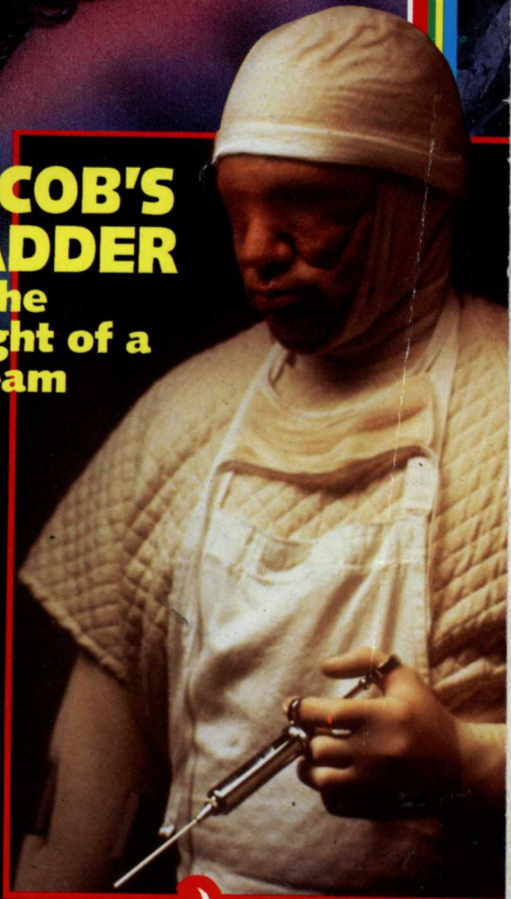


# FEAR

☠ HORROR ☠ FANTASY ☠ SCIENCE FICTION ☠



**JACOB'S  
LADDER**  
to the  
height of a  
scream



## FANTASTIC ANARCHY

Elric creator **Michael Moorcock** takes on the world

**DARIO ARGENTO**  
Anatomy of evil

**FLATLINERS**  
Beyond death with Lost Boys  
director Joel Schumacher

**FASCISM AND FETISH**  
Nazi imagery in movies

☠ VIDEOS ☠ BOOKS ☠ COMICS ☠ PRIZES ☠



November — a month of cold dark nights, fog and the smell of soot...

This is what you all want to feel in this issue, and yet the FEAR team is slaving away in brilliant sunshine — and it's the end of September! Even the factual world of magazine publishing has its touch of make believe.

What isn't fiction is the fact that more and more of you are reading FEAR and bolstering its number one position as Britain's leading voice in the Horror, Fantasy and Science Fiction field. We're obviously chuffed, and will continue to work our guts out (!) to make FEAR even better, expanding its coverage to all that infringes the world of the 'fantastique', as Clive Barker likes to call it.

This issue runs the gamut from Nazi imagery, through horror stalwarts Dario Argento, Joel Schumacher and killer-doll star Chucky, to fantasy veteran Michael Moorcock plus, would you believe, Mutant Ninja Turtles, Julian Lloyd Webber and Judge Dredd! Add a fistful of fiction and competitions — and all that's missing is a bit of art and music. Well, we're taking care of that too: check out what's due next month.

Should you think we're still slouching, sling us a letter with suggestions for extra areas of interest.

Make our November: get us slaving even harder on the January 1991 issue of FEAR!

# FEAR

ISSUE 23  
NOVEMBER 1990

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Our dead space devoted to your mail from Hell!

**It's a crisp clear night on Milan Avenue in Pasadena, California, but on a small portion of the street it's raining. Here the cast and crew of *Child's Play 2* are hard at work creating terror, and Chucky, that seemingly harmless doll, is back on the prowl. FEAR's J B Macabre steps into the shadows.**



**O**utside an apparently quiet house in a silent street, director John Lafia keeps a watchful eye on the setup of the scene that's about to shoot. The water cannons have finished soaking the grounds and John is inspecting the area for dry spots, an air-brushed design of Chucky holding a bloodied knife emblazoned on his leather jacket.

Zippering around the set with his portable video camera is screenwriter Don Mancini. After not having been allowed on the set of the original *Child's Play*, Don seems like a kid at Christmas as he makes his rounds capturing his video diary of the making of the sequel.

Given the circumstances surrounding *Child's Play* (Don's script was purchased by the studio and he was not asked to contribute to the rewrite, nor was he allowed on the set while John did the rewrites), John Lafia and Don

## OUT OF THE TOY BOX

Mancini should not be talking to each other; but together their personalities have formed the driving force behind this new film. 'The fact that we work together so well

is kind of weird,' says Don. 'On *Child's Play*, I wrote the original draft and then they hired John to rewrite my script. In Hollywood terms, that should make him my arch enemy...' But then, says John, 'I called him up and told him what we were doing. Don came over to my house and we chatted. I explained what I was doing with the rewrite and we just became friends, despite it all. Then when *Child's Play 2* came up we decided to do it together. It seemed the most logical thing to do.'

'It's really easy for the two of us just to sit down and do ideas, to come up with stuff together. Don actually does the writing. However, we brainstorm a lot together. The entire script for *Child's Play 2* is weird. It's almost like a shot list, to the extent that it is so worked out and so visual. Right from the start, I felt it was great to have both a writer and a director working together. I feel it

will make the film a more visual piece in terms of the language. Many writers write as 'writers' and it's up to the director to interpret that into visuals. We just worked together more as filmmakers creating a movie.

'When I was in film school I really did not have the opportunity to write a script. What I had to do was write a shot list and put the dialogue between the shots. That's how I thought and how I've approached screenwriting. With Don it really works out nicely that way.'

### ANIMATED CONVERSATION

So how will *Child's Play 2* differ from the original? According to John Lafia it will be: 'much punchier, sharper, slicker and bigger. It's more sophisticated visually and in terms of the overall directorial and storytelling aspects. On the other hand, it still possesses the incredibly sophisticated movements of Chucky, the

## THE WORLD OF FEAR



**Child's Play 2: 'It has that slickness, but at the centre is Chucky, this incorrigible, antisocial little monster...'**

doll. Not only do you have the doll, which worked great in the first film, you're also getting a much more stylish approach.

'This movie is going to work very well, better than the first one in fact. One, because the main characters have already been introduced. It was a big thing to find out if an audience would accept a killer doll that's animated and talks. We know now that they will, so we will be able to take Chucky further as a character. We know what the ground rules are. It's like having the same cooks cooking a meal. They've done it once, they've tested it and now they have better stuff going into it.'

The first film established Chucky as a classic horror character but, as director and writer testify, it's still difficult to describe his station in the monster greats spectrum. 'I think his closest relative is Bruce, the shark in *Jaws*, in terms of the level of violence in the movie, the level of blood,' says John. Don disagrees, arguing that *Child's Play* incorporates less violence than *Jaws*.

'I think the first film definitely made its mark in that it was not a bloody, gory movie,' says John. 'It was never intended to be. The thrill of this film is not that it is gory or shocking with heads blowing off. It's different.'

'I love *Dawn Of The Dead*, and all that intestine munching. I find those movies hilarious. They're

stupid, and at the same time intelligent, like the Ramones' music, you know what I mean? There's something going on there. There's a certain crude aesthetic.

'I think there are definitely two schools. *Child's Play* works more on a Hitchcockian level, and that is what's different and why I like it. What I get bored with is the *Jagged Edge/Fatal Attraction* type of bullshit. I find that adult horror really a snore. I think the appeal of horror is that certain snub-your-nose level, turn-up-the-rock-and-roll-full-blast, let's-be-kind-of-pubescent for a while. I think that's a critical level.

'That's what I like about *Child's Play 2*. It has that slickness, but at the centre of this is Chucky who's nothing more than this wisecracking little shit. Chucky is ultimately just this incorrigible, antisocial little monster. It satisfies all the things I like in a horror film at once.'

### PAIN IN THE ASS

The original movie worked well because of the relationship between the Chucky doll and its victims, but directing a scene between, for instance, a little boy and a puppet is, according to John: 'a major pain in the ass — every director's nightmare.'

Compared to the other monsters of the genre, Chucky appears to be reaching his zenith while Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees and Michael Myers have passed their peak. Lafia believes that his doll will eclipse even those mightiest creatures of horror in only his second outing. 'He's a bridge into something new, although I don't quite know what that 'new' will be. For the last ten

years we've been obsessed with the 'madman' — the human being who goes insane and becomes a killer. In a sense, they were all men who came back from the grave — they became supernatural, but basically they're still men, still psycho-killers. Freddy too, but he gets you in your dreams. Then there is Chucky. He was a psycho-killer. Now he's a doll! Because of that, we take a large step into the realm of the fantastic. He's not a man, he's a doll.

Maybe the next step will be something that was never a psycho-killer to begin with. Still, Chucky bridges that gap.'

Don adds: 'I think that part of his appeal is that Chucky is very Eighties. The Eighties was such a decade for the consumer, and Chucky is a product. He is something that people buy, and that is a joke unto itself. It makes it very timely, and that's why people embraced him. He's also a great visual pun, and he's aware of that. He's evil wrapped up in this very innocent-looking package, he's diabolical in the sense that he's hidden. He's among all the characters in the story all of the time: only the child has the purity to know the truth.'

If the prevailing Hollywood system behaves true to form, Chucky is likely to be back even before we see this sequel in Britain. Don Mancini is already working on a script: 'I feel proprietary about it because it's my brainchild. If this movie is as successful as we hope it's going to be, the studios will keep making them, with or without me and/or John. At this point, for me, it would be too painful to let it go. The experience of working on this one has been so great that I would really like to repeat it.'

**Child's Play 2, from UIP for Universal Films, opens on November 9 in the States. Look out for a UK release some time next year.**





## TUNNEL VISIONS

**Fatal Attraction** director **Adrian Lyne** hopes to underplay the gore elements in **Jacob's Ladder**, his new movie about a Vietnam vet who discovers bizarre secrets on the New York subway system. So is Lyne's new movie a horror film, a psychological thriller, or both? **J B Macabre** rides the ghost train.

**T**here is something terribly dark and mysterious about New York: perhaps the most sinister image of the Big Apple is that of the city's subway system, a vast network of tracks extending multiple levels under the earth. Some areas have been closed off for years. Who knows what horrors lurk there?

It is almost dawn and Jacob Singer, bleary-eyed from working a night shift, makes his way home on the subway. On the seat across from him lies a bundle of rags, a

sleeping hobo. Like many New Yorkers, Jacob has grown numb to the sight of the ill-fated homeless who claim the subway as their home, and usually he would not give them a second glance. However, this morning something is different.

The train pulls into Jacob's station and, as he is stepping out, something snakes out from under the hem of the man's coat. As the

doors close and the train pulls away, he is left with a fleeting vision that for some reason frightens him. His mind seeks to bury the image, but he cannot deny that what he saw was — a tail.

What is happening to Jacob Singer? Since his tour of duty in Vietnam he has been plagued by bad dreams from his wartime ordeals. Lately, his dreams have begun to invade his waking world,

turning it into a nightmare.

Without warning, everyday occurrences intersect with the bizarre. Vivid scenes from his past overlap the present with shocking frequency. As Jacob walks the streets of New York, reality begins to come apart at the seams. Though he tries to ignore these visions, Jacob soon finds that his disregard leads to more deeply disturbing experiences. He begins to unearth a trail of conspiracy, deception and murder. At the centre of the mystery, a deeper, darker secret lies in wait — one with an intense and startling consequence.

### VISIONARY THRILLER

In the depths of Bergen Street subway station, the cast and crew of *Jacob's Ladder* are hard at work bringing the nightmare world of Singer to the screen. At the helm is director Adrian Lyne, best known for his psychological thriller *Fatal Attraction*. With *Jacob's Ladder*, he hopes to explore an even more frightening realm, that of the human mind.

Joel Rubin's screenplay for *Jacob's Ladder* had been floating around Hollywood for a number of years before Lyne picked it up. It was mentioned in an *American Film* article about the best unproduced screenplays in Hollywood, and began to acquire a reputation as a unique and extraordinary work.

Lyne's enthusiasm for the project is obvious, and it is interesting to note how he became involved: 'I was reading a lot of dreck, so I asked my agent, 'What have you read that you think is really exceptional?' He sent me



**Jacob's Ladder: 'It's about digging into the human psyche and purging unconscious terrors...'**

Rubin's script. I liked it enormously! It was terrifying and worked on many levels. Firstly, it works as a psychological thriller, and secondly, the hero is constantly hallucinating, so there's a mixture of the real and the unreal.'

Lyne has adapted Rubin's material so that the key element lies in the distinction between the unreal and the surreal. 'Surrealism can be amusing and wonderful to look at,' he says, 'but it becomes abstract and you don't get emotionally involved. The audience has to believe that they are seeing the movie through the eyes of Jacob Singer.'

Rubin reflects on the development of his manuscript: 'I began the year long process of writing the script after having a nightmare in which I was locked inside a New York subway station. My mind started projecting that the only way out was down. I woke up sweating and thinking, 'What a great idea for a movie.'

'Right from the beginning, I wanted to explore what is most terrifying to me. Not just scary, but psychically horrifying. *Jacob's Ladder* ultimately became a story of terrible paranoia, of not knowing what is true. Every time you think you know where you're standing — the rug gets pulled out from underneath you. To me, that's a terrifying premise.'

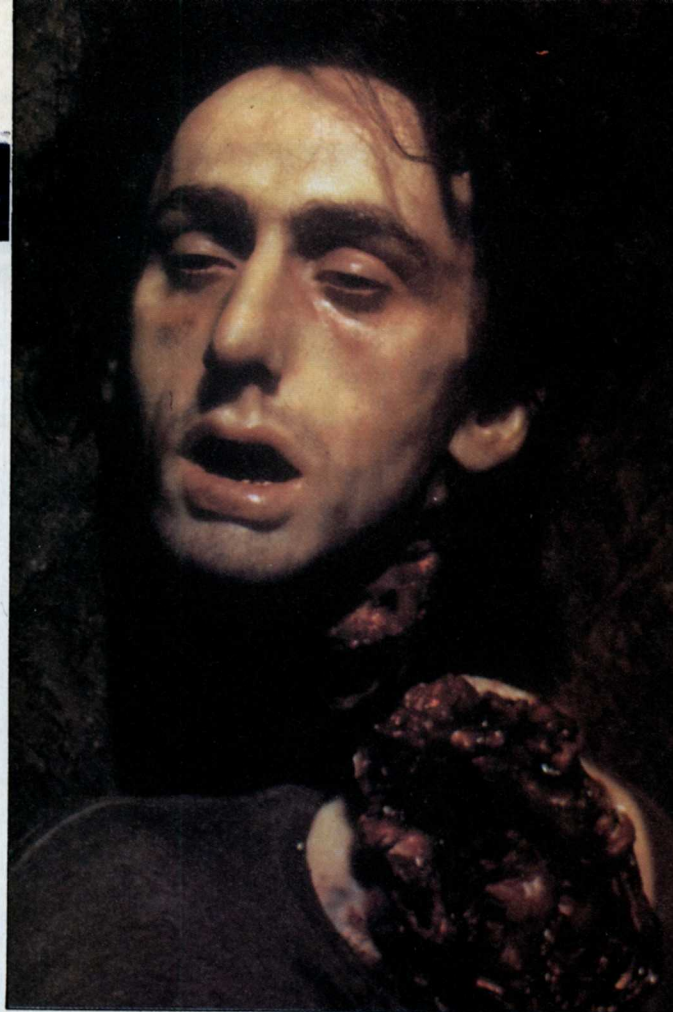
Rubin's break came in 1973, when he was preparing to direct his original script for the film of *The George Dunlap Tape*. The financing fell through and his screenplay was optioned by Douglas Trumbull, who in 1983 turned it into *Brainstorm*.

**LIGHT OF DAY**

Since 1984, Rubin has worked steadily as a writer. In addition to *Jacob's Ladder*, his most recent credit is the upcoming *Ghost*, a supernatural romance directed by Jerry Zucker and starring Patrick Swayze, Demi Moore and Whoopi Goldberg.

Having read the script, and with an awareness of the long road Rubin has travelled with it, I had to find out what struck him most about his brainchild. 'It reaches into certain dark areas, parts of ourselves that we refuse to examine during the light of day,' he explains. 'It's about digging into the human psyche and purging deep fears and unconscious terrors. It allows all these ghastly things to surface so that you can see them and touch them — and be free of them.'

'*Jacob's Ladder* is the kind of



film that may prove disturbing to many people, as it hits unexpected chords,' Lyne adds. 'If I do it right, it'll unleash an extraordinary mixture of emotions.'

Tim Robbins, best known as 'Nuke' Laloosh in the film *Bull Durham*, takes the part of Jacob Singer and this film marks his debut in a lead role of a dramatic feature. Elizabeth Pena, whose films include *Batteries Not Included*, *La Bamba* and *Blue Steel*, plays his passionate, unre-

dictable girlfriend, Jezz. The cast also includes Danny Aiello, Matt Craven, Pruitt Taylor Vince, Jason Alexander, Patricia Kalember and Macaulay Culkin.

The score was written by three-time Academy Award winner Maurice Jarre, who has written the music for a multitude of films, most recently *Dreamscape*, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, *Witness*, *Enemy Mine*, *Gorillas In The Mist*, *Fatal Attraction* and *Dead Poet's Society*.

**FLESH BASED**

Special make-up effects for the film are provided by Gordon J Smith, who received acclaim for his lifelike battle makeup in Oliver Stone's *Salvador* and *Platoon*. Most recently, he created the dream sequence in *Dead Ringers* in which Jeremy Irons becomes a Siamese twin. In 1986, Gordon formed his own company FXSmith. In addition, he has worked on *Near Dark*, *Parents*, *Criminal Law* and once again with Stone on *Born On The Fourth Of July*.

Adding a unique feel to the film is production designer Brian Morris. Since 1974, he has helped to create such memorable films as *The Haunting Of Julia*, *Quest For Fire*, *The Hunger* and *Angel Heart*.

It is worth noting that, even though the original screenplay for *Jacob's Ladder* was very much a horror genre piece, Lyne does not see it as a horror film. After meeting with Rubin, Joel went back and made some changes. The screenplay now draws more on archetypal imagery — William Blake, Hieronymous Bosch and the Bible. Lyne is delighted with the result: 'I didn't want to show Jacob's personal demons in a way that everybody recognises. If it's too familiar, it's not going to be dangerous or frightening. Rather than going to the animal kingdom, with horns and hooves, I always try to think in terms of a human equivalent — and make it kind of flesh based. Hopefully, you won't be able to reject it as easily, because you haven't seen it before.'

*Jacob's Ladder* seeks to combine elements from a variety of genres. What is particularly disturbing is that most directors seem to be quick to deny the horror element; it seems that when you talk about the surreal and it borders on the fantastical, it defines a certain genre, but when you start to discuss the world of demons and graphic violence, the studios and directors contradict themselves and fight to keep any reference to horror from entering an article about the film, or battle against it being publicised in a horrific journal. The responsibility for this phobia rests with Hollywood executives who use the words 'horror', 'gore' and 'pornography' interchangeably. It certainly appears that, with an ever growing audience for the macabre, it is high time such attitudes changed.

**Jacob's Ladder began principal photography in September 1989, and is scheduled for a February 1991 UK release.**

# THE WORLD OF FEAR

## GLORIOUS GOTHIC



Imagine a video collectors' club catering for horror/fantasy fans where you could buy, sell and swap your favourite films, correspond with fans all over the world, buy new sell-through titles at discounted prices and, according to concept-marketing supremo John Rose, 'generally have a bloody good time'.

That club is Prime Gothic, an international fantastic film collectors' club whose membership has burgeoned since its creation in January this year to a growing network of genre fans in the UK, Austria, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Canada and Denmark.

Prime Gothic's mainstay is its magazine, which appears six times a year. This features film, video, books and a range of promo product such as Freddy Krueger gloves and masks. Rose says: 'Members can advertise their video sales, wants or exchanges free for the whole year. They can also advertise to find fellow authors, filmmakers, friends, pen pals, whatever. We run competitions and carry features relevant to film collecting and horror.'

'We're not trying to compete with **Samhain**, **Shock Xpress** or even **FEAR**, we're running a horror club. From day one, our intention was to make Prime Gothic as big as

### Prime Gothic head honcho, John Rose

possible because we realise that a large membership is in everyone's interest. We've been featured in **Scandinavian Film And Video** and are tying up a promotion with Barry Kaufman of Chicago's **Video Mania**. Saying that Prime Gothic is an international club is no idle boast.'

The reason for starting the club, according to Rose, was that 'we wanted to create a genuine forum for true horror and fantastic film fans, where people could discuss their interests, swap tapes and so forth, free from commercial constraints or moral arbiters. You know, as a horror fan I felt cheated at what was going on in the horror scene, all the media nonsense and the big studios cashing in on sure fire pap like Freddy and Jason. This isn't all that horror fans want. They want more — they're perceptive, literate, informed.'

Membership costs £19.00 per annum in the UK and £25.00 overseas (IMOs only — no Visa facility). For more information, send a first class stamp together with your name and address to Prime Gothic, Pluto Enterprises, 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX.

## DUNGEON OF THE DEAD

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## BLACK SUNDAY BREAKS OUT

Manchester-based film festival organisers David Bryan and Malcolm Daghlish have split amicably, each planning to produce **Black Sunday** spectaculars in different parts of the country.

David is setting one up at a Manchester cinema to run on the weekend starting October 13, so you'll have to be snappy if you want to join up. Films already scheduled are: **Flatliners**, **Peacemaker**, **Two Evil Eyes**, **Vampire's Kiss**, **Leatherface** and **Repossessed**, all but one of which we've featured either in this or past issues of **FEAR**.

For more information, write to: David Bryan, Black Sunday, 51 Thatch Leach Lane, Whitefield, Manchester M25 6EN. But hurry!

## TYNESIDE TERRORS

This year's Tyneside International Film Festival boasts a goresome menu of new and old horror titles.

The festival, which runs from 5-21 October, is graced with screenings of **Hardware**, featured in issue 22 of **FEAR**, **Maniac Cop 2**, **Leatherface**, **Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3**, the **Argento/Romero** offering **Two Evil Eyes** (showcased in this issue), **Terror At The Opera** and **Sam Raimi's Darkman**.

Double bills include **House By The Cemetery** and **City Of The Living Dead**, and **Daughters Of Darkness** and **Blood Spattered Bride**. Classic hits such as **Herk Harvey's Carnival Of Souls** and **Andy Warhol's double bill**, **Flesh For Frankenstein** and **Blood For Dracula**, also put in an appearance.

Other events include a presentation by author **Stephen Gallagher** which includes behind the scenes clips from his new television mini-series, **Chimera**; a forum of some of the UK's leading horror writers, including **Lisa Tuttle** and **Stephen Laws**; and

## PHONE SHOCKS

CIC Marketing's **Dungeon of the Dead** is the latest 0898 epic to hit the phone lines. A suitably eerie soundtrack greets would-be adventurers who want to brave the dark corridors and fight the lurking monsters therein.

Interactive by simple choice-of-action options and enhanced by sound FX, **Dungeon** could be a thrilling way to spend your loot!

## LOVECRAFT FINDS NEW DISCIPLES

The **Last Disciple** is the first major film about the life and works of H P Lovecraft. Made by the independent production company **Fernwood Films**, the movie features **Clive Barker**, **Ramsey Campbell**, **Sam Raimi**, **Stuart Gordon**, **Colin Wilson** and **L Sprague De Camp**, amongst others, and was shot on location on Lovecraft's old stamping grounds in New England and New York City.

Screenings are planned for the **World Fantasy Convention** in November and the **World Horror Convention** in February. More details as they become available.



**Carnival Of Souls**

a workshop on the horror genre.

More information from **Tyneside Cinema**, 10 Pilgrim St, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 6QG.



# PAY NOW, DIE LATER

**In recent years there have been reports of a growing number of near-death experiences, where people have been brought back to life with memories of the hereafter. FEAR's J B Macabre talks to director Joel Schumacher, whose latest film, Flatliners, dares prematurely to penetrate death's domain.**

**A**t University Hospital School of Medicine, a group of five students have commenced on a chilling, secret experiment to see what lies beyond life. In order to break through the confines of the flesh and encounter the face of death they will take it in turns to stop their hearts — at which point the monitor goes 'flat line'. Moments later, the subject is revived by the other members of

the party.

In their quest for this forbidden knowledge the students will discover the dire consequences of tampering with immortality. Their trips into the hereafter will cause them to return with revelations of their past sins, and they will be forced to deal with these previous offences in the present.

The screenplay for *Flatliners* —

a new movie directed by Joel Schumacher and starring Kiefer Sutherland, Julia Roberts, Kevin Bacon, William Baldwin and Oliver Platt — is an original story by Peter Filardi. Schumacher, who has directed such films as *St Elmo's Fire* and *The Lost Boys*, was excited by the spiritual and horrific elements in Peter's script. '*Flatliners* is a story about atonement and forgiveness involving these students who, in a sense, violate the gods and pay a price,' he explains. 'I think we would all like to know what's in store for us after we die. There have been thousands of reports from all over the world from those who have encountered near-death, and most of them have reported pleasant

experiences. Our movie, however, is saying that you're not to tamper with death. If there is anything we're supposed to learn about it, it will be revealed when we die.'

## THE GOOD PLACE

The story and script began to take shape after a close friend of Filardi's underwent a near-death experience on the operating table. 'I think every writer tries to do something new and fresh,' states

**Kiefer Sutherland and Kevin Bacon, seeking new frontiers (above); architectural mix (below); raising the dead (top right); Julia Roberts as Rachel Mannus (right).**







Filardi, 'and the idea for *Flatliners* came about as a way of seeking a new frontier for people of my generation. The West has been done, space has been pretty well charted, and it seemed as though the only frontiers left would come from within ourselves.'

Kiefer Sutherland, who worked with Schumacher on *The Lost Boys*, plays the darkly charismatic character, Nelson Wright. 'My attraction to the character was that he had an incredible passion for what he did and for what he believed, and that kind of conviction is always a very appealing thing to play,' says Sutherland.

Rachel Mannus, a woman consumed by the idea of death and the afterlife, is played by Julia Roberts. Her collusion with the students results in a trip that causes her to come to terms with a painful childhood guilt. 'All five people in this movie have a different reason for wanting to do this,' states Roberts. 'My character is obsessed with the idea of death and making sure that when you die you're going to a good place.'

Kevin Bacon plays the innocent David Labraccio who provides the voice of reason for the other members of the group and ends up trying to right an old wrong committed in his childhood. 'Labraccio is the opposite of Nelson,' says Schumacher. 'As the movie progresses, everyone becomes dependent on Labraccio as a kind of centre to hold them all together, especially Nelson.'

## RADIANT LIGHT

During preproduction, the actors worked with an advisor who tutored them in proper medical procedures. They also took advan-

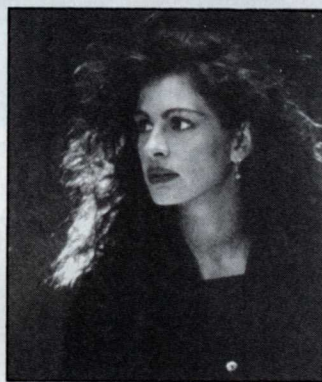
tage of Filardi's research into published accounts of near-death experiences; accident victims nearly all reported a pleasant experience of a tunnel leading to a radiant light and friendly voices, while suicide attempts yielded emotionally painful experiences.

Schumacher and the producers enlisted the talents of Jan De Bont as director of photography and Eugenio Zanetti as production designer. De Bont has worked on such films as *Black Rain*, *Die Hard* and *Ruthless People*, while Zanetti's credits include *Promised Land*, *Some Girls* and *Slamdance*. 'I told Eugenio and Jan that I wanted us all to take risks, to create our own world. This isn't a documentary — it's a fable and a fantasy, in some ways a science fiction movie — so I wanted to surround it with a very visually exciting and interesting world.'

Schumacher, De Bont and Zanetti combined a variety of styles of architecture, Greek, Roman, Gothic and Renaissance, with imaginative and striking lighting to create the film's universe. They feel the result is a set design and atmosphere that symbolises the eternal struggle with death.

Amongst the many sets built at Burbank Studios was the interior of the university's Taft Building, which houses the dog lab where the students conduct their experiments. The trio created a Gothic atmosphere for the lab by incorporating ominous lighting beneath an iron-grid floor to generate images of the underworld, and with angles and guardians above the columns to suggest the divine.

*Flatliners* is the first film to be produced by Michael Douglas and



Rick Bieber's Stonebridge Entertainment with Columbia Pictures, as part of a three-year agreement. Rick was impressed with the unique qualities of Peter's script. 'I think this film is going to be very provocative. There's no question that we're dealing with a subject matter that does have religious overtones. From the first moment that we saw the script, we were committed to depicting the story responsibly.'

The filmmakers and cast feel that the experience of making *Flatliners* has been personally enriching and that each person has come away with a deeper understanding and affirmation of life. 'Everybody has experienced loss and wished they had said something or done something they didn't get the chance to,' says Julia Roberts. 'This movie is about finding those opportunities.'

**Flatliners opens on November 9 at the Odeon West End in London, and at cinemas nationwide. The film will have its UK premiere at Black Sunday in Manchester on October 14.**

# SNIP! SNIP!

- Dalek creator **Terry Nation** has been charged with the task of taking **Dr Who** back to its roots for the new series, which is likely to star a new incarnation of the famous Timelord. **Verity Lambert**, the show's original producer, is also back, let's hope it puts those fans back behind their sofas...

- **Video Watchdog, the Perfectionist's Guide to Fantastic Video**, has just been launched in the States. Giving a detailed run down of cuts to classic and new vids, and priced at \$4.50, it is headed by **Tim Lucas**, a regular contributor to magazines such as **Fangoria**, whose original column started it all off. More info from: Tim Lucas, Video Watchdog, PO Box 5283, Cincinnati, Ohio 45205-0283, USA.

- Bram Stoker Award-winner **Horror: 100 Best Books**, edited by **Stephen Jones** and **Kim Newman**, is thankfully back in circulation. The book, in which one hundred authors, editors and critics write about their favourite piece of horror fiction or film, can be obtained from Horror: 100 Best Books, 130 Park View, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 6JU. The first world hardcover costs £11.95/\$20.00 each... What a bargain!

- **Stephen King** is involved with **Tales From The Darkside 2** while waiting for the television adaptation of **It**, to be directed by **Halloween 3** helmer **Tommy Lee Wallace**.

- **Exorcist 3** broke records by taking \$9 million during its first three days on US release. Watch out for an **Exorcist 3** feature next issue plus news of **Repossessed**, a spoof starring **Linda Blair**, to be released by Guild in December

## THE WORLD OF FEAR

At a weird banquet organised by the Beeb, six of horror's most famous practitioners got together for a brainstorm. Stephen Jones went along to check the pulse of the party for FEAR.

**H**orror history was made on the evening of April 5, 1990 when six of the genre's top gourmets of gore gathered at BBC's Lime Grove Studios for a very special party. Writer/director Clive Barker was chosen to host a discussion about horror themes and the creation of a movie scenario for the millennium along with Ramsey Campbell, John Carpenter, Roger Corman, Lisa Tuttle and Peter Atkins — the latter ably standing in for George Romero, who had to cancel at short notice.

The one-off special was titled 'Horror Cafe', produced by *The Late Show* team, and set for transmission in September. After suffering the rigours of the make-up department, the participants sat around a circular table set for a bizarre banquet. Waiters and waitresses surreptitiously came and went, filling glasses and serving multitudinous courses.



As a warm-up, the diners swapped disgusting food stories, mostly involving Japanese restaurants and Voodoo rituals, before Clive Barker summarised the objective of the evening's discussion: 'We have to pretend that on January 12, 1999, there's going to be a movie opening that nobody's ever seen before. A horror movie that is going to open the new millennium, and it has to be terrify-

ing — the scariest, the darkest, and possibly the most visionary horror movie ever created!

'We have to plug into everything the twentieth century told us about fear, and maybe we have to predict what the twenty-first century might have in store for us: something completely new, but also something that plugs into the ancient and mythic qualities of fear...'

**Horror Cafe: host Clive Barker (above) and star dinner guest Roger Corman (right)**

### OUT OF CONTROL

High ideals indeed: could the group gathered around the table meet the challenge of creating so awesome a concept? They started by defining terms.

Lisa Tuttle thought of horror as provoking a response in her audience, as she explained: 'I hope that what I write would disturb the reader, but at the same time it wouldn't just be a cheap thrill. It would tell them something about themselves, about the human condition, about life, and to do that I tend to look into what frightens me.'

Roger Corman admitted that what frightened him most was losing control, when the mind could no longer function: 'For me, the problem in a horror film is to break through the defences of the conscious mind and attack or expose the fears and fantasies of the unconscious mind.'

Peter Atkins picked up on what Corman said and revealed that 'the notion of dissolution, whether it's mental, physical, psychological, sexual or social,' was what he was scared of. 'I think the root of any work in any form that has actually succeeded in frightening me has touched upon *it'll all go away...*'

## BEST IN THE U.S.

**Who's publishing what in the States in October and November? Here's the first in a regular round-up of what lies over the horizon on the US literary front, presented from the land of liberty by Bob Morrish and John Gilbert.**

The big boys first, and *Jurassic Park*, the Michael Crichton book in which Steven Spielberg is showing so much interest is published by Random House this month with, no doubt, a high publicity quotient. J G Ballard revises his book *The Atrocity Exhibition* for Re/Search Publications, while lovers of the *Clan Of The Cave Bear* will be pleased to hear that Jean M Auel's

new hardcover *The Plains Of Passage* is on its way from Random House Crown.

V C Andrews, though deceased, continues to hold the market in her grip, so her next novel, *Dawn*, from Pocket Books, should break more publishing records.

SF great Greg Bear has three books out in October, the two of interest being *Tangents* and *The Wind From The Burning Woman* from Popular Library Questar. And staying with science fiction, the legendary Paul Anderson launches *Loser's Night* on the Pulphouse label, while Lucius Shepard prepares for the *Ends Of The Earth* from Arkham House.

Peter Straub has been busy after the recent successful British launch of *Mystery*. His new book is a collection of short stories called *Houses Without Doors*, and it appears from Penguin/Dutton in November, while in October small press publisher Donald M Grant launches *Mrs God*. John Brunner continues his trusty association with science fiction with *The Whole*

*Man* from Macmillan Collier Nucleus, and Philip J Riley doesn't care if the title's been used before, he's going for *Phantom Of The Opera* from Magic Image.

Harlan Ellison sees publication of *The Harlan Ellison Hornbook* from Mirage Press, Piers Anthony is back with fantasy for *Firefly* from Morrow, while Ocean View takes to the Clive Barker wave with *Four*, Barker's graphic novel and, on the non-fiction front, Clive Barker, *Illustrator* by Fred Burke.

Vampire lover Chelsea Quinn Yarbro has some *Bad Medicine* from Jove, and SF/fantasy author Sheri S Tepper is *Raising The Stones* for Doubleday Foundation. Gary Brandner, author of *The Howling*, is back with *The Work* from Borgo Press, while Jack William publishes *Lifeburst* and *Mazeway* with Ballantine Del Rey. Just a small list of recommendeds from a range of thousands, but enough to keep you occupied for the next month. Many of these titles will be available through your local specialist bookshop.

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John Carpenter questioned whether horror and fear were the same thing. 'The most ancient fear is of the unknown,' he explained. 'My personal fear is like Roger's — I fear loss of control.' He went on to reveal that he had conquered his own fears by learning to fly a helicopter, but was still scared of growing old: 'Isn't it inexorable? We are all going towards that uncertain end of darkness, and everybody's fear is death. What's beyond? Is there anything beyond? What will the last moments be like? Will I be a vegetable? Will I remember beauty? Will there be any beauty, or will there be this aching, horrifying loneliness?'

Ramsey Campbell, on the other hand, thought that the unknown was an exciting prospect. 'What really scares me is the notion that as year 2000 comes towards us, more and more sorts of craziness are going to erupt.'

Clive Barker added his definition of horror as 'banality — the sheer banality of the culture we live in. My sense of what's scary is related to things I see around me. And what I see around me are people who want to suppress the imagination.'

The discussion then continued with comments on the power of fear and the reaction of both creator and audience to this influence. 'The movie that changed my life was a film called *It Came From Outer Space*,' recalled Carpenter. 'This 3-D meteor comes screaming out of the night sky and blows up in my four year old face! I was shrieking in terror, but a couple of seconds later I felt such a high. I wanted to experience that fear because I was alive.'

'I don't think what we're giving is a negative experience,' agreed Corman. 'I think it's a positive and very helpful experience.' Moving onto the scenario they

had to create, Barker suggested they use Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* as a starting point, although he maintained that, as far as he was concerned, Stevenson's story was 'a nineteenth century conceit with a boring moral dichotomy bang in the middle of it.'

However, Corman pointed out that the period in which Stevenson was writing the story 'was really the beginning of the modern age of science,' and it was therefore as good a starting point as any for a work that would usher in the next thousand years.

The conversation then ranged across the scientific and the psychological, right-wing horror (it's out there) and left-wing horror (it's in us), the Faust legend (the pursuit of knowledge ending in disaster), and art versus entertainment.

Barker's proposed twist on Stevenson's tale began with a man picking up a book about a series of unsolved murders and realising for the first time that he was somehow responsible. 'It's Jekyll discovering he is Hyde,' he explained. 'Where do we go from there? Do we go into metaphysical realms — are there maybe Lovecraftian creatures that taught him the rituals of murder...?'

The narrative that subsequently evolved from this vignette concerned a bland futuristic society where a scientific experiment into the nature of human evil resulted in something terrible happening as a consequence. A series of ritualistic murders had awakened something — a larger, darker, force for the new age.

'I think we need sex in this movie,' opined Barker... 'I hope it wouldn't just be the kind of view where the woman is out of it except as the potential victim,' rebuked Tuttle... 'I'm not scared yet,' complained Carpenter...

'I need fresh things to come and scare me,' explained Barker... 'A dark millennialist movement?' suggested Atkins... 'Where does the fear come?' interjected Carpenter... 'You've got to make the dark side genuinely appealing,' agreed Campbell... 'Fear is a personal thing,' claimed Carpenter, 'that's what makes it work...'

As the plot developed, it took some odd turns, eventually encompassing sinister census takers and multiple murder.

'It won't be a hit,' stated Carpenter emphatically.

'Perhaps a cult classic?' suggested Campbell.

### SUM OF FRESH PARTS

Talk then turned to creating round-robin storylines involving face-stealing aliens and pod people spewing out their entrails. Perhaps not quite the major work of 'visionary horror' originally mooted at the beginning of the evening... Summing up, Barker recognised that 'what we've discovered is that we would make six very different movies.' 'The creative process is an individual process,' Corman agreed.

However, it was left to John Carpenter to vocalise their roles as storytellers when he observed that 'each aspect of the tale, as we went around the table, had a power, a uniqueness, and a point-of-view that we couldn't get together but we could get individually. There is a strength that comes out of each of us.'

Most horror figures seem to be dressed in black with capes, fangs or strange make-up, and really we're all pretty normal people. You can distance us by making us into Bela Lugosi or Boris Karloff, but we talk about things that everybody thinks about, because horror is a part of all of us. We try to express what is really in everybody in words and images.'

The evening ended with a champagne toast to Roger Corman, whose birthday it was, and then the well-fed diners disappeared into the night to create new terrors. For a brief three hours in a television studio, horror had become a respectable topic of conversation again. Six of its most eloquent practitioners had gathered together in a unique celebration of an oft maligned genre.

Whatever the millennium may bring, horror fiction will continue to fascinate and delight audiences for thousands of years to come 'We should be proud of what we do,' maintained Carpenter. 'The people who put us down are thlosers, and the audiences wh watch our movies or read the novels are the ones who win.'

## FEAR FICTION AWARDS

The climax of the British Fantasy Convention, held at Birmingham's Midland Hotel on 14-16 September, was marked by the presentation of a host of annual awards. Following a three course banquet, MC Stephen Laws was joined by British Guest of Honour Stephen Gallagher and American Guest of Honour Joe R Lansdale to announce this year's winners.

Prize for the Best Novel went to Dan Simmons for *Carrion Comfort*, Best Small Press was Dagon, edited by Carl Ford, Best Film Award went to *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* and Best Artist was Dave Carson. Stephen Laws presented Joe Lansdale with the award for Best Short Fiction for his story, *On The Far Side Of The Cadillac Desert With The Dead Folk*.

After the main awards ceremony, the annual FEAR Dead Dog Party got under way. This year the occasion was marked by the inauguration of the FEAR Fiction Awards, presented to two authors who FEAR readers felt had provided the best fiction during the past year. The winners were Brian Lumley (Best Established Author) for an extract from his novel *Necroscope III: The Source*, and Mark Chadbourn (Best New Author) for his short story, *Six Dead Boys In A Very Dark World*.

The two awards, each depicting a scene from the respective author's story, were designed and painted by Oliver Frey, famed illustrator of this esteemed organ, and presented by David Western, FEAR's Fiction Editor. All of us at FEAR heartily congratulate both winners and wish them every future success.

Next year the British Fantasy Convention will be held at the Ramada Inn, London. A full BFS Bulletin report on this year's Con will be published in the next issue of FEAR.

# THE WORLD OF FEAR

## HORROR AND THE HUGO

**Parties, panels and pandemonium: Stephen Jones reports from the World Science Fiction Convention in The Hague, where the Hugo awards were bestowed.**

Horror had a small but impressive presence at ConFiction, the 48th World Science Fiction Convention held at the Netherlands Congress Centre, The Hague, over 23-27 August.

Although the Guests of Honour reflected the convention's natural preoccupation with SF — writers Joe Haldeman, Harry Harrison and Wolfgang Jeschke, with **Science Fiction Chronicle's** editor Andrew Porter as Fan Guest of Honour — the Toastmistress was Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, author of the popular 'Saint Germain' series of vampire novels.

ConFiction marked only the second time this major event had been held in mainland Europe, and the Dutch Minister of Culture, Heçy d'Ancona, was on hand to preside over the impressive opening ceremony.

During the following four days, more than 2,300 fans and professionals from all over the world wandered around the vast concrete bunker that was the Congresgebouw, drinking small but expensive glasses of Euro-lager, buying books and fantasy

merchandising in the meagre and highly priced dealers' room, sipping scant but costly cups of coffee, perusing the modest and mostly uninteresting art show, snacking on tasteless and exorbitantly priced fast food meals, and listening to around 450 talks, panels and entertainments covering almost every conceivable area of the **fantastique**.

Horror may have only accounted for a baker's dozen of these programme items, but what there was certainly offered more value than other such fascinating topics as 'The Pill — Population and Paradox', 'Safe Sex and the Single Fan' or even 'The John Norman Fan Club'...

Cherry Wilder questioned Ramsey Campbell and myself about the morality of horror fiction, and Campbell was also one of a team who looked at the vampire theme as a subliterary genre. I chaired a midnight discussion between Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Suzy McKee Charnas and Brian Stableford on the eroticism of vampires, and Brian Aldiss contributed to a panel about Frankenstein's literary creator, Mary Shelley. Forest J Ackerman presented his incredible book and memorabilia collection in slide form, Barry Raymakers looked at horror movies, Darrell Schweitzer introduced his audience to the world of H P Lovecraft, Geoff Ryman investigated the roots of evil in childhood, while a whole slew of authors and editors debated style forms of science fiction, fantasy and horror.

For those who like their horrors a



**Party time: Brian Aldiss (top, in centre) celebrates his 65th birthday with wife Margaret and Wolfgang Jeschke; the Forbidden Planet shindig (below)**

little closer to home, various experts revealed the powers of divination, witchcraft and seances, although the most interesting and lively programme item turned out to be a 'Feminism and Horror' discussion, moderated by Lisa Tuttle with provocative comments from panel members Ramsey Campbell, Suzy McKee Charnas, Kathy Gale, Peter Nicholls and Karen Haber-Silverberg.

However the programming was, for the most part, chaotic. The organisers had apparently listed participants for the most peculiar events — whether or not they had actually confirmed they were even attending the convention! Therefore anyone hoping to meet editors Ginger Buchanan and Max Eilenberg or authors Somtow Sucharitkul and Tanith Lee were

disappointed when they didn't show, and although Clive Barker was listed on numerous programme items over all five days, he turned up just long enough to attend a party and autograph session organised by his Dutch publisher.

Saturday evening saw the presentation of the Hugo Awards — the Oscars of the science fiction field — in a fast-moving ceremony enlivened by a Dutch actor's embarrassing drunk act as Hugo Gernsback (editor of the first SF magazine, and after whom the award is named) and the US Ambassador to the Netherlands, C Howard Wilkins, revealing how he had been a closet SF fan since the age of 18.

The winners were: Stu Shiffman (**Best Fan Artist**); Britain's Dave Langford (**Best Fan Writer**); Don Maitz (**Best Professional Artist**); The Mad 3 Party (**Best Fanzine**); Locus (**Best Semiprozine** — for the 15th time!); Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade (**Best Dramatic Presentation** — but hardly science fiction); Gardner Dozois (**Best**

### WINNERS

**Hellbound competition (Issue 18):** Tracy Ewing from Belfast; John Worley from Moulton, Northampton; Peter Dight from Gosport, Hants; A Nixon from Belfast; Mr A Rhodes from Penkhill, Staffs; Gwen Bailey from Fulham, London; Maxine Scott of Belfast; Mr S Maguire of Wakefield, West Yorkshire; Steven Cook of Stevenston, Ayrshire; Dean Fisher from Nottingham; James Riley Point from Stratford, London; Aaron Scott from Belfast; Gerald Houghton from Irthingborough, Northants; Mr D Hipgrave from Wokingham, Berks; Mr G Ransom from Sheffield; Miss M Stanton from Beaconsfield, Bucks; Mr P Antley from Castlefields, Shropshire; Phil Newton of Brighton; T Taylor of Lewes, East Sussex; Mrs E Ives from Cambridge; D Wilson from Glasgow; Daniel Farrell from Watford, Herts; Mr Adam Hooper from Hauxton, Cambs; Wayne Gooderham from Northolt, Middlesex; Sarah Waites, South Oxhey, Herts; Mrs Sonia Hooper, Hauxton, Cambs; Steve Blackwell of Brighton; Joshua Scutchings from Garston, Herts; Colin McIntyre from Edinburgh.

**Reach For The Stars competition (Issue 19):** Ian Ward from Ashford, Kent; H Malik from Epsom Downs, Surrey; George Lazarou of Haringay,

London; S Waites from Watford, Herts; Kriss B Riley from Dorchester.

**Deadspeak Competition (Issue 19):** Jack Wainer from Ashby De La Zouch, Leics (first prize); Jan Perfect from Mickleham, Surrey; Tim Gayler from Chessington, Surrey; Tony Sandland from Rainham, Essex.

**James Herbert Creed competition (Issue 20):** Laura West from Cheltenham, Glos (first prize), John Myatt from Frodsham, Cheshire (second prize), and Paul Taylor from Enfield, Middlesex (third prize).

**Social Skills competition (Issue 20):** Stephen Manderson of Lisburn, County Antrim; Simon Clifford from Chippenham, Wilts; Miss K Martin from Newcastle On Tyne; Mrs E Ives from Cambridge; Simon Leung from Leven, Fife.

**SF Voyages competition (Issue 20):** W J Collins from Willenhall, West Midlands; Craig Mitchell of Gosforth, Tyne and Wear; Christopher Wills from Paisley, Scotland.

**Into Orbit competition (Issue 20):** F Carolan from Rathmore, County Meath; David Jackson from Highgate, London; Richard David Thomas of Tyldesley, Manchester; Dave Chapple from Saltash, Cornwall; Julie Atkin from Southgate, West Sussex; Antony Thomas of Runcorn in Cheshire.

# WOLVES IN THE FOLD

**W**e hear the clarion call all the time: 'Fantasy, horror, science fiction: it's a booming business'... But who, may I ask, is making all the money?

It's a valid question, but the answers are distorted by perception. We all hear stories of the money to be made in the magazine market and, while I'm not exactly in poor street, my publishers don't make the sort of dosh that film companies can claim back from their movies. I use my budgets carefully, with the best interests of readers at heart, and I hope it shows.

British book publishers are also in the same situation. They have to select the genre titles they take with great care and with almost no revenue to spare for advertising. As a result the big names always carry favour, tight categorisation is usually important, you have to fight for anything that's original or risky, and first time novelists are lucky to find themselves on a major publishing list at all (although companies like Headline, Transworld and Piatkus have defied all those rules during the past year).

To be fair, the Brits have taken notice of the mess in the American publishing market where, just a year ago, every publisher was hurriedly buying up fantasy and horror by the bucketload. Horror of horrors! They now find themselves with huge lists which cover their schedules for the next two years and, if you're not on it, beware: your book might not find its way to the exit door at the printers for several years.

A large amount of money has also been spent on what many commentators are now loudly proclaiming as dross titles, books which mimic the big names but, by and large, are unable to find their talents for invention. In their panic to find titles, many publishers buy just about anything they can find that has a reasonable horror/fantasy plot, characterisation and contemporary background. The result: a drastic cut-back in budgets for buying this year's product. Ouch!

Not surprisingly, the movie business appears to have no such problems, although many corporate executives would have you



believe otherwise. Most genre titles are made on low budgets, by which I mean between \$3 and \$9 million, and as Barry Norman so eloquently pointed out last month, many of them contain advertisement placements.

For those of you who don't include *Film 90* as part of your weekly viewing — and, despite my personal views on the content of the programme, it is a must for me — let me explain the placement system. In several of the latest big blockbusters you may have noticed product names being featured in a variety of not always discreet shots. Norman's view, which reflected that of genre great Harrison Ford, is that placement is not such a good idea. It can spoil a necessary run of suspended belief in a plotline.

I take a slightly different view. While begging the subtle placement of items that we saw in the earlier James Bond movies (remember all those credits at the end of the films and not being able to remember having seen a brand name anywhere?), I would stress that the technique can add to a film's viability. It's not necessary to go over the top, as in the *Back To The Future* flicks, but any extra income accrued by a genre film can only help the industry.

Unfortunately, there are many people who are now aiming at the horror, fantasy and SF genres because they see profit, profit, profit... Money is, obviously, an important part of any business venture, and any new avenue of revenue is ripe for exploitation, but anyone entering this business

just because their big pockets need to take oversized cheques will have a huge shock when they come to balance their books.

Most of us in this industry enjoy the subject matter and, to a great extent, cover it because we are fans, lovers of the art form. I, for instance, rank my being a fan on the same level of importance as being an editor or a writer. If we're to live in this specialist market, it's by strict rules enforced after years of knowing the industry. Step outside those boundaries of the possible and, like the Baron Munchausens of the film business, you'll find yourself in the downward column of the loss register.

The above is a warning that all at **FEAR** have heeded over the past two and a half years. We've proved that it's possible to run a successful genre title but the game is tough and we've had to adapt. This market is, indeed, big enough for anybody with originality and guts; in film, television, books and, yes, even magazines. But we all have to play by the rules, look responsibly at the size of the market, project its popularity into the future, and take note of those factors, not just other people's success, and reach for the cheque book. Those who don't follow the market rules may find that the wolves in the fold may become sheep in this field.

John Gilbert



**Professional Editor**); *The World Beyond The Hill* by Alexei and Cory Panshin (**Best Non-Fiction Book**); *Boobs*, a werewolf story by Suzy McKee Charnas (**Best Short Story**); *Enter A Soldier, Later: Enter Another* by Robert Silverberg (**Best Novelette**); *The Mountains Of Mourning* by Lois McMaster Bujold (**Best Novella**); and *Hyperion* by Dan Simmons (**Best Novel**).

Two other — non-Hugo — awards also presented during the ceremony were **Best Original Artwork**, to Don Maitz's cover for *Rimrunners*, and the **John W Campbell Award** for a new writer, which went to Kristine Kathryn Rusch.

On the party front, the best gatherings were organised by Transworld/Bantam to commemorate 40 years publishing, and Brian Aldiss to celebrate his 65th birthday, both held in the baroque surroundings of the plush Kurhaus Hotel. Smaller gatherings included parties hosted by Japanese fans, Interzone/GW Books and Titan Books/Forbidden Planet (launching their new anthology, **More Tales From The Forbidden Planet**).

Many of those who attended agreed that ConFiction could have been better organised. What saved the convention was its proximity to the beach and the scorching Bank Holiday weather, stunning firework displays over the sea every evening, a bewildering choice of restaurants and, of course, the opportunity to meet and mix with old friends and some of the biggest names in science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

However, despite the organisational problems, I hope it's not too long before we see other major conventions being held on the European mainland because, if nothing else, ConFiction is the first such event to have taken place that could truly be called a **World Con**.

## LEATHER FACE LATEST

The as yet uncertificated controversial horror movie *Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3* is to receive a UK airing in a series of special screenings at the Scala Cinema Club, Pentonville Road, Kings Cross, London. The film will be shown from 2 November for seven days, and from 30 November for a further week.

Though the movies of Dario Argento have suffered at the hands of international censors, the Italian director has been heralded by horror fans and filmmakers as one of the most exciting proponents of the genre. During a recent visit to the UK to launch his new film, *Two Evil Eyes*, Argento talked to Mark Kermode about the violent beauty which is at the heart of all his work.



I love dismemberment in films because it is somehow against compromise. You see something, and it's very good, and very nice, but somehow if it is broken it becomes more real. For me, it's like a ceremony, an Aztec or Indian ceremony that makes you happy and makes

you laugh — in ancient times people were killed and the blood spilled on the field to make it grow; people laughed and were joyful. OK, I know this is a legend, but my pictures also are like a ceremony, like a big feast, and people understand this and laugh and enjoy. Young people in particular. Old people are destroyed.'

Talking in animated broken English, Italian director Dario Argento is explaining his own theories of cinematic violence, espousing an avowedly amoral aesthetic philosophy which, over the years, has caused his movies to be decried by moral guardians, mistreated by distributors, and butchered by censors. Despite being hailed by horror fans and filmmakers alike as amongst the most innovative and creative directors in the field, the fruits of Argento's labour have frequently been turned sour by the slash-happy activities of those who see his work as unacceptable to the public at large.

Now, however, Argento has created his most 'palatable' work to date, a two-parter entitled *Two Evil Eyes*, made with fellow director George Romero, and based upon the writings of Edgar Allan Poe. Romero's section is a modern reworking of *The Facts In The Case Of M Valdemar*, whilst Argento's more kinetic contribution is an adaptation of *The Black Cat*. For the first time in a good many years, it appears that Argento and the censors are back on speaking terms.

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# SHORT FILMS ABOUT KILLING

'*Two Evil Eyes* is the softest picture of my life,' admits Argento candidly, 'and I don't think I will have any problems with the censors. I am really happy with it, happy to have made a film which is a homage to a man who perhaps first pushed me in this particular direction. When I was a teenager, reading Poe was my first meeting with something weird and different from normality. It's also important, I think, that *The Black Cat* is a somewhat autobiographical story; it's written in the first person and it's the only one of Poe's tales in which the narrator is unnamed.'

## ESCAPIST HORROR

Describing Poe's writings as a constant source of inspiration for his own cinematic creations, Argento expands upon the similarities between his artistic ambitions and those of his favourite author. 'The most important thing in my pictures is to escape from a reality which you don't like, or don't support. With the horror genre it is possible to talk about other realities. In my pictures I try to reflect that hard reality, which is not always wonderful, and is sometimes terrible. I believe that this is the centre both of my pictures and also of Poe's tales. The political corner of my pictures is perhaps that, if you try to escape this reality, you can jump into something worse.'

Whilst Argento's characteristic brand of escapist horror is indeed to the fore in *The Black Cat*, the preoccupations of codirector

**'I try to reflect that hard reality, which is not always wonderful, and is sometimes terrible... The political corner of my pictures is perhaps that, if you try to escape this reality, you can jump into something worse'**

George Romero are somewhat different; using the medium of horrific fantasy, Romero has striven throughout his cinematic career to investigate the 'harsh reality' with which we are familiar by providing fantastical allegories, a technique nowhere more evident than in the groundbreaking 'Dead' trilogy. Indeed, the jolting change of styles between the Romero and Argento segments of *Two Evil Eyes* highlights the extent to which these two filmmakers differ in their approach to the horror genre, and it is hardly surprising to learn that little or no influence was exerted by either director on the other's work.

'We are very different people and very different directors. We never spoke about his



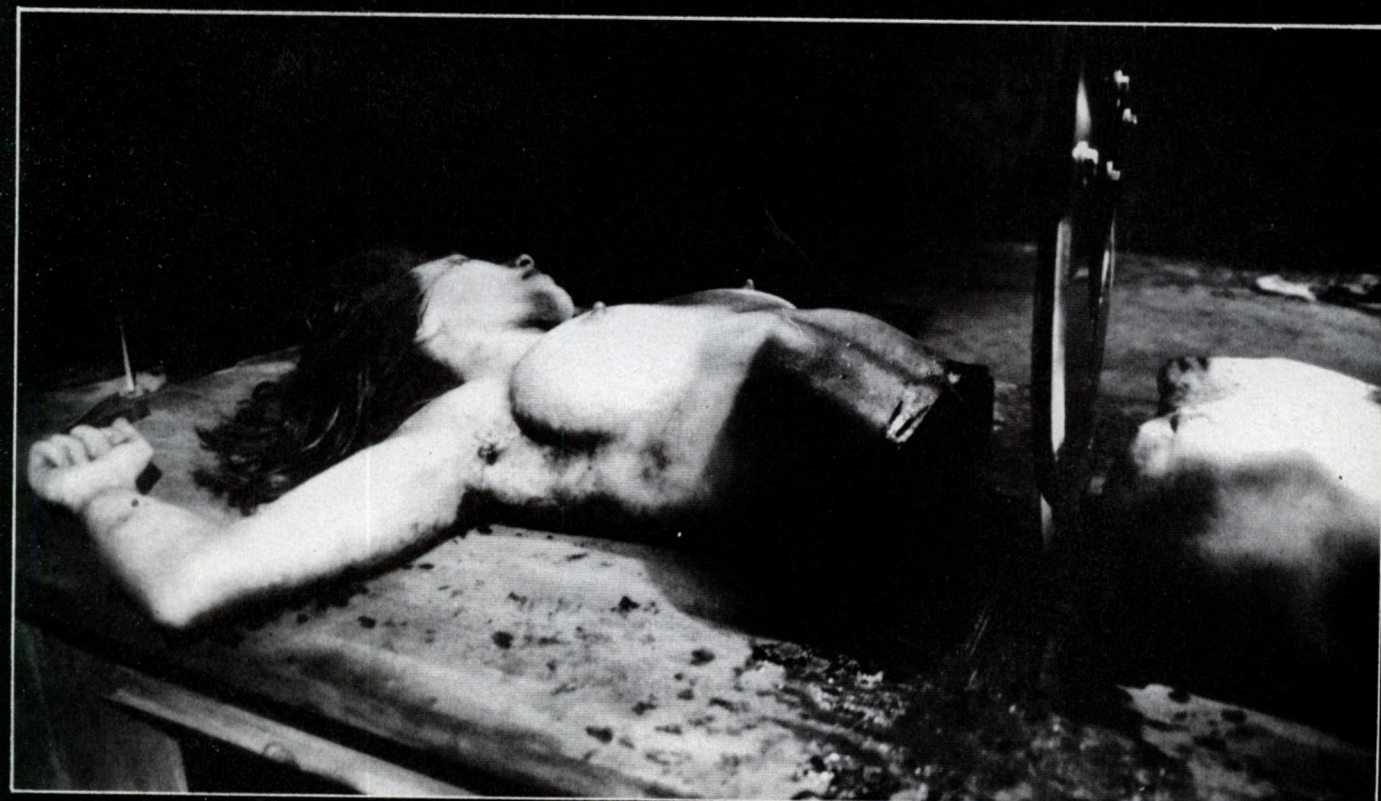
segment or my segment; they were completely independent. Sometimes we saw each other at night to drink some beer, but we didn't talk about the picture. We just saw the finished segments. We didn't even decide the order of the segments — that was up to the distributor. We just made a picture with the actors.'

So if no artistic interaction was involved, why embark upon a two-hander in the first place? 'Well, for doing Poe's tales, one hour segments are good because, of course, the tales are quite short. More than one hour is difficult because we must invent something. I invented, and in my segment we have many quotations from other tales... We actually shot one scene from *The Murders In The Rue Morgue*, when a victim is rammed head first down a chimney, but we cut it because the picture was too long. It was good though...maybe it'll end up in my next picture.'

### MECHANICAL CATS

Whilst the filmmakers may have remained firmly independent from one another in their directorial work on *Two Evil Eyes*, one factor which links their two sections is the use of special effects maestro Tom Savini. Described by Argento as 'a wonderful man, a real artist', Savini has collaborated with Romero on five movies since the dark classic *Martin*, and in the M Valdemar segment of *Two Evil Eyes* is called upon once again to provide make-up effects which would literally wake the dead. For *The Black Cat*, however, something rather more domestic was required. 'Savini made three mechanical cats for the picture — one big one for close-ups, then two of normal size. He then made some faces and legs, different body parts, which could be operated

Against compromise: Argento (left) directs *Opera*; and (below) the pit and the pendulum murder from *The Black Cat*, the Argento section of *Two Evil Eyes*, 'the softest picture of my life...'



independently. The problem is, however, that if the mechanical cat opened its mouth too far, you could see a battery inside! All the time we were shooting, the crew would keep shouting 'Batteries! We see batteries!', and we'd have to cut. Also, of course, we had five real black cats, which we swapped around, because sometimes cats can become stressed, or perhaps they feel uncomfortable with the people around them. You can't train cats, you see. All you can do is offer them food — put food there, and the cat goes to take the food. Otherwise, we would just sit around and wait until something happened; maybe the cat would yawn, and we'd shoot it, and then afterwards we put on a sound effect and it looks like the cat is roaring.'

Argento's professional relationship with George Romero dates back to *Dawn Of The Dead* on which the two collaborated, finally producing two alternative and distinct cuts of this seminal movie for use in different territories. Ironically, from his first experience of Romero's work, Argento was to be acutely aware of the problems of 'alternative versions', prints of films over which the distributor rather than the director had final cut. 'I originally saw *Night Of The Living*



*Dead* some years after its initial release. Strangely, the first version which arrived in Italy had no music, and they had changed the name of the director from George Romero to George Kramer, or something like that. I don't know why. They're crazy. I asked the distributor: 'Why did you do this? Why did you change the name? Why did you change the title? Why did you cut this?' And he just kept saying, 'I don't know'. Ah, fuck them! Then after five years they released it again, with the *right* name, and with the music. But this sort of thing happens all the time — I remember when we made *Dawn Of The Dead*, I was responsible for the European territories. And the French censor just completely cut the picture. And then I changed the title and I tried again... I tried *six* times over six years. Then when the country became socialist, more progressive, they passed the picture. But we had six years of battles. Every year, we'd go to Paris and the censors would sit there and go: 'Oh no! The picture is too terrible! Too violent! Go away!'

Such experiences have left Argento with a



**'The photograph may be beautiful, but the subject is horrendous. The photograph lends a distance. The difference is in the eyes'**

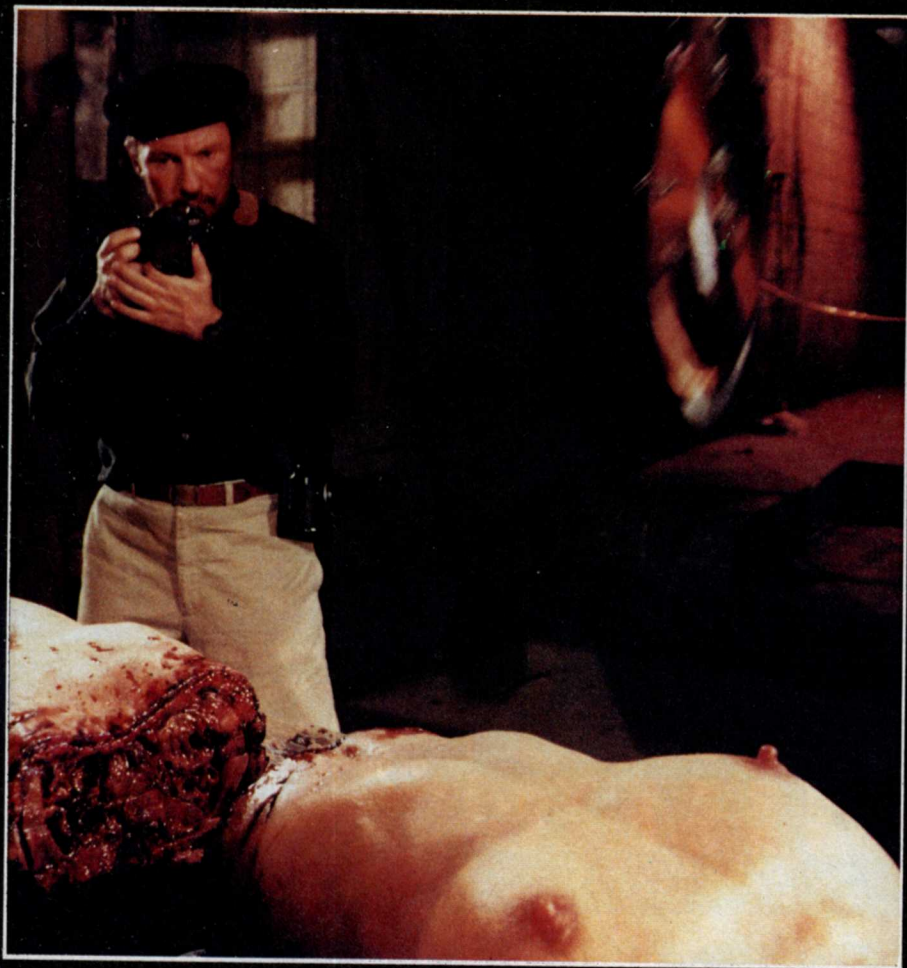
particularly sceptical view of political machinations in whatever form, leading him to the conclusion that bodies of authority (whether they be governments, censors or distributors) are fundamentally not to be trusted. 'People and governments basically remain the same throughout the ages,' he opines, with a resigned shake of the head. 'Edgar Allan Poe was persecuted all his life. For me, it's not the same — life is easier now than in Poe's time. But my pictures are still persecuted, they're cut by censors and distributors everywhere, especially here in England. People have preconceived ideas about my films and they *want* to cut them. Why? This is fantasy, it's not reality. I just don't understand why they cut them. I suppose it's not my business, but I'm really against this. Did you know, for exam-

ple, that my picture *Deep Red* has been cut by 40 minutes in France? It's a very short picture now! And now, after ten years, the distributor has finally put out an uncut version. Why did we have to wait this long?'

### LOVINGLY DISMEMBERED

Although the motives of distributors who butcher their own product are somewhat unfathomable, one clear reason why Argento's films have so regularly invoked the wrath of the censors is the director's aesthetic love of the macabre, a fascination with — perhaps even a celebration of — death and mutilation which has its roots in the romantic literary tradition, and in the writings of Argento's most favoured author, Edgar Allan Poe. Following in the Baudelairian tradition which





From left: *The Facts In The Case Of M Valdemar*, the Romero segment of *Two Evil Eyes*; Argento sets up the graphic opening shot for *The Black Cat*; Harvey Keitel as Rod Usher, photographing atrocities; and, from the same film, Madeleine Potter.

Weegee took photographs of killing, Poe wrote about killing, and I also make films about killing. Some people have said: 'Oh, you make pictures with killing and blood, the same as Weegee,' and they're very moralistic about it. The community says: 'No, this is bad'. In *Two Evil Eyes*, some of the people in the story look at Usher's work and say, 'Your pictures are too much,' and it's the same for me when the censor says: 'Too much!'. The same was also

**'When we shot *Opera*, it was terrible for me... I'm happy with it, but really I feel it's too dark a picture. It's not easy to film a story of a woman who is persecuted and killed, but this is the story I wanted to make'**

true of Poe, who received many letters saying: 'You bastard! You are very corrupt!' Personally, I respond to Weegee's work by thinking: 'This is reality. This is New York.' It is both ugly and beautiful. You see New York in the morning for example, maybe with the birds and the children, and it's one thing. But in the night it's prostitutes, travesty and transvestism, and people dying in car accidents. I remember Andy Warhol during one period mixed together many pictures of accidents and suicides.'

### SEE NO EVIL?

So does the photographic or cinematic image of a real-life travesty actually become something beautiful? The photograph may be beautiful, but the subject is horrendous. The photograph lends a distance. The difference is in the eyes. A policeman may pass and see a man killed, but Weegee will see maybe form, the body in a strange movement, the hand put in a certain way. He was fascinated by the symbols. It is the same with the way I make films — showing people things in a different way. I am also obsessed with memory, particularly in my first pictures, the way in which we create the things we remember. You remember something but it is not *real*, your senses have changed it. You put in other things. Ten people will see the same accident and offer ten different versions of the same event.'

exalts the 'beauty' of dying women, Poe laid himself open to (justified) charges of morbid misogyny, and much of his work is now rejected by feminist critics who view his writing as the ultimate in chauvinistic conceit. Argento too has been criticised for his portrayals of women simply as objects to be lovingly dismembered; the opening sequence of *The Black Cat* features a corpulent, naked woman lying sliced in half by a pendulous scythe, an image created by Poe and visually embellished by Argento. Far from attempting to sidestep such controversy, Argento embraces the 'pornography of violence' debate, and in *The Black Cat* tackles the subject head on — Harvey Keitel plays Rod Usher, a photographer whose work (much like Argento's) involves the photographing of atrocities in a manner which is peculiarly and disturbingly enticing.

'We found those images in police stations in America,' explains Argento of the photographs used in the film. 'They are real pictures. I am inspired by the photography of Weegee, who is now dead. He was this strange person who was interested in street killings. In *Two Evil Eyes*, Harvey Keitel actually dressed and looked similar to Weegee, of whom we had found a picture. So there is that connection running through:





**'Overall I think *Opera* is too excessive...but that's in the nature of the genre...the nature of opera is to push things to extremes'**



**Clockwise from top left: Inspector Alan (Urbano Barberini), the victim of a raven attack, and Cristina Marsilach, both from *Opera*; Argento at work; a shot from the ill-received *Creepers*. All stills from the collection of Alan Jones.**

Despite such an assertive philosophical defence of his work, Argento concedes that he has occasionally reined himself in, and held back from including in his films images which he felt were unacceptable. 'Sometimes I have...not censored myself, but...I have perhaps felt that something was too gratuitous. There was a scene which we cut from *Deep Red*, I remember, and also one from *Creepers*. For me, though, *Opera* is my most cruel picture and, incidentally, Orion, who are a very conservative company, cut scenes from it for

no reason. When we shot *Opera* it was terrible for me — the atmosphere of the picture was unforgettable. I'm happy with it, but really I feel it's too dark a picture. It's not easy to film a story of a woman who is persecuted and killed, but this is the story I wanted to make. Also it was so spectacular because the story is a melodrama. Overall, though, I think *Opera* is too excessive...too much, but that's in the nature of the genre. *Aida* and *La Traviata*, for example, are very terrible love stories because the nature of opera is to push things to extremes.'

Any reservations about the 'excessive' nature of some of his own work pale into insignificance when Argento is reminded of the outside forces which so frequently fall between his personal vision and the image which finally appears on the screen. In defending his right to make his own mistakes, Argento would perhaps sometimes prefer that the public be denied access to his movies rather than suffer the illegitimate cuts which

the powers-that-be have produced. 'I was invited to America for the premiere of *Creepers*,' he says laughingly, but flinching slightly at the memory, 'and I was happy. I then saw it, and suddenly it's: 'Fuck you, you bastards, you cut my picture! You invite me here, and you cut my picture! It would have been better to leave me in Italy! Oh well, that's life. But the only thing to do is to go with guns to the distributors and kill them. This is the only thing. Or go to Atlanta where they have the censors and kill every censor man. Because this only happens with films — it wouldn't happen with a painting, for example — people going 'I don't like that bit', and blanking it out. I feel it shows something against the cinema, as if the cinema itself is evil...'

**Two Evil Eyes is released, direct onto video rental, in December.**

# FANTASTIC

**Michael Moorcock, master of fantasy and mainstream fiction, creator of Jerry Cornelius and Elric and coscripter of *The Land That Time Forgot* discusses his hatred of Twilight Zone-type genre clichés, racism, sexism and pornography with FEAR's Stan Nicholls.**

**S**cience fiction and rock and roll were the two areas, I remember as a kid, where there was no adult interest,' says Michael Moorcock. 'I suppose I could dignify it all and romanticise it, by saying it was revolutionary or against the grain, but the fact is that every generation looks for something they can call their own. I suspect that's a lot of the reason I liked SF.'

The slightly disreputable outlaw image of science fiction and rock was an initial attraction for lots of people, I suggest, but neither seems dangerous any longer. 'In both cases they've become career options,' Moorcock agrees. 'If my headmaster, for instance, had said, 'What do you want to do, lad?' and I'd replied, 'Well, I want to play rock 'n' roll and be a science fiction writer,' he'd have whacked me about the head and sent me away to reconsider. But now, parents know there's a lot of money in rock and roll.'

'It's the same with the boom in fantasy and science fiction. Publishers tend to want the same as what's already sold. They want lots of Isaac Asimov imita-

tions. Or lots of Michael Moorcock imitations! The more eccentric and interesting stuff simply doesn't get a chance. Or if it is published, it's without much enthusiasm.'

Is success killing the field? 'It's not killing it any more than it killed the Western. What it does is standardise it, which means it's no longer attractive to the quirky, individual writer. Now there's a sort of blanket approach, with all those Tolkienish trilogies and endless series. They sell very well, and they sell for the same reason the originals didn't; because they are bland and acceptable. Everything in them has already been discussed, shown and developed. But people feel comfortable with that. They want fiction to comfort them. Particularly the furry animal kind of fantasy, the pixieshit.'

'The good thing about science fiction was that it offered a chance to be published in a popular form, which is important to a lot of writers. I never fancied being published in 'literary' magazines; it all seemed a dead end to me. The best test of myself as a writer was how well it went down with a proper public, and the nearest thing to a proper public were magazines like Ted Carnell's *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*, which were commercial markets.'

# ANARCHY



## ECCENTRIC STRUCTURE

Moorcock has a reputation for writing fast, and once turned out ten books in one year. Does this come from having been a journalist? 'Yes. Learning to hit deadlines — there not being any choice in the matter — you develop the kind of discipline that's necessary.'

'Also, I'm very schematic as a writer. I need to have a strong structure before I begin, which often is what takes the most time. *Mother London* took forever because I invented an eccentric structure for it, and I was a little scared of it. The technical demands were so great, I wasn't sure I could handle it.'

On the other hand, most fantasy tends to work to a formula. Yes, I virtually invented it! Fantasy novels are very easily structured because you're dealing with a genre, and the genre is the structure. If you get away from that structure, you're no longer giving the customers what they want. Which is not to say crap, but fulfilling expectations as far as genre goes.

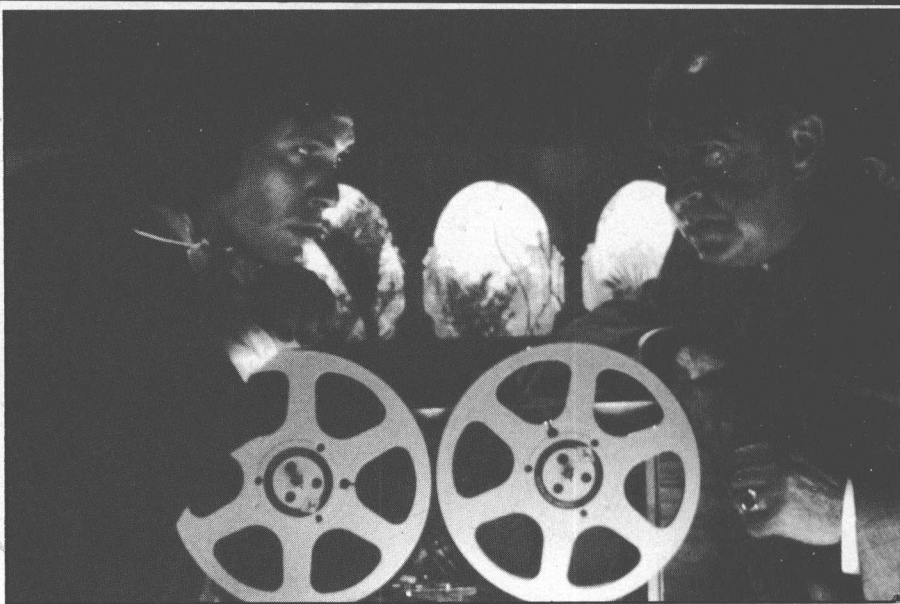
'Then again, if you're doing something like *Mother London*, which requires a totally new structure, it takes a lot more time. It becomes complicated because you're doing the opposite; you're trying to break down expectations. You're trying to destroy generic links, so that people won't impose an order on something that you're not intending should be there. The Jerry Cornelius books were done that way, so readers could take whatever they wanted from them. They are based on the idea that people will make their own interpretation. What you don't want is for them to read it as something conventional.'

**'My experience of making films is that they start right at the beginning to be bad. It begins to dawn that these people actually have a will towards producing crap. They haven't got any taste'**

In common with many writers, he finds the creative process involves cultivating a special frame of mind. 'I wake up with the most appalling anxieties when I'm working. I'm never going to write another word, I know that. That is my, as it were, virgin state, almost every day. It becomes generalised, it gets worse and worse. Just sheer fucking panic.'

One of Moorcock's most enduring contributions to the SF field was his editorship of *New Worlds*, which he took over in 1964 and ran until its demise in 1971. Uniquely, for a science fiction magazine, it was supported by an Arts Council grant.

'I never wanted *New Worlds* to be shifted into that little magazines area,' he explains, 'but the Arts Council expected you to modify, to become something suitable to receive their grant. So they didn't like it when, instead of moving towards the Establishment's way of dealing with things, you wanted to push it further on. They more or less said: 'We gave you this money in order for you to be respectable, and now look at what you're doing.' So it was never a particularly happy relationship. Not that I gave a fuck about it in



the first place. It was very kind of Brian [Aldiss] to organise it. He really did a good job, and I'm grateful to him. But I would never have asked for it myself. Going to the Arts Council struck me as being ludicrous.

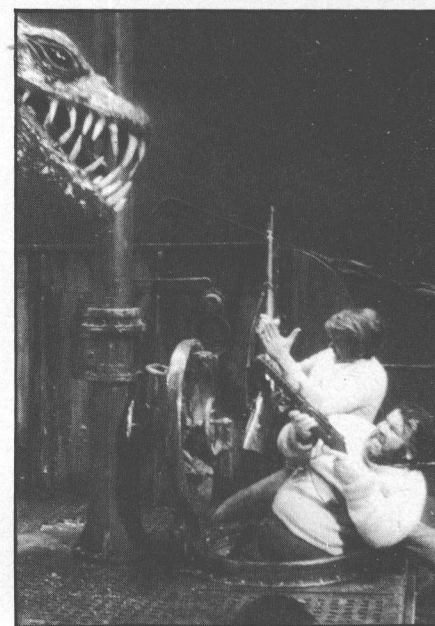
'I heard, years afterwards, that if it hadn't been for Angus Wilson having read a copy of *New Worlds* with *Behold The Man* in it, nobody on the committee would have known what the magazine was about. Giles Gordon, who is now my agent, was on the panel, and he had never heard of me or *New Worlds* at that time. He said it was entirely Angus' persuasion that got them to OK the grant.'

## RAY OF LIGHT

The magazine had an enormous influence, and helped to change the character of the genre, but what did it mean for Moorcock? 'I know there were readers out there for whom *New Worlds* was the only ray of light. To that extent, at a time when people needed confirmation of their ideals, it was very useful. It mattered to the readers, and it mattered to us. It kept our spirits up. It's always ridiculous to try and work out whether, if it had never occurred, all the Ballard stuff would have come out. I think eventually it would. I'm not sure I would have done the Cornelius stories if I didn't have a market for them, and it might have been the same with Aldiss' 'acidhead' stories. There were a lot of stories that came into existence largely because there was a magazine to run them.'

'We felt we were fighting for our literary identities, our actual *lives* as individuals. It was necessary to have some kind of rallying point where we could establish our version of reality, and there was a definite attempt to extend what we were doing to more and more areas. Which is one of the reasons we never really confined it to science fiction, and our readership wasn't confined to science fiction readers.'

'Some people think those of us involved with *New Worlds* had called ourselves 'New Wave', and we never did. We were not proscribing what it should be, we were proscribing what it *shouldn't* be. That was all. *New Worlds* had a policy of never telling you what it *was*. We didn't want old fashioned Carnell type science fiction, I must admit, but there were plenty of markets for that anyway, so we weren't trying to take the bread out of anybody's mouth. We were just saying, 'Look, if you're an eccentric or an individual and you want to try something out, this is the place for you, and you're welcome to use it.' That's why we had a lot of editors running, who would buy stories on their own independent decision. The decision didn't rest with me. I knew I didn't have a broad enough appreciation of certain kinds of fiction to be able to



**'Depressing' film versions of Moorcock novels: Jon Finch and Hugh Griffith in *The Final Programme* (top); Doug McClure, centre, in *The Land That Time Forgot* (below)**

select it. But as far as general decisions were concerned, it still had to have an essentially loony dictator, which is what I was. Every publication has to have a personality in that way, somebody who can't really tell the difference between themselves and the magazine.'

There had been nothing like *New Worlds* before. 'Almost all the people involved in it were thoroughly well-read in lots of different areas. They were not just science fiction readers, by a long shot. They liked science fiction, they weren't afraid of being science fiction writers — Jimmy [Ballard] for instance has never said he was anything but a science fiction writer, however eminent he's become — but they saw it as having certain possibilities.'

Many writers these days are modifying genres. Modifying the detective genre, for instance, which in fact Philip K Dick did forty years ago, somewhat more successfully. Many modern SF novels are exercises in nostalgia; they're not even exercises in looking at the future. I don't read them the way I would have read Ballard, Barry Bailey or Dick. I don't read them with that sense of excitement. These were people doing something fresh.

**Fantasy heavyweight  
Michael Moorcock**

'I don't want to sound like an old fart, because I'm sure there's good stuff going on all over the place, although to some extent it's frequently written by people who haven't got much of a track record within the genre. I mean, everybody reads science fiction now. You've got to have read some at least, even if you've decided you can't stand it.'

*New Worlds* was very much a product of its time, and should be seen in that context. 'What happened in the Sixties was an attempt — certainly by *New Worlds* — to embrace everything that was going on, and get some enjoyment out of it,' he recalls. 'There were all kinds of new drugs, new electronics, all sorts of shit going down. I'm not saying one didn't get overenthusiastic sometimes. A lot of people I knew snuffed it in that particular atmosphere, and you feel a bit that you're lucky you survived.'

'But that was the spirit of the time. The pamphlet I wrote, *Retreat From Liberty*, was about that; the fact that we had the chance of liberty and appear to have blown it. We fell back into rigid modes. People inch along, look back, and think, 'Well, I'm not so sure'.

'To me, and I said it at the time, I knew we were living through a golden age. It was better than it was ever going to be, and it couldn't last. What happened was almost inevitable. I still don't see anything wrong with the ideals; but there wasn't enough self-examination, a *real* wish to change yourself and the world. It got too easy. I've never known a greater sense of male power than I had when I was a hippie prince. It was sort of ridiculous. We should have been examining what effect we were having, and we didn't, because half the people involved were wankers, when you came down to it.'

'You realised, ten years later, that for most people it was a fashion. They were just going along with it because everyone else was. There appeared to be confirmation when it wasn't really there. I remember going to rock and roll festivals and seeing people behaving so badly to one another. There was the occasional Woodstock, but as much as anything people were absolutely selfish in almost every way. Little middle class wankers going along for the ride. They were on for the free drugs, and whatever else they could get, and they'd take it all then go and take from somewhere else. The Cornelius books were about the fragility of that particular...illusion, as it turned out.'

## DEAD NEWS

The first Cornelius novel, *The Final Programme*, was filmed in 1973. The producers hinted at a series, and promoted the character as a kind of alternative James Bond. 'That's where it went wrong, it wasn't intended as that. I was very depressed because they reversed a lot of the ideas. Whereas I was celebrating transexuality, if you like, or celebrating relationships that didn't depend on the sex of the people, and celebrating the possibilities of computers and jet planes or whatever, they tried to turn it into a warning about technology. They had Jon Finch making sexist and anti-lesbian remarks, all kinds of crap like that. They were just conventional.'

'It was like somebody takes your ideas and pisses on them. It's not that they changed the plot, or that they may have sensationalised it — they actually attacked the ideas that are the essence of the book.'

'My experience of making films is that they

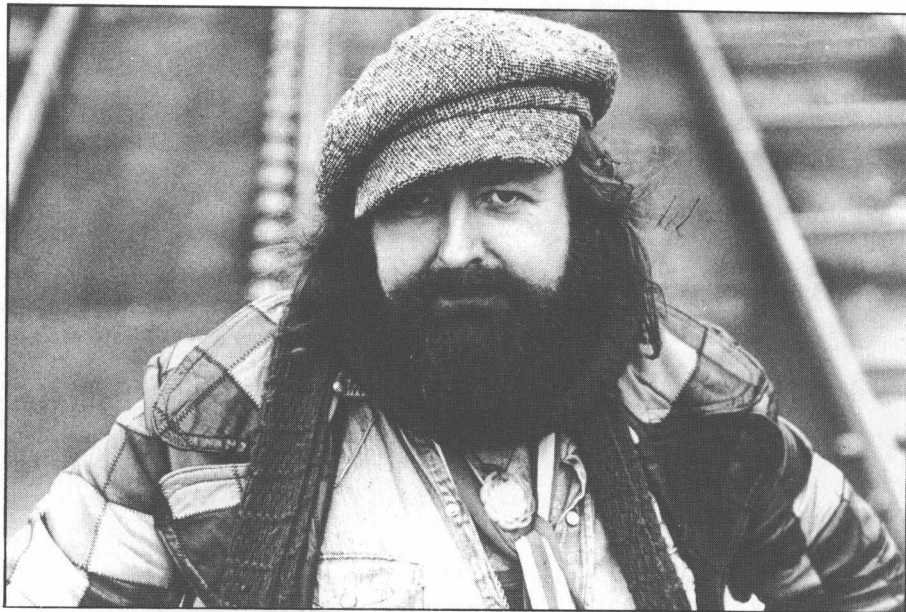


Photo: Roger Morton

**'Freedom of speech is something I feel very strongly about...but where a certain kind of expression, be it racist or sexist, is so powerful it represents a form of silencing other people, then that in itself acts against free speech'**

start right at the beginning to be bad. It begins to dawn that these people actually have a *will* towards producing crap. They haven't got any taste. Which I don't say is true of every film producer, or that it's characteristic of Hollywood; I've had as many problems with French and English people as I've had with Hollywood. But the bad producers are fucking banal. They've got the imaginations of dead newts. They're knocked out by the most ridiculous ideas. You know, 'Wow! Adam and Eve are really *space people!*' They've seen too many episodes of *Twilight Zone*, which is now the standard everyone's trying to achieve. They've become classics, and people speak of them as if they were state of the art, but everybody knows they were the only thing you had when you were a kid, and you had to put up with them. There simply wasn't anything better available at the time.'

'A mate of a friend of mine, who's very bright, has just written a book on post-modernism. He took as one of his examples the movie *Blade Runner*, and asks what moral issues are *not* discussed in the film. The original book was about fifty per cent discussing the moral issues, and it goes all the way, it takes the ideas and follows them through on all the levels Dick was capable of. He examines the implications of the fact that the androids only live for a few years. It's a good symbol he's using, but it's also in a sense a fairly ordinary idea for him. It's the kind of invention that any of us who write science fiction for a living come up with all the time to dress up our idea. The filmmakers then just take the superficial invention and forget about the rest of it. This is a constant problem. I had that with *The Land That Time Forgot* movie [coscripted with James Cawthorn]. It was the only Edgar Rice Burroughs book that actually had an idea in it, and I tried to pull it up and use it, because it was a very interesting idea. They turned it into dinosaurs wandering around killing one another and a volcano going off at the end.'

'The trouble is, when people do take risks, it costs them so much these days. Look at *Baron Munchausen*, which I thought was smashing. It was a magical film, similar to, but better than, anything Korda could have done. I was watching *Thief Of Baghdad* the other day. It's actually very patchy, you can see there were three directors on it, but the fantasy is well integrated. A lot of thought, real artistic skill, went into creating it. *Munchausen* had the same sense of integration. I would have voted for it as best fantasy film in years. And it bombs. Quite sensationally. Because people have become used to action, and a thrill a minute, and that's all they expect.'

'I think most filmmakers aren't very interesting people to start with. That's why I've become wary of doing movies. They tell you they really want you to use your imagination and go full out, and then you do it and they say, 'That's great stuff, Michael, but of course there's no way we can film it.' Commercial interests will always go for the lowest common denominator, because, apart from anything else it's cheaper to do that. If they know that a bloke with a big weapon, in dungarees with a lot of sweat and grimaces and all the rest of it, is the image that keeps selling, that's what they want. Which means that if you're producing a modern fantastic movie you get less content than you did in, say, a Todd Browning film.'

'In the old days, the lower the budget the more dependent they were on their imaginations, and on getting a really solid and meaty story. And some were stories with profound implications. The best of them dealt with certain realities of human nature and behaviour. You don't get much of that now. You rarely get something that makes you feel you're seeing an authentic myth, the way you did with *King Kong* — although it's still a ludicrous idea! The same with *Frankenstein*, which embodied something very basic. The Wolfman, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* are

going to keep going as long as the fundamental stories are there, the internal tragedies within the characters.'

He feels there are no ambivalent characters in fantasy films any more. 'There used to be knowing villains. They'd chosen evil, there was no question of them just being out for a good time. They were flexible, and there was always some possibility of the story changing. Which in a sense is like Shakespeare, when it's really well acted. I saw Ian McKellen in *Othello* a few months back and he was so good you actually thought the story was going to change. This time she's not going to get killed! She's going to be all right! I haven't seen a modern fantasy film which does that. Characters now are either Indiana Jones types or a bunch of kids. They are always in a sense immature or incomplete.'

'Most producers don't appear to have any more imagination than they're presented with, so the tendency is to copy what's

those women. I won't do it because it's not my business to tell them what to do. I'm dealing with the people who *don't* want to do it.'

'Fundamentally, I'm trying to attack these books and magazines on a commercial basis. The women's bodies are properties. It's to do with the free market, and if you believe that a totally free market is good for the world, fair enough. But then you're living in a cyberpunk future. I don't think we can stop pornography, but I think we can prevent it being an acceptable part of the public vocabulary.'

'Most of the arguments used against pornography — the emotional arguments — I won't use, because I think it's a question of taste and choice. But there are certain things I really do believe, and one is that pornography leads to sexual violence against women. It leads to expectations in men about women. When women do not fulfil those expectations, men round on them, and attack them for not being what pornography says they are. It's

### **'Most of the arguments used against pornography — the emotional arguments — I won't use, because I think it's a question of taste and choice. But there are certain things I really do believe, and one is that pornography leads to sexual violence against women'**

already been done, and to reduce it to sensation, to impact. It's like drugs or crazy sex; you can't stay at the one dose, because it doesn't work. Just like pornography, and all of those things depending on a dehumanised sensation.'

### **PSYCHOTIC FANTASIES**

In recent years, Moorcock has been vocal in his opposition to pornography, and particularly the kind of sexist fantasy typified by John Norman's *Gor* series. 'The books are the sort of stuff you read on lavatory walls; they are just extended psychotic fantasies.'

'People tend to laugh at them, except they're not laughable when you realise they are read by fourteen year old boys. Then people wonder why they go out and rape somebody. In my opinion, Norman's doing harm. Not that I'm going to go out and punch him to death or burn his books.'

Moorcock sees no conflict with freedom of expression here. 'Freedom of speech is something I feel very strongly about and continue to work for. But where a certain kind of expression, be it racist or sexist, is so powerful it represents a form of silencing other people, then that in itself acts against free speech. It tends to silence people who should have a chance to speak. That's what racial propaganda does. It says these people are not worth listening to, that what they say is funny, stupid or mindless. It's the same with pornography's treatment of women. It attacks the ordinary woman's self-confidence, it's telling her what she is.'

'When you've got that kind of pornography, constantly repeating the same message, it's dangerous. It says women like rape. Women do not like rape. You can get Uncle Toms among women, as it were, to say they think it's all marvellous and doesn't do anybody any harm, but I know from my experience that it *does* do a lot of people a lot of harm.'

What about the freedom of the women concerned to do as they want? 'What I'm against is a society which accepts that choice as a viable option. One thing I will not do is go on a TV programme that puts me in conflict with

life-destroying, spiritually destroying, to have that sort of thing.'

'But I'm not going to sit there like Claire Short saying, 'You'll come to a bad end, dear!' Most of them won't come to a bad end at all. They'll get happily married and everything will be fine.'

### **CRISIS OF CULTURE**

Moorcock sees science fiction continuing to have a function in an increasingly complex world searching for new political structures. 'Some people think we are on the borders of the particular kind of science fiction future where no holds are barred in anything. I don't think it will go that way, because society's not that self-destructive.'

'What you get, in the face of enormous amounts of data, is simplification. The old example of the Industrial Revolution and the gothic novel is a good one. During the Industrial Revolution society was changing about people's ears. Economically, things were shifting; different priorities and social ideas were being put forward. The gothic was a distinct response to all that. It simplified people's fears of the unknown.'

'The world is permanently mysterious to people. It was mysterious to the cave man, who produced his own version of fantasy to deal with it, and it's just as mysterious to me and you. We have always been afraid and anxious about the world. I don't think there's ever been a period in history when people have been, in any meaningful sense, content.'

'But there were times when people had different priorities, and the whole tendency of World War II had to do with the emphasis put on relationships and human values. This helped bring in the post-war Labour government. In modern history, humanist, radical governments tend to be elected on that basis after major conflicts. What happens is that daily life is so terrifying, people tend to concentrate much more on what's valuable. In a sense, the war marked the end of a particular culture. I don't have any overly doomy feeling about this, but we could be at the end of our culture, too. We may be the last generation, or

the last few generations, that regard reading as anything more than a very specific, highly specialised entertainment interest. Like dressing up in cowboy clothes and going to Nashville. The people who do it are *odd*. I'd hate to think that it was true, but one has to consider it as a possibility.'

He regards culture as being both permanently in decline and in a process of regeneration. 'The end of the Enlightenment has come down to a few engineers saying we can save the human race. But the day of the engineering messiahs is over. It's *got* to be over, whether they are Adolf Hitler or Karl Marx. Engineering approaches to human society just don't work.'

'You have to find different ways of working within the flux, of going with the flow, while maintaining dignity and human rights. Society must accept being in a state of permanent change. Nothing is going to be the same. I think we've got to develop a state of mind whereby we're ready not to hold onto things. I don't mean a throwaway culture, or anything as superficial as that, but a state whereby you are accepting the fact of constantly shifting values.'

'I'm an anarchist. I remain an anarchist, and I don't care if people laugh at me, because as far as I'm concerned those ideals seem good. Every foray I make into conventional politics winds up with it being reinforced that most of that is about people wanting their own areas of power, and being prepared to do almost anything to maintain them. We've got into the position where it's very hard to have a mutual moral view of things. It's possible to have it, but it means rethinking an awful lot of ideas.'

Work in progress includes the possibility of a film with Richard Dreyfuss. 'I saw him last December, and told him it was the first time anybody had put an idea to me I liked, that I could actually feel enthusiastic about. It's basically an alternate Earth story, and I'm quite happy to write it. I think Dreyfuss is a very interesting man, and I'd love to work with him.'

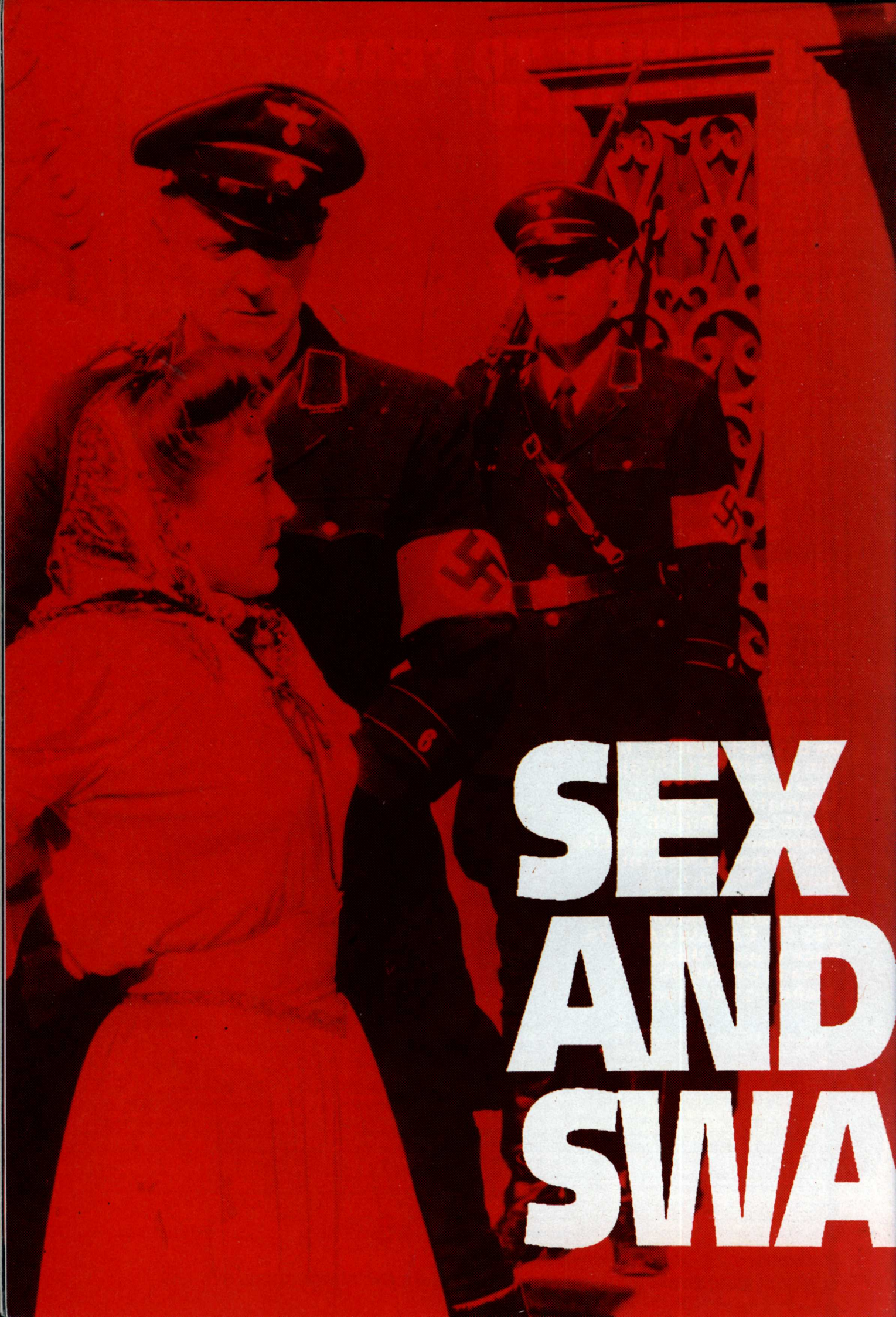
'I'm very reluctant to do movie work usually. I turned down *Hawksmoor*, although I was really flattered at the chance to do it, because I could foresee the problems. But working with Dreyfuss has been extremely rewarding and I'm encouraged that there's a good chance of the film being made.'

Meanwhile, he has returned to one of his most popular characters, Elric. 'Well, I'd got a couple of ideas that suited Elric, and I was offered very large amounts of money to do it. I think it will be my best Elric book ever, and that I've been able to expand the form a bit. I've tried to go back to the same kind of energy that characterised the earlier stories, and this time there's an element of humour. I'm very pleased with the result.'

Does he feel typecast by this? 'No. I get irritated by my fantasy getting in the way sometimes of the sales of my other books, and I feel I haven't got the full potential market for my non-fantasy books, but I'm not complaining.'

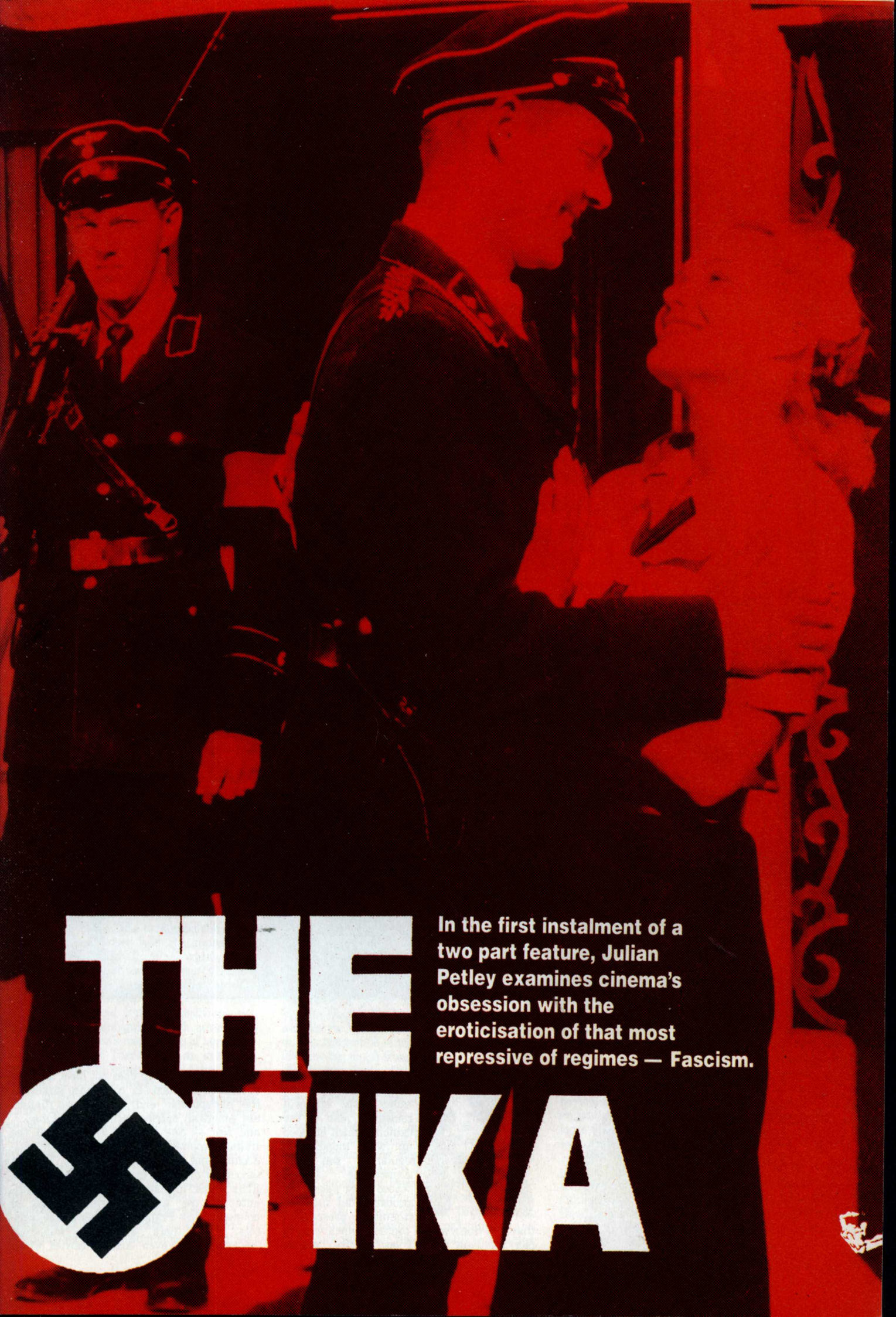
'I'm in the position of being fairly well-off compared to most people — not compared to Harold Robbins, perhaps, or indeed Isaac Asimov — but I'm still doing what I really like to do. I'm very grateful for the whole fantasy genre and what it's done for me.'

'Elric's bought me a lot more time, a lot more luxury, than most people have. It gives me the leisure to work on the vast projects I tend to work on. A lot of people couldn't conceive of doing that just for practical reasons. I feel I'm super fortunate. I have a really good life!'



# SEX AND SIWA





# THE

In the first instalment of a two part feature, Julian Petley examines cinema's obsession with the eroticisation of that most repressive of regimes — Fascism.



# STIKA



Previous page: *Women In Bondage* (1943) emerged from the Hays Office miraculously unscathed; a production shot from *A Time To Love And A Time To Die* (above) capitalises on the sexual undercurrent of Nazi imagery; and uniform is again the object of fetishisation in Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (right).

**A**

s anyone who was around during the 'video nasty' era will remember, one of the exhibits which cropped up with monotonous regularity was *SS Experiment Camp*, whose lurid packaging probably did more to stimulate prosecution than the film's actual content, which was, in fact, relatively tame. I say 'relative' because

*SS Experiment Camp* does not have the field to itself in the Nazi sex 'n' violence stakes. At the 'disreputable' end, the nearest runners are American entries such as *Love Camp 7* and *Ilse — She Wolf Of The SS* and the Italian *Deported Women Of The SS Special Section* and *Red Nights Of The Gestapo* (about all of which more in the next issue), films which, in many ways, are simply variants on the women-in-prison theme so beloved of Jess Franco and other sleaze meisters. But there are also numerous 'respectable' — even 'art' — movies which

utilise sex and/or eroticism within a Nazi or Italian fascist context; for example, Visconti's *The Damned*, Cavani's *The Night Porter*, Wertmuller's *Seven Beauties*, Bertolucci's *The Conformist*, Pasolini's *Salò*, Fosse's *Cabaret*, Brass' *Salon Kitty*, and so on.

It is sometimes argued that it was indeed *The Damned* which was responsible for what one might call this sexualisation or eroticisation of Nazi imagery, but this is really rather misleading. First of all, it ignores the steady spread of such imagery in the wider society, especially in the fields of fashion and pornography. As Susan Sontag wrote as far back as 1974 in her seminal essay on this subject, 'Fascinating Fascism': 'much of the imagery of far-out sex has been placed under the sign of Nazism. Boots, leather, chains, Iron Crosses on gleaming torsos, swastikas, along with meat hooks and heavy motorcycles, have become the secret and most lucrative paraphernalia of eroticism'. This is certainly true of a certain section of the gay community, but one has only to think of Siouxsie's early use of Nazi iconography, and the way in which S/M gear has entered the fashion market through the popularisation of punk styles, to see that this is also a much wider, more socially diffuse, phenomenon.

Secondly, to lay all the blame (or praise) at the door of *The Damned* is to ignore the fact that the cinema has long flirted with this eroticised image of Nazism, ever since Hollywood first began to turn out anti-Nazi films after America's entry into World War II. But let's get one thing straight from the start, you won't find this kind of imagery in movies produced in the Third Reich itself. SS men, concentration camps, and all the machinery of cruelty and oppression were, in that cinema, conspicuous only by their absence: Goebbels' propaganda machinery was concerned to lull people into accepting the 'New Order' by presenting them with its most benign face. It is only in some of the near-pornographic illustrations of Julius Streicher's rabidly anti-Semitic *Der Stürmer* (which was frowned upon by many Nazis) that one finds any hint of sexual pathology. After all, whatever the sexual tastes of Party members such as Röhm and Goebbels, Nazi ideology endlessly preached sexual conservatism and inveighed against the alleged 'decadence' of the preceding Weimar period. That such an incredibly sexually repressive society has somehow become erotic is one of the major paradoxes to be explored here.

## OVERHEATED

One of the earliest films to suggest the sexual dimension of Nazism and its appeal was Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, which, along with Brecht's *The Resistable Rise Of Arturo Ui*, remains to this day one of the most effective satires on Nazism. Chaplin deliberately brings out Adenoid Hynkel's lasciviousness, and the sexual ambiguity which attaches to so many of Chaplin's roles is also of particular significance here. There's also an extremely revealing scene in which Hynkel takes a gulp of water to cool his throat during one of his more hysterical speeches — and splashes some down his trousers as well, a clear indication, as one critic has put it, that 'his genitals are as overheated as his tonsils', and that the Hitler cult may have owed a good deal to sexual appeal as well as verbal rhetoric.

Equally interesting in this respect are the two films made in 1943 about Reinhard Heydrich, the 'Reichsprotektor' of Czechoslovakia whose death at the hands of partisans led to the destruction of the village



**‘Sirk’s film contains a particularly disturbing, and ambiguously sexualised portrayal of a concentration camp commandant who loves to play classical pieces on the piano whilst describing how he forces his prisoners to make their own funeral pyres’**

of Lidice and the murder of its inhabitants. In *Hitler's Madman* (1943), the first American film by the great Douglas Sirk, Heydrich's sadistic treatment of women is accentuated. For example, there's the scene in which he terrorises a group of female students at Prague University by selecting some of their number for the brothels on the Eastern front, during the course of which one young woman leaps to her death from a window. By the time of his own death, the cadaverous Heydrich (excellently incarnated by John Carradine) has achieved almost demonic proportions. Fritz Lang's version of the same story, *Hangmen Also Die*, features at least one syphilitic, homosexual Nazi officer, and the characterisation of Heydrich is even more extraordinary than in Sirk's film, as Jean-Louis Comolli and Francois Géré have pointed out in a remarkable analysis of the film in 'Cahiers du Cinema' (March 1978). Noting that Heydrich appears alive only once in the film, they continue: 'the character is designed

by the fiction to contrive within a single scene, to convene and concentrate in his person, through his body, his face, his attitude, the signs of a radical negativity, everything necessary to make him instantly and eternally hateful to the spectator. This body, this voice, these eyes bear death, castration, abnormality, sexual ambiguity. No hint of amiability; quite the contrary, in fact something equivocal, venomous, petty even in his extremes of cruelty... A body that is sexless and ageless, man-woman-child; but for that reason, in addition to the fact of his authority, an erotic body', and one which is considerably more fascinating than the film's rather pallid and conventional 'heroes'.

Other examples of wartime films which play on this connection between Nazism and sexuality of a frequently sadistic and strange kind include *Till We Meet Again*, in which a Nazi officer threatens to send a nun to the military brothels, telling her that 'the German Reich has use for such women';





*Hostages*, where a Nazi remarks that 'the tears of a young girl make the salt of the earth'; *The Cross Of Lorraine*, which has a prisoner chained to the wall and whipped by Nazi guards, one of whom says afterwards that 'we amputated his enthusiasm', hinting at darker things that happened off screen; *Enemy Of Women* which, through the story of Goebbels' pursuit of the young actress Maria Brandt, suggests the Propaganda Minister's voracious and well-documented appetite for starlets of all kinds; and *Once Upon A Honeymoon* which, even though a comedy, manages to introduce a reference to the Nazi sterilisation programme.

Of course, this being the Hollywood of the Hays Code, sexual themes, even if employed in such a way as to make the arch-enemy seem even more hateful, had to be approached with care, necessitating the frequent use of hints and allusions. One casualty of the Code was *The Hitler Gang*, part of which dealt with Hitler's early love for his niece, Geli Raubel. This, however, had to become somewhat more platonic than the film's makers originally intended, and other suggestions such as impotence, homosexuality and the Führer's more-than-fatherly interest in young girls had to be suppressed. Nonetheless, the film retained a somewhat steamy atmosphere in places and the Legion of Decency condemned it as 'unwholesome' — maybe they caught sight of the framed portrait of Hitler carrying a whip!

### FANTASTIC RUMOURS

The two wartime Hollywood films which have the greatest bearing on the present subject are undoubtedly *Hitler's Children* and *Women In Bondage*, both of which were made in 1943 and revolve around the eugenics theme. More specifically, both concerned the Lebensborn experiment, which was the object of fantastic

rumours even at the time, rumours which have since passed into popular mythology of the kind which fuels *SS Experiment Camp* and its ilk. The Lebensborn association was set up in 1936 under the auspices of the SS Race and Resettlement Bureau and was described by the editor of the SS paper 'Das Schwarze Korps' as providing 'mothers of large families with the finest possible obstetrical treatment in excellent maternity homes, also facilities for rest both before and after confinement. It also affords an opportunity for pre- and extra-conjugal mothers of good stock to give birth under relaxing conditions'. And for those SS officers unable to sire their own offspring, the Lebensborn homes provided a reservoir of 'racially and hereditarily worthwhile children' ready for adoption. Such was the rather prosaic truth of the matter, but it was not long before, in the Reich itself and elsewhere, the Lebensborn homes began to be seen by some as a cross between an SS brothel and a human stud farm.

In *Hitler's Children*, Anna Muller is the daughter of German-American parents and a pupil at the American Colony School in Berlin. She falls in love with Karl Bruner, who later becomes a Nazi. Unwilling to take part in the Nazis' plans to propagate the master race, Anna is eventually threatened with sterilisation. Eventually Karl sees the error of his ways and shoots both himself and Anna after denouncing the Nazis and all their works. Thanks to the depredations of the Hays Office, one has to read between the lines a bit; for example, the Lebensborn centres are described as 'rest homes' where the select 'may meet and decide to share the experience that makes them worthy of the Führer', but the film does contain an absolutely key moment in the annals of sadistic Nazi imagery, namely the scene in which Anna is tied to a flagpole and flogged by the SS in front of Karl and the serried ranks of uni-

**Nazis at play in *A Time To Love And A Time To Die* (above); the question of eugenics is addressed by the *Bund Deutscher Mädchen* in *Women In Bondage* (right).**

formed girls from the labour force.

More upfront is *Women In Bondage* — and how they got away with that title in 1943 is one of life's major mysteries! This tells the story of Margot Bracken, the wife of a German officer who is made Gruppenführerin of the local section of the German Girls' League. Her kindly treatment of the girls soon brings her into conflict with the cold, sadistic Gauleiterin Schneider, as does her disapproval of Nazi eugenics. Matters reach a head when her husband returns wounded from the Russian front, and the Gauleiterin orders her to find another father for her future children.

In *Women In Bondage* the members of the German Girls' League are told that: 'Love doesn't matter in selecting your mate. Yours is the greatest destiny, to create the master race'. When an old woman complains about her niece's active sex life she is told that 'the life they lead is a natural, healthy one. It's only old women like you who harbour dirty, filthy thoughts'. Here we see the spread of a goddess, pagan Führer cult through the indoctrination of young people into state sanctioned and promoted promiscuity — an image calculated to send shivers down the spine of puritan (or should that be prurient?) Americans, which is perhaps why the Hays Office largely left it alone. But in the scene in which the girls, dressed only in sheets, prepare for an 'examination for motherhood', are prefigured all the obligatory scenes in *SS Experiment Camp* and the like, in which the new arrivals at the camp are lined up for



 **'In Women In Bondage we see the spread of a godless, pagan Führer cult through the indoctrination of young people into state sanctioned and promoted promiscuity'**

inspection — only there, of course, they're stark naked.

It's perhaps worth pointing out that extermination camps as such do not appear in Hollywood wartime movies — even after the 'final solution' was set in motion — although prison and concentration camps feature variously in *Beasts Of Berlin*, *The Mortal Storm*, *Escape*, *Cross Of Lorraine*, *The Seventh Cross* and *None Shall Escape*. Again, censorship helped keep the horrors off the screen, but even without it one doubts whether most films would have gone any further; after all, there's little commercial or, for that matter, political/ideological, point in making features that most cinema audiences would find simply unwatchable.

One of the earliest films to give some indication of what really went on was *Sealed Verdict* in 1948; again, it's significant that one of the descriptions of Nazi atrocities has a distinctly sadistic sexual ring to it. This is the scene in which a father describes his daughter's degradation: 'at the camp, they put a whip in her hand. Push her into big room with many women, all naked. Her mother too... They force her to lash all the people, her mother. They all dance. Germans laugh. They dance till they can't stand up; then Germans turn on the gas.'

**SEXUAL AMBIGUITY**

Outside Hollywood at this time the sexual dimension of Nazism was touched on by Roberto Rossellini in both *Rome Open City* (1945) and *Germany Year Zero* (1947). In the former, both the Nazi commander of Rome and his female assistant are shown to be gay, whilst the unrepentant Nazi schoolteacher in the latter is clearly revealed to be a molester of little boys. This may not do much for Rossellini's reputation as a progressive filmmaker, but it certainly prefigures a tendency which was later to find its fullest flowering in the Italian cinema. Also worth noting, from a little later on, is Sirk's magisterial *A Time To Love And A Time To Die* (1958). Although primarily a poignant love story set in the last days of the Third Reich, the film also contains a particularly disturbing, and ambiguously sexualised, portrayal by Kurt Meisel of a concentration camp commandant who loves to play classical pieces on the piano whilst describing how he forces his prisoners to make their own funeral pyres. As a climax to his 'act' he constructs a miniature pyre on top of the piano, soaks it in petrol, and sets it alight.

However, we have to wait until 1969 for a really major escalation of the eroticisation of Nazism, in Visconti's *The Damned*, an explo-

ration of one of the director's favourite themes — the decadence of a dying European aristocracy — set against the backdrop of the early days of the Third Reich. The Essenbeck family, around which it revolves, is modelled not simply on the Krupps but on all those German industrialists who supported Hitler. Especially significant from our point of view is Konstantin, the vice-president of the family steel firm, and a member of the SA. Gross, rumbustious and homosexual, he is based on Ernst Röhm and, like his progenitor, is murdered by the SS in the *Night of the Long Knives*, which here is preceded by a homosexual orgy. But even more important is Martin, the heir to the firm. At the performance which marks the end of the opening scene (a birthday party for the head of the firm, Baron Joachim von Essenbeck, which happens to coincide with the burning of the Reichstag) Martin dresses up in drag and does a striking impersonation of Marlene Dietrich. By the end of the film he has raped his mother and been revealed as a paedophile and drug addict, and it is he who finally takes control of the family firm. However, he is no conventional villain but, as incarnated by the remarkable Helmut Berger, a Thanatos figure of considerable, if perverse, fascination. With its orgies, grotesqueries and preponderance of hellish red lighting, *The Damned* does indeed look forward to much that is to come, even if it can't be credited with inventing it. And who do we find in the cast but Dirk Bogarde and Charlotte Rampling, the sado-masochistic couple in one of the key movies in the eroticisation of Nazism, *The Night Porter*?

**Part two of Sex And The Swastika will appear in the December issue of FEAR.**



# GRAPHIC DE

Jay Ackroyd tracked down Warren Lapworth in just enough time for Judge Dredd to intimidate him into writing this month's comics column. What a card!

**B**izarre. *Wild Cards*, the series of books purporting to be comics in the form of novels, now actually are comics. Well, 48-page trade paperbacks to be accurate, from Epic (£3.10, import). In book one, Jay Ackroyd, private eye and part-time teleporter, is trying to track down whoever destroyed Jetboy's tomb.

Jetboy was the World War II hero who tried unsuccessfully to prevent the dropping of an alien virus bomb, nicknamed the Wild Card. It earned its name by the unpredictable results the virus has on anyone infected by it: 90% die, 9% become horribly mutated 'jokers', and just one in a hundred becomes an 'ace', someone who gains a useful (if sometimes limited) superhuman ability.

This first *Wild Cards* is mostly composed of flashbacks, of the alien race who chose to use their bomb on Earth and of Jetboy and his associates. Anyone familiar with the novels is likely to tire of this scene-setting pretty quickly but I, never having read any of them (*where are the pictures?!*) found it quite involving.

Although by six artists, the visuals are consistently mediocre, form quite good but inking rough and simple, shading non-existent in some places and horribly artificially stippled in others. Colours are badly chosen and their palette is limited. The value of translating comic book-style characters and situations into novels then turning them *back* into comics is dubious, but in its schlocky, B-movie way, *Wild Cards* works.



■ Above: not a 'Raw' deal, The 7 Seas Of Sin and (below) the nine faces of Thanos



## IN THE FLESH

Penguin have released a second *Raw* volume (£8.99), a 192-page, 24-story 'best of' from the magazine of the same name. Artist styles vary considerably throughout, but most use rough but effective form and inking; only four of the stories are in colour. Although from an equally wide spread of creators, plotting is much more consistent — weird and often grim. *Sneaking Out* is a homely American family tale that's also mildly disturbing, *The Seven Seas Of Sin* is a surreal, symbolic trip through man's vices and *Good Ol' Gregor Brown* is a stab at *Peanuts*, with Charlie Brown as some sort of giant bug (to mention but three). Most of the stories are of quality and together in a single volume *Raw* is almost what it purports to be: required reading for the post-literate.



# TAIL



■ Wild Cards



## ANY MORE QUEST-GEMS?

From the pages of the *Avengers* and, more recently, the *Silver Surfer* comes demi-god and infinitely nasty villain, Thanos. Mistress Death, the

physical incarnation of destruction and decay, has set him a task: to destroy half the population of the Universe. This is *The Thanos Quest* (Marvel, £3.50, import). Naturally, killing so many billions of creatures isn't the sort of job you can do in five minutes, so to speed up the process Thanos goes in search of the six Soul Gems. The Gems, each with a different property, hold immense power and are infamous in Marvel comics.

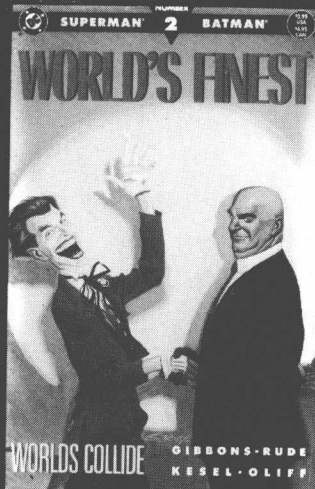
In Book One, Thanos tracks down the Soul, Power and Infinity Gems to the In-Betweener, Champion and the Gardener respectively, and engages in battles of body and mind with them. Ron Lim illustrates these cosmic encounters very well, with the carefully drawn and distinctive facial expressions bringing it all to life; he's really come on in leaps and bounds since his early days on the monthly *Silver Surfer* comic. Jagged and moodily coloured speech bubbles help to give Thanos an ominous air and Tom Vincent's use of colour and shading is excellent.

With its extravagant, cosmic and pretty damn silly basic plot, *The Thanos Quest* could easily have been

crass and disposable, but Jim Starlin has produced a highly readable little number. It's biased towards action, particularly fight scenes (Thanos versus Champion is quite a duel), but it's done with more thought and a more amusingly nasty dialogue than most mainstream comics — you can't help but root for mean, scheming Thanos.

## GOTHOPOLIS

As *World's Finest 2* opens (DC, £2.50, import), it's coming up to Christmas and Clark Kent arrives in Gotham City, to be greeted by Alfred the butler, while Bruce Wayne is met by Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen at Metropolis station. Representatives



of Lexcorp are in Gotham buying up property, by fair means or foul, in preparation for the arrival of Luthor himself. Meanwhile, the Joker's goons are causing trouble in Metropolis, the Clown Prince of Crime is in cahoots with Luthor, who plans to open orphanages in both Gotham and Metropolis to boost his public profile. Naturally, there's corruption at the bottom of it all.

Although simplistic in places, the artwork by Steve Rude and Karl Kesel is very pleasing to the eye, reminiscent of Alan Davis, and enhanced considerably by Steve Oliff's tasteful colouring. Dave Gibbons' story is pretty unlikely — Batman and Superman visit each others' homes and their respective arch-villains happen to have made the same exchange. It reads well until Christmas Eve and Midway orphanage's opening party, at which point it degenerates into a crude, sentimental and hopelessly outdated mess. Definitely *not* one of the finest comics I've read this month.

## DREDDFUL

Mean and moody, *Judge Dredd* — *The Magazine* (Fleetway, £1.50) has five stories. In *Midnite's Gem*, Dalbert Goong is caught in a gang war and is saved by Dredd, only to be pursued by some of the thugs. And an unseen bow-wielding vigilante is roaming the streets. Art is as basic as the thankfully short episode, moody inks the only redeeming feature.

*Chopper* is the nickname of Marlon Shakespeare, once a top supersurf racer in Mega-City Two until the disastrous surf 11 made him give it up for the peace of Drongo Springs, in the outback of Australia. But the corporation which runs supersurf is looking to take over Drongo Springs

— many mystically powerful 'songlines' cross there — and Chopper's in its bad books. What Garth Ennis reveals of the story has potential and John McCrea's visuals are very good; I was very fond of his work on *Troubled Souls* in *Crisis*.

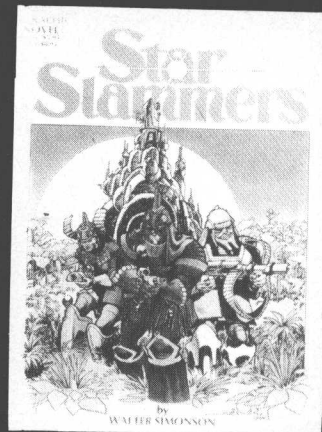
A quick tabloid spoof (*Mega-City News*) before *Young Death*. Predictably, this is the return of Judge Death, investigated by journalist Brian Skuter. Too little story to comment on in this first episode, but art is suitably dark and threatening.

*America* is the name of a woman Dredd once loved, and the first part of the story is split between his view point and that of her childhood friend, Bennett Beeny. This has the potential to be a very interesting story but although Colin MacNeil's colouring is atmospheric, his characters look damn weird to me! With a surname like Who? it's no surprise that life is *Beyond Our Kenny*. He was slammed in prison for attacking the machine and people who copied his comic artwork, and now his family, are finding times hard. Illustrations are quirky and light to suit the cynical story but it tries too hard to be effective.

So, is that lot worth £1.50? Just about; but it would have been a lot better if the *Mega-City News* and one of the stories were dropped to give space for the others to develop.

## BANDITS AT SKRIKS O'CLOCK

Sphere, Jalaia and Ethon: the *Star Slammers* (Marvel, £5.50). They're highly skilled mercenaries, the best there is at what they do, and they successfully defend a citadel against the Skriks. In addition to their fee, they take the Skrik ship and weaponry for use against their sworn enemies, the Bandits of Orion. But after leaving the citadel, they come out of lightspeed and straight into the middle of an Orion fleet...



*Star Slammers* was written, pencilled and inked by Walter Simonson. I've both read and viewed his work in the past and unfortunately here he's far from his best. Much of the artwork appears rushed, detail lacking and shading often just a few pen strokes, although colouring dyes help disguise weaknesses. The story's reasonable but doesn't really go anywhere — you don't feel you're getting enough for your money — and it's derivative of various sci-fi films, particularly *Star Wars*. Take more care and time over your work next time, Walt, and your talents will be duly recognised.

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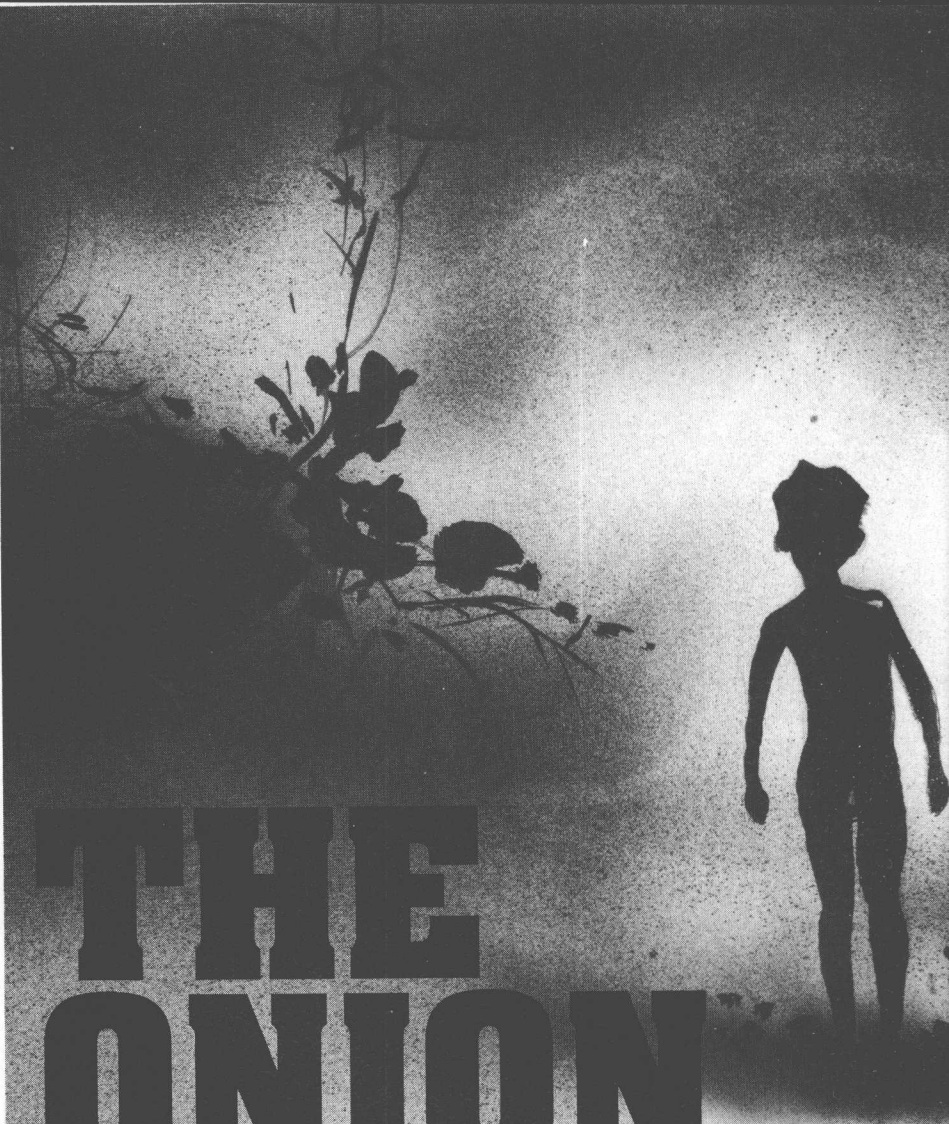
By Glen Dennis.

A ripping yarn...

### 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.



# THE ONION PEOPLE

By Mike Newland

**T**he only thing I'll confess — no, that's wrong — the only thing I'll *admit* is this: I did a sorry job of coping with the divorce. Jill's lawyers, bankrolled by Dellman Bullard, outclassed mine a hundred-to-nothing. The judge awarded her custody of our two children, I got leftovers, the house, the car, things that didn't matter.

'I hope there are no hard feelings about this, Calvin,' Bullard said to me afterwards, his gaze intimidating, his tone dictatorial.

I heard he played polo out at Willow Bend, where his nickname

was 'the Hun'. Women supposedly loved calling him that, only they dropped the 'the', making it a teasing flirtation. *Hon...*

They met by accident, he and my wife. He was the speaker at an investments seminar she attended.

The Hun. Atilla. Ruthless.

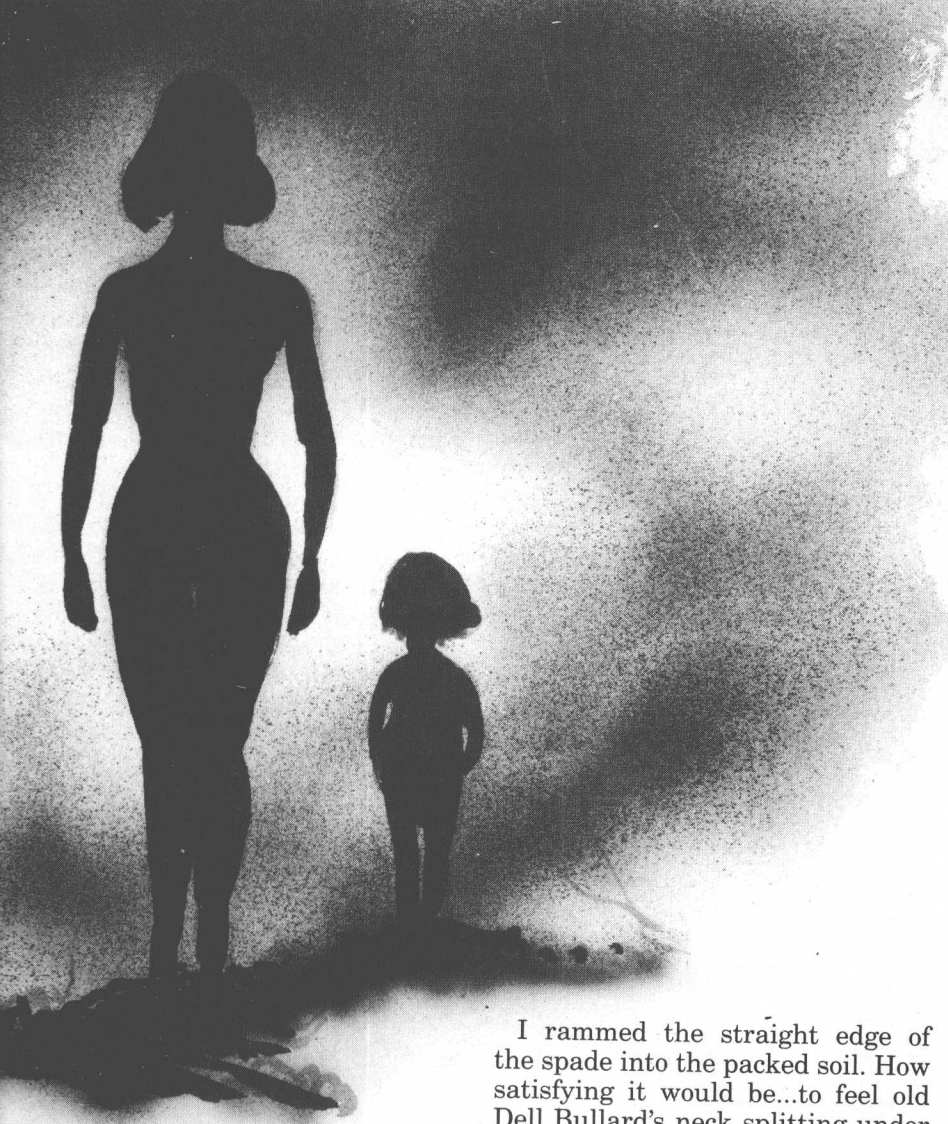
He said he hoped there were no hard feelings, then he offered me his hand. Gutless me, I shook it. His grip was firm, aggressive. I wasn't even there.

I loathed him. *I hope you die*, I was thinking in the back of my brain.



The house was a burden of memory. Long copper strands of Jill's hair turned up on pillows and in the bathroom. A forgotten crayon lay in the back of Lisa's closet. Empty rooms, mocking echoes. From under a sofa cushion





Boot to spade, I mounted and bore down. A sound came from the earth, a retch. The ground bubbled with dark fluid.

Dropping the spade, I went down on my knees and put my hands in the soil. They came up sticky with blood — blood hot from freshly severed arteries. My hands dug till they touched something. I grabbed hold and tugged.

**D**ellman Bullard's head burst out of the ground in my fingers. His neck was brutally amputated. Startled, shining eyes blinked at me. His face contorted in terror.

'It's horrible,' he blubbered. His breath stunk of onions.

I sprung up screaming, crawling with live terror. The lonely house resounded with my screams.



I called work a few days later, told them I quit. They didn't try stopping me. I figured I'd get by on the money left from the sale of the house.

For the first time since the dream, I stepped out back.

What I saw there made me pause.

It's difficult to describe accurately, but in the row where I'd planted the onions something else was growing, something weird. Three organisms of some kind — not plants, more like placentas. One was as big around as a head of lettuce, the other two were the size of crab apples. Rather than run, I squatted on the grass and studied them. They had no definite shape or form, but were jellylike and raw. They throbbled like sunning toads.

Puddling the ground around them was some kind of dark liquid. I recalled the blood in my dream.

Putting out my fingers, I touched the big one. It had a warm and meaty feel. Insects hummed on the still air, cars passed lazily on the street. I kept my hand there, touching the thing. It felt familiar and I detected a faint pulse.

Much of the world's evil comes from the seed of an innocent desire. People want a better life and they perpetuate a holocaust. They want peace, they create an atomic bomb. I wanted a woman to love, children to call my own. In that desire I somehow opened the gates to Hell.

**M**y hand began stroking the thing. Its flesh was indeed



I rammed the straight edge of the spade into the packed soil. How satisfying it would be...to feel old Dell Bullard's neck splitting under that thrust.

Planting the onion seeds, then the others, I remembered the baths Jill and I used to take together after we'd been sweating all afternoon in our garden. She worshipped my backrubs, she groaned and sighed, and in no time at all we'd be on top of each other, going at it. She was all mine then, every bit of her.

I missed her so bad I broke down and cried. *He* had her now. The bastard was fucking my wife. He'd stolen my children. Tears spilled off my face onto the onion seeds. All I wanted was to get my family back. That's what burned through my tears: that one terrible desire. To get them back. I almost wished Jill was dead. Then mourning her like this would at least make some sense.

The smell of her body making love to mine came back to me out of my salty tears and out of the freshly broken earth.



That night I dreamed.

I was digging the garden, night air clammy with fog. I felt more alone than ever, alert and restless.

I dug a Ruben Sierra baseball card. Kevin's. It haunted me for days.

I sold the place and moved into a rundown house in a less desirable part of town. I bought a used Yamaha, easier than hassling with the Skylark. I was sinking like a stone. I lost interest in my appearance, didn't care about my job. My appetite vanished. I quit shaving and spent my evenings alone in the dark, surrounded by unpacked boxes.

Gazing off into space. I would hear faraway police sirens. They wailed like grieving ghosts.

Unless you've been there, you've no idea how grim it is in the dungeon of the human soul.



To keep from going crazy, I started putting in a garden. Jill and I had been a damn good team of suburban farmers in our day. In fact, I still had a packet of onion seeds we'd bought and never used. For old times' sake I decided to plant them with the carrot and radish seeds I'd just bought.

familiar. As I worked it with careful, persistent dexterity, I felt it settle, warm, relaxed, under the steady pressure of my touch. It almost seemed to sigh.

My life had meaning again. My desires were being acknowledged.



They' grew in the cool gray moonlight.

I tended them constantly, watering, fertilizing, speaking softly to them in the fenced seclusion behind the house. I let the other vegetables die. Bringing a lawn chair, I sat and ate my TV dinners on my lap, watching every subtle development, their progress, their evolution from formlessness into clear, unmistakable beings.

They rose straight up from the ground: full-size human figures, a woman, a boy and a very young girl. Their skins were as pale and flawless as the underflesh of onions. Their dry lank hair was of a very light orange, their eyes loosely shut, blue lips pursed like the lips of the dead.

They were naked, their bodies — especially that of the woman — beautiful things to behold. Her breasts oozed resinous onion milk. Her slender thighs were together, long legs gliding downward to a pair of delicate ankles. She was rooted, as were the children, in bloody, curdled soil.

Long moments at a time, I gazed into her dreamy face.

She seemed to be floating in her mind, lashes graceful, angelic. I wanted to kiss her lips, but I resisted.

One night I dozed in the chair, only to be awakened by someone speaking my name.

'Calvin,' spoke the voice again.

I squinted through the dim shades of the moon at the figure of the woman looming there in the night. The figures of the children loomed beside her. They loomed like the idols of some long-dead cult.

'Calvin,' the woman whispered.

'Yes?' I replied, mouth straw-dry.

She'd opened her eyes. Stepping close, I found her peering weirdly into my face. Python eyes. 'Calvin,' she kept repeating, as if she'd learned the word on another world and was practicing its feel. I wanted to turn away, but I couldn't. Those snake eyes compelled me, glowing blood-red in

the dark. They hooked me, pulling me in. Her whole torso shuddered as she raised her right arm, moving with the jerky animation of a marionette. She extended a stiff hand, fingers flexing. Her nails were scissor sharp. The flex was like a reaction to an electric shock.

'Take me,' she commanded. I took her hand in mine, feeling her grip tighten. 'Pull,' she said.

I pulled. She twisted on her legs, cracking joints and tendons till both feet came unstuck from the mud. Still clenching my hand, she stumbled forth and collapsed against me. I caught her, holding on so she didn't fall. We clung together. Her breath came gasping against my shoulder. She shivered. There was a husky green smell to her, mixed with earthy underfunks and a vile reek of blood.

'Cold?' I asked.

**'Much of the world's evil comes from the seed of an innocent desire. People want a better life and they perpetuate a holocaust. They want peace, they create an atomic bomb'**

She nodded, teeth clattering. I snuggled her to me. We started for the house, when abruptly I turned to look back. The children stood motionless in the earth.

'Later,' she whispered, then drew me indoors.



Shaloi was her name.

She took me straight to bed, letting me have it. Milk sweat rolled off her, a smell that made me gag. But I'd been without sex too long and she spread herself wider, with more abandon than Jill ever had. She whispered filth, urging me to take her in ways I'd only fantasized before. We rutted like dogs.

Straddling me, hands on my shoulders, ramming herself up and down, her eyes never changed.

They were unmoved, the organs of a cadaver, its lids removed. With hardly enough air to speak, I asked her, blurting it between sighs: 'What *are* you? You're not a woman —'

She laughed, a brittle sound rattling like gravel on tin in the whirl of my brain. 'Of course I'm no woman,' she hissed. 'I came straight out of the ground. Didn't you see?'

'You planted me,' she said as I climaxed. She bent forward to kiss me. Her tongue was sour. I was drained, satisfied beyond words, drifting off to sleep, tears on my cheeks. Release so fantastic I cried. 'I'm an onion,' she whispered. 'High in fiber, low in fat, rich in vitamin C... A plain white unremarkable onion. And a helluva better fuck than Jill.'



I helped her free the children the following evening. We sweated, breathed together and pulled. They tumbled from the mud.

She called them her little scallions. The boy's name was Chivel. His sister was Lekeeta. When they called me 'Daddy' it gave me a warm rush, which proves I'm human.

We settled into a domestic routine. Shaloi was uncomplaining. Not like Jill. She put up with my worst habits, while I accepted her for what she was.

Whatever that was.

Yet in the dark, alone with her, I'll admit I felt afraid. I was human, she was something else. 'What kind of... What *are* you?' I asked her again, after we made love on another occasion. I was experiencing some form of denial.

She smiled patiently. 'I told you, Cal. An onion.' Her voice had a tinkling quality. Fairylike.

'No,' I said, 'you're no onion. You're some kind of...' The words weren't there. 'The boy...Chivel's his name, right?'

She nodded.

'What sort of name is that — French? And the girl, Lekeeta — that sounds Russian.'

She laughed. 'Do we look like Red onions to you?'

The joke puzzled me. Where did it come from? She was — they all were — so bizarre. As distant as the moon and yet they touched me.

So I accepted her. I didn't drive a stake through her heart or soak

her in kerosene and set her ablaze. I didn't murder her for being different.

She sat there with her back against the headboard, naked and goddess-like beside me. Long hair hanging over her shoulders, arms resting on the tops of her bare knees. Her smell pervading the dark. 'It's like this,' she told me. 'You planted onions, you got onions.'

'Not exactly —'

'You did get onions. But you wanted a family, too.'

I had no answer.

'So you got a family, too. Us. You got an onion family.'

'You *cannot* be an onion,' I was pissed, tired. 'An onion is a cold, mindless thing. It has no soul —'

'Yet it makes men cry.'

This threw me for a loop. I remembered my tears the first time we had sex. 'Look,' I struggled, 'you've got hair, fingers. Breasts! A *vagina*, for godsake, Shaloi —'

'Where's my bellybutton?'

'Huh?'

She didn't repeat herself. I'd heard. Where was her bellybutton? She didn't have one. Nor did Chivel or Lekeeta, little scallions.

**W**e killed such arguments with sex. Always more sex. She was irresistible. Sometimes we started in the afternoon and kept at it till early evening. I burned raw with pain and exhaustion, passed out and slept till sundown.

Despite the smell she left on me, I was happy. Dear God, was I happy! I even began looking in the papers for a job, skipping the front page horror stories — plane crashes, bank failures, battered wives, missing kids.

Soap and water wouldn't take her smell off me, so I figured I'd better settle for some kind of employment that required minimal contact with the public.

The house grew riper by the day. The terrible odor was on everything, the drapes, the carpet, even my food.

They didn't eat food. They ate fertilizer. Ate it by the grubby handful, straight from the bag. It stained their mouths, flecking their teeth like Oreo cookies and giving their breath a musty smell.

'Mama, what is food?' Chivel asked one day.

'Dead things,' Shaloi informed him.

'Do we eat dead things?'

'We all eat dead things.'

Talk like that gave me the willies. Eat your peas and carrots and dead things, dear. *We all eat dead things...*



They wore outfits I bought at K-Mart. It wasn't easy getting them to put them on. They loved going naked, which would've been okay — they spent most of their time indoors, anyway — except some nights we went out driving. So I insisted they learn to tolerate clothes.

They looked forward to those evening drives, worshipping speed and the radio blasting. They had a bad habit, though, of staring into adjacent cars when we were stopped at red lights. Their eyes burned like embers, which bothered people. So I made them wear sunglasses — pretty scary in their own way, shades in the dead of night, but an improvement over the alternative. I wore them too, as encouragement.

One night I pulled the car into a vacant field and let Shaloi take the wheel. She didn't hesitate. Sitting close, I gave her a driving lesson. She learned fast. She gassed it and we went on a joy ride.

We looked like a band of outlaws, all of us in our weird sunglasses careening through the night. It was the closest I ever came to being one of them. It was fun.

One night somebody knocked at the door.

It woke me from one of my post-coital slumbers, sheets still damp from screwing. Pulling my pants on, I stumbled into the living room, past the crackling TV. I peered through the curtain. Somebody waited out there in the dark.

Shaloi and the children were nowhere in sight. It was just me and the tube. Channels that didn't broadcast fascinated them. They sat with the lights off, night after night, hooked on patterns of static. It irritated me to death and was my major reason for taking them driving.

**I** opened up. It was the retired couple from the rent house next door. They gave me a curious stare.

'You smell that smell?' wheezed the old man. He had a lopsided skull, like a badly bruised melon. His wife, the bully of the pair, stood squat and scrappy-looking beside him. They both wore

bifocals, smudged lenses reflecting the glowing TV behind me.

'What smell?' I asked.

'Somethin' rawten,' replied the woman in a Brooklyn accent. 'It's all over the neighbah-hood, stinkin' up the ehh. Smells aww-ful. Got 'ny idea what it could be?'

It was me they smelled. I could tell by the way they eyed me, nostrils twitching sneakily as we spoke. The smell was in my hair, on my breath, under my nails. Nasty, overpowering, it covered me like a bad rash.

'Could be a cat crawled up under your house and died,' said the man, wishing to avoid a confrontation. But his wife shook her hateful little head. 'That's no cat.'

I slammed the door in their faces, furious. I hissed, 'Shaloi!', at the darkness, but there was no answer. 'Sh —' Something loomed in the corner of my eye. I turned, recoiling at what I saw. She hung upside down beside the door.

Her body was glued snail-like to a phosphorescent goo, a secretion that stickily slimed the wall. Her neck curled grotesquely around at me as she leered into my face. My mixture of fear and revulsion delighted her.

'What is that smell?' I demanded.

'Compost,' she replied. Her voice echoed, like the slither of a cobra in a dry well. 'All protein is death,' she said, neck wafting. 'Everybody murders to survive.' I heard snickering laughter from the unseen children. I cringed, imagining drooling rat tongues licking at my back. They appeared, both of them, across the shadowy room, watching me with bright, protruding eyes. The crackling TV was too much. I lurched over and switched channels. A bulletin hissed on. Kids' faces, a Mexican girl and two brothers. Grade school pictures. A correspondent, shots of police and grieving parents. Bloodhounds.

The onion people laughed. I felt Shaloi squirm off the wall and come and grip my arm with icy fingers. 'Let's do it,' she said.



We were out driving a couple of nights later when, deliberately or otherwise, we wound up in Highland Park. I couldn't resist going past the Bullard mansion, situated off the road in oak-shrouded seclusion.



'My family lives there,' I commented, slowing the car as we passed. 'That's what Jill married into.'

I'm sure there must have been a lot of bitterness in the way I put it.

Easing on the gas, I drove on. From the back seat, Lekeeta asked, 'Aren't *we* your family, Daddy?'

She had that same eerie tinkle to her voice as Shalloi.

'No,' Shalloi cut in before I answered, 'we're *onions*, dear.' She made it sound like a slur.

I felt the mood in the car turning sour.

'What I meant to say...' I began.

'Don't bother,' Shalloi snapped. She'd never been like this before — angry. I didn't know if I should take her seriously or not.

'You've got it wrong,' I said.

'You want them, not us. We're just your way of killing time.'

'That isn't true,'

'I can read your heart, Cal. You don't love us.'

True. How could I? But that didn't mean I didn't appreciate them. 'I *need* you,' was the best I could do. 'And I want you...'

'All you want is Dellman Bullard's head,' she snapped. 'The grudge has eaten all your love.'

Her powers of intuition frightened me. I'd never breathed his name in her presence, yet she *knew*. Just as she knew the true nature of my heart. Furthermore, she was interpreting my nightmare, the one I'd had before we met.

'You want him to suffer.'

'Yes, that's true,' I admitted. 'After all, I'm human.'

'Not I,' she struck back with scornful pride.

We rode home in silence and she wouldn't let me near her in bed.



I went out the next day wanting to break something. How could I have known such a minor thing would hurt her?

Jerking on my helmet, I rolled out my bike. Without a word, I took off, cruising aimlessly at first, then deciding what the hell. It was my life.

The stretch north takes you up through scrub country past one little bait stand after another, places that thrive on the sale of cold beer and firecrackers. There's a lake up that way — secluded, a place where a man can think.

I wound up there around noon. It was a week day, not yet summer. There wasn't much activity. Out near the spillway, with a few dozen spectators looking on, I saw a pair of police boats trolling. I stopped and called down the bank to a guy on the shore, asking him what was going on.

'Cops lookin' for them three kids,' he called back, not taking his eyes off the dragging.

'What three kids?'

'The missing ones. They think whoever took 'em might've tossed 'em in the lake.'

He never bothered looking me in the face. It probably doesn't matter anyhow — the faceplate hid my features.

Still, he may've been able to vouch that I was there.

I studied the tedious patterns the boats made. The drone of their engines lingered on the air. They were wasting their time. Somehow I just knew.

My day was spent following the trails. I tried to make some sense of it all. For my trouble, all I got was a sunburn. I came to the conclusion that there was no way out. I could not abandon Shalloi, regardless of the differences between us.



Late that afternoon I aimed for home. It took over an hour to get back. Feeling numb and windblasted, I turned onto my street and throttled lazily up the block.

A strange car, a silver-green Mercedes, sat in the driveway. It seemed remotely familiar. The door on the passenger's side yawned open. My old Skylark was nowhere in sight.

The personalized plate on the Mercedes sent ice through my veins. HUN, it read.

Bullard.

For a moment I thought he'd come to seduce Shalloi. I distrusted him that much.

I gunned up the drive, idled down, peered into the car. On the passenger's window was a transparent swipe of blood, more on the dash. Signs of violence — the rearview mirror knocked askew, a floormat lying flopwise in the yard. Credit cards everywhere. Money fluttering through the grass.

Movement next door caught my

eye. The nosey old bitch over there was watching me through a blind.

I killed the motor, kicked down the stand and threw off my helmet hurrying inside.

Chivel and Lekeeta were watching static on TV. Their heads swivelled, facing me with unreadable stares.

'Where's your mother?' I asked them.

As if on cue, they broke into giggles. I noticed then how their hands and clothes were smeared with blood. More than ever the air carried the taint of something gone horribly bad.

They giggled on and on like they were possessed.

'Shalloi!' I hollered, but she didn't answer.

I ran to the bedroom. She wasn't there. Back out, down the hall, into the kitchen. Empty. Blood on the walls, chairs overturned, a reek of decay permeating the air.

Something was in the pantry, the old-fashioned pantry, built deep into the wall. I had no use for all that space, and consequently it'd gone neglected. I hadn't been in there in months. I gripped the knob now, turning it, easing open the door.

The stink hit me like a wave. The darkness was a madhouse of flies.

Piled to the walls was a deranged collection of animal and vegetable waste — melon rinds, pieces of half-eaten chicken, cartons of curdled milk. Rancid cheese. Feces, tunafish cans and moldy cabbages. Corn cobs. Apple cores, ashes, coffee grounds. A balloonish dead rat bristling with ants. Macaroni, hair. Bones, chunks of rotting tissue. Eggshells and grease. Alive with roaches, everything crawling. No end to it. All mixed together like some freak, disgusting stew, sprinkled liberally with fertilizer from the empty bag.

Heaped indifferently along with all the rest, were three hideous stick figures, three corpses. Heads swollen grape-black. Maggots rioting thick as pudding in their scalps.

'Oh, my God...'

I'd found the missing children. The onion people had stashed them in my pantry.

I was sick. Through the kitchen window I made out a swirl of smoke coming from the back yard. Opening the door, I staggered outside.

Shalloi was at the charcoal grill,

erect and somber, tending to something there. She gazed up when I appeared, her eyes shielded by the sunglasses. Blood matted her russet hair, her lips twisted into a smirk. 'You're back,' she said.

I couldn't speak, couldn't manage a solitary word.

She stepped away from the cooker with a slight dip of the head, an indication I should take a look. From my vantage point on the stoop, the raised cover blocked my view. I came down the steps, snatching wildly in my mind for some straw of sanity. This couldn't be. The atrocity in the pantry had to be a dream. None of this was real.

**'Dellman Bullard's head burst out of the ground in my fingers. His neck was brutally amputated. Startled, shining eyes blinked at me. His face contorted in terror'**

I gazed down at the cooker.

Dell Bullard's impeccable head was sizzling like a fat brisket on the grill. Strands of tissue hung from the gaping neck, bubbling between the grates, flames licking his dimpled chin, now blistering and beginning to char. His tongue lolled wetly out of his mouth. His blue eyes gaped in unbelievable horror.

'You do eat your dead things cooked, don't you?' she teased.

The headless body was only a few feet away, slumped on its side against the shed. Its wrists were bound with rope. It wore a floral shirt.

Something more unspeakable than beheading had been done. The crotch was burned out of the Bermuda shorts. A glimpse of skin showed — pink, charred — and beside the body was the spade, organs and blood caking the blade.

'What have you *done*?' I shrieked. I manhandled her roughly, shaking her. The shades seemed to shield her from blame. Her expression

was cool, defiant. Snatching the glasses, I sailed them across the yard. I wanted to smash her face.

She let go a fierce snarl. Her eyes jittered in her head. Her breath was as rotten as a cyst.

It hit me finally, in that instant: she was not only not human — she was a monster. She lacked the humanity of a soul. She might as well have been a spider or an octopus. Imagine an octopus — worse yet, an onion — assuming human form. She was as evil as evil can be. I let go of her. 'How could you...'

'I drove your car,' she volunteered proudly. 'We slipped in his house and tortured him. Chivel tied his hands. We made him cry, Calvin...Dellman Bullard *cried!* He gave us his cars and lots and lots of money. He tried to buy us off. But we brought him here —'

'What about those kids?' I shrieked, gesturing at the kitchen.

'Our compost?'

'They're dead!'

'All protein is death,' she replied nonchalantly.

A version rushed over me. I was tingling with rage.

'Where's Jill?' I whispered. 'If you've —'

'I'm Jill.' She shrugged.

I slapped her hard in the face. She took it, head down, hair in her eyes.

'I'm everything you ever wanted,' she confided softly without looking up.

I hated Bullard but this was wrong. It was like saying you love the beach and then being forced to eat sand. And the children...those poor innocent things. What sort of monster — I grabbed the spade and went for her. She still didn't look up. Grinding my teeth, I swung. The blade thunked through her neck, a rubbery chop. Her head somersaulted. Her body dropped away. Blood exploded. It blew out in crescendos.

The blazing sun shimmered and went crimson. The shocked body, brainless, jerked spasmodically on the ground. The hands flapped. The instant seemed to focus and wheel like a sickening fall. She was dancing, trying to get away, but the everlasting blackness wouldn't let her.

I had beheaded her and her body writhed on the ground.

I was dizzy, out of control, I charged over her, up the steps, inside, where the monster children

were. I had the spade. I would kill them, murder evil.

They crouched together in a corner of the living room, huddled against the plaster, hands covering their heads as if they expected it. The TV was off, the screen dark. I reared over them, raising the spade. They whimpered, terrified.

*Here goes, fuckers...*

The last instant, just before I struck down, the boy looked up at me, big-eyed and quivering.

'Daddy, no...Please...' It was Kevin, my son.

I dropped the spade and tried to take him and the girl, Lisa, my four year old daughter, into my arms. But they cringed at my embrace. They were hysterical. They wore the same outfits as the scallions. Blood drenched them. It covered all of us.

I shook my head, baffled. Releasing them, I stumbled back to the porch. By now the greasy smoke was thickening. The smell of cooking flesh was vile. Every dog in the neighbourhood had gone insane, wild howls filling the air like a hurricane.

I came slowly down, a step at a time, eyes fixed on the figure of the decapitated woman, as motionless now as a fallen flag. Nothing exceptional about the corpse. The body was female and terminated in a stump of neck, epitome of human death. I halted on the lowest step, finding the air impossible to breathe.

I looked at her head.

It stared up at me from the spot where it had landed. Long copper hair radiated in a smooth cascade.

'Oh my sweet Lord Jesus...'

Jill had such touching eyes. They were the deep rust brown of twilight clouds.

I fell to my knees, cradling her head to my chest, stroking her beautiful hair, familiar-smelling still with that almond soap she always used. 'I love you,' I tried telling her, knowing it was over at last. 'I love you...I love you, Jill...Oh Jesus, I love you...'

I'm the only one who ever really did.



My car was found abandoned in Highland Park. Dented and old, it aroused suspicion. The cook, arriving to fix dinner, discovered the mansion empty with indications of violence — broken



furniture, a strand of rope, bloody kitchen knives.

An APB went out on the missing Mercedes.

It turned up in my driveway, where a squad car was already responding to a frantic call from the neighbor. She'd reported the sound of children screaming.

Cops entered, found Kevin and Lisa clinging together in a state of shock. The horror in the pantry was inescapable.

I was apprehended in the backyard, where the most recent carnage had occurred.

I surrendered without a struggle.



They have a hypnotist probing Kevin, unlocking his nightmares. Lisa, they claim, may be traumatized for life.

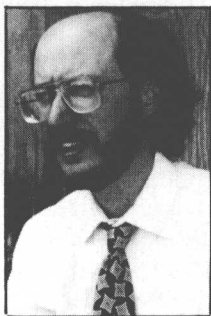
My face is in all the papers, on every channel. I'm famous. People say I'm crazy, people say I'm a genius. They say the onion people, who've disappeared without a trace, are a product of my own guilt.

No one doubts I'm capable of mass murder.

But their case against me won't stand.

I've saved a palmful of the onion seeds. A dozen or so. I didn't plant them all. I'm going to scatter them in the dirt outside the window of my cell. I'll make sure there are plenty of witnesses. I'll water them every day. We'll wait and see. Yes, we'll see...

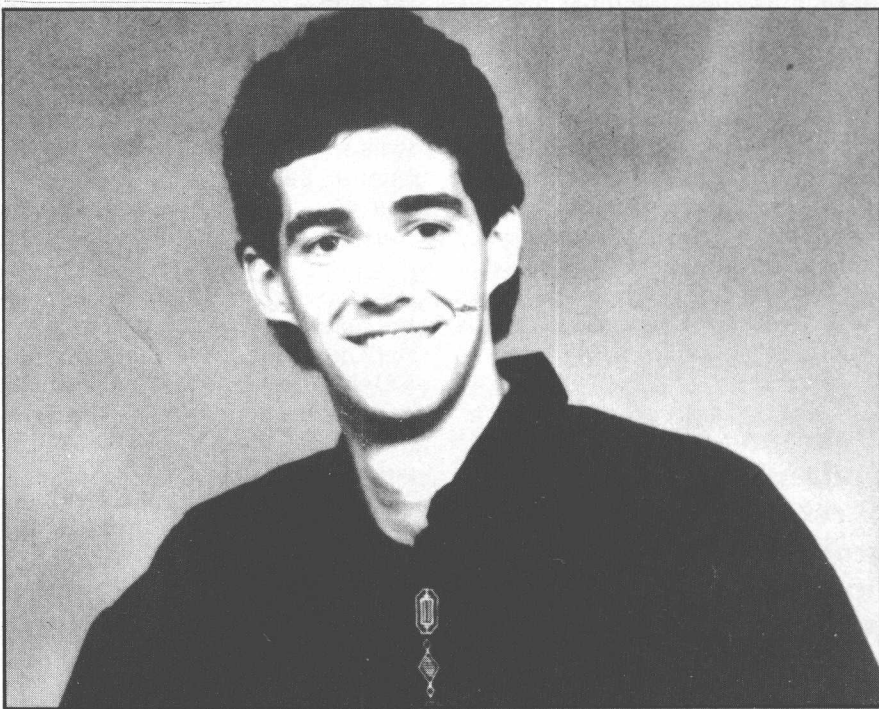
We'll see what comes out of the ground.



**MIKE NEWLAND**, who lives in Texas with his wife and two children (none of whom resemble onions) has published in *Film Experience* and *Grasslands*, with book reviews in *Deathrealm*. He attributes an early fascination with the macabre to childhood exposure to American TV, particularly *Twilight Zone* and the films of Alfred Hitchcock. 'I remember watching *Psycho* with my brothers when we were kids,' he says. 'Norman Bates came on at the climax dressed in drag, brandishing a butcher knife. One of my brothers was so scared, he began laughing. It's that paradox — horrified hilarity — I aim for most in my stories.'

## FICTION FILE 18

# DAN MCGIRT



### Liz Holliday talks to the man who's crazy about Cosmo.

**R**oyal Chaos (Pan, £3.99) is the sequel to Dan McGirt's first book, *Jason Cosmo* and, as with the original, the emphasis is on light-hearted, fast-moving action as Jason and his buddy Mercury Boltblaster seek to save the kingdom after revolutionaries kill Queen Raella — who just happens to be the love of Boltblaster's life. Naturally, things are not quite what they seem. The plot grows increasingly complicated as the Dark Magic Society, Rae the Sun Goddess, Natalia Slash and various other goodies and baddies join in the fun.

Like the first book, *Royal Chaos* is a spoof. Indeed, in a recent conversation, McGirt told me that: 'I regard it as a cartoon without pictures.'

The model would certainly seem to be Terry Pratchett: 'I always used to read a lot of science fiction and fantasy — sword and sorcery, Tolkien and so on — when I was in high school. That included humorous stuff, like Douglas Adams, Terry Pratchett and Robert Aspinin.'

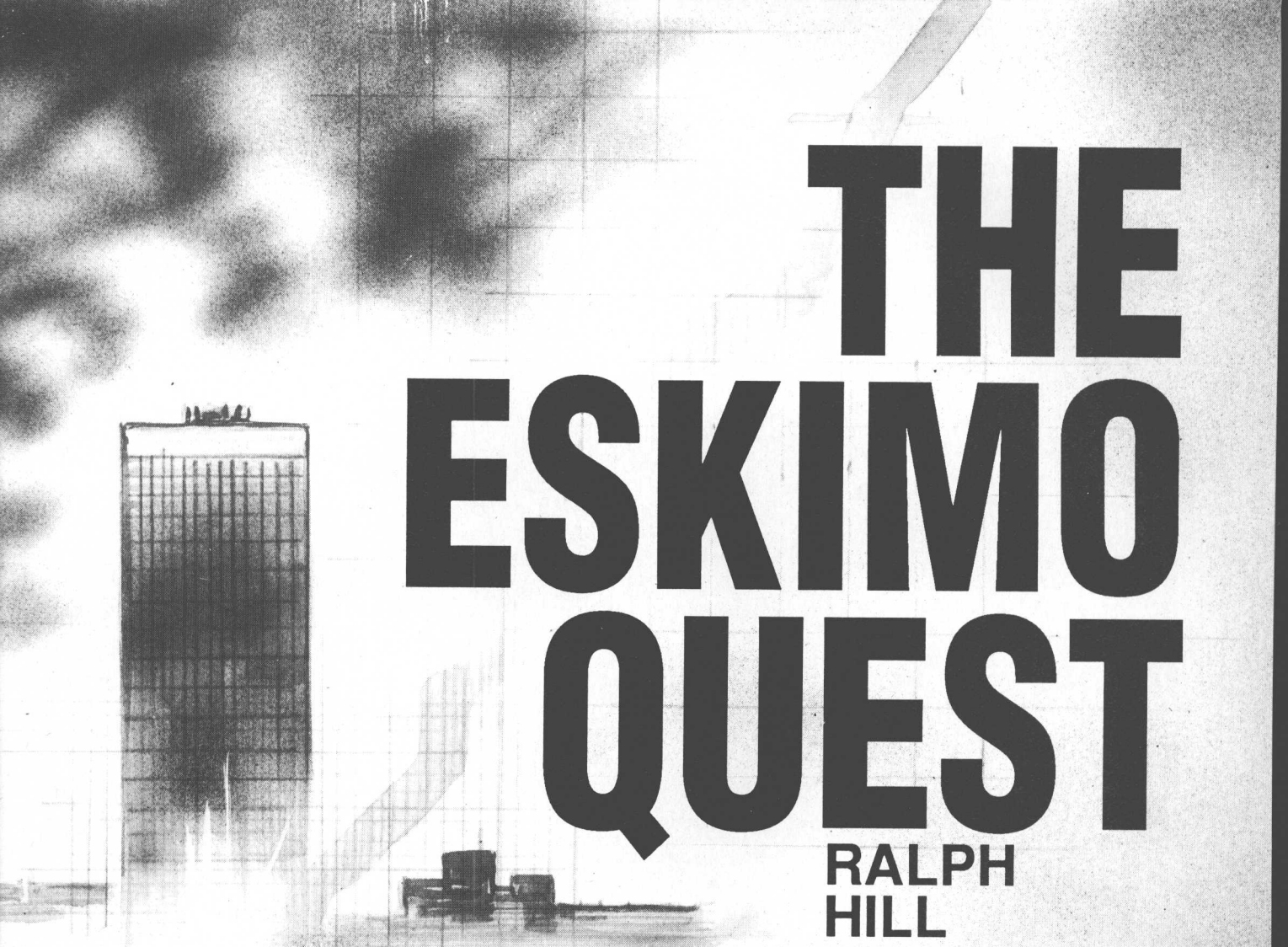
If the humour in McGirt's novels is perhaps a little broader, the satire somewhat blunted by comparison, it seems fair to say that this may in part be down to the author's age (he is only 23) and the age at which he started writing the stories: 'When I was 13 I wrote Jason Cosmo stories in longhand on notepaper. Each episode had a cliff-hanger ending, and I would give them to friends to read. By the time I'd finished high school I had maybe 200 episodes, written over the four or five years.'

Still, there was a lot of work to be done before Boltblaster, Cosmo and the rest were ready to meet their public. 'I had to develop more of my own setting. Originally I had had them running into Conan, Gandalf and so on. I got it right in my second year of college — 1987 — and NAL [the US publishers] bought it that Fall.'

The fact that McGirt's mother is a published writer of historical novels provided extra impetus for him to submit his work. Now that he has hit his stride, McGirt is happily working on a third Jason Cosmo book, deterred only by the need to finish his law degree: 'I have enough of a grand storyline to last through twelve volumes. I love writing Jason Cosmo, so if people want to read more about him, I'll keep writing it. I would also like to do a mainstream, regular fantasy — something of the sort I am spoofing. I suppose I might do SF, though it doesn't appeal to me so much. Doing twelve Jason Cosmos in a row might be tiresome — maybe I'll do something else after I finish the next book.'

The new novel has the provisional title of *Dirty Work*. In it the twins, Sapphrina and Rubis, are captured by pirates and, of course, it falls to Cosmo and Boltblaster to rescue them. McGirt hopes to finish it over the next summer. As he says: 'It isn't deep or thought-provoking stuff, and I can do a chapter or more a day. I make it up as I go along. Images and jokes come to me as I'm sitting at the keyboard. I do have a skeleton of a storyline, but I can change that as I proceed.'

McGirt did not know about the British publication until NAL told him: 'I am very excited to think of people reading my work over there. I'd really like to come and visit some time.'



# THE ESKIMO QUEST

RALPH  
HILL

required, and no eyesore on the horizon!

'It's a feather in your cap, landing this job, isn't it?'

I cricked my neck to stare up the face of the tall building. Even from the pavement thirty feet away, seeing the massive structure against the scudding white clouds made me quite dizzy. By virtue of the familiar relative-movement illusion, the tower itself seemed to be speeding through the air.

'It was a stroke of luck,' said Duggie, 'and it's better than freezing to death in the Orkneys! First one in Britain — in the world, in fact. According to the Met. boys, we can average twenty kilowatts, enough to supply all the needs of the building, and a surplus for the National Grid.'

'I saw the helicopter delivering the blades, yesterday. We didn't get much work done in class, I can tell you! Can I bring some students across to see the technical works?'

'Sorry, Geoff, not a chance, until she's commissioned and handed over. Even I can't bend the site-safety regs. You'll have to wait until you can apply to the owners. Now,

tell me about yourself. It must be all of fifteen years since we were classmates in 5H.'

'Nothing much to tell. Been married four years, bought a house just outside Freedale, and we've just had our second little girl. You married, Duggie?'

'No. I spend all my time with my nose in books and journals. It's Alice-In-Looking-Glass-Land these days. Things move so fast, you have to run all the time to stay in the same place. I expect you know that, from your own work?'

'Yes, but I can appreciate that there's more pressure on a chap like yourself, on the practical side, and with costs to look to. No time now for your dreams and theories. Do you remember the arguments you used to have with Jonah in his lab? I shall never forget the day when you challenged him about the asymptotic curve. 'Please sir,' you said, 'the curve of the equation can't approach the axes of the graph, getting nearer and nearer, for ever, without touching it! It must touch, one day.' 'I'll touch you one day, Hawtin,' says Jonah. 'There's the maths, and you can't



**I** was picking my way carefully along the snowy pavement on the edge of the building site when I spotted him. He was surrounded by cable-drums and crates of insulators.

'Duggie Hawtin?' I said.

'Geoff Goodman! Fancy meeting you! What brings you to Freedale?'

'Teaching at the Tech across the road. No need to ask what you're up to, is there? I like your hard hat. 'Chief Electrical Engineer', no less!'

'It is rather splendid, isn't it? I'm overseeing the installation of the generator on the roof of this monster. I expect you've read about it?'

'Saw it on the news, last year. Sounds a great idea! Giant wind-power generator, slap on top of a thirty-storey tower block!'

'That's right, Geoff. Plenty of wind in all directions, no extra land

fault it,' 'But sir...' says you. 'Don't give me any more of your 'buts',' says Jonah. 'If you don't believe it, young Hawtin, just try to make one touch, and when you've done it, write to me, care of the school; that'll find me. If I'm still alive when you've cracked it, you can buy me a drink out of your Nobel Prize money.'

**A**t the beginning of my narrative, Duggie had smiled, but by the end, his face had changed. He seemed absorbed, and in the grip of some strong emotion. I began to think I had foolishly stirred bitter memories, by relating too vividly the details of that far-off humiliation in Mr Jones' Physics Lab. I was wondering how I could pass it off; but before I could speak, he took a deep breath, and with glowing eyes he said, very slowly, 'Well Geoff, in one month's time, I'll write that letter.'

The obvious depth of his burning sincerity left me at a loss for words. It was no time for banter. I stared at him in silence. After a long time, he spoke again, hesitantly at first, as though in two minds whether to tell me more, or not; but as he warmed to his theme his confidence and air of conviction was ominous.

'I have cracked it,' he said. 'Do you remember Nellie's five-minute lectures?'

I remembered very well. Mr Nelson, our English master, made each boy in the class, in turn, produce a five-minute lecture. We had to mug-up a subject, stand in front of the class and deliver it, and answer questions. We would get through two, sometimes three, in his Thursday afternoon period.

'Remember?' I said. 'It was an experience we were hardly likely to forget. I did mine on 'The Explosion of the Krakatoa'.'

'Do you remember mine?' said Duggie.

'Why, yes I do,' I said. 'Something about temperature.'

'The Extremes of Temperature,' said Duggie. 'I got it from one stray tatty volume of a 'Knowledge Of The World' set. Paid tuppence for it at a rummage sale. It was volume XIV. I've still got it. I was so scared of old Nellie that I memorised whole chunks of that chapter. The amazing thing is that there's no upper limit — nuclear scientists regularly produce several million degrees — but the lower extreme is absolute. This is what fascinated me as a boy, and still does. All

through my university time, whenever I came across an article about extremes of cold, I studied it, and made notes.'

'You haven't changed, Duggie,' I said.

'Two ideas are crucial,' he said. 'First, what is temperature? It's a measure of how *hot* a thing is, not of how *cold* it is.' He picked up a lump of ice from a frozen puddle. 'It seems odd to think of this containing heat, but that's just our everyday-world understanding, inhibiting our perception of the truth. Second, what *makes* temperature? The temperature of an object is a measure of the speed at which its molecules are vibrating to and fro. The faster they move, the hotter it is; the slower they move, the colder it is.'

I had begun stamping my feet to warm them, and then laughed at the connection, but Duggie ignored me and went on with his lecture.

**T**he accepted theory is that if you could cool something to the point at which its molecules were completely still, that is as far as you could go. It is thought that nothing can be colder than that, so it's called 'Absolute Zero', and is held to be mathematically impossible to achieve.

'I remember now,' I said, waking up. 'Isn't it minus 273 degrees?'

'Well done, Geoff,' said Duggie. 'I'm glad someone was listening, that sweltering afternoon in Room 31; and didn't old Nellie wax sarcastic over that?'

'They get near 273 degrees in the liquefaction of gases, don't they?' I said.

'Only about halfway,' said Duggie, 'but much nearer in the next stage. Liquid helium freezes solid at minus 271 degrees — only two degrees above 'Absolute'. Now, my theory goes a bit further. What do you think would happen to an object if its temperature could be lowered to minus 273 degrees?'

'Let's see. When a thing gets hotter, it gets bigger; and when it gets colder, it gets smaller. I suppose, if it could actually be brought right down to minus 273 degrees, perhaps it would disappear!'

**D**uggie laughed. 'It isn't quite like that,' he said, 'but you have talked yourself into the right answer. I believe that the motion of the molecules stops at minus 273 degrees, but that 273 degrees is *not* absolute. The absolute lies *below* 273 degrees, when all the internal

energy would be drained away, the particles inside the very atoms would stop dead in their tracks, and the object would collapse into infinitesimal dust. In effect, it *would* disappear.'

'Yes, but wait a minute! Nothing can reach minus 273 degrees. It's the old asymptotic curve again.'

'I told you, Geoff. I've cracked it. Almost three years ago. I've checked all my calculations on the big IBM at the university, and run a simulation. My brother-in-law is chief tech assistant there. He lets me in at six in the morning, before the troops arrive. Up to now, I haven't told a living soul; but you were always a staunch pal to me, and I must tell someone. I've found out how to give that curve a mighty kick, and make it touch.'

'Good for you, Duggie! What figure do you get for this new Absolute of yours?'

'Almost exactly 277.'

'That's amazing! I can see you landing the Nobel yet!'

'Now, Geoff, you must promise me to keep this to yourself. I shall run the first practical test in a month's time, and that's where this little windmill comes in.'

'How's that?'

'I need a good charge to bring it off. If I asked any department to let me use their lab generators, they'd either scoff or insist on taking it over from me. Now, by a stroke of luck, I'll soon have my own.'

'But how can you set up a secret test, in there?'

'The generator's on the roof, but the control-room with all the transformers and switch-gear is in a huge basement. I've been given a free hand, and I've been slipping a few extra items of equipment in amongst the rest. They've been cleared without question. The schedule gives me a fortnight for calibration and testing, and when it's all shipshape and ready to go, I'll slip in early one Sunday morning, and make a little bit of history.'

'You really think you can make something disappear? What will it be?'

'Haven't decided yet. The chamber will be spherical — about five feet. Any suggestions?'

'You could get a body in there, if there's anyone you want to bump off! The perfect crime! Habeas non corpus!'

'You don't believe me, do you?'

'Of course I do, Duggie, but I can't help thinking about Harry Houdini.'



He made an elephant disappear! Seriously, though, I'd like to be there when you do it.'

'Valentine's Day, five a.m.'

'Five! You're an early bird!'

'Suit yourself, but five a.m. on Sunday the 14th of February it is, and if you're late, I shan't wait. Give me your phone number. If I don't call to cancel, it's on. Promise not to tell?'

**'The rumbling seemed to go on for ever. When the dust began to clear a little, I saw the steel mast and the buckled blades lying almost on the front steps of our main building'**

'Word of honour,' I said, gripping his hand. I gave him a sticky label with my address and telephone number.

'Come home for dinner one evening, Duggie,' I said. 'Meet the wife and kids. Have a chat about old times.'

'Thanks, Geoff, but not just now. I've got too much to do, and I'm poor company when I've got a big job on. Later, perhaps.'

'Right! See you on the 14th, if I can wake up.'

'Come alone, and don't tell a soul. Now I must get on.'



A week later, we saw the blades in motion. I pictured Duggie in the basement, checking his dials. In my lunch-break I walked over to the site. As I looked up, I again experienced the dizziness, but this time the illusion was strengthened by the conviction that the great blades were propelling the tower through the sky. It was speeding, falling...

As the days went by, I found myself speculating more and more about the experiment. What was the secret? I tried to recall all the known cooling processes. Evaporation? That wouldn't work. Rapid expansion of a gas? No, we were two stages past that, beyond liquefaction, and into solids. Where

did the generator fit in? I found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on the details of daily life. I became quite absent-minded, and made stupid mistakes, at home and at work.

Gradually, too, I became aware of a presentiment of danger, and thought of backing out, but curiosity triumphed, and I began searching for a plausible ruse to get myself out of the house at 4.30 a.m. Here, I had a stroke of luck.

A colleague who was an amateur astronomer happened to mention in the staff room that he was hoping to view Saturn, then in opposition, three hours before dawn on the next clear morning. He would set up his eight-inch Newtonian on the roof of the main building, to get a clear view of the sky low down to the south. The rings would be tilted towards Earth, and Titan, the largest moon, would be visible.

'It should be perfect!' he said. It *was* perfect. I could say that I would be joining him, and even if he picked a different day, it wouldn't affect the alibi. I had never told my wife a lie before, but I consoled myself on three counts: I had promised not to tell; it was a very "white lie"; and quite soon, surely, I would be free to confess. Joan wouldn't be asking to come with me, because she wasn't interested. Anyway, there were the children. I did worry that the Sunday morning might turn out cloudy, but I could say there had been a sufficient break in the cloud at 5 a.m., and she was not likely to be checking up.

On Saturday the 13th I checked the car for oil, water and petrol. To make sure, I gave the battery four hours on the charger. I made a pint of tea in a flask. I slept downstairs. When the alarm sounded next morning, I dressed up warmly, drank the tea, and stole out to the garage. The sky was clear and bright with stars. There was an icy wind cutting in from the north. Then, calamity! The off-side front tyre was flat. As I scrambled for the spare and the wheel-brace, I saw a glimmer of hope. I had allowed my usual full-hour for the journey, but on deserted roads, I would surely do it in less. I yanked the wheel off and dumped it on the bench, and saw the head of a large clout nail in the tread. I fitted the spare, and grabbed a rag to wipe the grease off my hands.

At twenty to five, I drove quietly

out of our cul-de-sac and along the avenue to the main road. I turned left, and put my foot down. At five to five, I was approaching the traffic lights outside Freedale, doing sixty. Red! There was good visibility both ways, and nothing coming, so I shot across.

Then I saw the Panda stripes glowing in my headlights. They had been lurking in the garage exit. I slowed right down to thirty, hoping they wouldn't bother; but they took off with a roar, lit up their red STOP sign, flashed, overtook, and braked in front of me.

'May I see your driving licence, sir?'

It was in my suit jacket.

'What is the registration number of this vehicle, sir?'

'Er — er — C882 OPN.'

'Are you aware that you have just passed a traffic signal at red?'

'Yes, officer, but I had clear vision both ways, and nothing was coming, so I thought it foolish to stop.'

'You thought it foolish to stop. And where might you be going at this hour in the morning?'

They heard out my astronomical alibi in stone-faced silence.

'Permit us to make a search of the interior of your vehicle, and the boot, if you please.'

The search didn't take long; but the name-taking, the lecture, and the warning did. Then I had to hear the explanation. There had been a break-in at a small electrical-goods store in the village just beyond where I lived.

When they had driven off, I was amazed to see that it was still only five minutes after five, and at ten past I had the tower block in view, at a distance of about five hundred yards. I saw that Duggie had started the blades turning, and I hoped I might yet be in time.

It was then that I saw the strangest sight of my life. I was looking at the ground-floor level, expecting perhaps to see a light. I saw light, all right, but it was a blazing orange light, far off, and I seemed to be seeing it *through* the concrete walls of the entire ground floor of that enormous building! In the same instant, the light was extinguished, there was an almighty rumbling roar, and the monster collapsed.

I braked hard, switched the engine off, and sat there trembling. The rumbling seemed to go on for ever. When the dust began to clear a little, I saw the steel mast and

the buckled blades lying almost on the front steps of our main building. I also began to see the orange light again. It was the glow of the street lamps on the ring road, *the other side of the site*. I had been looking clear through the space left when the masonry disappeared!

'Well Duggie, old mate,' I mused. 'You said you could give the famous curve a mighty kick. I'm afraid you overdid it; and but for a flat tyre, a red light, and a burglary, you might have taken me with you.'

The enquiry commission was faced with several mysteries, none of which it ever solved. Why did it fall? Why was there found, beneath the rubble, only an empty, over-large, earth-walled excavation, its thick concrete walls missing, and not an atom of steel from the transformers and the switch gear. And where was the Chief Engineer?

After the initial fuss had died down, I called at Duggie's lodgings. I told his landlady that I had loaned Duggie a computer-game disc which I would rather like to have back. She let me look. I soon found it. By a weird coincidence, Duggie and I had used the same ruse to serve our differing purposes, he to conceal the secret, and I to discover it. The typed label read;

SCREENGAME SOFTWARE  
INC, 10th AVENUE, NEW YORK  
NY 277 'THE ESKIMO QUEST'

277! The crafty devil! The police hadn't given it a second glance.

It was tough going, but I mastered it. I also discovered what had gone wrong. Duggie hadn't allowed for the effect of the superconductivity induced in metals by very low temperatures, and he had vastly underestimated the power of his electro-magnets. In fact, this makes the job much easier than he thought.

I've been promoted since then. I'm Head of Science now, with a sizeable budget to spend. I'm gradually getting the apparatus together, and one day, perhaps...

**RALPH HILL** was born in London in 1924. During his time in the Royal Navy he was awarded two war medals, four campaign stars and a 'Russian Convoy' Gold Medal. He completed an English degree in 1975 whilst teaching full time in state schools. His story, *The Ship Of Death*, won first prize in the Mid-Sussex Festival Open Competition last November.

## FICTION FILE 19

# JACK WOMACK

**The author of the critically acclaimed *Terraplane*, *Ambient* and the newly published *Heathern* argues the balance between idea and story within science fiction with FEAR's John Gilbert.**

New York is not my idea of a dream location, but Kentuckian SF writer Jack Womack prefers it to the countryside of Lexington where he spent much of his childhood. 'I lived there until the age of 21 and then moved to New York. There's a more interesting mix of people in cities. That's why I've always liked London, and I've noticed how Americanised it's become since I was here the last time eight years ago.'

His childhood was not, however, the quiet life that townies might expect a country boy to have. 'By the time I was in high school, most of the people with whom I hung out were the sort of fellas who tended to go out and kick racoons to death with their feet for laughs and impale themselves against bridges in car accidents when they were 20, and that was the more cheerful part of my adolescence.'

Womack took refuge in the world of literature, though despite his recent calling he 'never read science fiction, it's just during the past year that I started reading science fiction, to get a better grasp of the field in which I've found myself. I had read a little bit of Bradbury, I had read *Childhood's End* when I was about twelve. Ghost stories I always liked.'

His education was a hit and miss affair: 'There were two universities in the town in which I grew up. One was Transylvania University — and I'm not making that up. I went there for a year, dropped out, went to the University of Kentucky for two weeks, dropped out, went back to Transylvania for six months and dropped out again, and went to New York realising I was spending an enormous amount of money on an education that wasn't doing me a great deal of good. Since by that point I had decided I was best at writing, I thought I would move to New York because it's the centre of the industry and I would make better contacts in such a big place.'

Although he likes the social life in New York, his books reflect the view that huge city institutions and corporations around him do not hold the key to a safer future. 'I can't say a lot for them, and Dryco is representative in all my books of all businesses, all corporate structures and such, that tend to dehumanise people and after so long wind up destroying people when they believe they are actually helping them. This is evident in the book I'm writing now, which'll be the fourth in the series and the



more benevolent approach through its dealings with the rest of the world, but the benevolent approach is just as inhuman and even more vicious in some ways, in an unconscious sense, and so there's no change on one level.'

The social satires within Womack's books draw parallels with contemporary political and economic realities, so that his prediction that future governments will be governed by corporations is, to some degree, already happening. 'In *Terraplane*, corporate control in the Reagan years was just pumped up about 20 times and so, in accordance with this, what goes on in the next book will be more of the Bush era, where on one level it's kinder and gentler, but actually there's no change whatsoever.'

Heavy stuff, but Jack Womack sees himself as a storyteller first and only then as a man of social ideas. Readers who are wary of the self-indulgent intellectualism of some SF writers need have no fear here. 'I try to write my books so that they can be enjoyed on any number of levels; for story, for character, for however. As to the intellectualisation of science fiction, I'm not opposed to the intellectualisation of anything. Anything that has some thought behind it will tend to be more useful than something that has no thought. But you might as well write an essay if you just want to write something that is purely idea, if you're going to get an idea across at the expense of a story. In a novel, the story has to come first and the ideas fit in within the context of the story.'

# WARTS AND ALL

Mark Morris

**I**t started as nothing more obtrusive than a small bump between the second and third knuckle of the index finger of Jason Platt's right hand. It itched ever so slightly, and Jason rubbed at it as he lay back on his bed and stared out of the window. It was the summer holidays; the days were white-hot. Jason watched the tops of trees nudge the undersides of wispy clouds like cattle prods. Somewhere invisible birds chirped; faintly he could hear the pigs snorting in the sty. He sighed as he heard the back door slam, and was pulling on his baseball boots even before his mother's footsteps began to clump up the wooden stairs.

He was tying the second shoelace when her head appeared round the door. She looked weary, the skin around her eyes dark, her hair scraped carelessly back.

'Jacey,' she said in a tired voice, 'could you feed the chickens and fetch in the cows for milking? I'm going to have to phone the vet. Ermintrude's come down with something again.'

'Sure, mum,' Jason said, springing up from his bed as though in the hope that a show of vitality would translate itself to her. Since his dad had run off with 'that woman', they'd had to deal with one crisis after another. First their prize pig, Lizzy, had died of bloat; then some of the cows had eaten some fungus in the top field which had affected milk production; then the farm's plumbing — which had been on the way out for years — had finally

packed in; and now Ermintrude, the goat, whom his mother adored, kept coming down with these mysterious illnesses.

'What's wrong with her this time?' Jason asked, crossing the room.

Beth, his mother, shrugged as though she held the world on her shoulders.

'Oh...I don't know...Diarrhoea... bringing up her food...And her eyes look...funny...cloudy.'

Jason didn't like the sound of that, but he tried to keep his voice casual. 'It's probably just a bug she's got. Mr MacDonald'll give her something and she'll be right as rain in the morning.'

Beth's lips twitched into a smile. 'I hope so...But I'll still have to pay his bill, won't I?'

Jason placed a hand on her arm, tried to instil as much earnestness into his fifteen year old voice as he could. 'We'll get by, mum, don't worry. We'll be all right.'

His mother smiled, touched his hair briefly, but her eyes showed she was unconvinced. 'Course we will,' she said, then started down the stairs.

**J**ason followed, watching the way her shoulders slumped, the way she stooped like an old woman. He saw a few errant white hairs among the chestnut that he was sure had not been there a month ago. He loved his father achingly, but he also hated him for what he had done. Love and hate: sometimes Jason got so confused that they seemed like the same thing. Scowling, he trailed his mother through the kitchen and out the back door. Almost

unconsciously, he rubbed at the bump on his index finger.



'Nettle sting?' Beth asked.

Jason looked up almost guiltily, unaware that she had been watching him scratch. It was now night and the animals were quiet: the two of them had struggled through another day. Jason liked this time best — the quiet hour before bed when his mother sewed and he read his book. Sometimes the two of them played cards together or Trivial Pursuit or Scrabble. Or sometimes — though not often — they watched a film on the black-and-white TV, whose reception in winter made programmes take place in a snowstorm.

'No,' he said, and held up his hand on which the bump was now pimple-sized. 'It's this thing; it itches like mad. I noticed it this morning. I can't stop scratching it.'

Beth put aside the cardigan she was darning and took his hand. Her own hands were delicate, long-fingered, but work-rough. 'Hmmm,' she said, 'it's a wart. You shouldn't pick it, it'll spread. Look, you've made it bleed already.'

She bathed the wart in TCP, which got under the broken skin and bit like ants. Then she peeled the backing from a plaster and placed it carefully over the growth.

'Now, leave it alone. Tomorrow I'll get you something from the village.' She reached for the cardigan again, then her hands were deflected to her mouth which opened in a yawn. Blearily she looked at the clock and straightened up, placing a hand in the small of her back. 'I suppose I'd better go and check on Ermintrude,' she said wearily. 'Would you make the cocoa, love? I'll only be five minutes.'

'Yes, mum, course,' Jason replied. They stood up together.



**J**ason tossed and turned, unsure whether he was asleep or awake. He seemed full of a hideous, grinding itch, which he scratched and scratched and scratched, but which still did not go away. He suddenly jerked upright with a cry, his eyelids ripping open. He saw insipid light crawling over his curtains, a pink



dawn staining the room. He looked down at his bed, saw smears of half-dried blood striping the sheet and the pillow. The plaster his mother had placed over his wart the night before was screwed up like a small roll of pink flesh. Jason grimaced, his head thick, his stomach slightly nauseous. He rubbed his right hand on the edge of the bed, trying to soothe the itching which had escaped his dreams.

He was unable to do so. The itching persisted, biting-jabbing-rippling over his skin. Clenching his teeth, he held up the hand in front of his face and examined it. The original wart had been reduced to a raw, bloody wound by his fingernails; Jason was dismayed to see three more warts clustered close to the original, like offspring. His mother had told him that if he scratched the wart it would spread, but Jason hadn't reckoned on the process being this rapid. He toyed with the idea that he'd contracted measles or chicken pox, but then discarded the notion. No, he'd had both of those by the time he was eight, and he wasn't sure you could catch them twice. Hissing breath through his teeth, his right hand clenched into a fist, Jason hurried down the landing and into the bathroom.

Almost feverishly he put the plug in the wash basin, then twisted the cold tap. The water splattered up off the enamel, wetting his pyjamas, but Jason didn't care. He plunged his hand into the cold water and immediately gasped in relief. The warts stopped itching as though shocked by the temperature, or as though the itching had been a layer of sensation that the water had sloughed off. With his left hand he rummaged through the bathroom cabinet above the basin, found TCP, a lotion called Bug-Away (which was really for insect bites, but which Jason thought might help ease his itching), and a roll of bandage. He drew his hand from the water, dried it carefully on a towel, then put TCP on the damaged wart. The stinging made his eyes water, caused him to clap his left hand tightly to his mouth. When it began to ease a little he applied the Bug-Away, then wrapped the bandage awkwardly around his hand, tying it in a clumsy knot with the aid of his teeth. That done he returned to his

bedroom, sat on a chair (he was too repelled by the blood-smearred sheets to return to bed), and drifted into an uneasy sleep.

He woke a little later to the sound of weeping.



'Mum?' Jason said. 'Mum, what's the matter?'

He felt an internal fist squeeze his stomach and chest. His mother was slumped over the kitchen table, her head in her hands, her eyes swimming with tears. Her hair hung down like curtains, exposing the back of her neck; Jason stared at the soft down on her skin, the delicate nubs of vertebrae, and his eyes, too, filled up. He had never seen his mother look so vulnerable, so...exposed as she did at that moment. His right hand, which had begun to itch again, but only slightly, as if it were a sluggishly awakening wasps' nest, now jerked as though enlivened by her wretchedness. Holding it tight to his chest like a frightened kitten, Jason dragged up a chair and sat beside her.

'Mum,' he said tightly, 'mum, please don't cry.' He laid his left hand selfconsciously on the curve of her back. 'Talk to me, mum. Tell me what's wrong. I don't like to see you like this.'

He grimaced as she sniffed and raised her head; she looked like a witch, haggard and ugly. Something crackled in her palm; Jason had thought it was a handkerchief she'd been pressing to her face, but he now saw it was a piece of paper.

'The electricity bill's come,' she said in a reedy voice. 'And I just don't know how I'm going to pay it. That...that bastard left us with nothing, Jacey. A farm that costs more than it earns and bugger-all else. We're...we're going to have to sell some of the animals; that's the only solution. Even with you off school, this place is too big for us to manage on our own...'

She choked on a sob and wiped her face with her sleeve. For the millionth time that summer, Jason said, 'We'll manage, mum, you'll see. We'll get by, the two of us. We've got to really, haven't we?'

His words received no reply, and after a few moments he stood up and wandered over to the cooker. He filled the kettle, lit the gas, and began to potter about, making

breakfast. His hand was itching, but he tried to ignore it; yet he held it as a dog might hold a paw pierced with a thorn. Behind him he heard the creak of the chair as his mother sat-up, the sound of her blowing her nose. He sensed she was watching him, but he didn't turn to look at her. At length she asked, 'What's the bandage for?'

Jason picked up the tea pot and carried it to the table. He felt oddly embarrassed by the question, as though she'd asked him something deeply personal, or like the time he'd been examining his newly-sprouting pubic hair in a small hand-mirror in the bathroom and she'd walked in. Awkwardly he said, 'It's that wart. I must have been scratching it in my sleep. When I woke up this morning it was all bloody. And there were three more on my hand.'

Beth raised her eyebrows. 'Three? Are you sure? They don't usually spread that quick.'

'Well, these have,' said Jason, 'and they itch like crazy. I feel like chopping off my hand just to make it stop.'

He poured the tea and reached for the cornflakes. Beth said, 'I'll make an appointment for you with Doctor Miles. He should be able to fit us in some time this morning. It's not normal for warts to spread like that. And they don't usually itch either.'

Jason nodded and spooned cornflakes into his mouth. He felt clumsy holding the spoon in his left hand. His right hand he held tight to his stomach, balled into a fist like something asleep.



Doctor Miles was an avuncular man in his sixties. He wore a waistcoat and a watch on a gold chain, and had bushy mutton-chop whiskers like a character from Dickens. He had been Limefield's doctor for over thirty-five years, and seemed as permanent as the dark stone buildings and the brooding hills. When the Platts were admitted into his surgery, he stood up and lumbered towards them, hands outstretched.

'Elizabeth, my dear, how are you? And young Jason — my, you're a big lad. I expect you'll be a six-footer just like your...mm..yes, it's good to see you.'

He passed over the *faux pas* quickly, and without losing his

joviality, yet Jason still saw his mother's lips purse, the skin tighten around her face as though she were drawing in her defences. Miles waved them to seats which seemed to be moulded from glazed liquorice, perching himself on the edge of his colossal desk. Toying casually with the end of his stethoscope, he said, 'Now then, Jason. Your mother informs me you have some rather unusual warts.'

Jason nodded, and repeated what his mother had already told Miles on the phone while the doctor carefully snipped the knot on the bandage and peeled it from Jason's hand. As the bandage came away, Jason's voice tailed off, and he and his mother both stared at what lay beneath the material.

There were now five, six, seven, eight, *nine* warts on Jason's hand! *Nine!* Which meant that five new ones had sprung up in the last four hours! The original wart was a crusty, lumpy scab; the others ranged from small, white-tipped bumps to hard, dry nodules like split peas. For a long moment nobody said anything; even Miles was silent, his eyebrows raised quizzically. At last Beth murmured, 'It can't be... They can't be spreading as fast as this.' She glanced at Miles. 'What exactly *are* they, doctor?'

Miles hemmed and hawed. He examined the warts closely, probed at them with what looked like a plastic, blunt-ended toothpick. His brows were beetled; he clucked his tongue. At last he said, 'Well, I'm ashamed to admit I'm baffled.' He sat back, frowning. 'They certainly *look* like warts, but if what you tell me is true...' He paused. 'You're quite sure you only had four of these when you woke up this morning?'

Jason nodded.

'And when did you say you noticed the first one?'

'Yesterday morning.'

'And that was this one here?'

Miles said, pointing at the scab. Jason confirmed that it was. Miles shook his head and dragged a notepad towards him, taking a pen from his breast pocket with his other hand.

'Well, what I'd like to do, with your permission of course, is to make you an appointment with a colleague of mine. He's a skin specialist, his name is Stephen Lester, and he's based in Leeds. In

the meantime I'll make you out a prescription for something that *should* cauterize the warts and something that *should* stop the itching. If you find that what I've prescribed works, then let me know and I'll cancel the appointment. How does that sound?'

Jason glanced at his mother. It sounded okay to him, but her expression was one of reluctance. Knowing pride would keep her from explaining why, he said. 'Well, the thing is, doctor, it's a bit tight for us at the moment, and I'm not sure we can really afford —'

'Nothing *to* afford,' Miles interrupted him, holding up a hand. 'It's all paid for on the National Health. All you have to do is show up.' He reached for the phone. 'So are we agreed? I really do think you need to get those things seen to, Jason.'

They both looked at Beth, who nodded. 'Of course,' she said, and added indignantly, 'even if we *do* have to pay for it.'

Miles made his call. Jason smiled, secretly delighted by his mother's show of spirit, though he knew she would admonish him for bringing up their money situation afterwards. A few minutes later Miles put down the phone and said, 'Well, that's that. Your appointment is for next Tuesday at 2 pm. Here's your prescription. And remember what I told you — any improvement, you let me know.'

Jason smiled and thanked him. After Miles had carefully applied a clean bandage to his hand, he and his mother left and made their way to the chemist's to pick up the prescription. The stuff to cauterize the warts was like white glue, the lotion to ease the itching a greasy yellow. On the bus on the way home the itching got so bad that Jason had to rip off the new bandage and smear the yellow stuff over his hand. He reapplied the bandage with his mother's help, then leaned back, closing his eyes, gritting his teeth. He felt a little thick-headed, a touch feverish, but put this down to the stifflingly hot bus, the jolting and grinding of gears as the driver negotiated ruts in the road. Thankfully the yellow stuff seemed to act quickly, and within minutes the itching was little more than a subdued tingle.

When they got back, the first

thing they saw was Ermintrude, the goat, lying on her side in her pen.

This was not unusual in itself; Ermintrude slept often, especially in the heat. But there was something about the way she was lying that immediately drew the eye. Maybe it was the fact that she was so, so still; or maybe it was the flies, buzzing around her motionless form, clouds of them landing on her face then taking off again, like a busy airport in miniature.

The reason, however, was not important. The fact was, as soon as Jason saw the goat he felt a mixture of dread and weary inevitability. Beside him he heard his mother mutter, 'Oh my God,' then the two of them were through the gate and stumbling up the grassy incline beside the house.

Up close, the truth could not be denied. Ermintrude's tongue lolled from her mouth; her eyes, implacable as dark glass, were

half-open. The collar she wore round her neck, and the long chain attached to it and secured to a peg in the ground, looked like some slack and clumsy torture device.

Beth dropped to her knees and abruptly began to cry, her trembling right hand frantically stroking the goat's fur as though to massage life back into it. Jason stood at his mother's shoulder, staring down, listening to the flies whose incessant drone was like the empty, idiot hum of death itself. The sun beat on their backs, its apparent optimism like a mockery of their situation. Though he knew it was pointless, Jason could not help thinking that this was his fault; if only they'd stayed at home and not gone to the doctor's about his stupid warts, then maybe Ermintrude might still be alive.



Though she did not blame him for what had happened, Jason felt that his mother's silence was accusation enough. The two of them went about their tasks with barely a word to each other for the rest of the day, their eye contact reduced to a bare minimum. For Jason, however, guilt was not his only problem; coupled with it was an increasing physical discomfort, the root of which, he felt sure, lay in his itching hand. The yellow



stuff had done its job for a while, but now the itching was returning, and not just that but it seemed more voracious than ever and had spread as far as his elbow. Also the stuffy feeling in his head had worsened, as had his feverishness. It was almost five o'clock when Jason stumbled back to the house and up the stairs to the bathroom. He decided to change the dressing on his hand, take a couple of aspirin, and have a lie down before supper.

He unwound the bandage slowly, both hopeful and fearful of what he might see. He tried to convince himself that the white stuff the doctor had given him must be working, that the itching had increased because the stuff was getting inside the warts and burning them away. A pulse was jumping in his throat; he tried to swallow but couldn't. He smiled at his own nervousness. His left hand was trembling slightly as he tugged the last of the bandage away.

**T**he smile froze on his face. For the first time, fear jumped into his mind, slid down through his body like a rain of sparks. Jason cleared his throat and tried to tell himself that what he was seeing was not as bad as it seemed. It was the stuff the doctor had given him that made his arm look such a mess. Once he had washed all the gunk off, it would be okay.

He rested his arm in the sink and let cold water sluice over it. As before, he felt relief from his itching, though this time it was not so absolute; he felt the itching biting back, fighting against his attempts to drown it. He dried his arm carefully with toilet paper, then examined it again. The pulse hammered in his throat; he felt sick to the pit of his stomach. There were — it took him a minute or more to count them — twenty-four warts on his hand and forearm. *Twenty-fucking-four!* Almost an average of one every hour since yesterday morning.

Jason shook his head. No, it couldn't be. Apart from the warts — some of which were growing together like clumps of fungus — his arm looked...sickly. Wasted. As though all that lay beneath the skin — blood, muscle, bone — was turning mushy like old an banana.

He shuddered at the thought and closed his eyes to stop himself puking. It was just his

imagination; after all, there was no pain, just this bloody awful itching. Stubbornly he applied more of the white stuff, more of the yellow stuff, and smothered it in a clean bandage. He tied the bandage tight, as though to contain the...the infection beneath the constrictive material. By this time tomorrow, he assured himself, the white stuff would have begun its work; his warts would be shrivelling away. He looked at himself in the mirror, and was reassured that his face appeared normal, if a little flushed. The next moment he gripped the edge of the sink convulsively as the sound of his name came screeching up the stairs:

*'Jaaasonnn!!!'*

He turned towards the sound. Of course it had been his mother's voice, but preceded by a hideous screeching, squealing noise which

**'His arm looked sickly...wasted. As though all that lay beneath the skin — blood, muscle, bone — was turning mushy, like an old banana'**

was still going on. He thought wildly of something huge, like a juggernaut, careering out of control, slamming on its brakes as it ploughed towards the house. Then he realised what the noise really was; it was the pigs. They were screaming with terror, as though a lion had been let loose in their sty.

**J**ason raced downstairs, out of the back door and round the corner of the house. He saw his mother leaning over the wooden wall of the sty, screeching as loudly as the pigs, brandishing a broom in her hands. Her eyes were stretched wide; spittle was flying from her lips. Reaching her, Jason too leaned over the sty wall to see what was going on.

It was Napoleon, father of many; the oldest, dirtiest, fattest pig that they owned. He had gone berserk, and was charging about the sty, chomping, trampling, in a random and terrifying act of destruction. One of the younger pigs, Boxer, was a crushed mass of torn flesh; the others were huddled together,

squealing, tumbling over one another to get away each time the huge boar charged.

Beth was using the broom as a bludgeon, bringing it down again and again, clubbing guilty and innocent alike.

*'Mum!' Jason yelled at her. 'Mum, stop it! It's not doing any good!'*

She turned to face him, startled as though snatched from a dream. Jason took the broom from her and climbed up onto the wall. He dug his feet between the wooden slats and leaned over as far as he dared. Napoleon was snorting and rolling his eyes — black stone-eyes, empty and merciless, like a shark's. Creamy froth was dripping from the pig's gnashing mouth, bubbling from his flared snout. As Jason watched, Napoleon teetered slightly as though drunk, then let out an enraged bellow and charged head-first into the opposite wall.

The impact caused the sty to shudder, the pigs to squeal anew. Jason clutched the top of the wall to stop himself losing his balance. Napoleon grunted and shook his head, then seemed to sense that someone was watching him and swung slowly around. Choosing his moment, Jason raised the broom, then brought it slicing down. The broom-head made a sickening crunch as it impacted with Napoleon's skull.

Jason felt a judder pass through his body, but it seemed at first that Napoleon had been unaffected by the blow. The pig stood on the spot as though in measured and silent contemplation. His snout twitched; more froth drooled from his mouth. Then, in a horrible kind of slow motion, his legs buckled. His eyes glazed, and he rolled heavily onto his side. His flanks heaved — in, out, in, out — and he grunted softly as though in the midst of a contented dream.



**S**upper was cancelled. Beth seemed too traumatised by this latest episode to consider preparing any, and Jason felt to ill to eat anyway. Between them, they managed to drag Napoleon's unconscious body out of the sty and into Jason's father's toolshed. Jason covered the pig with a blanket, locked the shed door, then called Raich Tanner, known as the Meat-Man, who promised to drop

by and pick up Boxer's carcass in the morning. He was about to call the vet too, to come and look at Napoleon, when his mother stayed him with a hand on the arm.

'Leave it until tomorrow,' she said. 'I can't face seeing anyone else today.'

Jason felt inclined to argue — Napoleon might need immediate attention — but the look on his mother's face discouraged him. In the end he simply said, 'Okay, mum,' and replaced the receiver with a soft *ching*. That done, he did what he had planned to do earlier. He went upstairs, took two aspirin, lay back on his bed, and slept.

He had a strange and all-too-vivid dream. He was walking in the woods that bordered the farmland, his right arm itching horribly. He was looking for something, perhaps something to ease his discomfort, a herb or a plant or a root. It was early evening; sun was dripping through the trees, dappling the ground, but soon, Jason knew, it would grow dark: trees would turn black as though sucking the darkness in. He stumbled over rocks, around bushes, around trees, until, suddenly, he was in a clearing. *This* was where he was supposed to be — yet still he couldn't say what he was looking for. He walked forward cautiously, head turning this way and that as though afraid of ambush. Something caught his eye; a butterfly, perched on a leaf, delicate red wings shimmering like petals of blood. 'Butterfly,' Jason murmured, and was entranced by the word, as though really hearing it, relishing its lilting cadences, for the first time. He walked forward, saw the butterfly's antennae trembling, its eyelash-thin legs poised as though to spring. He moved closer. 'Butterfly,' he whispered again, as though the word was a charm that could glue the insect to the leaf. Still the butterfly didn't move. Now Jason was only an arm's length away. He stopped and breathed, 'Butterfly,' for the third time, then slowly raised his bandaged right hand. He extended his index finger and brought it slowly, trembling, towards the fragile insect. The butterfly remained where it was. Jason's finger touched one of the wings, began to stroke it gently. He smiled, enraptured, and began, softly, to coo. Without warning, the

butterfly crumbled to black ash and was scattered by the breeze.



The ceiling looked blurred. Jason gazed at it, but could not pinpoint exactly what it was that made it seem...different. He was lying on his back, fully-clothed, on top of his bed. Sunlight that contained the freshness of morning poured in through the window.

His arm hurt. Badly. Not just itched, but really *hurt* — as if someone had come along and broken it in the night. The itch was still there, but now it seemed swamped by the pain; or rather, not swamped but squeezed upwards along his chest and the right side of his face.

He opened his mouth; the itching fizzed along his jaw, in and out of his ear, cut a trail across his cheekbone and the rim of his eye socket. *Shit*, it felt as though hornets were hatching out inside his skull. But his arm; that was the main thing. His arm hurt *so bad*.

He tried to move it, and found, to his relief, that he could. He clenched and unclenched his hand, wincing against the prospect of further pain, but the ache remained constant; movement seemed not to affect it. He shuffled into a semi-sitting position and brought his right arm slowly round where he could see it. Beneath the bandage the arm looked... misshapen, somehow pulpy: the thought made him nauseous. He plucked at the knot and unwrapped the bandage with fumbling fingers.

The thing revealed beneath was so horrible, so utterly awful, that for a few moments he could do nothing but gaze at it.

It was hard to believe that the twisted length of rope smothered in warts had ever been a human limb; and even harder to believe that the obscenity was still attached to his body. A cold, clinical part of Jason's mind furnished him with a memory, an approximation: a dead tree branch he had found in the woods a few weeks ago that had been yellow-white with insects' eggs. He whimpered as he moved his hand. The fingers were like fat, lumpy-white worms, the arm itself boneless, fluid as a snake. He swung his legs to the floor, putting his left hand out to the wall to

support himself.

He froze. Fear raced through his body, slamming doors, blocking off air. The wall beneath his hand was...bumpy, as though there were pebbles beneath the wallpaper. And the carpet beneath his feet. And his bed. They were bumpy too.

He looked. Stared. Properly for the first time. Everything in his room — *everything* — was covered in...in lumps.

In warts.

*No! No, it was impossible!*

Jason slid to the floor and brought his knees up to his chin. He began to snigger, then to laugh, and then, finally, to scream. When he had done, his throat felt sore and tender, but his mind was clear, his thoughts almost unnaturally lucid. He looked around the room — warts on the cupboard, warts on the chair, warts like soap bubbles in the glass of his window — and he thought: *Mum. What about mum? Oh God, what about mum?*

He stood up, his legs weak and trembling, and stumbled out of his bedroom. Warts were popping up everywhere — on the landing, on the banister, even on the ornaments and plants and books and...everything.

He went into his mother's room. It was empty, the bed covers thrown back. The bed was full of warts, which from this distance looked like white beads.

*Ha! Ha! What a joke! April Fool! Tell me another!*

He came out of his mother's room and went into the bathroom.

She was not there either. Jason felt like going back to bed, warts or no warts. His arm hurt — fucking hurt — and flu symptoms were galloping through his body.

Half-turning, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. Reflective blisters flawed the glass, but there was still enough of a smooth surface for Jason to see what his face had become. He stared at the image — his right cheek reduced to lumpy porridge, his ear a cluster of fleshy bubbles — and he shouted, *'No!! No!! No!!'*

Instinctively he struck out with his left hand. The mirror burst, a spider's web that exploded into slivers of discordant, tinkling music. A stripe of blood welled up over the back of his hand. He ignored it, let it drip.

'Mum,' he moaned. 'Mum, where are you?' He sat on the edge of the



bath. 'What in God's name is happening to us?'

No answers came, not from God or anyone. Over the past couple of months, Jason had come to learn that often in life there were no answers. Things happened, bad things, and when you asked why, when you pleaded to be told what you'd done to deserve them, you were presented only with the blank and uncaring mask of Fate. There was no way round the mask, no way inside it, no way of examining Fate's motives, trying to make sense of its randomness. All you could do was accept its actions and carry on. Because the more you picked and probed and questioned, the more infected the wound that it had left in your life became.

Jason wanted, at that moment, to sleep, to die, to sink into a black and silent oblivion where he could forget this awful, awful...thing that in less than two days had taken over his life. *But first I have to find mum,* he told himself, *I have to make sure she's okay. I have to get away from here.*

He stood up, walked slowly along the landing, down the stairs, into the kitchen. There were warts everywhere — on the bread, the cooker, the cutlery, the mugs — but still there was no sign of his mother. His right arm hung limply, unbandaged, by his side. He felt ill, so very, very ill, but in a way he felt he'd gone beyond that, as though physical pain was somehow only a minor by-product of a greater horror. He walked to the back door, pushed it open, went outside. The sun blinded him, swathed him in heat, as though in a last desperate display of beauty, warmth, life.

'Mum!' Jason shouted. 'Mum, where are you?'

He heard movement to his left, round the corner of the house. He turned towards it as a voice, his mother's, spoke the first syllable of his name. 'Jay,' it said, as though pointing out a bird. Then, before the name could be completed, it bubbled up into a high, ratcheting scream.

'Mum!' Jason yelled, and forced himself to run towards the sound. He heard another scream, then a single sobbed word, 'No,' then a further scream, abruptly cut off. His body felt sluggish, and it hurt — *it hurt* — but Jason pushed it to its limits. The corner of the house

lay ten feet away...seven...four...one...

Then he skidded round it, saw the yard, the sty, the milking shed, the barn...

And caught a glimpse of something scuttling, shapeless, warty, dragging his mother into the barn's gloomy interior.

'Oh God, no' he moaned, and sprinted towards the barn's open door. As he ran he thought crazily: *Don't touch the butterfly, don't touch the butterfly, don't touch the butterfly.* Halfway across the yard he slipped on a cobblestone and fell sprawling, hands raised as though in surrender. He bumped his head, jarred his hips, but clambered to his feet and carried on.

The barn was dark after the sunlight. Shadow lay on shadow in a sombre and confusing collage. The smell was a blend of cows and hay — rich, sweet, musky. Gashes of light lay on the walls like luminous cuts.

Jason walked forward, aware of his rustling footsteps, his breath like tearing paper. He saw mounds of hay, tools against the walls, a wooden ladder leading up to a hay loft. At the far end of the barn, cloaked in shadows, was what he could only think of as a construction.

It was eight feet high, five feet across. It resembled a kiln built of papier mâché, or a colossal wasps' nest. It had grown — or been made — within the last twenty-four hours: Jason had visited the barn yesterday morning and there had been no sign of it then.

'Mum,' he called. His voice boomed hollowly and received only silence in reply.

He walked towards the construction (*the hive*, he thought suddenly), his arm hurting, his body feverish, black fear gnawing at his stomach. Each moment he expected something to fly at him out of the gloom, to come screeching out of the dimness, but nothing did. When he was six feet from the hive he stopped, the itching crawling over his face, making it twitch, and said: 'Mum, are you there?'

He heard something behind the hive. A small but persistent sound that had him inching his way forward, straining his ears. It was a delicate sound — wet, smacking, repetitive — like a baby stamping its tiny feet in water, or...or...an image bloomed suddenly in his

mind...Bess, his father's sheepdog, slurping her way through her midday bowl of Pedigree Chum.

'God, no..' Jason breathed. 'Oh God, please no..'

He tried to shout, 'Mum!', but the word dissolved in his mouth, became a choking sob. He took a lurching step towards the hive, then stopped as the slurping sounds were replaced by silence. He began to back away as a looming shadow, darker than the rest, sidled round the edge of the hive and seeped across the floor.

Something followed the shadow. Something hunched, fat, bulbous with warts. A sickening pungent smell spiked Jason's nostrils, and he turned his head away as he felt his gorge rise. When he turned back a second later the thing was staring at him unblinkingly.

Staring at him...

(*No, it couldn't be! It couldn't!*)

...with Napoleon's eyes.

'Ne...ne...ne...ne...ne...' Jason mumbled idiotically, his legs leading him a strange backpedalling dance. He thought of the broom crashing down on the pig's skull, the dead weight of the vast body he and his mother had dragged into the toolshed. The pig's eyes were black. Mean. So cold, so...so *soulless* that a flash of any kind of emotion — even hatred — would have been welcome in them.

'Napoleon's locked in the shed,' Jason whined as though his words could make it so. The warty thing growled at him softly, a black wound opening below its eyes to reveal crooked, chomping teeth. It oozed forward, though at first made no move to attack, as though it were merely protecting its lair.

And then, without warning, it let out a hideous screaming bellow and charged.

Jason turned and fled, hot needles blazing through his body, ground glass speeding through his veins. Yet, despite his ailments, he ran faster than he had ever run in his life before. His brain seemed to jolt in his skull, dislodging his thoughts. The sun glared at him. The yard seemed to stretch forever. Jason's feet flew over the cobbles: once he almost slipped and prayed hard before regaining his balance. At last he reached the corner of the house, and seconds later — long, long seconds — he was bursting in through the kitchen door, turning and slamming it behind him.



He stood, his back to the door, sweat pouring down his face. He was not sure how close to him the Napoleon-thing had come, nor even if it had followed him out of the barn, for the grinding, pounding, roaring machine of his own body had drowned out all other sound. That machine was winding down now, breaking into its constituent parts: pain, itch, fear, fever. Suddenly exhausted, Jason slid to the floor, leaving a smeary, sweaty mark on the door's warty wood, and closed his eyes.

Time passed. Jason was not aware he'd been thinking, but when he finally opened his eyes again he realised he'd come to a decision. With difficulty he dragged himself to his feet, looking round the warty kitchen until his eyes alighted on the big box of Swan Vestas his mother kept handy to light the gas. He picked up the matches, grimacing at the feel of warts on the box, like blisters beneath the cardboard, and put them in his pocket. Then he crossed the kitchen and dragged open the heavy door that led into the cellar.

He went down the cellar steps, feeling warts of stone pushing against the soles of his feet, warts of rusty iron on the banister. The cellar was cool and quiet and dark: Jason switched on the light at the bottom and everything jumped into brightness. He sat on the bottom step, suddenly overcome by a feeling of horror, of depression — by an overwhelming urge to eject that blackness from his system. He sunk his face into his left hand and started to sob and shake his head. After a while he began to murmur, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry,' over and over again through his tears.

Once his quiet hysteria had run its course, he stood up and crossed to a set of shelves affixed to the opposite wall. He took down a rusty, cobweb-strewn can of petrol, held it to his ear and jiggled it. Liquid sloshed inside; not much, but enough for his purposes. Can in hand, matches in pocket, Jason ascended the stairs to the kitchen.

He looked out of the kitchen window. There was no sign of the Napoleon-thing, so he opened the door a crack and peered out. He half-expected something to come at him, squealing, but nothing did, so he opened the door wider and stepped into the sunshine. He left the door ajar, and as a precaution

unscrewed the cap of the petrol can and threw it away. He took the matches from his pocket, and then, with a deep breath, began to walk towards the corner of the house.

Actually turning the corner into the yard was the worst part. He had to force his legs to perform the action. He wondered how quickly he could splash on the petrol, take a match from the box, strike the match, throw it. The procedure seemed time-consuming and cumbersome. He suspected that if the Napoleon-thing came for him again, he would simply throw whatever was in his hands at the creature and run. He sniggered at the image despite his fear, looking around with wide eyes as he entered the yard.

It was empty. The only sound he

**'He began to back away as a looming shadow, darker than the rest, sidled round the edge of the hive and seeped across the floor'**

could hear was the lazy drone of summer. For the first time he noticed the door of his father's toolshed, the bottom half shattered like matchwood. He swallowed. The pulse in his throat was beginning to jump again. His body felt like a clumsy, tortuous burden as he crossed the yard and re-entered the barn.

Silence. Gloom. So deep, so profound, that Jason felt like dancing and singing to counter it. At the far end, the hive sat in its nest of hay and shadows like a giant egg. The Napoleon-thing was nowhere to be seen.

Jason began to walk forward. The petrol sloshed at his side; the matchbox felt solid and comforting in his wart-encrusted right hand. *If that thing comes for me, he thought, I'll turn it into bacon rashers.*

He could smell the petrol. Could smell something else too, something besides the hay. It was a hot smell, raw, unpleasant. *Bacon rashers*, he thought desperately. *Fucking bacon rashers.* He walked right up to the hive, heart gibbering, and began to jerk petrol around its base.

Something moved behind the

hive. Shifted. Grunted quietly. 'Bacon rashers,' Jason muttered and waited for the Napoleon-thing to emerge. He waited long moments until the grunting softened and the movements ceased. *Too scared*, he thought. *Either that or the thing's asleep.*

He splashed petrol over the hive itself, unaware that he was humming softly. The chemical smell made his stomach turn, but Jason ignored it. When the can was empty, he tossed it onto a mound of hay and fumbled open the box of matches. He was about to reach in for a match when he thought: *I wonder what it feels like.*

The thought seemed unbidden, almost startling — like something scuttling from beneath a rock on the beach. 'I wonder what it feels like,' he said out loud, and next moment had transferred the box to his left hand and was reaching out with his gnarled right arm. He stretched his fingers, like white-barnacled worms, and laid his palm flat on the hive's exterior. It was warm. Dry. Alive. And more... more than that...it spoke to him...

It was not an actual word, but a boom, a throb, a pulse that resounded throughout his entire body. Jason's itching flared, then stilled, like fire doused with water. He felt suddenly...free — that was the only phrase to describe it. Free as a bird, free as the wind, free as...free as...

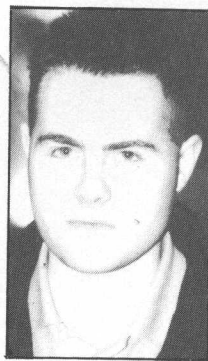
Free.

'Free,' he said. And smiled. The word sounded good in his mouth.

*Free.* That single word somehow, magically, seemed to embrace a complete and perfect philosophy.

'Free,' he said again, and chuckled delightedly. 'Free.'

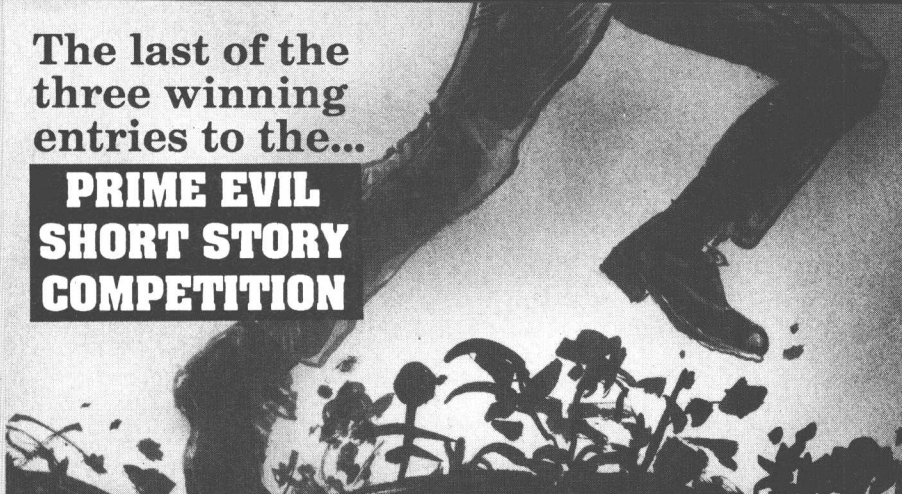
Then he threw the matches away, squatted back on his haunches, and waited.



**MARK MORRIS** was born in 1963 in the mining town of Bolsover, Derbyshire, and now lives in Leeds with his wife, Nel. He became a full time writer in August 1988 and saw the publication of his first novel, *Toady*, in September 1989 as a Piatkus hardback. Corgi will publish *Toady* as a lead paperback title in October 1990, and Bantam will publish the novel in the USA early in 1991, although with a different title. Mark's second novel, *Stitch*, will appear in hardback early in 1991.

The last of the  
three winning  
entries to the...

**PRIME EVIL  
SHORT STORY  
COMPETITION**



# WHEN THE GARDENS BLOOM AT NIGHT

Andrew Wilson

**H**e sprinted crisply down the midnight streets, sweat forming a liquid sheet between the frosting air and his overheated body. On and on he ran; out into the suburbs, where the squares of housing become rectangles, and finally blocks, between the roads. The lights of the city nucleus had been left behind, and even the overspill of their glow was gone. Only the blurred orange of isolated street lamps broke out in the darkness. The houses lay like black mouths, lurking far away from the pavements at the ends of gravelly tongues.

Once into these darkened precincts he left the road and, ducking low, slipped around the back of a house. For a moment he watched the black forms beyond him, and then he dashed to the bottom of a long garden. Leaping the fence, he began to run along the lawns and borders of the white-collar homes, hurdling fences, climbing railings and pushing through hedges. He used the stratified landscape as an assault course, a test of his stamina.

His charging legs punched a stamp across the virgin borders, carelessly crushing flowers underfoot and staining the ground with sap. A smile slid across his face as he thought of the impotent shock that would corkscrew through the guts of these householders tomorrow. My God! Someone has been on our property!

The hideous realisation that their little castles were not as secure as they had thought.

The glow from television screens drew sketches on curtains, shapes which twitched and jumped like spastic jugglers; company cars, solid as tanks in the dark, crouched beside the whitewashed walls, greenhouses dimly reflected the night sky like boxes filled with dreams. His face cracked another smile: did they really think these icons gave them sanctuary? Sniggers whistled through his teeth as his devastating feet made another joke of the thought.

'So why do you do it?' Fox had asked him as they shared a bottle of vodka one night.

'I like it,' he had told Fox mildly. 'It stretches me, it pushes me further than I would normally go.'

'Really?'

'Oh, yes. My will's not strong enough to make me do anything more than try my best with something as intrinsically boring as running. It just happens to be what I'm best at, so I need something to drive me to do my best. I need a motive.'

'Such as the possibility of someone finding you in their flowerbed?'

Fox smiled.

'I need to feel threatened,' he said simply.

They had both laughed then.

**H**is breath resembled a snort of laughter now, but it was just his lungs panting for more oxygen to quench their never-ending demand. He gasped again as he

leapt a small rockery and loped through a battalion of plastic gnomes. Shadows swarmed over his body as he lunged from one area of dim visibility to another, while plants and trees clutched at him with inquisitive roots and branches. He scrambled on unhindered. Far to his right, the moon shone like a splinter of glass.

As he plunged into yet another garden, he slowed his headlong steeplechase; a pole in the middle of the well-groomed lawn had distracted him. It had a ball attached to its upper end, and in the shadows of the trees, without the aid of lamplight, it almost seemed like a giant lollipop.

He crouched in a neatly tilled border and puzzled over what the shape could be, until he had convinced himself that the household was dead to the world.

When he finally crept up to the pole, he found that the object was not a ball but some kind of vegetable. He could make out nothing in the blackness, so he put his hands out and felt it. The skin gave beneath his probing fingers; it was cold and fleshy to the touch, and trailed a segmented stalk or root. Grasping the base, which was spongy and dampened with a sticky liquid, he jerked it off the stake that supported it for a closer look.

As he brought the thing up to his face, a light went on in the house. His second judgement about the clotted, dripping globe had been wrong as well. He was holding a human head and spinal column which had been torn free from the body.

He shrieked and hurled it away and twisted to run. But he slipped and tripped, legs caught in something like a root. His fall cracked his ankle and he clutched at it, whimpering.

In the midst of his terror, the black house seemed to focus its one shining window on his writhing form in a ghastly stare. His feet were entangled in ropy lengths of intestine.

**T**he guts had been laid out around the stake like a fiendish fairy ring. Inside the circle, liver and lights, kidneys and hearts and eyes and ears were all arranged with other organs in neat and regular patterns.

He tried to eliminate the pain from his mind and began to crawl, shaking, back towards the fence.

The grass felt sticky and warm. More lights came on in the house and covered the red lawn in sheets of glaring white. He dragged himself desperately away, making for the side fence, the next garden, another house, sanctuary.

There were voices from the house behind him; a door opened.

The fence was low and made from wire mesh. He flopped over it and, pushing forward, hauled himself to his feet and thrashed through the decaying leaves surrounding the bushes.

**'The skin gave beneath his probing fingers; it was cold and fleshy to the touch'**

Flailing his arms and mumbling, 'Come on, come on,' he hobbled towards his haven. It was a small building but it had a peaked roof, almost like a church. The shouts of the searchers opposite reached him as he hurled himself against the back door and started to pound on it. It was only after a minute that he remembered to use the bell too.

A light went on in the room above him, a window opened. From below, he saw only a silhouette. There was talking and then thumping footsteps on the stairs. He sagged against the door, tears blurring his eyes. His hands were covered in earth and blood, he realised; he was spattered all over with both and it smelled weird.

The door swung open and the light blinded him. He shielded his face with his filthy hands, choking out: 'Next door...it's awful...awful! Please help me...'

'Such pretty flowers...' sighed the figure. 'It's a pity we can only cultivate our special blooms after dark.'

He wiped his face and jerked his head up.

A woman stood before him; her body was smeared with blood.

'They've killed someone...' His voice tailed away.

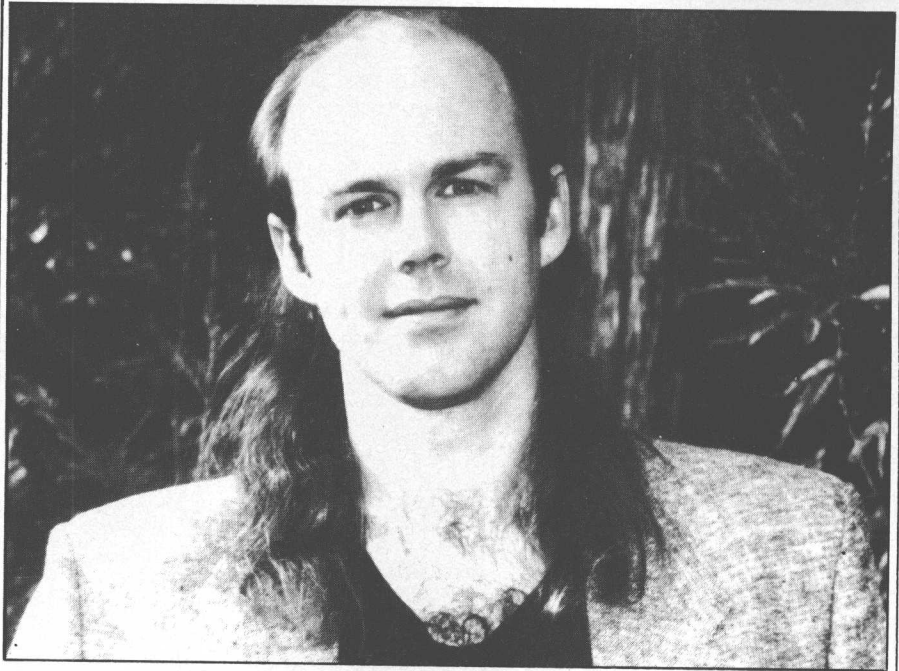
'We know,' she said, a grin peeling across her face like a scar.

She seemed to produce the ritual blade from nowhere, like a conjurer. His broken ankle gave way beneath him. The knife sheared down, quick as a flash of lightning.

And his head fell away.

## FICTION FILE 20

# TAD WILLIAMS



**The author of the *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* trilogy shares with John Gilbert his concern for standards within the fantasy genre.**

**D**isappointment with the standard of fantasy fiction was one of the reasons that prompted Tad Williams to write his epic trilogy *Memory, Sorrow And Thorn*, the second volume of which, *Stone Of Farewell*, is published this month. 'Fantasy has gotten so popular that there is a great deal of marketing pressure to put out more of the same. It's comfort reading, the equivalent of candy or ice cream, a little treat for yourself at the end of the day.

'It's very difficult to write 'high fantasy' without automatically being seen as a slavish Tolkien, and that can either be completely because of marketing designation or because it is an imitation of some sort. I think the time has arrived for commentary on Tolkien, rather than just imitation.'

His considered comments come from a lifetime interest, and concern for fantasy. 'I've been reading fantasy and science fiction since I was pretty young — things like *Wind In The Willows* and *E Nesbitt* — but I didn't start writing until I was in my twenties.'

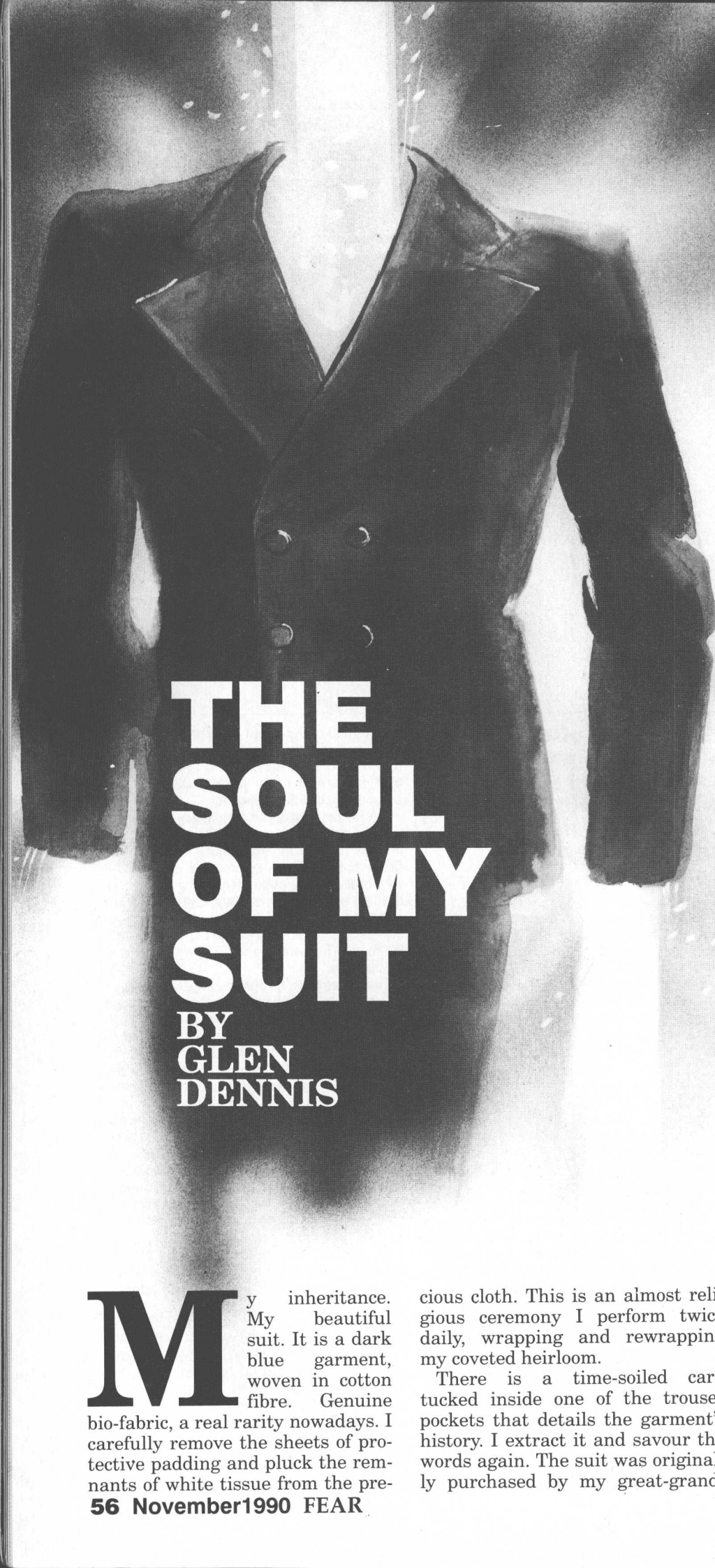
A wealth of short stories was followed by his first novel, *Tail Chaser's Song*, which fared reasonably well in the States, but did an overnight disappearing act in Britain. His second novel, the first in the *Memory, Sorrow And Thorn* saga, came about through a little constructive luck. 'I sold my first book to my publishers and I was writing

a historical novel about ancient Egypt. When I told my publishers about it, they looked at it in horror. They asked me if I had anything else, and I said I did, so they said let's see something, and they liked it.'

An unusual start for a massive trilogy, but aren't publishers wary that large series can also be huge commercial flops? 'I think *The Dragonbone Chair* succeeded because it was big, and my publishers were pretty willing to trust me. Some friends thought that I might have been asked to cut the first draft, but my publishers asked me to add a little bit to it. They were encouraging my worst tendencies.'

Huge fantasy trilogies can lead writers into all sorts of difficulties, not least because they might misname or mis-describe characters; for those reasons of continuity, Tad is 'devoted' to his word processor. 'I'm absolutely in love with using a computer. This series is so complicated that I have to keep chapter abstracts so I can find out what a character was doing last. It also allows me to have my indexes close to hand. I've also gotten involved in the computer field. I'm actually involved in multimedia work — video and computer. It's quite fascinating and it also touches on the edges of artificial intelligence. My partner and I are forming a company, and I think we're creating a new form of multimedia which should be up and running in six to eight months. I can't say too much about it, but I hope it will interest other writers.'

At the moment Tad is about to finish the final volume of his trilogy. 'It's called *Two Green Angel Tower*. My next book after the series will be a sort of SF thing, a quest novel set in virtual reality. I want to be writing as many kinds of things as possible so, after that, I want to try my hand at a horror novel and, perhaps, a modern novel — but don't tell my publisher that!'



# THE SOUL OF MY SUIT

BY  
GLEN  
DENNIS

**M**y inheritance. My beautiful suit. It is a dark blue garment, woven in cotton fibre. Genuine bio-fabric, a real rarity nowadays. I carefully remove the sheets of protective padding and pluck the remnants of white tissue from the pre-

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cious cloth. This is an almost religious ceremony I perform twice daily, wrapping and rewrapping my coveted heirloom.

There is a time-soiled card tucked inside one of the trouser pockets that details the garment's history. I extract it and savour the words again. The suit was originally purchased by my great-grand-

mother, Mini Mac, at an auction of the 'old and curious' held in 1988. The lot was described as 'being formerly in the possession of a distinguished professor of genetics'. I can only allude to the authenticity of this information — for me, the *spiel* smacks of romantic fantasy, a subtle sale's ploy. This tale of the anonymous biologist failed to impress, and Mini Mac, being the only bidder, obtained the suit at its reserve price of one hundred English pounds. Later that day she presented the elegant costume to her husband, my great-grandfather, for his twenty-second birthday.

The suit is of an old-fashioned design; double breasted, with large lapels which my wife, Jane, derisively refers to as hang gliders. As if she has a discerning eye in these matters of taste!

The feminine aspect of male dress, so popular during the late Nineties, is currently on the decline. Ironically it is the sharp, masculine cut of my suit which has become *à la mode*, much to Jane's annoyance. It is as though the fashions oscillate in one hundred year cycles; but I cannot, of course, omit the fact that the vast majority of our people are content to enslave themselves in uniformity, denying any freedom of expression.

**I**f the weather is fine I wear my suit to the office, always taking a spare set of conventional overalls in case of rain. Everyone loves the suit. Even the conservative have to stop and stare and admire. They do not scoff or laugh. It is Jane who pokes fun at what she regards as an embarrassing eccentricity. Perhaps she is right and all the neighbours do mock me behind my back. I would not care if they did.

Curiously the suit's sharp contours complement our architecture. I am at one with the urban environment. The garment is perfectly adapted to the rigid geometries of buildings in the late twenty-nineties. The pyramidal and octahedral structures form a kind of aesthetic harmony with my suit. Can't the contemporary designers perceive just how incongruous and unhealthy the bland overalls are in the concrete and glass precincts?

Of course the suit is important to me because of the tangible link it provides with my past. The suit gives me a history. I am in contact with Mini Mac and her husband whenever I wear or merely see the

ancient cloth.

It is getting late now.

'Jack, come to bed,' Jane calls dreamily. She is switching off the lights. I am blanked in darkness. I curse. You're not still caressing that damn suit? Why don't you go to bed with it? I'm sure it'll have more fun than I've ever had.' If anything, her voice sounds more hateful in the shadows of my study. Deftly I fold the suit, and place it in its box; then I bury this time capsule beneath a pile of papers. I say goodnight to it and reluctantly get washed and ready for bed.

The following morning I awaken with the smell of sizzling bacon tickling my nostrils. My head feels numb. I concentrate. I have had a nightmare. The sweat sticks to my body like glue. The suit! I rush to my study and recover the box. I stare down into the box's empty gut, blue veins popping from my forehead. The suit has vanished. Impossible! Did I not sing it a lullaby last night? Or did I? My mind is confused. Instinctively I rifle through bundles of paper. I throw books about the room, sweeping them disrespectfully from shelves. The suit is nowhere to be found. I run to my wardrobe and tear at the collection of overalls; sniffing into the black corners and recesses like a crazed dog.

'What are you doing up there?' Jane shouts. My ears prick up like radar antennae. Of course, it must be her! Her jealousy has finally got the better of her. In a flash I am downstairs, having tumbled along the bannisters of our mock twentieth century house. In a fever, I pace slowly towards Jane, calculating my anger. She looks up indignantly from the frying pan.

'What are you up to?' she asks.

'It's the suit,' I seethe, 'what have you done with it?' I erupt like a volcano that has lain dormant for aeons. A wave of tension strikes my neck.

'Can't you find your clothes, little boy?' she humours. This checks my frenzy for a moment. Yes, I am being irrational. Keep calm. Think logically.

'I have just been excommunicated from my past,' I blabber. She laughs.

'You melodramatic fool.' Amused, she takes my hand and we both go upstairs to look. The search is unsuccessful. Ten minutes later we are sitting down to breakfast. I

have my face buried in my hands.

'Perhaps you left it in the pub?' she suggests.

'No. No. I saw it last night. Besides, the weather has been good lately. I've worn the suit all week — I couldn't very well have been walking around naked,' I reply sarcastically. Jane's comment has, however, given me a clue. I try to think back over the previous days, but my memory is blurred. My brain is full of cobwebs. I rage against its pathetic power as it throws up a collection of randomly juxtaposed events, in no clear chronological order.

Perhaps I did not see the suit yesterday evening. What is wrong with me? I cannot blame Jane. I am a fully grown adult, not some

**'I run to my wardrobe and tear at the collection of overalls; sniffing into the black corners and recesses like a crazed dog'**

five year old channelling his aggression onto his parent. It's only a piece of fabric, I tell myself. But no, I will not leave it at that.

Jane is being understanding and my shoulders are hunched in a permanent shrug. I push my plate aside and drink my coffee.

'Will you go into the office today,' she asks, in an attempt to change the subject for both our sakes. I want to go. I brood for a second and hastily present a deadpan face.

'Yes, I'll have to go in. The network is down so there's no possibility of working from home.' She nods. I realise then that she knows I am lying — she has already logged into the main frame this morning, the list of users has just belched onto the screen. We both tactfully ignore this point. I run upstairs one more time for a last look round — for therapeutic reasons more than anything else.

I leave the house, having resolved to ask at the lost property desk of the local library. Yes, I can definitely recall visiting the library.

I try to magic the suit there in advance — using quantum probability techniques that have long been discredited. I am wasting my

time. Still I conjure in my head with a sea of collapsing wave functions.

As I sit on the silent tram, the madness returns. We are all wearing the mandatory overalls — there is no style, no daring. The world is a drab black and white. I look sadly out of the window, onto the greasy pavements. There is fine drizzle falling and through it I see a blue-coloured advertisement — it stirs memories and taunts me.

At the library a peevish young girl, wearing thick spectacles and the same overalls as mine — as everyone else's — comes over. She recognises me.

'Excuse me, but have you had a bag containing a blue suit handed in?'

'Just a moment.' She checks the lost property. I watch the chances of success shrink like a deflating balloon as each item is withdrawn from the tea chest. It is not an infinite well, and so soon it must run dry. The assistant delves no more.

'No, afraid not.' I leave her my network number just in case. Suddenly the curator enters, giving me an idea.

'Could the suit have been left in the reference library,' I ask eagerly.

'No.' The barrage of negatives hurts. 'All lost property is located here,' she informs me. So in dull attire, my history torn from me, I leave. Someone says hello, but I ignore the greeting. I am in an intolerably foul mood. Can I face a day at the office? I should have stayed at home. It is embarrassing to carry your worries so openly.

I enter the new pyramidal office block. A polarised glass obscenity. The conditioned, ionised air chokes me. The machinists glance up in surprise.

'No suit today Jack?'

'No. No suit. You're very perceptive.'

The boss already sits in my office — he has rung my wife and is expecting me. We are about to start work.

'Don't mention the suit,' I yell, anticipating his words on their first breath.

'OK, OK,' he replies. I scour the office, but the suit is not there. I phone Jane during the tea break. I don't mention the suit. I am busy collapsing those imaginary wave functions again, willing the garment into existence. Has she found it? No. She tactfully avoids the subject. It's nice to hear from me,



she says. Have I calmed down, she asks?

I ring her again later, on the premise of asking if any post has been mailed through. None has. I put down the receiver in disgust. I write some reports, fidgeting continually in my chair.

And then it happens. The telephone rings. It must be Jane. She has found the suit.

'It's your wife.'

I grab the receiver.

'Yes. Yes. Hello darling, you've unearthed it?'

**'I am a lost man. I am disintegrating; my obsession, an invisible thing, is gnawing at my brain like a starved grub attacking a fruit'**

'No.' She informs me that the Johnsons are coming over for supper; tells me to be on my best behaviour and to avoid the morbid topic of my blessed suit. The line goes dead and hums like a live wire.

The afternoon drags by. The weather clears and I can see the perfect symmetry of our regular, polyhedra city. The pyramids on the horizon have a hard outline. Suspended high up in my sterile office I see the sky, a deep, mocking blue. It burns down on me. The whole city is daubed in the dark blue of my suit, or so it seems. I am a lost man. I am disintegrating; my obsession, an invisible thing, is gnawing at my brain like a starved grub attacking a fruit. I have lost my past and hence have no future.

There is a silent conspiracy, surely. I look up at the machinists, they bear sinister smiles. Everyone is in on the act, I decide. 'Jack and his suit,' they are all saying. I can almost lipread the words. Irrationality returns. The suit is irreplaceable. There is no more cotton. No tailors with any skill. My overalls are suffocating me.

'A lovely view, sir,' says one of the machinists.

'Get out!' I scream.

Halfway through the afternoon the idea of a conspiracy has fully gripped me. Paranoia is riddling my insides as I nervously roll an octahedrally-based pencil across

the desk top.

I go home. The sunlight is bright and optimistic. How I hate the sun today and long for the overcast skies typical of our climate. The tram is full and like albino ants we all scurry in our white overalls, out of the urban districts. Opposite me a youth sits, expressing his individuality with a gold bracelet — nothing compared to my suit. Perhaps my suit is in another world now. I think back and am certain that I saw it last night, but reality is rapidly receding.

I am in mourning. It is as though there has been a death in the family — but worse, this loss represents the genocide of my family tree. I can't be trusted even with my past.

I arrive home and the lounge is set for the supper. The table is laid out with various foods and the best crystal is displayed on the sideboard.

'Hello,' I shout; and then, half-heartedly and feeling like a low criminal, 'any luck?' Jane does not hear.

'Just coming, darling.' I can tell by the tone of her voice that she is speaking whilst arranging her hair in the mirror. 'The Johnsons will be over at eight. You'd better start getting ready.' I glance at my watch and collapse into a chair. It is half-past seven. I rip off my overalls. How I hate those clothes. And then Jane enters and my heart explodes. She is wearing my blue suit.

'You bitch!' I shriek. Conflicting thoughts run through my head. At least the past has been rediscovered; but why has she tormented me all day?

She acts as though nothing has happened. She smiles innocently.

'How do I look, darling?' she enquires with a feminine shyness. I can't lie.

'Gorgeous,' I have to admit. Somehow on her, the blue suit is even more appealing.

'I'm sorry Jack. But I just wanted to try it on and surprise you. I didn't dream that you'd need to take a peep at the suit first thing in the morning.'

I am not listening.

'You only had to ask,' I storm.

'You never let me near the suit. There is no way in a thousand years that you'd have ever given me permission to as much as touch it!'

I know she is right. I suddenly

become aware of my inexplicable nastiness, my petty cruelty. Perhaps this whole episode has been fated. Perhaps it will reconcile the two of us.

I understand her now. I walk up to her and reach out to touch her shoulder. She recoils.

'Ouch, that hurts,' she yells. So this feeling of *rapprochement* is not mutual; she is still spurning me. I grit my teeth and apologise.

'If you're going to be like that...' I begin, and then approach her again, determined to reclaim my suit. I start with the jacket. She screams. 'It's killing me!'

I take a look under the cuffs and see that the suit is part of her flesh. It is welded to her. The skin and textile have united to form an amorphous, elastic covering.

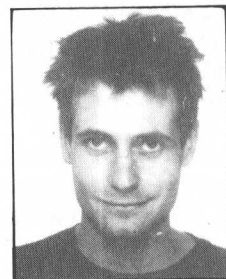
Tenderly I try to ease the cloth, but it will not budge. Jane is sobbing. I rush to the phone and call the doctor. Yes, it is an emergency.

The paramedics arrive. The phenomenon is inexplicable, they say. For me it is as if the suit possesses a genetic memory of its ancestry. It is protecting the phantom genes imprinted in its past.

The paramedics take me to one side. They will have to amputate. I give my consent and, like a team of seamstresses, they set to work removing the precious cloth, cutting it away, limb from limb, amputating the jacket, sleeve by sleeve.

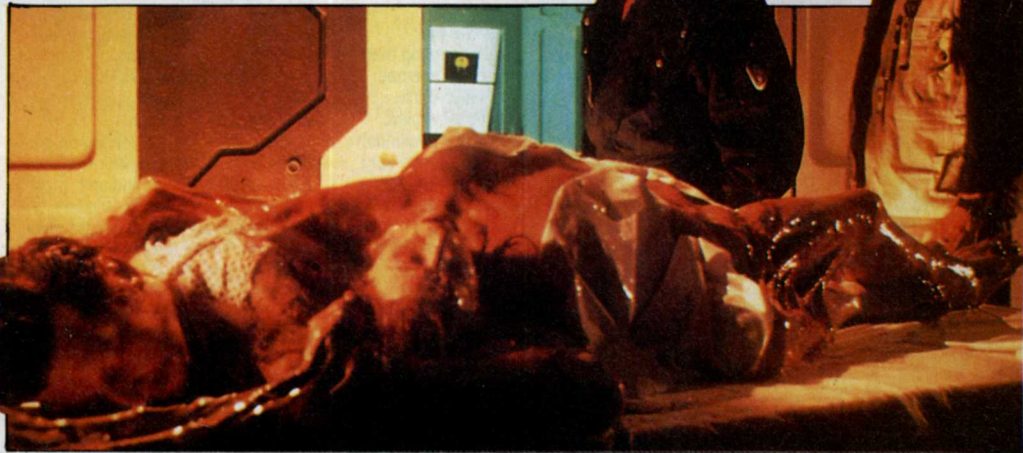
Later that night, after having despatched the Johnsons, I pick up the bloody shreds of my suit and place them lovingly in tissue paper.

My wife lies, heavily sedated, upon the bed. A multitude of bandages enshroud her. The flesh has been torn away to the bone in places. I go up my study and pour myself a drink. There she lies, somewhere below me, responsible for this vandalism. I gaze at the dark blue cuttings — random snips of DNA code dating back over a century. I laugh. I still have the soul of my suit and not even she can take that away from me. I say goodnight, and put the suit to bed.



**GLEN DENNIS** is a twenty-four year old avid Wellsian, living in Folkestone, Kent. He studied chemistry at Sussex university.

# FEAR REVIEWS




■ After Alien: Leviathan

# GENETIC MUTANTS



## LEVIATHAN

Starring Peter Weller, Amanda Pays, Daniel Stern, Richard Crenna  
 Director George P Cosmatos  
 Distributor CBS/Fox  
 Cert 18, 93 mins

 Shack 7 is an underwater base manned by eight men and women who have been submerged on a mining mission for two months. With three days left until they can return to the surface, they discover the sunken Russian naval vessel, Leviathan. Searching through the ship's log, they find that the entire crew died of a mystery disease before the craft was scuppered. Vodka is found amongst the dead crew's belongings and the crew of Shack 7 look all set for an underwater party until their leader, Beck (Peter Weller), steps in with his rule book and confiscates the alcohol. Unbeknownst to him, Six Pack (Daniel Stern) managed to pocket a hip flask of the Russian vodka and sets about having his own private party with Bowman (Lisa Eilbacher). Needless to say, the vodka isn't quite what it seems. The Russians have been playing around with genetic mutation experiments and have used the vodka as a medium to carry a virus that changes people into horrific monsters.

Six Pack is taken ill with a strange skin complaint and eventually dies. His dead body rapidly changes into something more fish-like, and before you know it he's alive again. Beck and his fellow crew members manage to dispose of the monster before it becomes too much of a problem and Bowman kills herself when she realises that she too is evolving into *something else*. But the crew of Shack 7 aren't about to get off so lightly. Part of Six Pack is still on board — and growing!

From here on it's a pitched battle between the remaining crew of Shack 7 and the genetic mutant. The monster continually evolves throughout the film, absorbing the memories of its victims and genetically fusing their faces with its body, so by the end of the film it's a pretty impressive creature.


Though accused of jumping on the underwater bandwagon perpetuated by *The Abyss*, *Leviathan* owes more to *Alien* with its creature-versus-crew scenario (there's even a monster in the stomach scene!). As such, it offers nothing new, but a rehash of ideas that have been better portrayed elsewhere. Still it's a well-shot action movie with some nice creature effects, and worth watching for these alone.

**Robin Candy**



## NOT QUITE HUMAN 2

Starring Jay Underwood, Robyn Lively, Alan Thicke, Katie Barberi  
 Director Eric Luke  
 Distributor Buena Vista

 *Not Quite Human 2* takes Chip (Jay Underwood), an android with the outward appearance of a googly-eyed high school student, out on his own into summer school. Closely followed by his 'Dad' and 'sister', Chip discovers that the school has a neat robotics department, and tries to get involved. However, the scientists in this department, unaware that Chip is an android, are determined to produce the first android themselves. So determined in fact, that they send computer viruses

which eventually destroys an android's internals to all other android developers.


Chip's own innards start to break up, often in the most hilarious/predictable circumstances. Don't imagine that *Not Quite Human 2* is action packed, it gets horribly goopy and sweet — Chip falls in love with a female android, being as robotically romantic as possible, saves her life as her batteries run out, his dad falls in love with a goody female scientist and everyone lives happily ever after. There are a few good lines, but this film is so obviously made to traditional Disney formula that it is very predictable and ultimately tiresome.

**Richard Eddy**

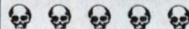


## SWEET MURDER

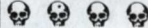
Starring Hélène Udy, Embeth Davidtz, Russell Todd, Michael McCabe  
 Director Percival Rubens  
 Distributor New World  
 Cert 18, 100 mins

 Laurie Shannon is a new girl in town and, with remarkable ease, moves in as the flatmate of Lisa Smith. They become good friends, the jobless, depressive Lisa looking to Laurie for comfort. But the peace is disturbed by the arrival of Dell Davis, who begins dating Laurie after meeting her at the bookshop where she works. However, Dell's intrusion into the girls' lives is relatively minor compared to that of John Pearson.

### Not To Be Missed



### Recommended



### Fair



### Poor



### Diabolical



## VIDEO AND CINEMA



### HORROR

Dead Ringers  
 Frankenhooker  
 Malediction  
 Outcast  
 Prom Night 3  
 Prophecies  
 Stephen King's This Is Horror Volume 3  
 Transformations  
 Videodrome



### SCIENCE FICTION

The Fantastic Four  
 Leviathan  
 Not Quite Human 2  
 Peacemaker  
 RoboCop — Detroit Crimewave  
 Dinosaurs  
 The X-Men



### FANTASY

Honey, I Shrunk The Kids  
 Limit Up  
 Phantoms  
 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles



### THRILLER

Blind Fury  
 The Exterminator  
 The Killer  
 Monkey Shines  
 Sweet Murder

Representing a group of solicitors, he calls one evening to inform Laurie discreetly of the death of her mother. Although she wasn't a rich woman, she inherited a great amount of money from a friend just before she died, and so Laurie is in line to receive two million dollars. Lisa overhears their conversation and plots to kill Laurie and take her place.

*Sweet Murder* can hardly be called inventive; a huge inheritance is the most clichéd motive for murder that I can think of. The dowdy, downtrodden, but scheming Lisa is a standard psycho; it's



■ Sweet Murder

usually the quiet ones craving affection that end up with the bloody kitchen knife in their hands. Lisa's flat is a mirror of her personality — dreary colours, plain walls and murky lighting — a very simple set but one which conveys the appropriate dank, claustrophobic atmosphere. Unfortunately, scenes elsewhere are almost as dim and restrictive, so there's little contrast, and the murderer's lair isn't quite the focal point it should be.


Performances are mediocre, bar Hélène Udy's Lisa, stretching above the norm with a careful balance of paranoia and closeted insanity, her devotion to and admiration for Laurie hinting at submissive homosexuality. Her transformation from a sweet young woman to a greedy multiple killer is obvious, yet amusing, and the film's running time passes quickly; worth a Sunday afternoon's rental.

Warren Lapworth



## PEACEMAKER

Starring Robert Davi, Robert Forster, Hilary Shepard, Lance Edwards  
Director Kevin S Tenney  
Distributor Medusa  
Cert 18, 87 mins

 Earth can be a dangerous place for an alien. This particular extraterrestrial lands in a moonlit lake and proceeds to borrow a shotgun from a parked squad car. He ends up in the morgue, filled with more police bullets than an ammunition depot can hold, and destined for an autopsy performed by a young woman doctor. Not ready yet for this kind of attention, he regenerates in front of her eyes and takes her hostage, but finds himself under attack by his alien adversary.

From then on it's massive warfare, with both sides enlisting the help of the doctor by proclaiming to be a peacemaker (read intergalactic policeman) in pursuit of a killer psychopath. The scene is set for car chases and fights, from fisticuffs to shotgun battles, with both opponents seemingly disregarding the obvious fact that only a direct hit in the brain will prevent a regeneration of their bodies. Thank heavens for the doctor though, who manages to sort out who's who, albeit after several stabs, and teaches both aliens the concept of a joke before the final showdown.


The scenario may seem familiar to anyone who has enjoyed the Schwarzenegger blockbuster *The Terminator*, but *Peacemaker* runs a different formula altogether — Formula Ford as compared to Formula One. Lacking the acting talent and the special effects megabucks of *The Terminator*, the sheer muscle of *Peacemaker* fails to win the blockbuster war, though it attempts to outstrip the earlier offering in ingenuity and suspense. Unfortunately, however, it doesn't do this either, so the outcome is one and a half hours of undemanding entertainment with good, but not exceptional, special effects.

Franco Frey

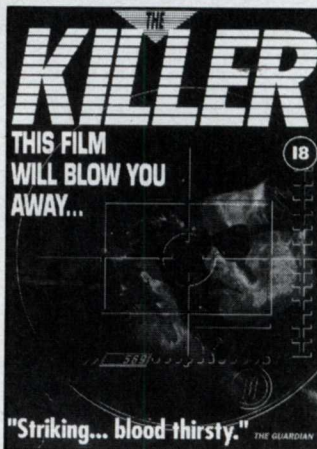


## THE KILLER

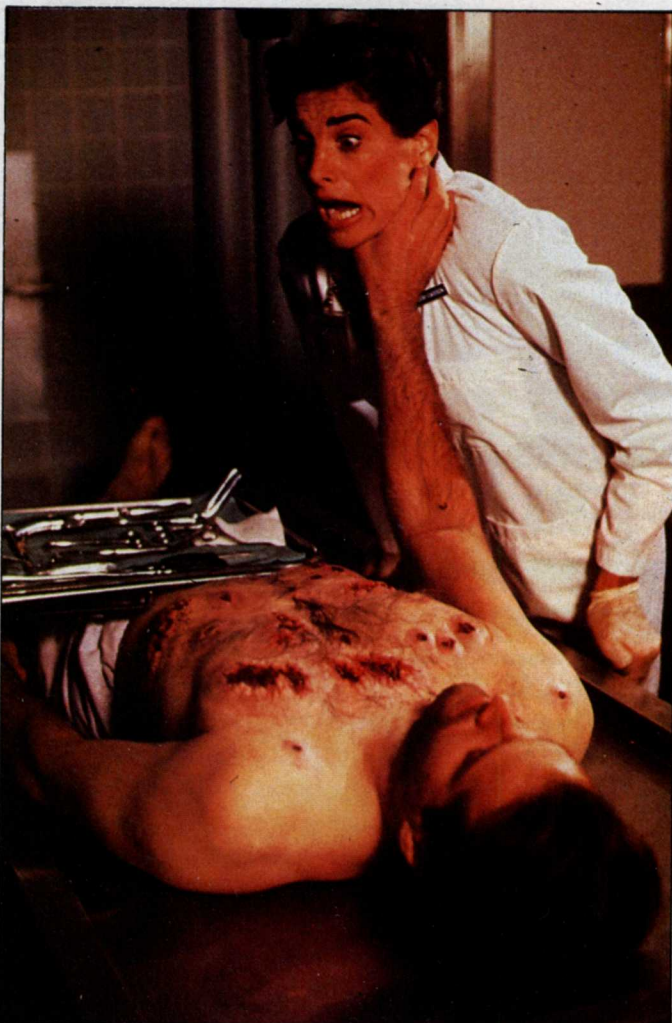
Starring Chow Yun-Fat, Danny Lee, Sally Yeh, Kenneth Tsang  
Director John Woo  
Distributor Guild Home Video  
Cert 18, 110 mins

 If you are still under the impression that gun-toting men of few words are stereotypes exclusive to Hollywood, then think again. *The Killer*, a Palace Premiere release which comes on like Peckinpah minus the elegiac bits, hails from Hong Kong and features their 'biggest star,' Chow Yun-Fat, alongside a battery of lethal weapons.

Hitman Jeff (Yun-Fat) is hired by a mafia mobster to make mincemeat of a gaggle of gangsters scheduled to assemble at a sleazy cocktail lounge. In



■ A patient's revenge: Peacemaker



a bloody shootout, Jeff accidentally hits innocent bystander and cabaret singer Jenny with a stray bullet. In a subsequent meeting with Jenny, Jeff discovers that the wound he inflicted has left her blind. Consumed with guilt, he assents to carry out one last contract in order to finance an eye operation for the young woman, but his decision leads him into direct conflict with the mob, and into a vortex of escalating violence.


From the makers of *Peking Opera Blues* and *The Butterfly Murders*, *The Killer* will undoubtedly find an army of followers amongst fans of the late lamented Bruce Lee. Whilst assuming all the superficial trappings of the strong, silent American hero as perpetuated by Eastwood, Coburn and the like, Jeff nevertheless remains a strangely two-dimensional central figure, but presumably it is intended that gouts of blood and a hefty body count will make up for any absence of characterisation. However, despite inevitably atrocious dubbing, the kinetic pace and lush, rich-hued photography of this relentlessly violent action thriller will most probably, as the cover blurb suggests, leave 'the viewer shell-shocked and breathless!', even if it did leave this particular kiljoy of a critic stone cold.

Patience Coster



## TRANSFORMATIONS

Starring Rex Smith, Lisa Langlois, Patrick Macnee, Jay Kamen  
Director Christopher Neame  
Distributor CBS/Fox  
Cert 18, 78 mins

 Rex Smith stars as a sexy space ace Wolf Shaddock, whose friends intimate that they've hidden his birthday present on his ship. That present appears to be a beautiful near-naked woman who begins to have sex with him. After a few thrusts, we see that she's turning in to a reptile, but, as the couple climax, she returns to her gorgeous self.


Crash landing on a penal colony, he ruts his way through some of the planet's less fussy women before learning that he has a deadly moral disease which slowly turns him into a sex-mad mutant. As the illness affects the whole station a group of convicts, led by British actor Christopher Neame, decides to escape in cue *Alien*-type battle on board spacecraft, and for a moment you might think there's an unhappy ending on the way. But everything turns out sickeningly right in the end, and you begin to ponder the point of this schlock.

John Gilbert



## HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS

Starring Rick Moranis, Matt Frewer, Marcia Strassman  
Director Joe Johnston  
Distributor Buena Vista  
Cert PG, 90 mins

 One of the most hilarious comedies to hit the screen since the original *Ghostbusters* has Rick Moranis playing a young inventor, having to bring up his family on peanuts because none of his crazy devices work.

His latest research project, which appears to be going the same way as the others, is a gun which will shrink any object down to microscopic size. Only the accidental intervention of a baseball,





thrown through a window by one of the boys next door gets it working and, by then, you just know that even this happy occurrence will lead to no good.

Another accident has the Moranis children and the neighbouring boys shrunk in stature and carried to the bottom of the garden by the family dog. From there they try to travel back to the house, encountering on their way a friendly ant, a hostile wasp, a battling spider and a dew bath.

Above ground, Moranis and his wife, played with equitable calm by Marcia Strassman, try to find the children in a series of crazy set pieces, the most ingenious of which takes place when Moranis hangs himself horizontally from a rotary clothes line and inspects the grass strands with a miner's helmet and flash-light.

A must-see for all children, and all who would aspire to be so. Book early, though. I expect this to be on long order in most video rental stores.

John Gilbert



■ Rick Moranis and canine accomplice: Honey, I Shrunk The Kids

### MALEDICTION

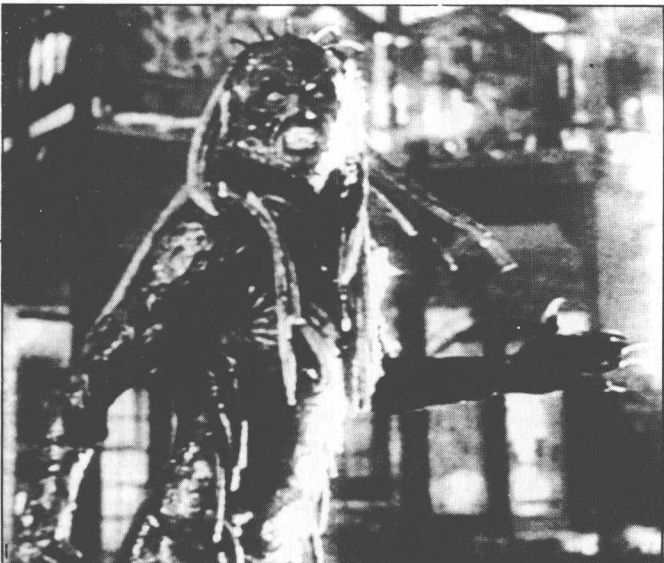
*Starring Robert Forster, Lydie Denier, Caren Kaye, Phillip Glasser*  
*Director Bert Gordon*  
*Distributor CIC Video*  
*Cert 18, 92 mins*



Lou Cherney has recently been forced to retire from the US police force due to an injury received in the line of duty. He's called upon to track down Karen Rhodes by her father; Lou originally tried to find her when he was a cop, but refuses to do so as a private investigator. However, when an eighteen year old model, Erica, is found murdered and horribly mutilated, and a photograph of Karen and herself is found in her flat, Lou changes his mind.

Lou visits the office of Nicole St James, boss of the model agency Erica

■ Malediction



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used to belong to. Then she is shown the photo, Nicole denies ever having seen Karen, but soon we learn that they are lovers. She also has a strange painting in her office, one still in the process of being produced, of a Barcelona monastery in 1654. When police records show she died in a road accident, Erica's diary is appropriated by Lou's boss, who is killed to prevent the horrific practices it relates from being revealed. Something very strange is going on and Lou will have to face Nicole, her hitman bodyguard and his son (whose mind is possessed by Nicole), in order to complete his job.

Although it has the feeling and outward appearance of a cop TV movie, *Malediction* is pretty low key. The way the different elements of the story fit together — the painting, the missing girl, the long-haired murderer and so on — is quite cleverly done, surprisingly so, considering the out-and-out action and raunchy scenes that dominate the film.

Robert Forster is hampered by the 'injured cop retires and turns private detective' plot device (stuffed yawn), but he puts in a likeable performance and it is to his benefit that his liberated bimbo girlfriend leaves him. Lydie Denier as Nicole is a great modern witch, her calm outward elegance an amusing contrast with the infinite ruthlessness within.


*Malediction* is a neatly directed, evenly paced and readily watchable journey through a series of murders, a modest body count boosted when Lou gets hot on the trail. Witching isn't as strong a part of the narrative as it could have been, with most of the murders mortal hitman stuff rather than supernatural, but the Lou versus Nicole duel is one worthy of attention.

Warren Lapworth



## FRANKENHOOKER

Starring James Lorinz, Patty Hollen, Charlotte Helmkamp, Louise Lasser  
Director Frank Henenlotter  
Distributor Medusa  
Cert 18, 81 mins

 The ultimate in exploitation movies, *Frankenhooker*, from the Frank Henenlotter school of sleaze, takes just about every bad taste biscuit going, as Young Demented

Scientist of the Year, Jeffrey Franken, tries to re-animate his own true love. She's been diced by a lawnmower so, after mapping out the electronic circuits needed to make her new body work, Franken goes to a New York red light area to find some spare parts.

Cornering some foxy ladies in a hotel room, he intends to find out which one has the perfect body. Unfortunately, he falls in love with different parts from each. Worse still, they grab his bag of doctored drugs, and explode, filling the room with an orgy of flesh.

Jeffrey collects together the parts and sews the best bits up to make a composite body, with his fiancée's head as the *pièce de résistance* (sic). Meanwhile, the hookers' pimp, steaming because of loss of business, comes after Franken. The resultant conflagration is hilarious, though not totally unexpected, as the crazed scientist gets worked over by the pimp and the girlfriend.


While *Frankenhooker* is not the most innovative movie around and will probably have the anti-exploitation lobby screaming from the ramparts, its hokey action and total lunacy just beg for it not to be taken seriously. So — I'm not taking it seriously. But those who want to watch what could — eventually — become a cult classic (from the director of *Basketcase 1* and *2*) should have a plentiful supply of beer and popcorn on hand. Yes, it's that kind of a movie.

John Gilbert



## MONKEYSHINES: AN EXPERIMENT IN FEAR

Starring John Beghe, John Pankow, Kate McNeil, Boo  
Director George A Romero  
Distributor Virgin Video  
Cert 18, 90 mins

 Seriously underrated as a theatrical feature, this brilliantly manipulative thriller deserves the attention of all horror fans and, in particular, followers of the great director himself.

Based on British author Michael Stewart's scorching bestseller, though with a slightly different script by Romero — and a disappointingly sweet ending



■ Monkey Shines

influenced by the distributor — the film tells the story of a young paralysed athlete, Alan Mann (Beghe), who is given a rather unusual pet Capucin monkey by his best friend Geoffrey Fisher (Pankow).

Unfortunately, Fisher has been treating the monkey, affectionately called Ella, with an intelligence drug and, as well as doing Mann's housework, it goes out and kills those people who irritate him. The victims include his girlfriend, her lover and his mother. Fisher eventually performs his first moral act, trying to kill the monkey, but dies from a lethal overdose of his own monkey-killing drug as the creature itself is in its death throes.


Marvellous stuff, concocted and controlled by a director who is likely to be one of the behind-the-scenes film faces of the Nineties.

John Gilbert



## PROPHECIES

Starring John D Le May, Chris Wiggins, Marie-Franc Lambert  
Director Tom McLoughlin  
Distributor CIC Video  
Cert 15, 103 mins

 The forces of Satan have targeted a little French town as the starting point for their quest for world domination and ultimate

darkness. This town is a Lourdes lookalike, complete with healing springs and a nun who's been visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary. Psychic phenomena researcher Jack Marshak (Chris Wiggins) travels from America to speak to the nun with a vision, only to find the town in the grip of some evil force. The nun, Sister Adele (Marie-Franc Lambert), is the focus for its malevolent intentions; if she can be destroyed then Satan can walk the earth again.

Marshak befriends Sister Adele after saving her from one murder attempt, and learns from her that the fallen angel Astoroth (John D Le May) is behind the attacks. Astoroth is endowed with various demonic powers which he uses to try and fulfil six prophecies that will resurrect Satan. With the scene set, Marshak throws himself into the good versus evil struggle only to be rendered unconscious in the first round.

Fortunately, some of his friends turn up to help the battle but they don't fare much better. It looks as if Satan is about to win, but Marshak recovers just in time, the Virgin Mary makes a guest appearance and Satan and his cohorts are put firmly in their place. Phew!


*Prophecies* is a complete disaster. The plot is full of holes (despite the deaths of several nuns, the police only take an interest in the strange goings-on after Sister Adele is murdered). The script is full of risible lines (such as, 'I have to find that nun') and the acting is dreadful. Astoroth seems to burst into manic laughter at the end of each sentence, a technique that makes him look more like a pantomime villain than the evil force he is supposed to be. There is little entertainment value in this film: steer clear.

Robin Candy



## PHANTOMS

Starring Sherilyn Fenn, Malcolm Jamieson, Charlie, Hilary Mason  
Director Charles Band  
Distributor Entertainment In Video  
Cert 18, 90 mins

 Catherine (Sherilyn Fenn), an American sculptress of Italian extraction, returns to her family castle in Italy to be greeted by her faithful old nanny, Martha (Hilary Mason) — remember her chilling performance

■ Grand design: Frankenhooker





■ Beauty and the Beast: Phantoms

as the blind psychic in Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*?). There Catherine meets up with her art restorer chum Gina (Charlie), who soon falls under the spell of Laurence (Malcolm Jamieson), a handsome member of a troupe of travelling players who are visiting the town. One night, at Gina's insistence, Catherine invites the troupe back to the castle for dinner. During the meal, Laurence bewitches the two women and, after plying them with wine, proceeds to violate them both. During the night, Catherine visualises Laurence transforming into a monstrous creature as he makes love to her. To complicate matters further, Gina starts to uncover hidden symbols in a painting she is restoring and Martha begins to reveal the secrets of her own past. Nothing is what it seems, and it soon transpires that Catherine must confront her murky family history if she is to come to terms with the confusions of the present.


Another intriguing and strangely haunting small movie from the Charles Band stable, *Phantoms* has the oddly (deliberately?) experimental feel we have come to expect from this prolific producer/director. Though the performances (particularly those of SHERILYN FENN and the bimboette CHARLIE) leave a good deal to be desired and the special effects don't exactly smack you between the eyes with their originality, Band's story, freely adapted from *Beauty And The Beast* (and playing up the sex and spooks elements for all they're worth), manages to maintain a level of mystery and suspense which might have eluded a less resourceful filmmaker. Though nowhere as interesting as the much maligned *Shadowzone*, *Phantoms* has its moments; but don't be deceived, the high points are pretty rare.

Patience Coster



## OUTCAST

Starring John Tench, Peter Read, Tracy Hout, Paul Amato  
 Director Roman Buchok  
 Distributor New World  
 Cert 18, 92 mins

 Poor old Henry: beaten by his stepfather as a child, ridiculed and picked upon by all, he's the eternal misfit. After being thrown out of a bar, a mysterious stranger known only as the Drifter promises him a way out, a way to gain unlimited power and be feared by all. But Henry's not quite ready for it yet.

He leaves his country home for the city and is soon victimised by a pair of local cops. He joins forces with Johnny and the Lizard, two other destitute youths, but they set him up in a robbery and Henry is slung in jail. Released two years later, the Drifter arrives and takes him to a dark, featureless room where he tattoos a magical symbol onto his chest. When he's released from the room, Henry can control people's minds and actions and sets out to wreak vengeance upon all those who have wronged him in the past (rather a long job). But he has to abide by one rule: he may take a life, save a life, but he must not create a life.

*Outcast* has all the makings of a jolly 'worm that turns' occult yarn, and lives up to this for the first half hour. The film promises to yield a fast-paced, violence-packed jaunt through vengeance and the supernatural, but then it doesn't come up with the goods.

When Henry begins his killing spree, a detective teams up with a psychic to track him down; but these new, supposedly heroic characters are introduced so late in the day that it is impossible to identify with them. Nor is it possible to sympathise with Henry either, gaining his much deserved vengeance. He despatches enemies in an unspectacular fashion (the movie doesn't warrant an 18 certificate) and he's an arrogant, tasteless idiot after his

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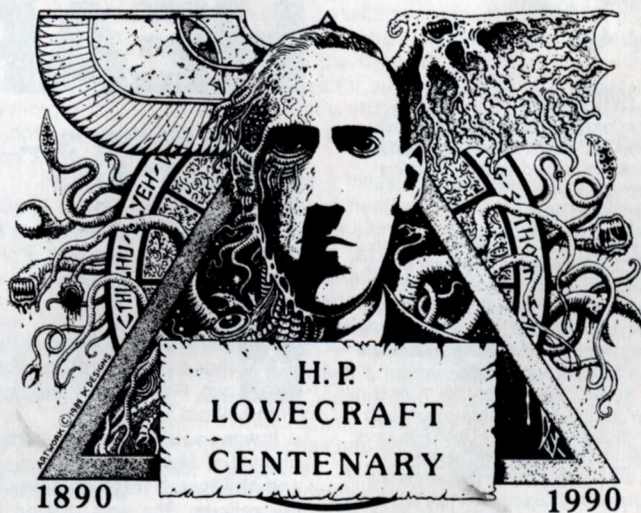
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tattoo-triggered transformation, rather than the affable chap he was before.

As Henry matures, he uses his powers to enter the world of big business, dealing in the stock market, and the movie becomes reminiscent of a streetwise pseudo *Omen* trilogy compacted into one easily digestible, readily disposable film. Indeed, Henry is sometimes referred to as the Anti-Christ. It's easy to spot when he breaks the 'not create a life' rule and from there on in to predict what the climax of the film will involve. In a nutshell, *Outcast* boils down to a spooky excuse for GBH and macho nonsense.

Warren Lapworth



### LIMIT UP

*Starring Nancy Allen, Dean Stockwell, Brad Hall, Danitra Vance, Ray Charles*  
*Directors Richard Martini, Lu Anders*  
*Distributor Medusa Picture*  
*Cert PG, 85 mins*

Yet another reworking of the Faust legend this time with a cute twist. Nancy (*RoboCop*) Allen stars as Casey Falls, a woman with high hopes of becoming a trader in that overwhelmingly male domain, the Chicago stock exchange.

Better than average luck might bring her the job, but her boss, played with impeccable venom by Dean Stockwell, intends to put her down at every available opportunity. Every time she takes the initiative, he's there to offer snide comments and suggestions. One day, when she inadvertently gives a tip to a competitor, he grasps the opportunity to sack her.

In steps Nike (Danita Vance), a bubbly black devil who apparently wants to help Casey obtain all those little luxuries in life, like a Porsche and large house, by training her as a trader in soya beans. The payback? Her soul. This little devil has global plans. She wants Casey to corner the soya bean market by hiking the price up and bringing about famine, disease and poverty. Who said devils weren't clever? Nike doesn't, of course, get it all her own way, but comes close to cornering Casey in a hellish hole. Casey only manages to escape with the assistance of a mysterious sax player (Ray Charles) who always seems to be lurking in the background.

Jolly family entertainment, *Limit Up*

■ *Outcast*



# HELLO MARY LOU, GOODBYE HEART

## PROM NIGHT 3 — THE LAST KISS

*Starring Courtney Taylor, Tim Conlon, Cyndy Preston, David Stratton, Dylan Neal*  
*Directors Peter R Simpson, Ron Oliver*  
*Distributor CBS/Fox Video*  
*Cert 18, 95 mins*

Mary Lou is back with a vengeance. For those of you not familiar with the previous two *Prom Night* outings, she is a demon from hell out for revenge.

It was in Hamilton high school at the 1957 prom night that Mary Lou Maloney died in a freak fire, and she hasn't forgiven anyone for not rushing to her rescue. She sets out on a killing spree that should have started with the hero of the film, Alex Grey, but instead she falls in love with him. Alex is an average student looking for something different in his life, so when Mary Lou comes along it's like a dream come true. He gets the girl, his grades suddenly shoot up and life in general is rosy. That is, until Alex discovers that Mary Lou has been dead for thirty years and has also been killing anyone who gets in the way of his success. Various people die in not very pleasant ways: the science teacher suffers a case of food-mixer-through-the-head, the school guidance counsellor is doused in acid and Alex's best friend finds that, like the Tin Man, he doesn't have a heart. When Alex threatens to end their affair, Mary Lou vows that she will kill his new girlfriend, Sarah, at the next prom night which, coincidentally, is in a few days time...

Those of you who enjoyed the previous two

shows that you can have a film about the devil without all the attendant gore, doom and gloom. While Allen is supposed to be the star of this piece, Vance, in her guise as Nike, steals the show — although quite why the filmmakers have identified black with the devil again, I just don't know. Politics aside, have no second thoughts. Just go for this saucy comedy.

John Gilbert



## BLIND FURY

*Starring Rutger Hauer, Terrance O'Quinn, Lisa Blount, Randall Cobb, Noble Willingham*  
*Director Phillip Noyce*  
*Distributor RCA/Columbia*  
*Cert 18, 83 mins*

Director Phillip Noyce follows *Dead Calm*, his 1988 thriller about horrors befalling a couple stranded at sea, with the landlocked tale of a disabled Vietnam vet whose martial arts skills are put to the test twenty years after his return from war.

Blinded in a mortar attack in the Vietnam jungle, Nick Parker (Hauer) is

trapped and subsequently nurtured by a tribe of friendly natives, who teach him the ancient Samurai art of swordsmanship. Years later, Parker returns to the States and heads for Miami, the home of Frank Devereux, an old army buddy who went missing during the fateful battle and who is now gainfully employed as a chemist. Parker arrives in time to find Devereux's wife and child besieged by a gang of vicious rednecks who plan to kidnap the boy, Billy (Brandon Call), in order to blackmail Frank into manufacturing a designer drug for the Mob. When the thugs shoot down Mrs Devereux in cold blood, Nick exacts revenge with his trusty swordstick and takes to the road with Billy in tow, to discover the whereabouts of Frank and reunite father and son.

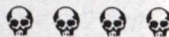
The presence of Rutger Hauer, together with a passable script, transforms this routinely made thriller into a sardonically witty action adventure. Liberally laced with violent outbursts of weapon-wielding and disposable armies of cheroot-chewing white trash baddies, the movie succeeds on the level of an entertaining romp while maintaining its tone as distinctly tongue in cheek. 'Hey,



■ Courtney Taylor as Mary Lou Maloney:  
*Prom Night 3*

*Prom Night* movies will probably like this one, in which Mary Lou's murderous sprees become wilder and more gruesome than ever. Although the make-up isn't totally convincing, some of the effects are very humorous, and the acting is generally good, with Courtney Taylor as the vengeful Mary Lou giving the best performance. So hire this vid, and invite a few friends round to enjoy the fun; but keep an eye on your companions, they might just start sprouting horns.

Mark Caswell



jackass,' screams an aggrieved driver, upon colliding with Nick's van in a frenetic getaway attempt, 'are you blind?' 'Yes,' replies Nick coolly: 'What's your excuse?'

If you can survive the nauseatingly sentimental, but mercifully brief scenes between Nick and Billy, and support the notion that a blind man could singlehandedly wipe out phalanxes of armed assassins, then there should be enough here to keep you pinned to your seat of an evening.

Patience Coster



## THE X-MEN

Directors Ray Lee, Donald Jurwich  
Distributor Leisureview Ltd  
Cert PG, 44 mins, £9.99



## THE FANTASTIC FOUR

Director Brad Case  
Distributor Leisureview Ltd  
Cert U, 46 mins, £7.99



## ROBOCOP — DETROIT CRIMEWAVE

Directors Bill Hutton, Tony Love  
Distributor Leisureview Ltd  
Cert PG, 64 mins, £9.99



Three more Marvel Comics cartoon releases via Leisureview. In Professor Xavier's *Uncanny X-Men*, 'Pryde Of The X-Men' takes us back to the days when intangible Kitty Pryde (aka Shadowcat/Sprite) joined the team of merry mutants. Surprise surprise, the villains of the story are Magneto and his Brotherhood of Mutant Terrorists. The heroic mutants have to prevent Magneto's Asteroid M space station from deflecting a comet to the Earth.

The second story, 'The X-Men Adventure', isn't even a proper X-Men story; it's an episode from *Spider-Man And His Amazing Friends*. Spider-Man, Firestar and Iceman test their skills in the X-Men's 'Danger Room', only to find it — and the mansion's other computerised systems — have been taken over by Cyberiad. He was once a man, but an accident caused by Firestar forced him to become a cyborg and now he's out for vengeance.

While the second story is middle-of-the-road in terms of both drawings and plot, 'Pryde Of The X-Men' is quite good, characters and costumes authentic and shading and shadows used well. The voices aren't right — Cyclops' is too harsh for a nice guy and Wolverine has an Australian accent rather than the Canadian one he should have — but, as comics translations go, *The X-Men* is commendable and a worthwhile purchase for fans.

*The Fantastic Four* holds two episodes from the second TV series so it's the new FF, which means that stupid little robot, Herbie, makes up the numbers with Mr Fantastic, Invisible Girl and the Thing, rather than the Human Torch. In 'A Monster Among Us', a huge gorilla-like alien goes on the rampage, and it is up to our heroes to stop it.



■ Interactive television: Deborah Harry and James Woods in Videodrome

# MIND CONTROL

## VIDEODROME

Starring James Woods, Deborah Harry, Sonja Smits, Peter Dvorsky, Les Carlson, Jack Creley, Lynne Gosman  
Director David Cronenberg  
Distributor CIC  
Cert 18, 84 mins, £9.99



The launch of video around a decade ago led to general speculation about the possibility of mind control and illegal practices, and triggered off a moral debate which still persists today. How much exposure to the cathode ray is good for us? Is there a limit to the sort of subjects we can be exposed to? Is there a point at which, in the viewer's mind, TV fiction might take over from reality? And, if more and more people watch more and more television, then surely TV becomes their reality?

Never one to pass up the opportunity to engage in a juicy philosophical argument, particularly when it has the potential for expressing his own doom-laden world view, David Cronenberg seized the moment (1982) to make *Videodrome*, a nightmare vision of the domination of the collective consciousness of North America via the airwaves. Now, ironically, the experience of *Videodrome* is available on sell-through to avid video viewers everywhere.

Max Renn (Woods) is president of Civic TV ('the one you take to bed with you'), a small and seedy cable station offering its viewers anything from 'softcore pornography to hardcore violence'. Dissatisfied with the tameness of most of the product pushed his way, Max is intrigued when Harlan (Dvorsky), his technical wizard colleague taps into Videodrome, a hardcore porn channel supposedly pirated by unscrambling an illegal satellite transmission. Max is immediately convinced that Videodrome is what his channel lacks — 'It's just torture, murder, mutilation. No plot. No characters. Very realistic...' — and resolves to track down the show's distributors.

In the meantime, Max has become involved with Nicki Brand (Harry), a radio talkshow hostess whose penchant for masochistic sex both disturbs and excites him. The pirate tape of Videodrome arouses her interest and she announces her intention to visit Pittsburgh (where, it transpires, the show is made) to audition as a screen 'victim'. Max's own efforts to track down the people behind

Videodrome prove fruitless, and he asks one of his regular suppliers, Marsha (Lynne Gosman), to do some detective work for him. Marsha's investigations lead her to the conclusion that Videodrome is, in fact, snuff television and that exposure to its signal can be fatal to the viewer. But Max's perception of reality is becoming distorted by increasingly bizarre and horrific hallucinations, and it appears that he is already an unwitting slave to Videodrome.

Of all the filmmakers currently associated with the horror genre, David Cronenberg assumes perhaps the most pessimistic view of the human condition. Amorality and alienation are recurring themes within the Cronenberg canon and, in his films, atonement for such weaknesses is generally brutal and bloody, visited upon his characters from within themselves, by way of their own physical disintegration.

Max Renn is a classic Cronenberg anti-hero, a cold, calculating hustler whose obsession with porn is more than simply professional and whose casual attitude to the effect it has on society signals his total alienation from that society. His is a world of confused and vacillating morals: his cool justification of hardcore porn — 'Better on TV than on the streets' — conflicting with his outraged response to Nicki's announcement that she plans to audition for Videodrome. It is Marsha, herself a porn merchant, who sees Max for what he really is. 'Videodrome has something you don't have, Max,' she warns him, 'it has a philosophy, and that's what makes it dangerous.'

Cronenberg's film literally reflects the collapse of Max's already fragile sense of self. The narrative spins off into hallucinatory fragments, depicting Max as both victim and assassin, his body mutating into a walking VCR, a gun growing organically out of his arm. James Woods' edgy, defensive performance is spot on and Cronenberg exploits Rick Baker's special make-up effects to the full; most notably in the now notorious scene in which Max's navel 'opens up' to receive a prerecorded videocassette inserted by the villains. *Videodrome* may not be Cronenberg's greatest work to date, but its relentlessly bleak and dark comic vision makes it a vital collectors' item from this, the most serious-minded and most gifted horror filmmaker around today.

Patience Coster



Power plants all over the world disappear below ground in 'The Mole Man' and the FF track the subterranean villain to Monster Isle to put an end to his plan of world domination.

*Fantastic Four* visuals are almost as simplistic as the cheap storylines, although the sterner-looking characters of 'The Mole Man' are a touch better. Herbie's voice is irritating, but his arguments with the Thing are the most amusing parts of the video. The Human Torch is sorely missed and only easily entertained children will enjoy this; at £7.99 it is of debatable value.

Cyborg lawman Alex Murphy, better known as *RoboCop*, faces three threats to Old Detroit with human partner Anne Lewis. In 'The Scrambler', a criminal taps into OCP's main computer and takes control over RoboCop, while similarly in 'The Brotherhood' an anti-mechanoid cult releases electromagnetic pulse bombs to deactivate any robots in range — and that includes Murphy. And a jealous officer becomes 'The Man In The Iron Suit', donning massive battle armour before duelling with RoboCop.

The adventures are straightforward and in the wrong order: 'The Man In The Iron Suit' is the best introduction to Robo and should have featured first, while one of the other episodes should have been replaced, as they're both based on the principle of metal Murphy losing control of himself. Drawings are adequately detailed and 'cartoonised', RoboCop looks better than I thought he would, the animation mimicking his cinematic movements well. Sound effects of RoboCop's thumping footsteps and whirring motors are taken direct from the movie and add authenticity and a little atmosphere to the proceedings. A reasonable buy for a tenner but don't expect the cartoons to live up to the movie.

Warren Lapworth

## THE EXTERMINATOR

Starring Robert Ginty, Samantha Eggar, Christopher George  
Director James Glickenhaus  
Distributor Legend  
Cert 18, 94 mins, £9.99

Cashing in on the string of vigilante films launched by the original *Death Wish*, *The Exterminator* takes off with an extra helping of Vietnam buddy bravery. Black soldier Michael Jefferson rescues his friend, serviceman John Eastland from torture and death at the hands of an evil bunch of Vietcong and together they are saved by an ubiquitous Iroquois helicopter picking its way through the fireball-filled night sky.

The film then transfers to the squalor of the Bronx, where not even the Vietcong would dare venture, but where our two war veterans try to make an honest living. Jefferson becomes a target of a vicious gang attack after foiling an attempted robbery and saving Eastland's skin for the second time, and ends up in hospital with a broken neck. Eastland vows revenge and sets about wiping out the gang and any other seedy elements he comes across. A collection of weaponry borrowed from the army comes in handy for the clean up, and is added to by the inventive use of torch guns, petrol-soaked mattresses and industrial meat mincers, which make light work of the gang members and the local Mafia boss (who literally ends up as a pile of minced meat). A detective is hard on the tail of the vigilante but, more sinisterly, the CIA are instructed to eliminate the one man

band before the next election...

*The Exterminator* has absolutely nothing going for it. There is no originality in the script, the characters are totally unlikeable, the acting is flat and uninvolved, and the direction is totally lacking in pace, style or wit. At times the film gives the impression of having been made as a home movie. The low budget can't be blamed for this, as the Bronx environment makes for a cheap but interesting and realistic backdrop. In fact, it makes the film, permeating the entire production and engendering a mood of squalor and depression.

Franco Frey



## STEPHEN KING'S THIS IS HORROR VOL 3

Distributor Leisureview Video  
Cert 18, 45 mins



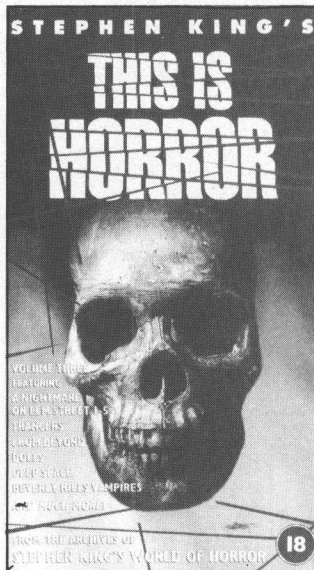
A scant 45 minutes of video compilation, but gore fans should find it a rave. Each of these cassettes contains parts of an interview with Stephen King, made several years ago in and around his home. I'm not complaining, though. His responses to the questions about his approach to horror are as valid now as they were then. Just listening to this cultured, interesting man talk about the contemporary industry which, to a large extent he spawned, makes you go all gooey.

If for some odd reason King isn't your bag, the cassette also contains a heavy dose of contemporary cinemania. Freddy Krueger takes a tour down Elm Street with scenes from the most recent movies. Fred Olen Ray, low budget sleazemeister, shows his method of making films such as *Deep Space*, *The Tomb* and the recently released *Beverly Hills Vamp*. Charles Band, that other low budget horror master whose Empire film company is famous for its excesses, looks at the horror industry and introduces clips from his films *Dolls*, *From Beyond* and a little ditty entitled *Sorority Babes From The Slime Bowl-A-Rama*.

As a bonus, and much the best item in my view, is the look at our Stateside buddies, The KNB Effects Group. Famous for their sterling work on the Nightmare movies, *Bride Of Re-Animator*, *The Horrorshow* and, just recently, *Night Angel*, the team shows how it creates effects and the planning put into them.

An interesting addition to your sell-through collection, *This Is Horror* promises much, and mostly delivers. It's not as good as some of the rock video mags on the stands, but time will tell and, hell, we need something like this!

Bob Rachin



## DEAD RINGERS

Starring Jeremy Irons, Genevieve Bujold, Heidi Von Palleske, Barbara Gordon  
Director David Cronenberg  
Distributor CBS/Fox  
Cert 18, 115 mins, £9.99



*Dead Ringers*... is as close to a classical tragedy as I've come, in that it's inevitable right from the opening what the twins' destiny will be. In an interview in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* (January 1989), David Cronenberg describes the background to a film that ranks as his most mature work to date, a story of identical twins, Beverly and Elliot Mantle, whose mutual inseparability in life points irrevocably to their joint deaths.

The Mantle brothers are highly respected Toronto-based gynaecologists whose reputation rests upon their complementary talents — Elliot is the confident, charming communicator, Beverly the shy, painstaking grafter. The twins share everything: their success, their apartment, their thoughts — and their women. When Claire Niveau (Bujold), a childless actress, visits the Mantle fertility clinic for consultation, Elliot seduces her and then suggests to Beverly that they take it in turns to sleep with her. But Beverly falls in love with Claire and his emotions for her begin to conflict with his relationship with Elliot; gradually his already fragile sense of identity begins to disintegrate, and it soon becomes clear that the twins' future is doomed.

It may seem perverse to describe this relentlessly bleak film as one of the cinematic high points of the Eighties, but that is what it is: a moving, intense,

■ Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: a laff.

subtle, beautifully photographed full-blown tragedy about the human condition. As both twins, and in the performance of his career, Irons manages to show Beverly and Elliot as somehow separate, yet as two sides of the same coin. Cronenberg eschews the visceral gore effects of his past for something far more frightening — and much more difficult to pull off — the minutely detailed depiction of a person's loss of sanity. *Dead Ringers* is an example of filmmaking from a director at the height of his powers; if Cronenberg can be accused of ever having produced a masterpiece, then this is it.

Patience Coster



## TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Starring Judith Hoag, Elias Koteas, Josh Pais  
Director Steve Barron  
Distributor MCEG/Virgin Vision  
Cert PG



Inevitably there will be many for whom this is all too much, for whom the idea of four oversized talking turtles with a penchant for pizza is about as funny as a kick in the teeth. Wise up, chums! This is really rather wonderful. A hoot. A laff. Sure, it's nonsense, stupid, juvenile, silly, plainly derivative, utterly preposterous, and possesses a story about as demanding as a liquid lunch. But there's something resolutely appealing, something unmistakably, naively endearing about those turtles.

The loosely constructed story incorporates a mythology of sorts of our four favourite terrapins who, flushed down the loo and accidentally dunked in some radioactive goo in the sewer system, grow to gigantic proportions and fall under the guidance of a four foot tall rat, Splinter. Once the pet of a Ninja master, Splinter schools his charges in the ancient martial art of Ninja. And when Splinter is kidnapped by the dreaded Shredder and his ruthless gang of teenage hoods, our four radical reps — Raphael (red mask), Leonardo (blue), Donatello (purple) and Michaelangelo (orange) — together with roving reporter April O'Neil (Judith Hoag) set out to rescue him.

That's it, plotwise. This is kiddies' fodder through and through, albeit with 194 acts of violence and a number of smart, pop culture one-liners. The crew of Jim Henson's *Creature Shop* have here excelled all their previous creations, producing a series of animatronic marvels, living, breathing creatures with remarkably individual, delineated personalities, while pop promo maestro Steve Barron makes amends for the abysmal *Electric Dreams* by resisting the urge to go overboard in the visual department, concentrating instead on the characters. Given the movie cost a fifth of *Batman*, it's an astute move. The result is far better than anyone could have expected, and one that succeeds in being shamelessly entertaining, immensely enjoyable undemanding hokum, and fabulously funny to boot.

Pay attention to the hype, ignore everything with the words Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles attached — and go and see this.

Mark Salisbury



# BOOKS

## THE GHOST NOW STANDING ON PLATFORM ONE

Edited by Richard Peyton  
Publisher Souvenir Press  
Format HB £14.95

You may remember Arnold Ridley for his portrayal of Godfrey in *Dad's Army*, but did you know that he was also responsible for a ghost story called 'Journey Into Fear' which later resulted in the 1941 film, *The Ghost Train*, starring Arthur Askey? This rather esoteric fact is capitalised upon by editor Richard Peyton in *The Ghost Now Standing On Platform One*, a collection of classic locomotive stories of the supernatural.

The other surprise of this dour-looking volume is the interest shown in both trains and ghosts by writers whom you would not normally associate with the horror genre. Take John Wyndham, for instance, whose novels are more reminiscent of his life's output than the ghost on the underground which haunts his tale called 'Confidence Trick'. Fantasy novelist J D Beresford is stranded in a gloomy tale at Lewisham station, while F Scott Fitzgerald, American author of *The Great Gatsby*, takes a short trip home with some guests you'd be unlikely to find at one of his society soirées.

That said, several eminent horror pundits get their chance to grease the wheels of darkness. Robert Bloch's 'That Hellbound Train', Ray Bradbury's 'The Town Where No One Got Off' and Algernon Blackwood's 'Miss Slumbubble — And Claustrophobia' are well known classics, while 'Lonely Train A'Comin'' by William F Nolan, 'The Waiting Room' by Robert Aickman, and 'Pacific 421' from August Derleth are strong contenders for pick of the crop.



It is good to see an editor put together a theme anthology that is cohesive simply because he took his stories from classic sources, rather than throwing his 'great idea' out to a dozen well known writers to see if they could 'come up with anything'. The addition of several stories from real life, and the partitioning of the book into sections dealing with different types of apparition, make it well worth the attention of train enthusiasts and general horror readers. Go out and spot one today.

John Gilbert



## KISAENG

Marc Olden  
Publisher NEL  
Format HB £13.95

Underage sex, drugs and ritual murder form a steamy bond in Marc Olden's latest erotic 'Eastern' thriller, *Kisaeng*.

Wealthy counterfeiter 'Laughing Boy' Park Song has an lusty appetite for sex, but he only truly enjoys orgasm with underage girls and then only if he is able to kill them during The Act. This type of activity is simply a pastime, but one which leads him into conflict with Detective Sergeant Manny Decker, who is investigating the disappearance of Tawny, the daughter of his lover.

Tawny has, unfortunately, fallen in with Song, who intends to train her as the perfect woman and then kill her in his usual ecstatic way. But the sex killer

### Not To Be Missed



#### Recommended



#### Fair



#### Poor



#### Diabolical



## BOOKS



### HORROR

**The Ghost Now Standing On Platform One**  
**Seaharp Hotel**  
**Short Sharp Shocks**  
**Sweetheart**



### SCIENCE FICTION

**Buck Rogers — Armageddon**  
**Off Vesta**  
**Demon Download**  
**The Difference Engine**  
**Egypt Green**  
**The Gates Of Eden**  
**The Homeward Bounders**  
**The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook Three**  
**Route 666**  
**More Tales From The Forbidden Planet**



### FANTASY

**Eric**  
**Fire And Hemlock**  
**A Graveyard For Lunatics**  
**Random Walk**  
**The War Of The Ring**



### THRILLER

**Kisaeng**  
**Summer Of Fear**

### NON FICTION

**Man And His Symbols**

Erratum: The review of *Second Variety*, Volume 2: The Collected Stories of Philip K Dick, published in issue 22, should have been credited to Mark Wynne, not Stuart Wynne as stated.

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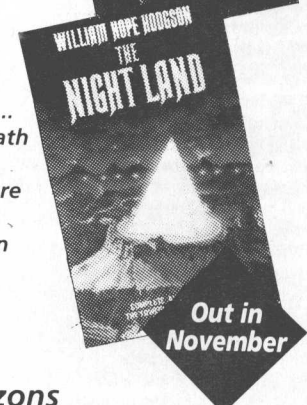
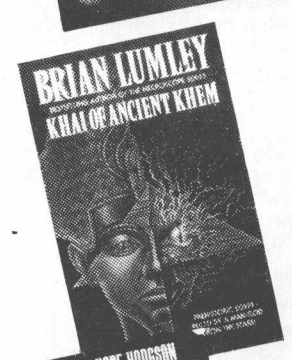
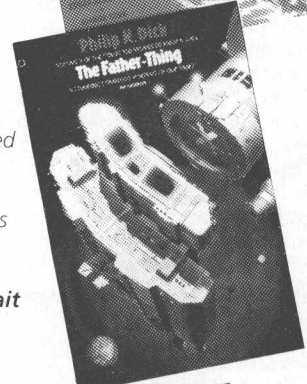
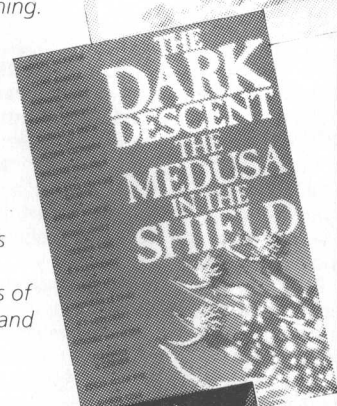
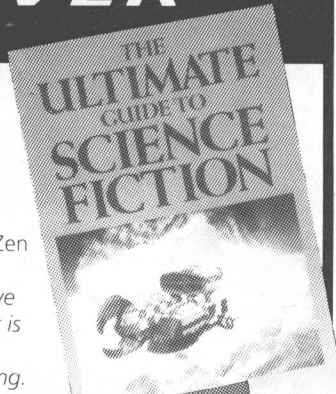
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# WINNING COMBINATION

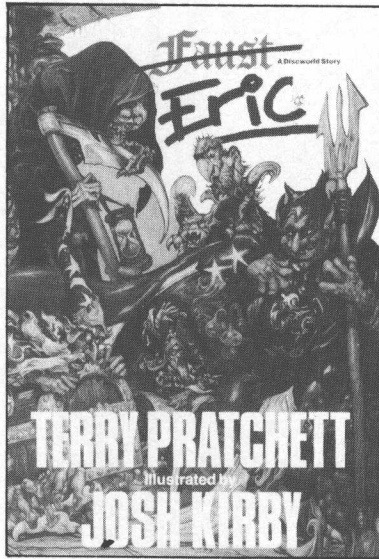
## ERIC

Terry Pratchett  
Illustrated by Josh Kirby  
Publisher Gollancz  
Format PB £7.99

None of Pratchett's Discworld stories would be complete without a Josh Kirby illustration on the jacket. Kirby illustrates the stories so well and crams almost every detail of the plot and most of the characters onto the cover. For all lovers of the Pratchett/Kirby combination, *Eric* is the perfect buy. Published in large format on quality paper, *Eric* features sixteen Kirby illustrations and all of them are wonderful; especially the one showing the Discworld complete with elephants and Great A'Tuin.

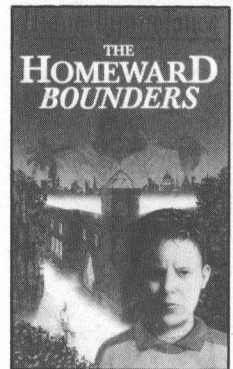
Pratchett brings back Rincewind, the most useless wizard on Discworld who, along with his irrepressible luggage, is summoned by teenage demonology hacker Eric who believes Rincewind to be a demon. Persuading Rincewind to give him three wishes, Eric requests to live forever, rule the world and meet the most beautiful woman. And the chaos begins.

Their adventures take them to the dawn of time, into a ancient jungle land; we see them cause havoc in the Tsortean wars, and there's also a trip to Hell. Shorter than previous Discworld novels, *Eric* is a wonderful romp through the Discworld's unexplored countryside and, yet again, Pratchett has conjured up a host of very amusing characters and barmy events, and Death is as polite as ever.



This book isn't for readers who have not yet experienced the Discworld, as the characters and workings of Discworld are not fully explained, as in the novels. But *Eric* is another excellent helping from Pratchett's bizarre world and, with many Kirby illustrations, a real must for Discworld fanatics.

Richard Eddy



mature reader's entertainment (sickos among you turn to the beginning of chapter six) which was certainly a flaw in her collection *Hidden Turnings*.

Jamie joins forces with the other homeward bounders to attack *Their* stronghold — the fortress. But visions of Jamie embarking on a formulated hero mission are utterly ill-conceived, as Wynne Jones is simply too good to take the trite and easy route. The italicised and repetitious references to *Them* do become a little irritating, however; we don't need to be reminded constantly of *Their* evil and sinister qualities, as Wynne Jones skilfully inscribes this into the text.

Once more, Wynne Jones provides a wealth of imagination — where blood, gore and fancy names are superfluous — which instils fear and genuinely impresses. If this offering doesn't grab you, then nothing else this prolific author writes should or will.

Benjamin Dowell

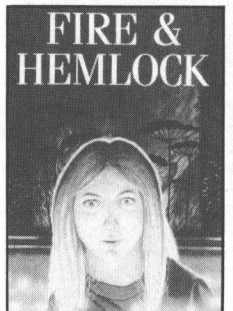


## FIRE AND HEMLOCK

Diana Wynne Jones  
Publisher Mandarin  
Format PB £2.99



*Fire And Hemlock* initially struck me as one of those occasional, poor and sadly predictable efforts of fantasy writers to emulate the special superiority of Mills & Boon, which succeeds only in clumsily obscuring the fantasy readers' main interests. However, through a faithful persistency I realised that I was completely wrong. The pukey bits aren't allowed to dominate, though when they appear, if anything, they contribute to the story's excellence (though cynical adolescents should still, perhaps, keep clear).



Ignoring the blurb, we are presented with an original tale based around the young, pretty Polly and her relationship with Tom Lynn. Sorcerial mysteries, haunting imagery, fairies and the like combine effectively with the passion, to produce an addictive and thoroughly good read.

Some years back, Polly gatecrashed a funeral party and met Tom, who gave her a haunting photo of fire and hemlock

has reckoned without the low animal cunning of Decker.

Tough, realistic, sadistic and erotic, *Kisaeng* combines the traditions of Lustabader and Clavell, but outstrips them with sheer energy of narrative. Olden obviously enjoys his literary romps. He is a master of this rapidly growing genre; a clever storyteller and go-getter who doesn't mind hitting below the belt. And it certainly shows in *Kisaeng*.

John Gilbert



## EGYPT GREEN

Christopher Hyde  
Publisher Headline  
Format PB £4.50

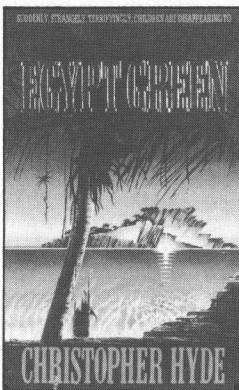


Techno-horror at its most ludicrous, Christopher Hyde's latest book combines the plot of the James Bond movie *Moonraker* with current international concern over Third World famine and general overpopulation.

The Earth's governments set aside all economic differences to come up with a ridiculous pile-driver-hammer-cracks-nut solution to the famine problem. They kidnap the world's brightest children and hold them in sterile environments. They then intend to release a deadly plague virus which will kill large numbers of Third World citizens. Their moral argument? That diseases which science has begun to understand and control would normally have killed comparable

numbers of people through natural infection.

Furthermore, the American government is prepared for a limited infection within the States — after all, disease knows no political boundaries.



Once the disease has played itself out, the bright children will be released to build a bright new world.

Whilst Hyde is at pains to point out that the technology and problems exist, he fails to convince that, for instance, a government worried about its citizens in the Gulf states would willingly sacrifice them for the salvation of the Third World. Rather, I suspect, they would put the stress on birth control and relief efforts, as they are now doing.

Hyde ought to consider just how far he can go without invoking scepticism amongst his readers. The action is hot,

the social concerns viable, but this time he's stretched credibility too far.

John Gilbert



## THE HOMEWARD BOUNDERS

Diana Wynne Jones  
Publisher Mandarin  
Format PB £2.99



*The Homeward Bounders* is Diana Wynne Jones' most cleverly conceived and best executed work to date. Here she portrays an enigmatic and frightening scenario, with interesting, vividly defined scenes and characters.

The protagonist, Jamie, is thrown from normality into the 'Boundaries', a metaphorical labyrinth of fear and persecution; young, lonely and perplexed, he is somewhat alarmed. When *They* (his persecuting baddies) inform him that if he finds himself in the 'right world' he can bound homeward, this is when the fun starts.

*The Homeward Bounders* is in a similar style to the cartoon serial *Dungeons And Dragons* (though here we have the effective elements without the latter's irksome brattishness). The way in which Jamie gradually comes to terms emotionally with his plight, survives and begins to understand the 'curious logic' behind events is masterly. Whilst catering for the broad scope that the 'teens' category encompasses, Wynne Jones does not neglect the



flowers. At first Polly can 'see' dark figures appearing from the centre of the picture, 'racing to beat out the flames in the foreground' when sometimes mist had enshrouded them. Years later, Polly forgets her immense affection for Tom and the photo creates none of the original paths, but the written interest is maintained, Tom 'returns', and the story evolves very well.

*Fire And Hemlock* is considerably lengthier than anything Diana Wynne Jones fans may be used to and the format is certainly different, with relevant poetical quotations introducing each chapter. The chapters are named by the classical music epithets (allegro, andante etc) so it's all pretty hot stuff (ho, ho). Here Wynne Jones adopts a wonderfully descriptive style, presenting scenes and images with a rich, sensuous touch (reminiscent of Tanith Lee on a good day); and this, together with the atmosphere of nostalgia, makes this book a satisfying holiday or post-holiday read for any teenager.

**Benjamin Dowell**



## ROUTE 666

Edited by David Pringle  
 Publisher Games Workshop  
 Format PB £4.99

*Route 666* is the latest short story compilation in the aptly titled *Dark Future* series of books, all based on the fantasy RPG also published by the Games Workshop. While undoubtedly some authors gained inspiration from RPG games, Raymond E Fiest began writing by developing D&D scenarios, and this is very much a marketing exercise. *Interzone's* columnist Charles Platt has recently related his dismay in writing for the series, the long hours sweating over dull rulebooks in the hope of quick cash, only to find his story rejected in favour of material written with only a fleeting regard for the endless source material provided by this popular RPG.

The eponymous story by Jack Yeovil (aka Kim Newman) emphasises the need for cheating, without itself cheating enough. Newman's outline of the alternative *Dark Future* universe is brief and glib. During the 1960 presidential election Jack Kennedy was found in bed with Marilyn Monroe, as a consequence Nixon won and only Republican presidents have been elected since. It's not much of an explanation of the breakdown of western civilisation, even if Ollie North is the current head of state. The basic concept is *Mad Max* transferred to America, a dubious concept further damaged by outfitting the gang cults with the very latest in military hardware. Who pays and why isn't explained.

Newman injects more humour by naming a female gang-cult after the

blue-rinsed Daughters of the American Revolution, a good joke, but the irony reduces the realism rating to zero. *Kid Zero & Snake Eyes* by Brian Craig takes things a bit more seriously, apart from briefly sending up William Gibson's *Count Zero*, with Snake Eyes as a prostitute afflicted by a progressively worsening genetic disease. The callousness of the 'multinat' corporation which caused the disease is predictable, and while somewhat poignant, the story is little more than a sketch, the start-up scenario for a RPG game. It also points up the crushing irony of a world based on endless amounts of gore, 'low-life' characters such as prostitutes, pimps, Hell's Angels et al, but forbidden from swearing!

*Ghost Town* by Neil Jones is as involving as a combat report of a typical RPG game, while Myles Burnham's *Duel Control* adds the Duke of Bedminster to the combat mix, with driving marginally more dangerous than the Duke of Westminster's. Brian Craig keeps up his above-average style with *Thicker Than Water*, but this time extends himself to a full story, again based on genetic engineering, and not bad. Neil McIntosh's *Maverick Son* uses a drug conspiracy to excuse yet more senseless and uninvolved violence, while Myles Burnham's *Four Minute Warning* deals with TV evangelists. This tale has some *Mad Max* characters storming an evangelical show to run videos showing a Bakker-like husband and wife team to be spending all the money on themselves, indulging in numerous carnal sins and running Third World slave camps. Brian Craig (again!) does a Helen of Troy spoof with *Only In Twilight* and it all finishes with *Uptown Girl* by William King, where the kidnapped girlie turns out to be as psychopathically violent as everyone else here.

**Stuart Wynne**



## DEMON DOWNLOAD

Jack Yeovil  
 Publisher Games Workshop  
 Format PB £4.99

Although this one has Jack Yeovil on the spine, to maintain the quality brandname of author Kim Newman, the abundance of film references makes it very much a Newman book. Almost every page seems have one cinematic pun, ranging from the obscure to the groaningly obvious. The book has a raucous sense of humour, a self-mocking irony not so much about 'cyber-goth' — more's the pity — but about life generally. Page eleven sees a cyberpunkish newsflash turned into a three page stream of jokes: 'Vatican LXXXV has changed the shape of the Catholic Church... rumours that the Vatican plans to market an officially blessed condom under the brand name of His Holiness's Swiss Guards are unconfirmed at this date.'

Newman's alternative world, where Rudolf Hess is still alive and suing everyone for breach of copyright on Nazi symbols, can't be taken seriously. It's a tapestry of one-liner jokes from President Ollie North to Prime Minister Archer, heavily biased to movies of course. Someone getting up is described as like Lon Chaney Jr in *The Mummy*. It's all good fun, but the plot is weak.

Basically, a powerful evangelical church is ruled by an immortal demon, Nguyen Seth, previously known as Jack The Ripper and also a Vietnam vet. He's



currently plotting to destroy the fragmented US government and the suddenly hip Roman Catholic Church. His prime weapon is a computer virus cum demon. Once unleashed, it spreads from computer to computer, taking over all manner of military hardware with bloody consequences. Enter Sister Chantal Juillerat, a Swiss cyberexorcist who is inevitably young, beautiful and invincible. Her battlecar is an intelligent Ferrari called Federico, her uniform a catsuit and she's neither believable nor particularly funny.

In fact, character and structure are probably the biggest problems with the book. The first chapter introduces a woman from *Route 666* as if she's the book's central character, then moves on to her former lover — Stack. Sketches of the baddies follow, then Chantal is introduced on page 35. A transparent bid to play on adolescent male desires, she's perfectly two-dimensional until a flashback beginning on page 153. This

is witty and funny, but much too late in a 253 page book.

What this leaves us with is uninvolved plot and characters, liberally spiced with gore but not much swearing, and some good jokes. Of course Harry Harrison's *Stainless Steel Rat* series covered similarly cynical, self-mocking ground for an adolescent readership. They actually tell some very good stories though, which *Demon Download* certainly doesn't. But if you don't mind skimming between the jokes it's worth a look.

**Stuart Wynne**



## SHORT SHARP SHOCKS

Edited by Julian Lloyd Webber  
 Publisher Weidenfeld & Nicolson  
 Format HB £13.00



In the main, anthologies consist of recently published or newly written short stories. Not so Julian Lloyd Webber's *Short Sharp Shocks*, a selection of the famous cellist's favourite horror stories, where some of the tales were first published over 20 years ago. These stories, that 'refused to go away', cover a variety of horror themes with the exception of the splatter genre: there's no gore just for gore's sake.

The book gets off to an excellent start with 'Pat-A-Cake, Pat-A-Cake' by Bernard Taylor, a story which may change the way you think about cute, helpless babies. This is followed by 'Bush Master', a masterpiece and the

# FOUR PAST MIDNIGHT

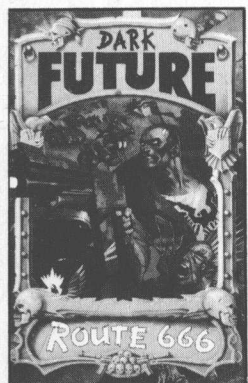
# STEPHEN KING

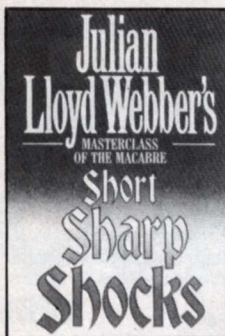
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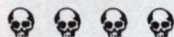
first of two offerings from Conrad Hill. It begins with Minnie, a houseproud housewife, battling to the point of obsession against the build-up of grime and dirt in her home. Her husband Richard visits a local curiosity shop and, whilst browsing, comes across the Bush Master. The shop owner explains that it's an African invention which feeds off rubbish, a sort of living vacuum cleaner. Thinking that it will shake his wife from her cleaning psychosis, Richard buys it but soon discovers that its appetite is not easily satisfied.

The high standards set by the first two stories are maintained throughout the rest of the book. R C Cook's 'Green Fingers' has an old woman pottering around her garden which can make absolutely anything grow! And Sydney J Bounds' 'A Complete Collection' features a keen book collector who wants more than just the author's autograph.

Only a couple of the stories are disappointing, but even these can't be described as terrible — they're just not up to the same standard as the rest.

Julian Lloyd Webber has rescued some excellent short stories from certain obscurity. Let's just hope he knows of a few more.

Robin Candy

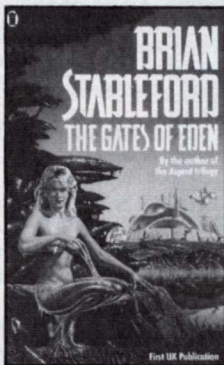


### THE GATES OF EDEN

Brian Stableford  
 Publisher NEL  
 Format PB £3.50



Strange nightmares start xenobiologist Dr Lee Caretta on his course of careering confrontation with the mysterious inhabitants of a newly discovered Earth-type planet. The planet has been discovered by a shipbound community of Earthers who have just woken up. They ask for assistance during the investigation of the planet, but it soon becomes apparent that the ship's captain wants to colonise it, no matter what the dangers. And there is a danger



which, like a disease, could spread.

Not to give too much away, the tribe that lives on the planet can mimic any life form they meet. They are also very hostile. Needless to say, the dreams of settlement soon go out of the window and, after Caretta's attempt to escape the planet unscathed, Stableford hints that, given time and access to space travel, these creatures could easily blend in with, and perhaps take over from, any life form in the universe. It's a chilling epilogue which rounds off an excellent B-title SF novel and again confirms that Stableford is one of the brightest ideas men in the SF&F genres.

John Gilbert



### THE WAR OF THE RING THE HISTORY OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS PART THREE

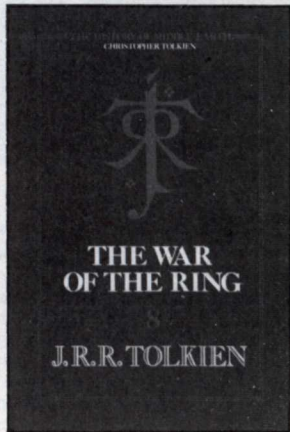
J R R Tolkien  
 Publisher Unwin  
 Format HB £17.95



J R R Tolkien's *The History Of Middle Earth* series has now produced its eighth weighty tome with the promise of at least another book to come. If you've ploughed your way through the previous seven texts you'll be familiar with Christopher Tolkien's style of presenting and editing his father's work; though recent converts to Hobbit lore may find that style not as reader friendly as J R R's stories.

For me the history of the middle earth

series is now becoming interesting. The first five books (*The Book Of Lost Tales Part One* to *The Lost Road And Other Writings*) dealt with the manuscripts which eventually became the *Silmarillion* (itself an unfinished book) and tended to be rather dry. From book six onwards the series charts Tolkien's thought processes as he writes *The Lord Of The Rings*. Thankfully,



compared to the previous books, these have more emphasis on story. Nevertheless, Christopher Tolkien's notes, while exhaustive and often fascinating, tend to bury J R R's work and make the books more stilted than they need to be.

*The War Of The Ring* takes up the story from the destruction of Isengard to the point at which the host from the west is about to march into Mordor. This represents a good chunk of both *The Two Towers* and *Return Of The King*

# RICHARD LAYMON



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# STEAMPUNK REVOLUTION

## THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE

William Gibson and Bruce Sterling

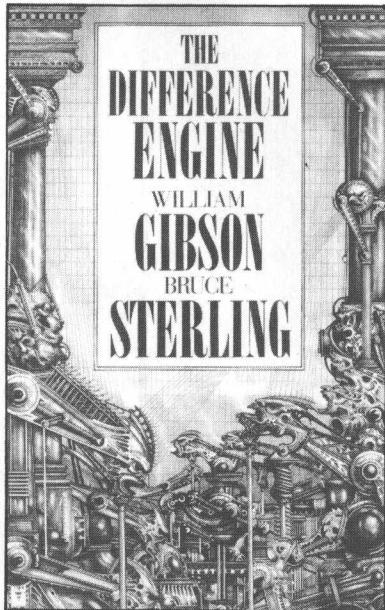
Publisher Gollancz

Format HB £12.95

 Cyberpunk is dead; long live steampunk! Cyberkings Gibson and Sterling have hung up their digital interfaces and put on their frock-coats for this exploration of what Victorian London might have been like if Charles Babbage had actually managed to get his difference engine — a mechanical ancestor of today's computers — manufactured. There is continuity; this novel, like the earlier work of both writers, is about the effects of computers on the world we live in. It's just that the world is a hundred years ago.

*The Difference Engine* is something of a flawed masterpiece. In style it's well-nigh perfect; how two American writers have managed to capture what feels like the authentic voice of Victorian London is astounding. There's the odd glitch and clumsiness, but far less than I expected. It's unfortunate, with the storytelling so good that the story itself lets the book down. There are only so many ways you can describe London smog, and when it goes on for most of the book it gets a trifle wearisome. And when every eminent Victorian you can think of gets a bit part, always in a different line of work than in our own world (Byron is prime minister, Disraeli is a hack writer), the constant clever name-dropping becomes irritating.

The book is in five parts, or 'iterations', and although the theme continues from one to the next, the breaks in the narrative and the change of viewpoint characters make it feel like five separate stories. The best character of all, the young prostitute at the centre of the first section, doesn't reappear until almost the end of the book. And at the end comes a sort of coda, nearly 30 pages of scraps: press cuttings, excerpts from diaries and



letters, poems, posters... The idea is obviously to put the whole thing in its (fictional) historical context, but the scraps have the feel of outtakes from the rest of the novel.

The Science Museum is actually building Babbage's Engine for the bicentenary of his birth in 1992; it will be interesting to look at it and speculate how close are Gibson and Sterling to what would have happened...? *The Difference Engine* could have been an outstanding novel; despite its faults, it's still an enjoyable read.

David V Barrett



family, to embark on a trek of his own. But his is a journey of bloodshed and mayhem which he seems completely powerless to stop.

On one level, *Random Walk* reminds you of the old Woody Allen joke in which our hero recalls taking a test in metaphysics and cheating by looking into the soul of the boy at the next desk. In other words, the philosophising seems initially to be a bit 'peace and love, man': but only initially. And Adlon's antics are sufficiently debased and graphic to provide a constant — though not particularly refreshing — touchstone of relative normalcy.

And that's about it. But yet there's so much more. Guthrie's walk goes on and on, through state after state, gathering more and more walkers, while Sara Duskin grows to realise how little you can see with only your eyes and Mark Adlon just keeps on killing. But even he realises that one day the killing will have to stop.

*Random Walk* is a curious book, an off-beat blending of Pirsig's famous book on motorbikes, Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*, Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*, McCammon's *Swan Song* and William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways*. Intoxicating, unorthodox, revelatory and perhaps one of the year's most important and socially relevant novels. If you have trouble getting hold of a copy at your local specialist bookshop, phone London's Murder One. It's well worth your efforts.

Pete Crowther



## SEAHARP HOTEL

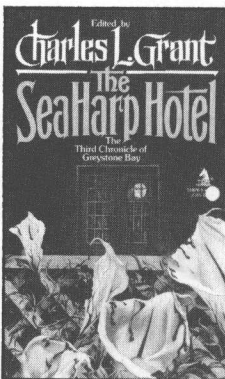
Charles L Grant

Publisher Tor Books

Format PB, \$3.95



The third volume in Grant's Greystone Bay Chronicles (preceded by *Greystone Bay* and *Doom City*), all of which are set in the same fictional locale, providing glimpses of various local evils. Here, unfortunately, the 15 stories don't match up to their predecessors.



There are highlights, to be sure, but the collection lacks consistency. One of the best stories is Steve Rasnic Tem's unsettling 'Aquarium', in which the protagonist, Michael, who spent a segment of his orphaned childhood at the SeaHarp, returns to the hotel many years later to catalogue the various pieces of furniture, art and effects. Once there, Michael's remembrances of his time at the orphanage, and of the dehumanising effect of being repeatedly paraded before potential parents (an experience which Michael has come to liken to that of a fish in an aquarium), gradually take over his thoughts and leave him an empty shell with no sense of identity.

and includes many of the best bits of each book, such as Frodo's journey through Shelob's lair and Gandalf's meeting with Sauruman at the foot of Orthanc.

Ultimately, the degree of enjoyment you derive from reading *The War Of The Ring* (or, indeed, any of the other *Lord Of The Rings* history books) really depends on how much you enjoyed the original *Lord Of The Rings*. For many, it was a nice story and nothing more. For these readers, knowing how the characters and plotlines developed and changed would not be particularly interesting. But if you're the sort of person who wants to know the history of the Palantir or how the monstrous Shelob evolved, then *The War Of The Ring* is essential reading.

Robin Candy




## RANDOM WALK

Lawrence Block

Publisher Tor

Format PB, 4.95

 This hitherto unsung mini epic has sidled its way into the country by virtue only of its

author's previous successes in the crime/mystery field — you may have seen the film *Eight Million Ways To Die* or have read the classic *When The Sacred Ginnmill Closes*. Then again, maybe you haven't. Frankly, it's not important. What Lawrence Block has come up with is a small book towering in scope, a kind of *Zen And The Art Of Backpacking* or *A Rambler's Guide To Serial Killing*.

Guthrie Wagner, his past uneventful, his future uninspiring, tends bar in Oregon. When we meet him he's taking an old girlfriend up to Eugene to get an abortion. When he gets home, despondent, he hears a voice in his head saying, 'You could take a walk'. He promptly hands in his notice on both his job and his apartment, sells his car, buys a new pair of trainers and sets off east on Route 138.

Within a couple of days, he's spent nights sleeping rough in near-freezing temperatures, without realising that it was even cold, and quit smoking. He has no idea where he's going, nor why, and he doesn't give more than a second's dismissive thought to what he's going to do when he gets back. The road is all.

Mark Adlon is a real estate salesman with an increasingly demanding sideline:

he likes to rape women as they die. Of course, this latter criterion involves him in having to ensure the timing is just right. When we meet him, he's just clinched a deal and is hell-bent on having some fun. He finds it in a 7-11 girl called Cindi who he beats, rapes and strangles in a back room. Mark has set himself his very own road, different to the one being travelled by Guthrie Wagner, but no less obsessive.

When we meet Sara Duskin, she's going blind. She's losing her sight in order that she can see more clearly. And what she sees in her mind is an image of a lot of people walking down a highway. Dutifully, she sets out with her teenage son, Thom, on a course which eventually intercepts Guthrie's. By then, her sight has gone completely.

By this time, Guthrie has picked up a man who has just abandoned his truck by the side of the road. A few days and several miles down the road the four of them will pick up many more people; people whose tattoos mysteriously fade, who grow new teeth in dead gums, whose cancers go into recession and who litter the roadside with no-longer-needed crutches and zimmer frames.

Meanwhile, Mark Adlon has submerged the more social side of his character, abandoning both job and





# MODERN MYTHS

## MORE TALES FROM THE FORBIDDEN PLANET

Edited by Roz Kaveney  
Publisher Titan Books  
Format PB £7.95

This sequel to the classic *Tales From The Forbidden Planet* is, from the outset, a disappointment. Despite the spattering of star names, such as Terry Pratchett, Colin Greenland, Larry Niven and Mary Gentle, many of the 15 stories are little more than light confection, leaving a blandness in the brain which soon has you forgetting this collection, despite the formidable FP logo.

The book begins well with a hilarious high-tech variation on the 'Why did the chicken cross the road?' theme, by Terry Pratchett. Gilbert Shelton's illustration, however, while spot on, gives Pratchett's clever game away too early for my liking.

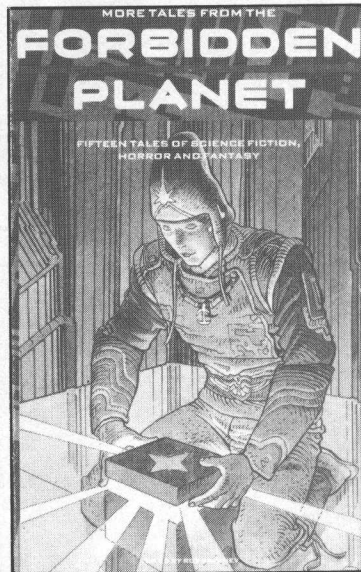
In contrast, Rachel Pollack's modern myth, 'The Woman Who Didn't Come Back', is a bleak, somewhat satirical look at what can happen if you meddle with magic in particular and the status quo in general. Again, while Jamie Reid's illustration — of questionable quality — gives the plot away, Rachel manages to do that herself, again early on in her text.

John Sladek is the next author to come under my hammer but, fortunately, his story gives succour to the weaklings of the pack, dealing with an unlikely case of hostage-taking in a futuristic burg-

er joint. It romps strongly along until the ending is in sight and then, unbelievably, picks up a cliché and bats it out of court for a disappointing final set piece.

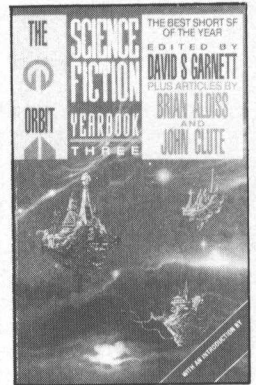
Sladek is joined by Greenland, Watson, Gaiman, Clute and Constantine, each of whom offer interesting, if somewhat conventional, stories. They are not, however, enough to save this disappointing volume. The illustrations are not the best work from the likes of Messrs McKean, Bisley, Reid and Vess. Each stares dully out of the page, like the diagrams in a Collins educational textbook, and fails to drag the reader into the stories. It's a shame, but goes to show that logo owners should be more careful when deciding just what to badge.

**John Gilbert**



'Dori Bangs', a delightful story about American rock critic Lester Bangs and graphic artist Dori Speda. Both real life characters are now dead, but Sterling's story shows how their lives may have turned out differently if only they'd met. Charles Sheffield's 'Out Of Copywrite' looks forward to a time in which cloning from dead cells is possible, with scientists Isaac Newton and Marie Curie, among others, making guest appearances.

My own favourite is Orson Scott Card's 'Dogwalker', with its cyberpunk overtones. Goo Boy is a thirty year old man trapped in the body of a nine year old boy. As a boy he was shot in the head by accident and patched up with a brain tissue replacement, called Goo.



Somewhere along the line someone did a bit of a bodged job and turned off his growth hormones. His one talent in life is obtaining security passwords: give him a look at someone's CV and he'll stand a pretty good chance of guessing any computer passwords they use. Dogwalker enters into his life in need of a password that will give him access to a government computer which issues travel permits. However, Goo Boy has got to be a hundred per cent sure he's got the correct word. One false slip and everyone ends up in jail, or maybe worse. Excellent stuff.

**Robin Candy**



## MAN AND HIS SYMBOLS

Conceived and edited by Carl G Jung  
Publisher Arkana  
Format limpback £10.95

Psychologist and eminent thinker Carl Jung probably had not the slightest inkling of the potential uses to which his magnum opus could be put by horror writers and filmmakers. In it he hypothesises about the relationship between symbols in relation to human culture and the individual and collective unconscious.

The book is, to use colloquialism, pretty racy, with pictures and underlining text which will particularly affect the prudish or squeamish. Entering the book through a gateway to an Egyptian burial chamber, we come across pictorial evidence of mass hysteria, leading to gruesome ritual suicide, the ghoulish excesses of snake-handling during religious ceremonies and the spearing of bulls in a Spanish ring.

While all of these pictures have their shock value, they also have some effect on the human unconscious, depicting rites of passage more overtly observed through the eyes of young African boys about to undergo the transition into manhood.

Comparatively ancient though the book may be — it was first published by

Robert Vardeman's 'Blood Lilies', upon which the cover illustration is based, involves a demented gardener with a special flower-growing formula. In Suzie McKee's Charnas's 'Evil Thoughts', the gradual disintegration of the protagonist's sanity is reflected in her obsession with the mushrooms which sprout on her lawn, mushrooms which she comes to believe represent her evil thoughts.

Thomas Monteleone's 'No Pain, No Gain' is a horrific EC-Comics-style story about a bell boy who finds himself in charge of a small, but rapidly growing creature which a local archaeologist has left for safekeeping. Unfortunately, the initially promising tale is ultimately pointless and jarringly out of sync with the other, much subtler, stories. Nancy Holder's 'Ami Amet Deli Pencet' is also disappointing, starting out as a study of one woman's supernaturally induced descent into madness, but eventually collapsing beneath its increasingly oblique narration.

**Robert Morrish**



## SWEETHEART

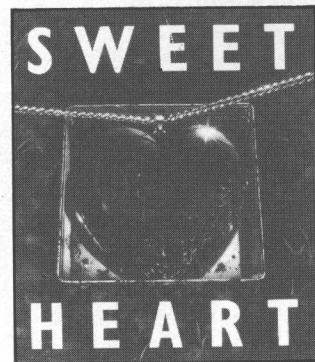
Peter James  
Publisher Gollancz  
Format HB, £12.95



Reincarnation, a fateful love triangle, trinkets from the past and a strangely shaped landmark all fall into the already overburdened lap of Charley, a young

housewife who, with her husband Tom, moves from the city to a small place in the country.

All appears to be idyllic until Charley begins to have terrifying visions and nightmares, one in which she is murdered in a car and another in which she carries a small bundle up the face of a heartshaped rock. It is not until she discovers the murder car on her property, and the object that her dream persona found (a small box with a locket within it), that she begins to believe in



the possibility of reincarnation.

The past might have lain buried, but for a tempestuous affair between Charley's husband and young woman called Laura. Could the events of the past be coming full circle, and what can Charley do to prevent what appears to be another quick demise in her present incarnation?

Peter James cleverly builds character and suspense in tandem in this, his sixth novel. Standing mid-range between James Herbert's forthright style of fiction and the immense subtleties of Ramsey Campbell, *Sweetheart* is, without doubt, his most accomplished work and brings with it the air of authority exhibited by the great names in British horror. James is now their standard-bearer and, before long, will, no doubt, become the general.

**John Gilbert**



## THE ORBIT SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK THREE

Edited by David S Garnett  
Publisher Orbit  
Format PB £4.99

A collection of short stories can often prove to be a more rewarding read than a whole novel. The beauty of short stories is that they don't carry any surplus weight, whereas a novel can often get bogged down in self-indulgent waffle; restrict an author to a several thousand words and automatically anything that is not essential to the plot has to be axed.

Editor David S Garnett has got an eye for a good science fiction story. Several of the pieces contained within the latest *Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook* were written by top science fiction writers as well as being Hugo and Nebula award finalists.

Highlights include Bruce Sterling's

Aldus Books in 1964 and has since been reproduced in a number of forms — Jung's sometimes arguable insights still remain fresh. A map for writers in search of ideas at a very basic human level this book will profoundly effect the reader on deep emotional and mental levels — far more than any sizeable bucket of blood. It's worth having, if only for reference.

John Gilbert

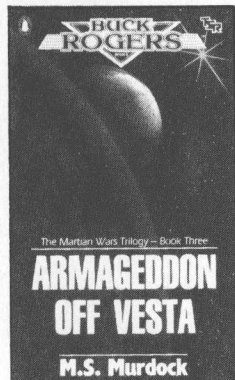


## BUCK ROGERS — ARMAGEDDON OFF VESTA

M S Murdock  
 Publisher Penguin  
 Format PB £3.99



It's the twenty-fifth century and all of the innermost planets of our solar system are at war. Earth, which by now is a twisted, rubble-strewn hell hole, is the home of the NEO freedom fighters who are battling the mighty forces of the Martian corporate state, known fearfully as RAM. But, as strong as the RAM forces are, they don't possess the brilliantly unpredictable talents of Captain Buck Rogers, a twentieth century astronaut who somehow survived accidental suspended animation and joined the ranks of NEO. But neither NEO nor RAM fight alone, both have allies. The ruling family on the planet Mercury has sided with RAM, whilst the Venusians are fearful that RAM will overrun Earth and attempt to conquer them afterwards and so are assisting NEO, as are the inhabitants of Luna (Earth's moon).



The plotline here is more involved than the average TV episode (luckily), though the author is guilty of my least favourite play which is introducing new characters and situations to the plot every few paragraphs. I hate just getting into one part of a story, say with Buck leading an attack on an enemy base, and having it suddenly change to a new situation. But I quite enjoyed the way the battle swings first in favour of NEO and then back to RAM. Although in the end you know that Buck Rogers will win the day, *Armageddon Off Vesta* is worth a read if you can follow the slightly confusing narrative.

Mark Caswell



## SUMMER OF FEAR

Lois Duncan  
 Publisher Penguin  
 Format PB £3.50



I don't usually need to make much of an effort to be chronically bored, so reading 217 pages of Lois Duncan's 'thriller' was



# HOLLYWOOD BABYLON

## A GRAVEYARD FOR LUNATICS

Ray Bradbury  
 Publisher Grafton  
 Format HB £13.99



Something of a sequel — perhaps 'follow-up' would be more accurate — to his *Death Is A Lonely Business*, Bradbury's *A Graveyard For Lunatics* is a treasure trove of characters, set in Hollywood during the last days of the great studios and their larger-than-life directors and stars.

It begins, appropriately enough, on All Hallows' Eve, 1954, when the book's first-person protagonist finds a typed note telling him to go to Green Glades Park cemetery where 'a great revelation awaits'. The trip marks the beginning of a heady and breathless spiral into studio politics and the complex unravelling of a twenty year old mystery concerning death, deceit and movie mogul manipulation.

*A Graveyard For Lunatics* is brimful with carnival geeks, hucksters and romantics, larger-than-life people who march to the beat of a wholly different drum, like Roman legionnaire extras to the strains of a Miklos Rozsa soundtrack. These include Roy Holdstrom (read 'Ray Harryhausen'), a special effects wizard who wants to create the ultimate beast; a Jewish producer who wants to cut the Judas character out of his biblical epic because he fears that to include him would be anti-semitic; JC, a debauched actor with everyday stigmata, who makes his living out of playing Jesus, admitting his private lusts during daily trips to the confessional booth; a bizarre collection of fannish autograph hunters who haunt the studio gates by day and the doorways of celebrity-filled eateries by night; a film editor who has compiled an unauthorised film-clip history of the industry; the monocle-clad director Fritz Wong, who instructs his stage hands to hire 2,000 locusts for his plague scene; an eternally beautiful queen of the silver screen who swims naked in the ocean and watches constant reruns of her old films on her apartment wall; and a wretchedly disfigured man who hides in a studio reconstruction of Notre Dame's bell tower and whose countenance is so disturbing that grown men who see him are moved to ask, 'Why do you live?'.

a model exercise in futility. *Summer Of Fear* should satisfy the tastes of the readers of *My Guy* or *Judy Blume* — and why not? We are all entitled to our preferences — but for the rest of us this is trivial trumpery of the highest order.

I thought the word 'novel' meant new and innovative, and so able to rouse the senses to a certain degree. Here, however, is Lois Duncan's definition: Rachel Bryant's family, feeling sorry for Julia (whose parents were killed in a car crash), invite her to stay in good ol' Apple-piedom (this is an American book, by the way). Julia charms everyone — except the heroine Rachel, whose pet dog notices Julia's 'fixating stare' and various other idiosyncracies which all, of course, point to the fact that she is a green, wart-ridden, eighteen-headed witch. Needless to say, Rachel investigates and reveals the usual

Ray Bradbury is two people: one is 'himself and the other is his Doug Spalding character, permanently sneakered, racing at, past and through life, enjoying a veritably endless sarsaparilla summer. Because of this, he clearly and eloquently fears not the prospect of growing old. For, in truth, he will never be old simply because he relives his own — and his country's — past through his literary creations.

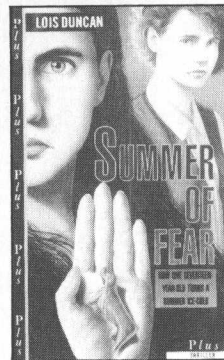
Witness, for example, Bradbury's stunning evocation of nostalgic remembrance as the narrator finds a movie set recreation of his home town, the inevitable Green Town, Illinois, complete with a replica of his father's 1929 Buick 'parked in the dust on the brick street, waiting to head west in 1933'. It forms one of his most powerful scenes: a complete contradiction of Thomas Wolfe's assurance that 'you can never go home again' and a natural continuation of Bradbury's poem 'You Can Go Home Again'.

And continuing the almost time-travelling self-communication from his poem 'Remembrance', in which the middle-aged narrator climbs a boyhood tree to discover, untouched by time, a note he had written some forty years earlier — the note says, simply, 'I remember you' — *Graveyard's* protagonist gets to see himself from twenty years earlier, thirteen years old and roller-booted, queueing for autographs on one of Maggie Botwin's illicit home movies.

Bradbury is doing here what he has always done, but now he's doing it better. Just like Immanuel Brokaw, the hapless psychiatrist in his story 'The Man In The Rorschach Shirt', who used the colours and shapes emblazoned on his shirt to unlock the deeply buried thoughts of occasional 'patients' he encounters on the streets, Bradbury uses pure language as a painter's palette, boldly sweeping words across a page in both pastel and primary hues, like a bloodless scalpel scraping and scratching away at — and ultimately, revealing — the reader's innermost thoughts and memories.

*A Graveyard For Lunatics* is not simply a 'good' book, it's an indispensable glimpse into the past, into the movie industry and into ourselves. Miss it at your peril!

Pete Crowther



sinister truths.

Perhaps I am being unnecessarily cruel: the simple prose leads me to believe that *Summer Of Fear* is directed at a much younger audience than that of

today's teen market. An optimist's theory may be that the pitiful awfulness is apparent only to certain people of a certain age (myself included, though who was it that said Wagner's music is not as bad as it sounds?)

The plot unfolds with painful predictability interspersed with the odd bit of yawn-inducing information. But the blurb, fulfilling its task admirably in giving us a taste of things to come, provides one inadvertent gem of originality: 'Suddenly everything falls into place and all Rachel's questions are replaced by terror as she realises what Julia is really planning.' My, my, peel my tangerines, if that's original entertainment then come back Ms Blume, all is forgiven...

Benjamin Dowell



# FEAR FORUM

Author fan clubs? We're not sure if there are any, but do look out for a comprehensive article on fan clubs and organisations early next year. We'll also be featuring writers' workshops and discussing their viability.

## CENSORED — AGAIN!

Dear FEAR

James Waplington is correct to suggest (FEAR 21) that we should do more than just write to FEAR in our attempt to keep censorship under control. However, I feel I must answer his attack against those who do write to you on the subject — especially as I fall into James' category of 'time-wasters'. His opinion on the matter obviously concurs with the Spook's, whose comment after my letter in issue 16 was that I was 'calling to the converted'. I disagree with them both... The council for the defence calls upon Miss Vanessa Coutts — an unconverted FEAR reader.

I have very strong opinions on censorship, but I am willing to listen to others' points of view and revise my beliefs where appropriate. I like to think this, anyway. These thoughts, however, did not just pop into my head; I have watched TV discussions and read letters and articles on censorship — usually on programmes or in publications aimed at the more open-minded. The important thing is that I had access to

**This month readers urge MPs to ban censorship, question Barry Norman's sense of judgement and find more ways to criticise our skull ratings. If you're one of those undead, belligerent types, then get that incubus off your chest...write to: FEAR FORUM, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW.**

## A TAD MORE FANTASY

Dear FEAR

Congratulations on a truly excellent magazine. But please let's see a bit more in the way of fantasy and science fiction features and interviews, as I feel these are scaled down compared to your horror reviews.

I'd particularly like to see interviews with C J Cherryh, Raymond E Fiest, Louise Cooper, Harry Turtledove, Michael Scott Rohan, David Eddings, Tad Williams and Melanie Rawn. After all, you are a Horror, Fantasy and Science Fiction magazine...

**Mark Hardy, Cottesmore, Leicestershire**

You may have noticed that, during the past few months, our SF&F coverage has substantially increased. We've published interviews with Larry Niven, Steven Barnes, Harlan Ellison, Pat Murphy and Brian Stableford. In this issue you've got Michael Moorcock, Jack Womack and, yes, Tad Williams. We are also offering you Asimov, Silverberg and Mary Gentle and William Gibson to look forward to in the near future. So... what are you moaning about?

## A BETTER LEATHERFACE?

Dear FEAR

I was prompted to write to you about your article on Leatherface in issue 15. Having recently seen the R-rated version of this film I fail to see why it is considered to be such a turd.

In many ways I found it to be superior to the original. We actually get to meet the Leatherface family and find out about their lives. In this film they were actually characters and not just psychopathic hillbillies.

And the lack of gore? So what. The original contained no gore, and nobody complains about that. This film is dark, menacing and brooding — like the original — and the acting is better in this sequel.

Okay, so the ending is shite — but ignore it. It's a small gripe about such a good film.

**Alex Gifford, Maidenhead, Berkshire.**

## STRAIGHT TALK

Dear FEAR

One of the best things I've read in your superior magazine was the rare Harlan Ellison interview in issue 21.

He didn't give us any bullshit; he was straight down the line. His views on writing were radical and refreshing; and the additional piece on his life story made gripping reading.

Of course, I've heard of Mr Ellison but hitherto haven't read any of his work. That interview, though, has certainly whetted my appetite, and I shall scour the bookshop shelves for this interesting man's titles.

**David Francis, Beckenham, Kent**

## SKULL CRUSHING

Dear FEAR

I realise that this criticism has already been addressed, but what happened to the skull ratings? They started out as a guide and now appear to be a farce. The trouble is that your readers spend their hard earned cash based on your recommendations. I have fallen into the trap twice so far with *Shadowzone* and *Never Cry Devil* both recommended or better (both a let down). I fancy viewing *Dark Angel* and *High Desert Kill* but am, to say the least, suspicious of your ratings.

Could you please ensure that your critics comply with the stated rating scale? It's costing me a bloody fortune!!!

Yours, an avid fan just the same.

**Andy Gray, Selston, Notts**

PS: I cannot help but wonder at the lack of skull rating against the review of *The Masque Of The Red Death*. As a one skull rating

is 'diabolical, what does a zero skull rating mean? And is it printable?

*The ratings, like the reviews, are, by their nature subject to personal opinion. You have yours, we have ours. Far from being easy on trash, we have, according to some people, become more venomous in our reviewing treatment. You can't please all the people... As for The Masque Of The Red Death, it should have been rated with three skulls, but unfortunately these fell off the artwork at the printers... Alas, even in our FEARful fantasy world, accidents do happen...*

## FAN-TASTIC

Dear FEAR

Would it be possible for you to run an article or series of articles including names, addresses and general information about major authors' fan clubs in the three genres you cover?

Keep up the good work — you're the best in the field...

**Kirk Chapman, Coventry**

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# FEAR

● **TAKES TO THE STAGE** with a look at horror, fantasy and SF in the theatre, from the high-glam gloss of Phantom Of The Opera to the glam-rock tastelessness of The Rocky Horror Show.

● **HUNTS THE DESIGNER LABEL** in a major interview with **H R GIGER** from his home in Switzerland. The master artist, who visualised Alien and Necronomicon, talks candidly about his life, the film version of Dune that never was, his relationship with Salvador Dali and his view of the horror, fantasy and SF genres.

● **DISSECTS THE DAMNED** in Part Two of our controversial exploration of the eroticisation of Nazi imagery. We examine the links between Fascism and fornication in post Sixties cinema.

● **KISSES THE CRUCIFIX** with a look at the two big Exorcist movies, one a spin-off the other a spoof, and talks exclusively to superstar Linda Blair to discover just how well the subject of demonic possession has weathered since the original film appeared in 1973.

● **GETS HEAVY** with **MACABRE METAL**, a new reviews and interviews section on the rock scene and its relationship with the horror and fantasy genres.

**PLUS...JOE HALDEMAN** reveals his Hemingway Hoax...**MARC OLDEN** on his penchant for horror and the East...**DEAN R KOONTZ'S** Whispers on film...and another gaggle of gruesome stories led by **GRAHAM MASTERTON'S** The Hurry Monster, published to mark the launch of his charity horror anthology.

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ON SALE  
NOVEMBER 8**

opposing views (**FEAR** should be congratulated for printing Miss Coutts' letter) and was inspired to give some thought to the topic.

Now I'm sure that most **FEAR** readers do object to censorship, but I suspect that to some people it is little more than an inconvenience: not being able to see the 'juicy bits' in the latest horror flick. And I'm afraid that many people would be quite content once restrictions were lifted just enough to satisfy their own tastes and outlooks.

I think I am safe in saying that it has been established that **FEAR** shall be more than just another magazine covering the more gross/graphic aspects of horror — as the enthusiasm for *Society* proves — so is it so wrong that your letters page should be a forum for discussion on any relevant subject? And censorship is extremely relevant. It is not just about decapitation scenes being cut: it is about Nazis burning books, and Stalinists imprisoning poets — and that is *real* horror.

I should add that, after this letter has been sent off, I shall be writing to James to offer my support for his proposed anti-censorship group. Maybe continued discussion will inspire others to do likewise. And perhaps Vanessa Coutts will one day join us!

**Paul Foy, Clarkston, Glasgow**

*Though some of our readers appear to be sick to death of the subject of censorship, we agree with you entirely Paul, and hope that our continued policy of printing readers' views on this subject proves just how relevant we at FEAR feel the censorship debate to be.*

## CALLING THE SHOTS

Dear **FEAR**

If you and your readers would like to see uncensored movies freely — and legally — available, there might now be something we can all do. The Labour MP Jeff Rooker recently called for a European Convention on Heritage and Culture which could introduce laws banning censorship. Might I suggest that you arrange an interview with Mr Rooker in which he could impart information on how we can all help him in his endeavour, whether it be writ-

ing to our MPs, our MEPs, or whatever, and he could also have the opportunity to tell us all about the Convention? The address to write to is: The Rt Hon Jeff Rooker MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

**Dave Grant, Aberdeen, Scotland**

*Censoring censorship — what a great idea, and we're all for it! As for an interview: we'd love to add his voice to the discussion. Thanks for suggesting it!*

## NORMAN'S NIGHTMARES

Dear **FEAR**

Having read a letter from Barry Norman's brother in your September issue, I felt I had to write. I don't think there's a man on this earth that gets up my nose more than Barry Norman.

As the host of *Film Whatever* he should be impartial in his reviews. However, when it comes to a horror film he treats the genre with total contempt. His reviews are downright patronising, he always ends them with sarcastic remarks and, I'm sorry Charles Thompson, but saying he has a 'mental block' on horror films is an understatement.

I agree that *Nightmare 5* was crap, but does this mean it shouldn't be reviewed? I would have thought even this would make more money than Barry's foreign gems. No matter how you look at it, if the film is foreign, if it takes us back to the Hollywood days and if it isn't a horror movie, then it'll get a slot on his show.

I read *Fangoria* and *Gorezone*. Sure, they're bloody, but if people actually read them then they would find some damn good interviews. Also, they show films well in advance of their release, so I already know about them months before they are reviewed in depth over here. Some of the gory pictures they include show scenes we will never see because of the good old BBFC, so I also like to catch what we're missing.

**Robin Smith, Gatley, Manchester**

## MUTED MEET

Dear **FEAR**

I recently attended a 'Meet the

Authors' evening, arranged by my local library, where the guest speakers were Michael Stewart (*Monkey Shines*) and Peter James (*Possession, Dreamer*). Sadly, however, the turnout was very low and the two authors found themselves talking to an audience that they almost outnumbered. Both, however, were charming and spent the evening conversing with the limited number of fans who were able to attend, and making it a special evening to remember for all present.

The library hopes it may be able to invite the authors back for another attempt in October and I am writing to ask if you could make a small plug for this and bring it to the attention of readers in South London. The library can be contacted on (081) 770 4700 for further details of the event, which is free.

**Dean Geoghegan, Sutton, Surrey**

## WRITER'S CRAMP

Dear **FEAR**

My office is small, 9' x 6'. Within it lies my word processor, filing cabinet, desk, bookcases and — 21 copies of **FEAR**. I did mention this once before, but the dwarves evidently didn't get the letter to you, because nothing was done... So I'm trying again in the hope that this time my missive escapes the evil one's clutches.

I need a box file or binder of some kind in which to store my **FEAR** magazines. A file, black, blocked **FEAR** on the back in gold, to hold 12 issues. Then I can order two, and have the satisfaction of knowing that the next three issues at least will have somewhere to live! After that, well, I'd have to order another, wouldn't I?

Please help, before the magazines threaten to engulf the office... And please keep on churning out the **FEAR**; it's the high point of each month's magazine purchases.

**Dorothy Davies, Faringdon, Oxon**

*Don't despair... We shall be looking into the possibility of producing a FEAR binder early next year. That is, if you can still open your office door by then...*

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