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EXCLUSIVE

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Alien III...



DEVILISH DECEPTIONS
Exorcist III — still afraid...?

STEPHEN KING

IT lives at last...

HORROR LIVE

Upstaging the cinema?

DEAN R KOONTZ

Whispers on film

DOLPH LUNDGREN

Body and soul...

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Seduction. Romance. Murder. The things one does for love.

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Vampire's Kiss

18

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JOHN DALY and DEREK GIBSON Present for † HEMDALE FILM CORPORATION
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AND AT A CINEMA NEAR YOU

The first year of the nineties is coming to a close — a momentous year in anticipation, but has it lived up to its image as a milestone of change?

Leaving aside world affairs and focusing on the realm of FEAR, have there been any signs of radical new directions in the artistic (and not so artistic) output of horror, fantasy and SF creators?

Well, in movies sequelmania still runs its ever tighter spiral of uninspired expiry, and fantasy trilogies and the like continue to adorn our bookshelves with artfully designed variations on the same old tapestry of wishful thinking.

There have been exceptions in all fields, but only few, and of those none guaranteed to stay the course of time.

This may be disappointing, but could it be that it's not the year that counts?

A year is a year, and just because it happens to mark a new decade should it be held responsible for having failed magically to bring about a sudden new flowering?

While horror, fantasy and SF often rely on wondrous events out of the blue, real life creativity depends on the person who conceives, writes, films and paints.

People are not affected by dates, but by events, big or small, that twist and turn the workings of their minds and souls to new frontiers in their sphere of achievement.

So maybe nothing *that* momentous to the world of FEAR shook 1990, and perhaps nothing will this decade — after all, are we not really waiting for the year 2000: *that* sounds like a watershed!

FEAR holds that films, books, the creations of the fantastic should be enjoyed (or not) as they come. Only posterity will judge what was truly great. To try and anticipate, or judge, now smacks of pomposity.

1990 has been a fair year, and may yet hold its as yet unrecognised nugget of lasting worth. Check it out in FEAR's December 2001 look back!

Have a fantastic Christmas...

FEAR

ISSUE 24

DECEMBER 1990

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The bloodsoaked arena where you and your letters take us to task...

Liza Walker, rising teenage star of a new erotic thriller about apes and obsession, talks to Mark Kermode.

In a startling new film entitled *The Mad Monkey*, directed by Spaniard Fernando Trueba, young British actress Liza Walker makes an auspicious screen debut, starring alongside Jeff Goldblum and Miranda Richardson in one of the year's most disturbing and unsettling chillers. Adapted from the novel by Christopher Frank, *The Mad Monkey* (gaudily retitled *Twisted Obsession in the States*) is a macabre and enticing psychological drama, detailing author Dan Gillis' fatal obsession with the youthful but deathly Jenny (played by Walker), an obsession which leads him into a twilight nether-region of incest, corruption and betrayal. Tackling the dichotomously childish/whorish role of Jenny with an unnerving ease, Liza Walker (now aged eighteen) has astonished international critics, confounding those who believed her too young to attempt such a challenging and potentially disturbing role. Indeed, so strong was the opposition to Walker's participation in some quarters that the sixteen year old actress was forced to abandon her course at the Italia Conti School of Theatre and Dance when they refused to negotiate her contract after deeming the script too problematic. 'They thought it was too controversial,' explains Walker, her elfin features belying an incongruous emotional maturity, 'and they felt strongly that such a young girl shouldn't have to play such a strange character. In their eyes, they probably didn't think I could cope with it.'

The script was indeed rather frightening when I first read it,' admits Walker candidly. 'You read the stuff that Jenny says and it's shocking, which is the point of course; everyone is shocked that these words could come out of such a young, sweet, innocent girl. But you have to turn your mind to the way it's been written, which is not that she's being dirty or disgusting, but that she's talking quite coolly and innocently. That's the whole weird thing about the character of Jenny. During the auditions for the film, Fernando deliberately chose one of the heaviest scenes to be read. He obviously thought: 'If she can do *this*, then she can do everything else in the film.'

Of equal importance was the casting of the extraordinary Jeff Goldblum as Dan, with whom Liza develops a bizarrely destructive, erotic relationship. Although initially unfamiliar with Goldblum's work in movies such as Cronenberg's *The Fly*, Walker soon came to respect and trust her screen partner, whose on-set peculiarities are fast becoming legend. 'I met Jeff for the first time on the first day in Paris. He was sitting in the hotel and we sat and talked, and it was fine. And then he stood up! And I thought: 'Jesus Christ, this man is so tall...!' He's very



MONKEY SHINES

intense, but he also really takes the piss. Like he'd constantly take the piss out of my English accent. Also, Jeff always had a book with him, and it got so I could tell which scene we were going to do that morning by what book he was reading: if it was Arthur Miller, then it would be something aggressive; if it was Woody Allen it would be light-hearted and witty. I could tell exactly the mood it was going to be that morning from what he was reading.'

MORGUE SCENE

Bound within an engrossing thriller-esque narrative, Dan and Jenny's relationship takes on a nightmarish quality as Dan becomes increasingly unhinged from the harsh reality of his own chaotic (but reassuringly tangible) domestic affairs. As *The Mad Monkey* progresses inexorably toward its horrifying denouement, Trueba's vision shifts from realism to dark fantasy, climaxing in a truly unnerving morgue scene in which long dead bodies float up from a desolate basement, engulfing Dan in a highly stylised dance of death.

So does Walker view *The Mad Monkey* as a horror movie? 'Obviously there are horrific elements, and the characters themselves are quite horrible — they're not exactly the type of people that you'd like to know. I don't think I'd call it a horror movie, though — I'd call it a psychological thriller. The morgue scene is probably the most horrific scene in *The Mad Monkey*, and I love that scene. That was shot in an old ale-house in Paris, and the underwater stuff was done in a swimming pool with a viewing window. I had scuba-diving lessons, and when it came to filming, there was a woman underwater with me with two oxygen tanks; one for her and one for me. I was hanging onto weights on the bottom of the pool, and they'd pull the oxygen-tube away, and I'd have to clear the bubbles from my face and then float up facing straight out into the mirror. And it was freezing in there! By the end of the day I'd come out looking like a prune! They also made a full body cast of me, which was to be used in a dream sequence when Jenny falls from a balcony, but I don't think they used it. I used to keep the

cast outside the dressing room, and it was really weird and really horrible. You look at it and you start to get really critical of yourself...'

If Walker's reaction to an unreal image of herself was one of horror, however, the reaction of audiences to the young actress may prove to be equally disturbing: 'In Venice, where the movie played, there were quite a few people who were a bit uneasy or funny around me, although I certainly haven't had any 'Get away from me' reactions so far. Some people do take films very literally, and it can really change their lives. I don't take them that way, and that's why I'm not offended by things like *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife And Her Lover*, which I loved. I don't think there's anything

wrong with taking a film literally if that's what you want to do, but to blame a director, scriptwriter, author, actress or whatever for doing something 'disgusting', portraying something in a certain way, I think it's very unfair. It's not the director's fault that some people may think these things are dirty and disgusting. Fernando Trueba has created an incredible film that has some strong things to show us and to say. No one has actually been that anti the film yet, but I accept that some probably will be, and I'll probably get loads of people saying 'How could you do something like this?' But in my eyes, it's an incredible film and I love it, and I don't really care what people say.'

WHISPERS FROM THE PSYCHE

Dean R Koontz has certainly begun to get more attention from Hollywood. Future projects include *Phantoms* and *Midnight* while ITC Entertainment, in conjunction with Cinepix Productions, has just wrapped production on *Whispers*.

Locations for *Whispers* included a turn-of-the-century Montreal mansion and studio sets which were closed to the press and public. The producer John Dunning explains: 'Closed sets were necessary. We didn't want anyone to know how our film ended or how we interpreted some of the more frightening moments in the story. Suffice it to say, all the excitement inherent in the story is going to be there on the screen. So audiences will just have to wait to find out how really electrifying a first rate thriller can be.'

The story centres around novelist Hilary Thomas, who has received the news that her latest book will be published. That night she is attacked by a strong, athletic man.

Hilary realises that she knows him from one of her trips to Lee Valley. Her assailant is Bruno Clavel, the owner of Clavel Orchards. In a violent struggle, Bruno falls but manages to make his exit while Hilary tries to phone the police. Before he departs, Bruno tells her that he will be back. With the help of Detective Sergeant Tony Clemensa, Hilary's search for an explanation takes her deeper into a bizarre tale that is both shocking and incredible.

Whispers is directed by Douglas Jackson, one of Canada's most experienced filmmakers. In 1987 Doug won an Ace Award for directing *Banshee*, an episode from HBO's Ray Bradbury's Theatre, starring Peter O'Toole. In 1988 he directed several episodes of the new *Twilight Zone*, and when *Whispers* came along he wanted in from the start. 'Directing a suspense-thriller, especially one based on a bestselling book by



Violent struggle: a dramatic moment from *Whispers* (above); Jeff Goldblum and Liza Walker in *The Mad Monkey* (top left)

Dean Koontz, is a great opportunity. I had read the novel and already had a visual impression of the terror and fear confronting not only Hilary, but Bruno as well.

'This was a great project to work on. The screenplay was intelligent and the actors selected to portray the characters were superb. Victoria Tennant, Chris Sarandon and Jean LeClerc were true professionals, always ready to give that little extra that makes the difference between a so-so performance and a great one.

'One of the most interesting and challenging aspects of directing this feature was the attention to special effects. Some of them are very dynamic and very frightening. All in all, I think we've produced a real classic thriller.'

The script was written by Anita Doohan, whose first break came as a production assistant on the original *Star Trek* series. She became the Assistant Producer to Gene Roddenberry and later

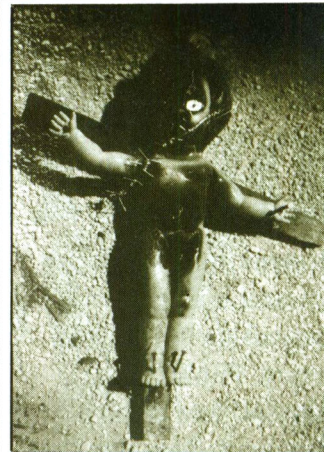
moved on to Sandy Howard Productions where she worked on the feature film *The Island Of Doctor Moreau*. 'The biggest challenge in adapting the book to the screen was developing the characters and making sure their interactions weren't lost. The courage and independence of Hilary, the troubled psyche of Bruno and the insensitivity of Tony all become intertwined, an integral part of all the twists and turns that unfold before the climax and final confrontation is reached.'

Jean LeClerc plays Bruno, a man obsessed with revenge. 'Portraying Bruno was the ideal vehicle for exploring the inner psyche,' he says. 'It was an opportunity to discover what makes a person evil and how one lives with a tortured soul.' Chris Sarandon, who has appeared in *Child's Play* and *Fright Night*, was chosen to play Hilary's guardian and lover. 'I started to get this feeling that I was cast for certain roles because I died well,' Chris chuckles. 'This time, however, even though I get beat up, shot and stabbed, I manage to survive. I even end up with the girl.'

J B Macabre

HORROR ITALIAN STYLE

The Mariano Bains directed short feature film, *Caruncula* debuts at Black Sunday at the Camden Parkway cinema in London on 17 November. Said to be a bizarre parody of the Italian horror genre, *Caruncula* is the simple tale of a lonely girl (Rosalind Furlong) who lives with her ageing mother (Joan Hicks) and an unseen baby. A sentimental soul, the heroine sets off to catch a romantic movie at a weird and sleazy cinema; but what we know (and she doesn't) is that a 'psycho' (Jonathan Jaynes), whose kicks include torturing baby dolls and inflicting pain on himself with barbed wire, is also visiting the cinema. The meeting of the two protagonists is inevitable, but in the cat and mouse game that ensues it becomes apparent that the two sides are more equally matched



than we might at first have envisaged...

The movie bears all the hallmarks of Italian horror — dominant music soundtrack, lushly coloured visuals, set pieces of gore and mayhem, logic gaps, character inconsistencies and a degree of sadism. The producer, Bob Portal describes it as 'something like a grotesque looney tune...' And all this, would you believe, in a mere twenty minutes of screen time! Dario, nota bene.

Patience Coster

Nailbiter

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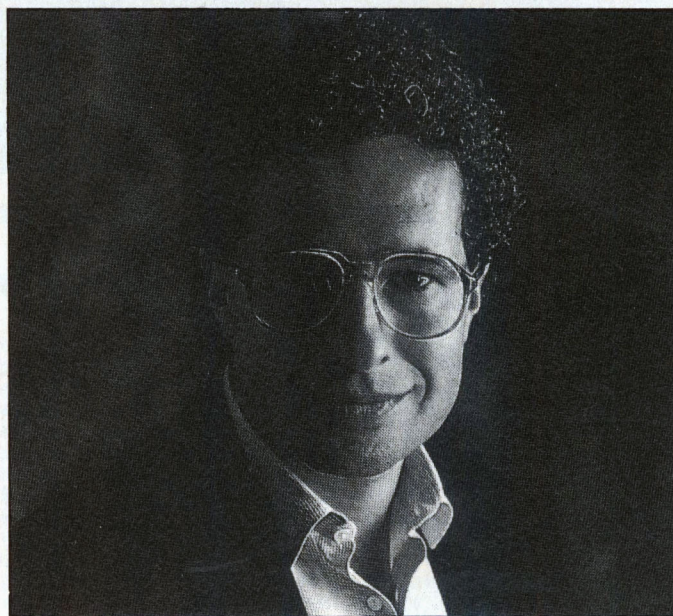
THE WORLD OF FEAR

IN AT THE DEATH

Horror novelist Peter James will go anywhere for a good story. FEAR's Nick Hasted and John Gilbert follow him into his past lives.

Peter James picks up a book from his shelf. 'The greatest thing is seeing foreign translations,' he says, 'like this Japanese one. Awful cover... I got the Jaguar keys added to it later.'

The Jaguar in the driveway to his large house in Sussex is a symbol of his continuing success with novels like *Possession* and *Dreamer*; serious, stringently paced paranormal tales that investigate possibility and character.



James is certainly no stranger to success, as his work in other fields proves. His career started at the end of the Sixties, when he left Britain and public school for Canada. There he tried to break into movies. 'Then we met Bob Clark, the American director, who'd just made a film called *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things*. He'd also done several horror films with Ted Michaels — *Blood Orgy Of The She Devils*, *I Dismembered Mama*. He made a film called *Dead Of Night* for us, about a soldier who was killed in Vietnam, then came home. As far as we were concerned this was a horror film about a man who came back. They saw it as an anti-Vietnam film. This was when Vietnam was at its height, and this was Deep South America, where there was no anti-

Vietnam sentiment at all. And they got very angry, we could hear the rumblings in the cinema. So we almost got lynched when our film came out, because of this imagined symbolism. It was extraordinary.'

LIFE AFTER DEATH

After *Dead Of Night* and a three-year stint on three other films, James went

instant supperseller, published in 15 countries, and spurred James to combine horror stories with a great deal of research. He approached *Dreamer*, recently released in paperback, and his new novel, *Sweet Heart*, in a similar way. 'Sweet Heart I spent three years researching. There are two aspects to research. The first is having the facts right, the second is that, from doing the research, you get an authentic feel.'

For *Sweet Heart*, James took a series of hypnotic rebirthing and regression sessions in which he was taken back to his mother's womb and returned to past lives which included having been a fishmonger in Hull, a French woman murdered by her lover, and a primitive South Seas islander. 'When I first went I intended to stay awake to see what tricks he'd get up to, and took along a hidden tape recorder. He made me lie down and covered me with blankets because he said that although it was a hot day I might get cold. He started by going back through my childhood and then made me go back to before I was born, to a past life where I went straight into images of being in the Second World War.'

'I had two or three strong images of past lives. When I came back out I felt quite tired but thought that I'd only been there for about ten or fifteen minutes. Then the hypnotist apologised but said he had to throw me out; we had started at 10am and it was now 1.30pm. My tape recorder had, of course, stopped after 45 minutes. He handed me three tapes, and I just couldn't believe it.'

James has continued with the hypnotic sessions even now that he is on a different track of paranormal research with his next novel, *Twilight*. Recently he spent a week following in his central character's footsteps as an anaesthetist who has out-of-the-body experiences. The book is 'about the whole death process. What I want to continue to do is to challenge our perceptions and, in this case, to see to what extent life is an illusion.'

Dreamer is published by Sphere in paperback. Sweet Heart is available in hardcover from Gollancz. Twilight should be available in the autumn of 1991.



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HIDDEN PROMISE

It may not be the biggest, but it's one of Britain's best; situated near Leicester Square in London's Charing Cross Road, Fantasy Inn (aka The Book Inn) packs more punch on two floors than many of the larger shops.

A postcard stand outside is designed to draw in the casual browser or tourist, while the shop front reflects the goodies inside, from imported hardcover books through graphic novels, magazines, posters, audio books and masks.

back to his earlier love: books.

He began writing paranormal horror when a friend's son was killed in a car accident and the family asked him to write a non-fiction account of their attempts to contact the boy through seances. As the sessions continued James became more intrigued with the area, and gathered mounting evidence of survival after death, but eventually discovered that his friends' contacts with their son were going nowhere dramatically. He began to wonder whether he could inject that drama and use his extensive research for a novel. 'I thought it would be a great idea to have someone who went to a seance and discovered something really horrendous about someone who had died.'

The result, *Possession*, was an

The unusually knowledgeable shop staff will point out the areas for your interests, while shop owner Richard Waller is often by the till chatting to regular customers.

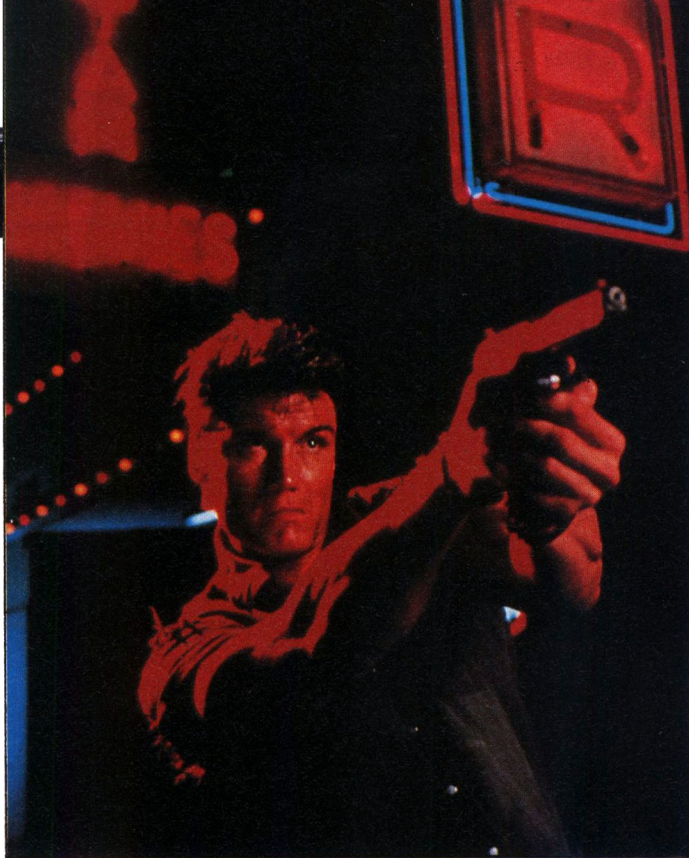
The ground floor contains shelves of new hardcover and paperback books, ranging through the horror, fantasy, science fiction and crime genres, backed up with a wall to wall of older titles. There's also a small, though varied, range of limited editions. Added to that you have a rack of the latest genre magazines, a display of discount hardcovers and an array of expensive face filmic masks/models (from approximately £75.00 to £250.00).

Downstairs, the basement

contains several tons of the latest comic books and back issues of the most prominent genre magazines. Half of the space is given over to science fiction and fantasy, be it novels, making of... or poster books you require. You might also find the odd shooting script for films such as John Carpenter's *Christine*, plus other esoteric items hidden amongst the general jamboree.

Finally, the Inn's calendar is jam packed with signings. Look out for the ads in **FEAR** or the flyers posted in the shop's windows.

Fantasy Inn, 17 Charing Cross Road, London, WC2H 0EP. Tel: (071) 839 2712.



Dark Angel: the heat is on for Dolph (left), with Brian Benben (above)

Shakespeare's characters were real Renaissance men — men who could speak well, read poetry, and still cut off people's heads.'

Lundgren's next film has him as a weaponless journalist caught up in CIA doubledealing in Israel, and there are currently no plans to team him in what might be regarded as his dream ticket with Arnie. He is, however, plotting the actor's dream — to be in charge of his own movies. 'Now that I'm surer of what I want to do, I'm

going to coproduce my next film. There are two ways you can get on as an actor: you either stick with what you're good at and gradually get to work on films with bigger budgets and with better directors, or you get involved in production. That way you have a greater say in the sort of films on which you work.'

And despite the cynics who can only see his screen attraction in terms of his pecs, Dolph insists that he will have the last laugh. 'In films, we are all self-made men. It's only talent and ambition that limit how far you can go — not who you know. Who cares if people laugh?'

MUSCLING IN

Dolph Lundgren, down-to-earth megastar of the upcoming SF thriller *Dark Angel* pulls few punches on the pitfalls and the promise of being a musclebound he-man in the movies. FEAR's Martin Claiden joins him in the ring.

In every respect, apart from his height, the blond, Swedish actor Dolph Lundgren is a constant source of surprise. The man who literally laid the killer punch on Apollo Creed and made the Italian Stallion look like an insignificant amateur in *Rocky 4* is very much at ease, nonchalantly stretching his long legs and allowing a frequent smile to light up his classic Nordic features.

Although part of his self-contentment derives from his love of the outdoor life and his karate expertise, he's clearly delighted that, with his two most recent hit films, *The Punisher* and *Dark Angel*, he's at last starting to compete on equal terms with Sly and Schwarzenegger for the tough guy roles: 'Three years ago, when Arnold was beginning to make movies, people laughed at him. Now the same people who laughed loudest are offering him any money in the world and begging him to make films for them.'

Lundgren openly admires the Austrian megastar, though he feels that the comparisons between them must wane in time. 'I don't think we'll always be making the same sort of films. Arnold is probably one of the most successful people in the business

at the moment, but I'm still at the start of my career. Remember, I'm only 30, and I've only been in the business for five years.'

As for Stallone, Dolph tries to be diplomatic: 'If you go around looking like you do on screen, with 25 minders and a private plane, you set yourself up for problems.' Whether Dolph's feelings have been tinged by his romance with Sly's ex, Brigitte Nielsen, he isn't saying; but, unlike Brigitte, Dolph has avoided doing the usual round of Hollywood parties and high profile socialising. 'If you travel everywhere first class and get everything done for you from the moment you get up, you end up living in a fantasy world.'

Fantasy, though, is at the heart of *Dark Angel*, a SF thriller in which the role of the blonde avenger is taken by Mathias Hues, a seven-foot astral drug-dealer whose greeting to each of his earthly victims is: 'I come in peace'. Such blatant upstaging would be unthinkable in a Stallone movie, but Dolph has sufficient self-confidence to be happy with his role as the terrestrial cop on the trail of the extraterrestrial villain. 'So far, I think I've only used ten percent of my talent. You've got to take chances if you want to grow. Ten years ago, I was in Sweden training for karate, and the only connection I had with movies was going to the cinema to see *Rocky* or something like that. You never can tell how things will develop.'

Lundgren still returns to Sweden in the summer to instruct youngsters in karate ('that puts me under pressure to be as fit as the other instructors'), and works out for a couple of hours each day to keep his muscles in tone. But the more humane image he presents in *Dark Angel* is perhaps the beginning of a shift away from the he-man stereotype to more diverse roles, particularly in the areas of comedy and romance where he feels he has a natural aptitude. And as for the Bard? 'I'd love to play Mark Anthony.

Black Sunday

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CONTACT

The British Fantasy Convention and its cohorts recently assaulted Brum, and FEAR's John Gilbert was at the front of the scrum — here's his commentary.

Birmingham: a metropolis far distant from the balmy hills and gentle country living of Ludlow but nevertheless a fine place to hold the British Fantasy Convention.

This year, and for the first time since I started attending the event, I was shuttled into the overflow hotel, The Park International, a wonderfully rich and restful place in all respects, except that they tried to charge me double the convention rate for my room on departure. Soon, however, I'd dropped my luggage and crossed New Street to The Midland Hotel, a grand place that has played host to the BFC for so many seasons.

Bumping into Brian and Dot Lumley on my way to the registration desk on the first floor, it was soon to become apparent that this was likely to be the biggest BFC, in terms of guests, for some time. On the landing I met *Hellraiser 2*'s Peter Atkins and Nicholas Vince and shook hands for the second and third times that day.

Evening approached and, after a well attended screening of *City Of The Living Dead*, a panel of editors, including Stephen Jones, Dave Sutton (*Fantasy Tales*), Dave Reader (*Skeleton Crew*), Carl Ford and Phil Williams lined up to reason why they wanted to do their jobs — with much participation from the floor by our own esteemed Ed. who himself got into full flow on the 'how to be a writer' panel on Saturday morning.

Thanks must go to Kim Newman, who resuscitated many a weary Con member with a Saturday breakfast of Bucks Fizz and bacon butties to pro-

mote his new novel *Bad Dreams*. Afterwards, Master of Ceremonies Stephen Laws opened the convention, introduced the two Guests of Honour, Joe R Lansdale and Stephen Gallagher and led into the first panel of the day, where tongue-tied illustrators (including FEAR's Oliver Frey) tried to explain the pros and cons of what they do with brushes.

Laws went back on stage in the afternoon to present a wonderful video tour of Hammer horror, showing just some of the techniques used by filmmakers and writers to achieve suspense. The video was back in use when Stephen Gallagher showed clips from his new television series, *Chimera*, and described the process of translating it from the novel to the small screen. The most ineffectual panel followed, during which the normally ever-bright Kim Newman, Christopher Fowler, Nicholas Vince, Peter Atkins and Ramsey Campbell were lost for words when asked to illustrate the importance — or otherwise — of special effects within contemporary filmmaking.

Later, Adrian Cole turned terror into titters, arriving in the main conference hall decked out as a monster from Hell and reading from his hilarious horror spoof *The Revenge Of The Heavy Metal Vampires* (FEAR readers may remember the publication last year of Cole's *The Vulgariad*).

The obligatory Saturday night raffle saw the return of Stephen Jones and Jo Fletcher as co-hosts, giving away books, videos and 'incredibly rare copies of FEAR issue one' (thanks, Steve).

Sunday morning started with sore heads and the overrunning of *Dario Argento's World Of Horror*, a video which was followed by a horror panel, which included most of the horror writers at the convention. A reading by Diana Wynne Jones — so engrossing that the audience asked for more — was followed by a panel on how not to reinvent *Lord Of The Rings*, with contributions from Jo Fletcher, Freda Warrington, Keith Timson, Storm Constantine and Susan Price.

The penultimate event of the Con was the Banquet, the food for which



was excellent for a change, and the presentation of the British Fantasy Awards by Messrs Gallagher, Lansdale and Laws. The congrats to the winners flowed into our very own Dead Dog Party — now firmly established as a regular event — which was followed by the presentation of the FEAR Fiction Awards by Fiction Editor David Western.

Guests and delegates left the hotel suitably shattered and bolstered in the knowledge that the Con will be huge

next year, and will take place in London at The Ramada Inn. Sounds fab. FEAR will be there.

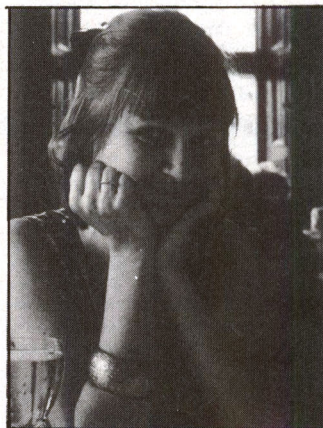
FEAR Fiction Awards (top): Mark Chadbourne (Best New Author), David Western (Fiction/Art Editor), John Gilbert (Managing Editor), Oliver Frey (Editorial Director), Brian Lumley (Best Established Author). **BFS Awards (below):** Pan rep, for Nancy Collins (Best Newcomer), Joe Lansdale (Best Short Fiction), Dave Carson (Best Artist), Carl Ford (Best Small Press)



Photos: Seamus A Ryan

COSTER QUILTS IN SPROG SHOCK!

Patience Coster, Deputy Editor of FEAR since June 1989, is leaving to start a little genre of her own. Patience is due to have a baby on December 9 (though judging by FEAR's schedules, the actual delivery date could well be several weeks late, ho-ho). The staff at FEAR will miss her admirable word-juggling and blind rages, and we wish her and the nipper the very best. We have not



entirely exorcised Patience from FEAR's pages, however, for from January she will take up the position of Consultant Editor and will continue to contribute to the magazine.

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TRANSLATION RITES

The works of genre giant Stephen King have undergone fifteen big screen adaptations, many of them toweringly unsuccessful. Now, with *Graveyard Shift*, screenwriter John Esposito has the dubious honour of honing the horror master's art into film. FEAR's J B Macabre meets the man who would translate King.

Those who say that King does not translate well to film blame it mostly on King. You've come along as a writer seeking to create your script, but also seeking approval from Stephen. After everything you have experienced, can you say that the works that have come up short are not King's fault?

JE: Oh no, definitely not! I think the people that are paying attention know that. Certainly they can appreciate what he's doing in the book and if you ever see his screenplays, it's pretty astonishing, you can see how he completely changes his style. He's a

screenwriter in his own right, which most novelists are not. It's certainly not his fault, but if you're not directing, it's not your vision.

The director comes in, throws out what he feels he does not need, re-edits and re-interprets. Then there is a domino effect, and the entire script can change, and even re-change by the day. Then the film editors come in and restructure that vision. It's kind of amazing. With King it's very true, when you also consider that he has not written the majority of the screenplays. Even the ones he has penned will be translated any way the director sees fit.

The end result is that, as a scriptwriter, you lose sight of your original vision. They keep asking you to do things that have been done before. Not that I did anything highly original in the first draft of *Graveyard Shift*, but what happened — and this is really true — is that New World Pictures optioned the film in 1986, about the same time as *Fatal Attraction* was having a successful run at the box office. And they literally came in and asked me how we could make it more like *Fatal Attraction*! Prior to that, Vestron had been interested in the film; that summer *Aliens* was the big hit, and they asked me how to make it more like *Aliens*. That's how things evolved and changed; it all depends on who is in charge at the moment.

As you wrote the script, did you find there was a particular direction that you wanted to take, and did you feel the piece provided enough material for you to work with?

Confronting the monster in *Graveyard Shift*

I definitely didn't think there was too much there in the short story. I was kind of terrified when I read the story again. I read it earlier when I got the assignment, but when I went back to look at it again I thought, 'Oh God, I'm dead!'. I looked for a theme I wanted to comment on. It was a real American horror story, which is what King does best. I thought if I could tap into that, something he could have expanded into a novel, that would turn this film into a good Stephen King film. I grabbed that angle and ran with it as fast as I could, because I only had a week.

MEETING THE MASTER

As you were shooting in King's home town, did he spend a lot of time on the set?

He was incredibly supportive. He approved all the scripts and made detailed comments. He did come to the set a few times, but he wasn't there a lot. He came for a visit to see how things were going, looked at some footage and seemed pleased with what was going on.

It's funny: we had a breakfast before we started shooting. I met him and was starstruck, there he was — the master. He was very friendly and put me at ease. Before he left, he

KING RAT

In 1978, Stephen King published the first volume of his short stories, *Night Shift*. The first story from this collection to see the transformation from print to celluloid was *Children Of The Corn*. Halloween 1990 will see the cinema release of the second piece from the *Night Shift* collection: *Graveyard Shift*. A Ralph Singleton film, *Graveyard Shift* (Sugar Entertainment/Paramount Pictures) stars David Andrews, Stephen Machet, Kelly Wolf and Brad Dourif.

Graveyard Shift was filmed on location in and around King's neighbourhood of Bangor, Maine, and is the sixteenth feature film to be produced from one of King's works and the third to be filmed in Maine, the previous two being *Creepshow 2* and *Pet Semetary*.

The reopening of the abandoned Bauchman Textile Mill on the outskirts of Gates Falls unleashes an unrelenting terror. When a few of the mill's workmen are chosen to clean out the rat-infested basement they find themselves in the presence of an unimaginable monstrosity.

'King's films evoke terror, suspense, action, blood, gore and a wonderful sense of comedy,' states Ralph Singleton. 'You can have fun with his movies, which is what we're doing here. We have a cast of characters that audiences will love — and hate. They're pitted against a very fearsome seven-foot creature that lives in a nest beneath a cemetery next to

the textile mill.'

Singleton makes his directorial debut with *Graveyard Shift*, and is also the film's producer. His previous production credits include *Another 48 Hours* and *Harlem Night* and he received an Emmy as producer on the TV series *Cagney & Lacey*. William J Dunn is coproducer.

'We started off with King's compelling short story,' says Dunn, 'and brought in screenwriter John Esposito. Then we added a mixture of Hollywood veterans and some of today's younger professionals.' John Esposito is a native of Long Island, New York; he has written for fanzines such as *Slaughter House*, and makes his screenwriting debut with this movie.

Stephen Machet was cast in the villainous role of Warwick, the mill's foreman and the motivation behind the tale. Stephen has appeared in such films as *Supercops*, *Nightwing*, *Galaxina* and *The Monster Squad*. For three years he has played good guy David Keeler in *Cagney & Lacey*, and felt that playing Warwick was an opportunity to exercise his talents to the full. He describes Warwick as 'a very hard, tough man, someone consumed with power'.

This human devil and his work crew must inevitably confront the creature that resides in the mill's basement. Ralph sees this monster as 'the next generation in the development of movie magic'. Called in to design this figment of King's hellish imagination is Gordon Smith, whose professional skill as a makeup effects artist can be seen in *Born On The Fourth*



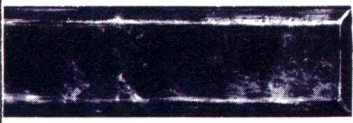


**Graveyard Shift:
Brad Dourif
as Vietnam vet and
ratcatcher**

leaned over and said: 'Wait until you see what they do to your script'. That was pretty much the size of it. He said that it would be a great education and a good opportunity, and it was. A few weeks ago, I interviewed

Brad Dourif who also stars in this film. I was surprised when he began to talk about how fed-up he was with all the marketing, and all the people with their fingers in the pie. It sounds like you've experienced it first hand. When you sit down to write your next script, what will you do in order to preserve your vision?

Try to get more control, I guess. As time goes on, you are in a better position to produce or direct. The flipside of that is you could totally bomb-out. I



could be the worst director in the world. I could have gone in and tried my hand at *Graveyard Shift* and really screwed it up. It's very easy for me to look from below the typewriter and pontificate — everything looks good on paper and sounds good in your head.

Some of the time you know why it works, or doesn't work, on paper. It's just my opinion, but you can watch it on the screen and know why it's not working and that's the worst thing in the world. On the same note, someone with Brad Dourif's talent can come in and improve the material. That's the balance, to see an actor come in and just say those words. You say to yourself, 'Whoa, this is why you do it!' You hope to go see it and laugh, scream a little bit and have fun. You hope people are going to shell out seven bucks to see the film, have some fun with it and not come looking for you.

Of July, Sea Of Love, Platoon and Near Dark. Utilising a recently developed translucent 'ski', Gordon has created a human-powered, as opposed to mechanical or animated, creature. The end result is so graphic that it can be shot up close. Some of the crew comment that it was perhaps too close for comfort.

Also lending a helping hand is the bizarre rat exterminator Tucker Cleveland, played by Brad Dourif, star of *The Exorcist 3*, *Grim Prairie Tales* and the voice of Chucky in *Child's Play 1 and 2*. Brad was excited about the chance to act in a Stephen King film, but says: 'My character is not scary. I'm the guy with the information. I'm playing a rat exterminator, from the Vietnam war, where I learned about vermin. I have a big scene in it, with a long monologue — and I die. It should be fun.'

Location manager Laurie Whitman's job was to find the perfect location to serve as *The Bauchman Textile Mill*. She found the ideal site in the Bartlettyarn Mill in Harmony, Maine, just outside Bangor. The mill was a creaky wood and tin building which, with a little help from the set designers, would look as it did had it been operating a hundred years earlier. In actuality, Bartlettyarn Mill is the only mill in America still using the old-fashioned 'picker' machine to comb and separate bales of wool. The crew found a larger version of the picker, called the 'Fearnot', in Canada and moved it to a sound stage in Maine where some scenes were filmed.

Other locations around

King's home were used, including the abandoned Bangor Waterworks, a barn in Brewer (said to be one of the oldest in the state), an archaic diner and an operational rock quarry.

As another busy King year emerges, including the publication of *The Dark Half*, *Four Past Midnight* and the movie release of *Misery* at the end of November and the mini-series *It* at the end of October, it's kind of

interesting to note that some of the scenes for *Graveyard Shift* were shot in the city of Hermon, Maine, where King wrote the story while living in a trailer and teaching high school at \$6,400 a year. J B Macabre

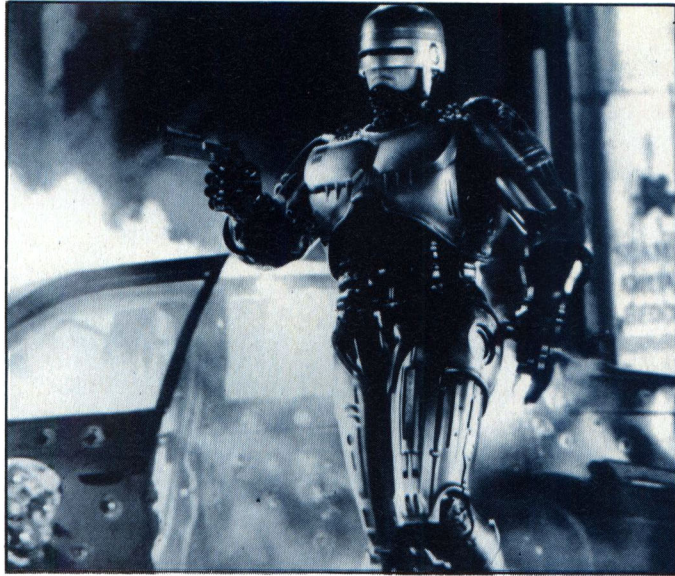
The cast of *It*, an ABC mini-series based on King's novel and, below, James Caan stars in the movie version of King's *Misery*



SNIP! SNIP!

- Bolero's **Bo Derek** dons fangs and, perhaps, doffs clothes in her new vampire movie.
- Penguin will print four of the original **Mutant Ninja Turtle** books at the end of November, priced at £6.99 and written by hardshell creators **Kevin Eastman** and **Peter Laird**. Original copies of these comics are fetching upward of £200 on the dealer market.
- **Robert Englund** has just wrapped shooting of **A Nightmare On Elm Street 6**. It has a 3D ending, forcing the series' remaining fans to put on those special specs for the finale. What a gimmick that will be, but the gimmick has been tried before... in hopeless flops. Meanwhile, **A Nightmare On Elm Street 5: The Dream Master** will be available on rental video from November 22.
- Look out for the new **Anne Rice** hardcover, **The Witching Hour**, due out from Chatto and Windus in March 1991. On the film front, **Interview With A Vampire** and **The Vampire Lestat** are due to be shot back to back next year. Let's hope the results do not reflect the **Back To The Future** series.
- The demise of **Parkfield Entertainment** has released **Tales From The Darkside**, from Laurel Entertainment, back onto the British market. Contenders for this long overdue anthology movie, featured in **FEAR** issue 19, are reported to include **Medusa** and **Guild**.
- **Christopher Fowler's** SF novel, **Roofworld** has been bought by Paramount Pictures. Filming is due to start in February 1991.
- Fantasy joker **Terry Pratchett's** next three books are worth £300,000 to him, while **David Gemmell** is set to gain £220,000 for his next three.
- New fantasy titles to be published by Corgi early next year include **The Door Into Fire** by Diane Duane, **Grass** by Sheri S Tepper and **Pegasus In Flight** by Anne McCaffrey.

THE WORLD OF FEAR

ROBO 3
SET TO GO

John Glenday gets to grips with the latest transatlantic movie gossip...

A few months ago I reported on the casting of David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*, based upon William Burroughs' seminal drug culture novel of the Sixties. Since then, there have been cast revisions and Peter (*RoboCop*) Weller now headlines. Australian actress Judi Davis will be lending credible support to a storyline that is based around a rat exterminator who becomes involved with drug dealers.

Stuart Gordon, the stepfather of Herbert West, is expected to resume his directing career after a long absence. After unleashing a new wave of H P Lovecraft films and being one of the instigators of *Honey, I Shrank The Kids* (originally called *The Teeny Weenies*), Gordon suffered from ill health. He can now resume his mould-breaking career with *The Pit And The Pendulum*. The film was touted some time ago with Peter O'Toole in the lead, but never came to fruition. Latest news is that Lance Henriksen (*Aliens*, *House 3*) will step in to fill the lead. Charles Band produces.

Another update, this time on *The Addams Family*. Cher and Kevin Kline were originally cast as the leads, but now Anjelica Huston (*The Witches*) will play Morticia, with Raul Julia portraying Gomez.

There will definitely be a *RoboCop 3*, possibly in 1991. Orion Pictures is set to tone down the violence to widen the market and capture the existing young fans of the metal man who watch the cartoon series and play with the toys. To achieve this feat they have

employed *The Monster Squad* man Fred Dekker. Dekker created a PG13 horror film with *The Squad* and has kept his hand in recently by directing segments for *Tales From The Crypt*, but has not yet found the right project with which to hit the big time.

PETER PANNED

Peter Pan looks set for a resurgence in the early Nineties, with Steven Spielberg rekindling his interest after several years. Rumoured to be on his horizon is an updated version called, simply, *Hook*. This version will feature an adult Peter Pan (Robin Williams) facing his chief nemesis, Captain Hook of the title, portrayed by Dustin Hoffman. A second Pan project in the works is a sequel to the Disney original. It may be live action and the two movies may have links, possibly Hoffman as Hook in both films?

For all Trekkies out there, there will be a number six to tie-in with the twenty-fifth anniversary. No story details yet, but when James Doohan (Scotty) made an appearance at Forbidden Planet to promote number five he did say that everyone had signed up for this one, which is possibly the last.

Disney project *Princess Of Mars* may see the light of day after various trials and tribulations. *Red October/Die Hard* director John McTiernan has been linked with the project, putting those dreadful Robin Hood rumours to rest.

Let's fade out with a few snippets. *Alien 3* has been put back to February because somebody doesn't like the script... *Bill And Ted Go To Hell* will be directed by Peter Hewitt... George Romero is set to direct *Beetlejuice Goes Hawaiian*... And, finally, bad news for Sam Raimi fans... It is likely that *Darkman* will be cut for its UK showing to give it a 15 certificate.

BRIGHT
EYES,
DARK
DREAMS

They sit in dark silence, watching bright images flicker on a glowing screen. Before them rise passion, anger, adventure, avarice and naked evil. The film companies court their favour with wine and canapés while the public relations companies send them plastic freebies. They are the film critics, whose bread and butter is earned by prospecting with celluloid, and they are the ones who are criticised when readers and filmmakers disagree with their comments.

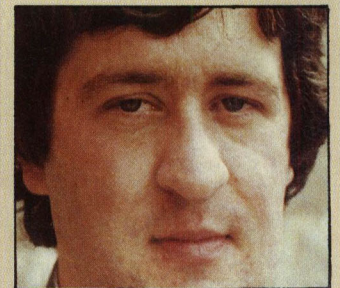
Is it fair to criticise those critics when, by definition, their job relies on personal insight rather than any structured system of thought? Critics and reviewers are influenced and aided, to varying degrees, by three filmic factors. Firstly, knowledge of other similar films or related books can be important when making an assessment. Socialisation also plays an important part in a critic's make-up; just as it is useless to defend newspapers against political bias, so you cannot deny that critics are affected by their environs, family, and the type of entertainment with which they grew up. This type of socialisation could well explain why a critic does not like kitchen-sink dramas or movies in which deprivation plays a part.

Finally, Hype! is running riot as more money is being pushed into the promotion of so-called blockbusters. I have noticed a slackening of values with regard to megabudget movies — and I admit I'm falling in with the crowd, somewhat. During the past year we've seen Sly Stallone accorded the title of *Moviemaking Genius*, while dozens of other moneymaking stars, such as Cruise and Willis, both suits-and-teeth actors in my view, are treated with the same accord.

No wonder readers often ask where objectivity has gone; after all, they are the punters, the viewers who determine success and failure. But in this age of

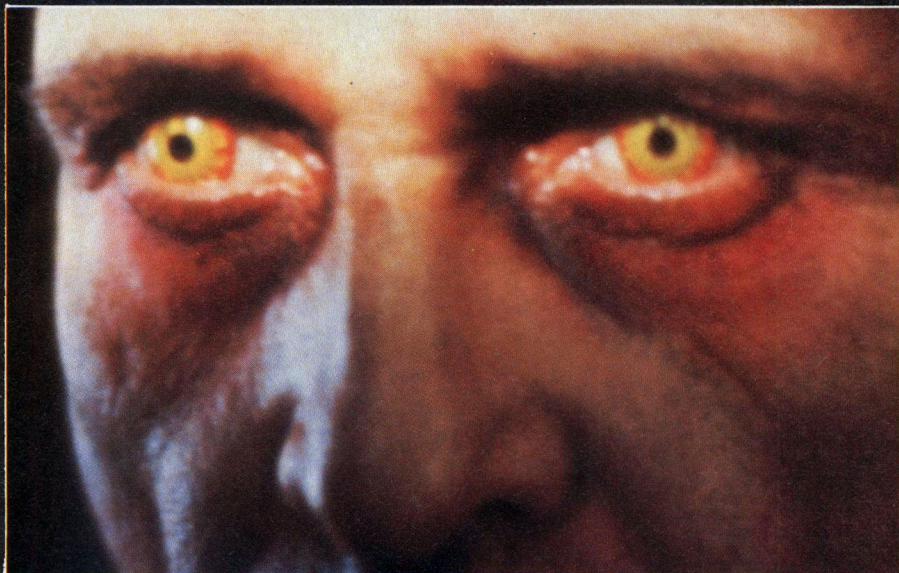
hype, where a director's name on the cover can sell magazines, a far more sinister element is encroaching on critics' corner. Public relations is a tough business, and when you've got a large film company looking at what you're doing for their latest product, it's not surprising that the niceties of magazine etiquette, in which advertising and editorial departments are totally separate, are ignored. The primary sting goes like this: if you give us good coverage, we may just pay for an advertisement. You obviously can't force a critic to raise their 'this is a turd' opinion, but I have known at least one big-time editor to drop a review or toss a video into the bin because it might be treated harshly.

All this goes to prove that being a critic can be a politically sensitive, and often unattractive, task. You get dumped on from all sides; from companies, readers and, sometimes, from your own peers. It does, however, have its rewards as long as you remain true: and you can tell whether critics are being honest, from the bottom of their hearts. I hope that the new generation of critics, who are growing up with the plethora of genre mags, are as worthy as those who are now big names in the business. It would be a pity to see them corrupted by the pressures of commercialism, and I hope you won't be seeing that sort of behaviour in this publication.



John Glenday

**Haunted by demons?
Jinxed by evil spirits?
Responsible for suicides,
murders and madness?
Seventeen years after the
first shocking appearance
of *The Exorcist* — and on
the eve of the release of
both *Exorcist 3* and
Repossessed — Mark
Kermode sifts through the
rumours, innuendos and
porky-pies surrounding
this milestone in horror
cinema and asks: 'Who's
still afraid of *The
Exorcist*?'**



DEVILISH DECEPTIONS

What must be the reputation of the film?' asked William Peter Blatty in *FEAR* a few months ago, recounting how an associate refused to allow his cobra to be used in *The Exorcist 3* because he felt it would become jinxed. What indeed? Yet glancing back to 1973, when Blatty and Friedkin's groundbreaking collaboration first heralded in a new era of horror, the rumours of the 'jinx' which haunted *The Exorcist* can be recognised as a crucial element in the promotion of the movie — a promotion which resulted in a staggering \$66.3 million taken at the box office in the film's initial release period, making it the most successful movie of all time.

Perhaps more than any horror film, *The Exorcist* generated rumours of unholy goings on. 'It was as if some evil force was haunting the film,' Blatty told journalists in December 1973, on the eve of the film's release, adding ominously: 'It is impossible to put all these things down to coincidence — if anyone wanted proof that evil forces do exist, I think the strange and inexplicable events that occurred during the filming of *The Exorcist* would be enough to convince them.'

The most widely reported 'strange and inexplicable event' was clearly the death of Jack MacGowran, who passed away two weeks after completing his scenes as Burke Dennings. Other fatalities obliquely attributed to the movie included those of Max Von Sydow's brother (who died in Sweden) and Linda Blair's grandfather. To add to this litany of casualties, Jason Miller's son Jordan was struck by a speeding motorbike during a

beach visit, putting him (briefly) in intensive care, a gaffer cut off his own fingers (or toes, depending on your source) on set, and Ellen Burstyn ricked her back. More bizarre still, it was widely reported that Blatty's secretary, Noni, had been mysteriously taken ill, whilst her room-mate had gone insane and been carted off to an asylum in a straight-jacket. Oh yes, and the set of the MacNeil house constructed at the Ceco 54th Street studios burned down... on a Sunday, no less. 'There were in fact some *thirteen* episodes during the making of the movie that seemed like diabolical interventions,' wrote unit publicist Howard Newman in his splendidly hokum paperback, *The Exorcist: The Strange Story Behind The Film*. 'Coincidence or not, numerologists will enjoy speculating on that...'

POSSESSED ON SET

Most of the events cited above would have simply been put down to bad luck but for the press' reporting of the 'jinx' theory. Talking repeatedly of the 'amazing double images'

which showed up on the shots of Linda Blair, director and shrewd publicist William Friedkin also embarked upon what amounted to a campaign of disinformation regarding the movie's special effects, causing one critic to comment that Friedkin would only be happy if everyone thought that poor old Linda Blair had *actually* become possessed on set. 'There are strange images and visions that showed up on the film that were never planned,' Friedkin told journalist Benjamin Fort in late 1973. 'There are double exposures in the little girl's face at the end of one reel that are *unbelievable!*'

More unbelievable, however, were Friedkin's increasingly bizarre claims about how the special effects were done, most significantly his repeated assertion that the levitation scene 'was achieved by the use of magnetic fields'; Ms Blair is in fact hanging from a harness suspended by piano wires, which are clearly visible even on a video print. Friedkin also attempted initially to convince journalists that the demonic voice provided by Mercedes McCambridge was actually the

voice of Linda Blair, an endeavour in which he was thwarted by Ms McCambridge's demand for a screen credit. 'It's not true that some of [Blair's] words were blended with mine on the final track,' McCambridge told the *New York Times* early in 1974. 'All of the devilish vocality is mine — all of it. Every word!' After threats of legal action, Friedkin was forced to acknowledge McCambridge's work, and she received a credit (although not as the demon's voice) on all but the first thirty prints of *The Exorcist*.

Other 'areas of uncertainty' included the 'intensive psychological testing' through which the director claims he put Ms Blair, but of which Linda's Blair's mother has no recollection. This was to be particularly significant later on when the newspapers became flooded with stories that Linda Blair had been driven insane by her performance, despite the numerous public appearances made by the clearly healthy young actress. 'It did not bother me very much to do the film, and I was not

disturbed in any way,' a feisty Linda told *The Guardian* in March 1974. 'People felt I would have problems after doing it, but I have never had any.' Friedkin also attempted, for a number of conflicting reasons, to convince the press that Blair was used for every scene in the film, including the notorious crucifix masturbation scene. 'She did everything in the picture, she had no double, no stand in. It's all her,' he claimed. In fact, a stand-in named Eileen Dietz was used for a number of brief shots including the projectile vomiting effect, a scene of Regan struggling with her mother, and most significantly the controversial shot of Regan's hand driving the crucifix beneath her nightgown.

HEART ATTACKS

Released on Boxing Day 1973, *The Exorcist* generated a wave of audience hysteria the likes of which had not been seen since the opening of the 1931 *Frankenstein*, from which patrons ran screaming, causing cinema man-

agers to lay on smelling salts and ambulance crews for the adversely affected. Within weeks of the first public screening of *The Exorcist*, reports were flowing in of fainting, vomiting, heart attacks, and at least one miscarriage. In Berkeley, a male patron received injuries when he threw himself at the screen to 'get the demon'. Later, the *Toronto Medical Post* reported that four women had been confined to psychiatric care after seeing the film. 'There is no way you can sit through that film without receiving some lasting negative or disturbing effects,' announced Chicago psychiatrist Dr Louis Schlan, whilst Oakbrook theatre manager Frank Kveton was somewhat more down-to-earth in his assessment: 'My janitors are going crazy wiping up the vomit!' he opined ruefully.

More seriously, European press reports in the months following the movie's worldwide release concentrated upon a number of cases of criminal and suicidal behaviour for which *The Exorcist* was squarely blamed. In West

EXO

Mark Kermode talks to Linda Blair about the making of *Repossessed*, her new comedy/spoof of *The Exorcist*...

One person for whom the bizarre rumours and extraordinary response which greeted *The Exorcist* has had particular significance is Linda Blair, a level-headed young woman (she's 31 now) who emerged from all the fuss with an Oscar nomination and a Golden Globe Award. Ask anyone with whom Linda has worked, from jazz singer Annie Ross to director Wes Craven, and they'll tell you the same thing: 'Linda is a really nice, hardworking, professional actress... and she's been given a really rough ride by the press'. Yet Linda remains philosophical about the press-fuelled hysteria, demonstrating a coolly detached (and eminently sane) perspective: 'The press really wanted me to be mixed up,' she says resignedly. 'Also with the audience — if you choose to see a scary film, or if you want to see comedy, or drama, whatever it is, you choose 'this is what I want to experience right now'. Maybe with *The Exorcist* they want to believe those weird rumours because it helps the whole process. They want to believe that weird things happened because they want to hang onto that. Yes, Jack MacGowran died... he was working on another film at the time. Personally, I do not want to bring bad and evil and things into my own life, because there's enough dramatic things that happen in the world.'

Supernatural myths aside, the extraordinary success of *The Exorcist* also brought with it a certain burden for the aspiring young actress whom the public seemed intent to typecast as 'that possessed child'



Cool detachment: Linda Blair in *Hell Night*

'The newspapers became flooded with stories that Linda Blair had been driven insane by her performance, despite numerous public appearances made by the clearly healthy young actress'

Germany, the death of 19 year old Rainer Hertrampf, who shot himself with an automatic rifle some time after seeing *The Exorcist*, led to calls for the film to be banned. In England, a much publicised inquest concerning the death of 16 year old John Power, who had seen *The Exorcist* the day before he died, revealed that the teenager had suffered a totally unrelated epileptic attack, but public fears of the film's harmful potential were aroused nonetheless. In October 1974, *The Exorcist* was cited as responsible for the murder of nine year old Sandra Simpson by teenager Nicholas Bell who told a York crown court: 'It was not really me that did it. There

was something inside me. It is ever since I saw that film *The Exorcist*. I felt something take possession of me. It has been in me ever since.'

Adding to the fervent zeal with which some condemned *The Exorcist* was the increasing worry voiced in certain quarters that both the English and American censors had been too lenient with the movie. The American ratings board, the MPAA, rated *The Exorcist* 'R', which allowed children to view the film with parental approval. MPAA President Jack Valenti stressed that the picture contained 'no overt sex' and 'no excessive violence', but community pressure in Washington and Boston

REPOSESSED!

for the rest of her working life. Attempting from an early stage to break into comedy, Blair met resistance from producers and public alike who saw her as a purveyor of 'controversial drama'. So has *The Exorcist* become something of an albatross over the years: 'It's like growing used to your left hand, it's just there — I could do any number of movies and win ten Academy awards and people would still ask me about *The Exorcist* because it just shocked the world. But that's OK — people want to know, and I try and answer their questions because I realise that it's still an interesting subject to people. Maybe some other people would just refuse to talk about it, but I think it's kind of unfair to have a snuffy attitude when the audience is what gives us our career.'

FREE SPIRIT

Now, however, Blair has turned the public-opinion typecasting to her advantage with *Repossessed*, an unabashedly low brow *Exorcist* spoof in which she adds a comic twist to her most famous role. It's a brave move and Blair, ever the realist, realised from the outset the dangerous potential of the project backfiring. How did she finally put her fears behind her? 'Bob Logan came to me several months after doing *Up Your Alley* [a successful low budget comedy, available here on Colourbox Video] and said: 'I've got a great idea for a comedy spoof of *The Exorcist*.' And I said: 'Don't even touch it.' I had worked too hard to get away from it. But he said: 'I'm gonna write it anyway.' So then he showed me a treatment and I still told him no, because people, friends of mine, have been asking me to do it for years and I'd turned all of them down. But he wrote the script anyway, and said: 'What would it take for you to do it?' And I said: 'Leslie Nielsen.' So then they came round saying they got Leslie, and I agreed.'

The production of *Repossessed* was not trouble free, involving extensive re-editing after a young audience demonstrated that not everybody was au fait with *The Exorcist*. Concerned that it might become an 'in joke'

movie, Logan shot additional footage loaded with shamelessly teen-orientated sight gags, and the hotch-potch result has since met with a surprisingly favourable review in *Variety*. Although the jury is still out on the public reaction front, perhaps Blair will now be able to pursue her chosen medium, and throw off the mantle of movies such as *Chained Heat*. 'I HATE that movie!' she says unequivocally. 'It's just destroyed me. If I could take it away, I would.'

Horror fans will be pleased to learn, however, that Linda has not renounced her frightful heritage and is still proud of her work in films such as Wes Craven's *Summer*

'I could do any number of movies and win ten Academy awards, and people would still ask me about *The Exorcist*, because it just shocked the world'

Of Fear, Chuck Vincent's terrifically twisted *Bad Blood*, and of course Tom de Simone's *Hell Night*: 'I like that movie, although I don't like my weight: I was heavier then and most people in America like to knock me for how heavy I became at a certain point. Anyway, hey, life goes on. But they were interested in doing a sequel, and I came up with a great idea which was kind of like a psychological thriller, like a *Dressed To Kill*. Marti becomes a psychiatrist, and she sees this guy who got killed in the movie, she sees his twin brother. And it's about what the trauma of that makes her do. It's funny,' laughs Blair, typically self-effacing, 'because I had a lot of people come to me in the last year or so and say: '*Hell Night* is a cult film.' It's news to me...'

Fears 'follow Exorcist film'

By DAVID WOODHEAD
CHURCHMEN and social workers are dealing with cases of mental disturbance in people who have seen the film "The Exorcist" which opened...

vice-chairman of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychological and Spiritual Studies. About 50 others...

Blame 'Exorcist' In W. German Suicide; Dutch Auds 'Bored'

Kaiserslautern, Oct. 29. In addition to a variety of other charges levelled at it, Warner's "Exorcist" is now...

Inquest ordered on 'Exorcist' boy

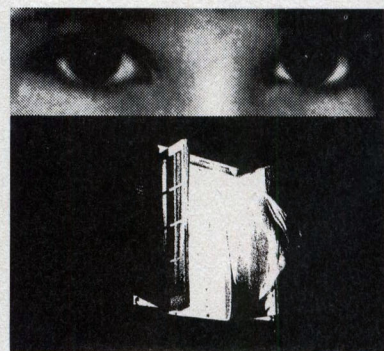
By our own Reporter
An inquest has been ordered to be held on a 16-year-old boy who died the day after seeing the film "The Exorcist". The boy, John Power, took his 15-year-old friend...

Gala night 'No' to meeting with the Queen Mother

By Victor Davis
THE YOUNG actress star of the film "The Exorcist" has been barred from meeting the Queen Mother at the Royal Film Performance...

WILLIAM PETER BLATTY'S THE EXORCIST

Directed by WILLIAM FRIEDKIN



ELLEN BURSTYN - MAX VON SYDOW - LEE J. COBB
KITTY WINN - JACK McGOWRAN - JASON MILLER
LINDA BLAIR
Executive Producer: NOEL MARSHALL - Screenplay: WILLIAM PETER BLATTY
Produced by WILLIAM PETER BLATTY
Directed by WILLIAM FRIEDKIN

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The Exorcist 3: George C Scott revives Lt Kinderman for the William Peter Blatty directed sequel

forced the DA's office to overturn the 'R' rating and slap a 17 age restriction on the movie. In Britain, *The Exorcist* was passed uncut for an 'X' certificate (the equivalent of the modern '18' rating), but found itself under attack from the Christian lobby. The Festival of Light, who picketed performances of the film, handing out leaflets to potential viewers warning them of the 'dangers of opening themselves up to the forces of darkness.' Claiming (without evidence) that two people had already died as a result of watching *The Exorcist*, Festival Chairman Peter Thompson demanded that the Home Secretary Roy Jenkins conduct a public inquiry into the regulation of admission to 'X' films. In a wave of media-promoted hysteria worryingly similar to the current panic surrounding 'horror videos', *The Exorcist* was promptly blamed for all manner of social ills ranging from a series of sexual assaults to the theft of a jacket and trousers by a woman who hadn't actually seen the movie, but whose eighteen year old daughter had become disturbed after a view-

ing. Ironically, on February 24, 1975, the Government censorship board of Tunis banned the movie outright on the grounds that it presented 'unjustified' propaganda in favour of Christianity!

SUBLIMINAL CUTS

Recently, *The Exorcist* has run into problems under the Video Recordings Act and is currently deemed illegal on video in England. 'The problem with video is that you can't really control the age at all,' explains BBFC director James Ferman. 'There are so many well-documented cases of teenagers having hysteria from seeing *The Exorcist*. It's a scary story for an age-group of maximum superstition, and we've been very cautious about it.'

One oft cited explanation for the traumatising power of *The Exorcist* is the use of subliminal visual and aural stimulants, to which Friedkin candidly admitted in 1973, citing director Alain Resnais' documentary *Night And Fog* as his inspiration. 'The subliminal cut is the most important discovery the motion picture has made since the close-up,' said Friedkin. 'It is the most provocative and useful tool that a filmmaker has today as a storytelling device because it really expresses the way we all think in cinematic terms. The way when we're walking down the street or

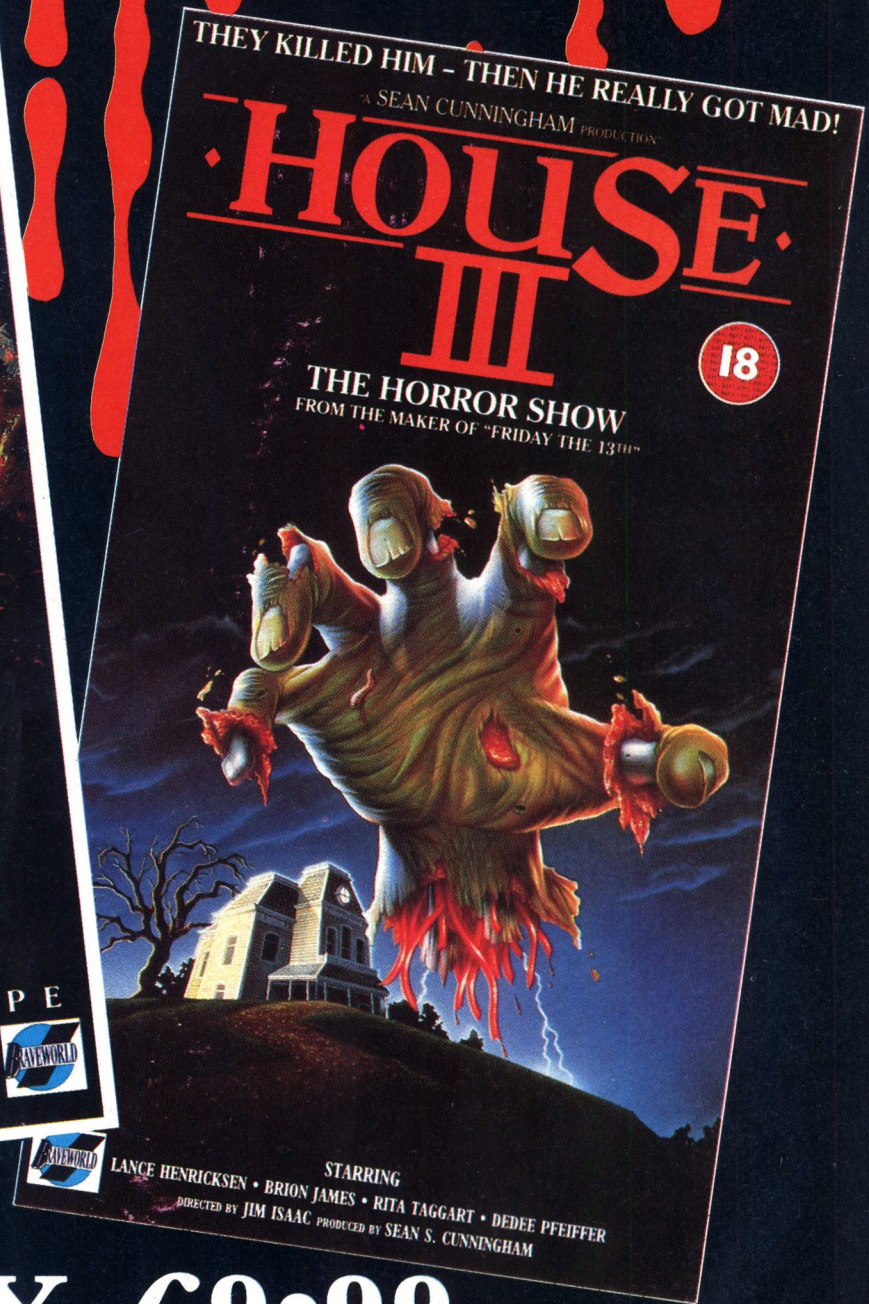
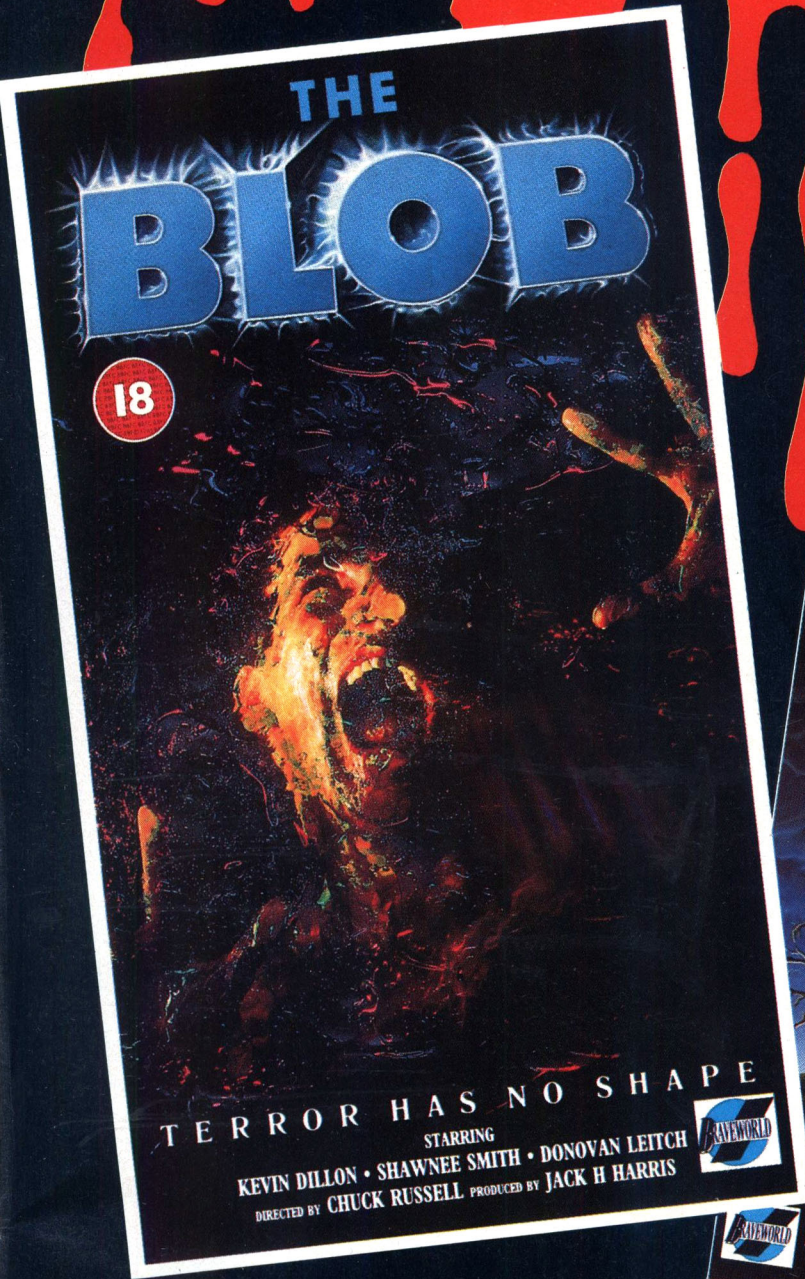
talking to each other and while you're looking at me, or I at you, we're flashing on something else constantly. The way the mind reaches into God knows where for a picture out of our subconscious.' There are indeed two significant 'subliminals' in *The Exorcist* whose presence is easily identifiable — firstly, during Karras' dream of his mother, the screen is filled for two frames with a white-painted image of Jason Miller's leering face, appearing as a death mask; and during the exorcism itself, Linda Blair's tossing head is replaced momentarily with Miller's similarly deathly visage.

Yet jumping the apocryphal-rumour-bandwagon, some writers have claimed that *The Exorcist* is littered with such 'tacischoptic displays', most notably Wilson Bryan Key who, in his influential work *Media Sexploitation: The Hidden Implants Of America's Mass Media* makes a number of startling accusations against Friedkin's movie, asserting that 'for a small minority *The Exorcist* could be threatening or even dangerous.' Amongst Key's charges of sneaky subconscious foul-play is the claim that, during a scene in which Merrin sits by Regan's bed 'his breath condensed [and] a ghostly face appeared momentarily in the cloud. The face, apparently drawn on several frames, was also consciously invisible to the audience.' Furthermore, Key insists that 'while Father Karras prays in church, a skull-shaped shadow appears on the white wall behind him.' Close examination of a video print of *The Exorcist* fails to support these outlandish claims, however, along with Key's assertion that the death mask of Karras flashes up 'many times' during the film. One possible explanation for these discrepancies is a theory which has since passed into modern mythology which states that Warners actually withdrew and recut *The Exorcist* after its initial release, removing the subliminals for fear of legal recriminations. A more likely explanation is simply that they were never there in the first place.

If Key's claims of sneaky visual stimuli were 'exaggerated', there is no doubt that in one area at least, *The Exorcist* is indeed a Pandora's box of weird and unsettling delights — the soundtrack. Talking to Cindy Ehrlich in 1973, soundman Ron Nagle revealed that amongst the noises incorporated on the movie's soundtrack were fighting dogs, squealing pigs on their way to the slaughter, and an angry bee trapped in a jar; all of these sounds were treated and varisped to produce rumbles and undertones which appear throughout the exorcism scenes. Nagle also claimed that he had pounded his girlfriend's back and recorded her groans, and had her swallow pulpy raw egg whites and taped her convulsing. However, since Mercedes McCambridge has subsequently announced that, during her work on *The Exorcist*, she swallowed eighteen raw eggs and a pulpy apple, and was tied to a chair with bed-sheets, Nagle's claim about his mistreatment of his 'girlfriend' may well be yet another in the bizarre catalogue of half truths, misleading rumours, and devilish deceptions which surrounded the first release of this most extraordinary horror movie, and which still haunt *The Exorcist* today.

The Exorcist 3 opens in London on 23 November; Repossessed launches nationwide on 30 November.

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EYE OF THE GI



The triumph of the late Seventies SF/horror blockbuster *Alien* owed virtually everything to one man: the Swiss artist, H R Giger. As he embarks upon the blueprint for *Alien* number three, Juhani Nurmi and Peter Briggs meet the designer whose wild imagination gave birth to the ultimate bogeyman.

GIGER

H.R. GIGER 70
A. JODOROWSKY'S
DUNE

'Nothing the God of Biomechanics wouldn't let you into Heaven for...'

Rutger Hauer in Blade Runner, 1982

There is a God of Biomechanics: his name is Hans Rudi Giger. Born on February 5, 1940 in Chur, a small habitation nestled in a valley surrounded by the snow-capped Alps, Giger describes his home town as 'an unbearable dump for someone like me'. His father owned a pharmacy, and nurtured a hope that one day his son would run it; but unfortunately young Hans' marks in Latin dashed that hope. Indeed, Giger claims that academically he was a poor student.

When Giger was about five years of age his town played host to American soldiers, who introduced the locals to the fruits of Uncle Sam's inventiveness — chewing-gum and *Life* magazine. It was the latter which, by running a photospread from Jean Cocteau's *Beauty And The Beast*, had a formative effect on Giger's already rampant imagination: a 'secret window' in his home yielded a view of the space between two houses, and this was transformed in the young artist's mind's eye into a gaping ancient shaft.

After serving time in the military, with a stint as a draughtsman at the Meissen architectural company, Giger went to the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts in 1962 to study interior and industrial design. Around this time, he began to suffer terrible recurring nightmares and discovered that, by writing them down upon awakening and then reconstructing them as illustrations, these bad dreams became tolerable.

In 1966, he left the art school and joined Andreas Christens as a designer. For several years his illustrations were conceived using primitive means, but in 1972 he discovered the airbrush after discarding oils as too time-consuming.

It was while visiting Salvador Dali at his home in Spain that Giger first encountered maverick filmmaker Alexander Jodorowsky, who was trying to persuade Dali to appear in his production of Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Subsequently, Giger was introduced to Dan O'Bannon who had just completed the SF movie *Dark Star* with John Carpenter. Giger's work imprinted itself on O'Bannon's mind and, in August 1977, with an idea for screenplay entitled *Star Beast*, O'Bannon called the artist at his home in Zurich in an attempt to secure his services. *Star Beast* eventually became *Alien* and Giger not only provided his conceptual abilities but also sculpted his own creations. The produc-

tion profited immensely from his presence. David Giler, one of the coproducers admitted that: 'we received an extra \$2.5 million from Twentieth Century Fox on the basis of his storyboard ideas alone. That's how important he was to the project.' Giger reaped his reward in his new found fame and the Oscar he won in recognition of his work.

However, subsequent projects were not so rewarding. His work on Brian Gibson's proposed sci-fi shocker, *The Tourist* (some 70 sketches and 11 paintings) came to nothing when that project was aborted. The designs he provided for Gibson's *Poltergeist 2* were altered beyond recognition, something he still recalls with bitterness. Recently, Giger has ventured into more arcane territory. He has designed a drinking bar in Japan, but is less than happy with the finished construction. However, this has not deterred him and he is currently planning a sister bar in New York's Third Avenue which he promises will eclipse the original in every respect. He has also signed on for *Alien 3*.

We visited Giger in his two-storey house in Zurich, roaming through its biomechanically-adorned halls as we talked. A man with a sly sense of humour, he lists among his influences Edgar Allan Poe, Miles Davies, John Coltrane, Frank Zappa, Elvis Presley and, principally, Hieronymous Bosch.

FEAR: You've often expressed disappointment at the way filmmakers have treated your concepts and illustrations, saying that the final result does not always turn out the way you hoped.

GIGER: I think it's happened to everybody who has worked with film, because to do a film is to work with a lot of people. You can't do everything yourself. If you have good people who can work within the way you think, then it's okay; but if you have people who are not so good, or if they think completely differently to you, then it's terrible. You can be kind of...forced to do something you don't want to simply because the writer is also the producer, or something like that, and that's very bad. You've used other sculptors to help realise your work in three dimensions: Peter Voysey on *Alien* and Cornelius de Vries for your furniture designs here in Switzerland. When you start on *Alien 3*, do you think that you will want to have the same team with whom you originally worked?

I don't know. Most of the good people are not available and so I have to look at what's around. I like working with Cornelius de Vries. I don't know if he's as quick as the film business demands, because there it's terrible — you have to go like crazy. It's always time. Cornelius and I, we've worked together for a long time and done several things. He could learn a lot, but I don't know if he's able to work under those conditions or that type of pressure.

Alien 3 is, naturally, still quite secret, and has been ongoing for several years with directors like Renny Harlin and Ridley Scott and writers such as William Gibson and Eric Red. You weren't invited to work on James Cameron's *Aliens*. What's got you excited about doing this third part?

I don't like to talk about these things because sometimes I talk too much, and then it doesn't work out. I think that's what hap-

20 December 1990 FEAR



'Bones have very nice forms, especially if they are twisted a little bit. Bones in combination with metallics, with tubes. It's like a cathedral. Like Gaudi'

pened with me when I worked with Ridley Scott on this 'train'. After five months, he finally said that he wouldn't be doing it, and so I was waiting the whole time for nothing and I was not paid. You know, I like Ridley Scott's work very much, and so I'm probably — it sounds stupid — a great admirer [laughs], otherwise I wouldn't have waited so long.

Did you like *Blade Runner*?

Yes, I think it's one of his best films.

This 'train' was some sort of tube station on Earth, wasn't it?

I did some designs when I heard about Renny Harlin, but I wasn't told any of the story. I thought that the head of the Alien, that long head, could be like a train. Like the metro! I did some designs of this 'metro-as-an-Alien',

and sent them to Twentieth Century Fox, but I never heard what they said about them.

Do you have an Alien here?

Yes. A real one! A Rambaldi — mechanical.

The original design had worms inside its transparent head-cowling...

We tried to get it to work, but it was too hot and the worms kept falling asleep!

Was Bolaji Badejo, the actor who played the Alien, easy to work with?

He was a very gentle man, and he had all the weight of this costume on him! It took so long to put him in the suit, it must have been really boring for him.

I think it was a good decision not to show the Alien too much, because in 1978, when we were making the film, the special effects in England were not too good. The tail couldn't

move properly! The head Rambaldi did was good, but the other things weren't. The whole thing was supposed to be translucent, but that didn't work. Now, of course, things are much more advanced.

LYNCHED

You've said before that David Lynch's *Eraserhead* is one of your favourite films, and that you'd like to work with him. A lot of your rusty, steamy machinery is reminiscent of his work.

Yes, that's true. People have asked him about me, but he isn't really enthusiastic about my work. I've been told that he thinks we stole his *Eraserhead* baby for the *Alien* chest-burster, but that's not true. I told Ridley Scott that he should see this film, though he never did. David Lynch said that it was filmed exactly as his was, but it couldn't have been because Ridley hadn't seen it! Lynch talked like it was some sort of homage to his work. I don't know why he's like that. Probably jealousy — I don't know. I worked on *Dune*, and then finally he got it. He doesn't seem to want to be friendly to me, and I don't know why. It's stupid.

Many people found *Dune* boring. Did you?

No. I think there were good elements in it. The Harkonnen Baron was wonderful! There are some strong things in it, and it must be so difficult to do such a film. It's probably wrong to stick to the books.

What of his other films?

I like *Blue Velvet*. *The Elephant Man*, for instance, is perfect. Perfect! I like what he's doing. He's very, very good. We have very similar views [laughs]. Maybe that's not so good!

In the issue of *Cinefantastique* magazine devoted to you, it revealed that director Bill Malone was to make a picture called *The Mirror*, based on your *Necronomicon* works. Not much has been heard since. What happened?

I don't know! I haven't heard anything either. Maybe there's no money. Not long ago I got a letter from Malone saying that he was doing something and he wanted a monster from me, but he didn't mention *The Mirror*. I don't know whether it's dead or not. We're so out of contact from the centre of film here in Zurich, we have no film culture or industry.

COMICAL APPROACH

What sort of movies do you watch for entertainment?

I like a horror film that's fun! I have a project called *The Mystery Of Sango Tardo*, in which some alien creatures come and make the people here very nervous.

Would you like this to be a Swiss production?

It could be set in Switzerland, but the effects would have to be done in London or the States or somewhere, and would have to be the best. It would have to be a big film, and very well made. It *could* be made as a straight horror film, although I would have to change it a little bit, but I'd prefer a comical approach. I like to be amused! *Sango Tardo* means 'Saint Godness...the Holy Gods...the Mountains of the Holy Gods'. At the same time, it's about genetic engineering, so there will be my Biomechanoids who are a little better than human beings!

Have you discussed this with Ridley Scott?

I told him about it and he said that he's interested and wants to come to Switzerland so I can show him what I have done. I've made these kind of comics [storyboards]. I would very much like to work with him. I could have

a very good writer — Frederick Dermott — he's a theatre man. It would be terrific to use him, but he's seventy years old! I don't want to do everything myself — I need other people to work with, top people. If I was the worst person on the whole crew, that would be okay!

Tell us about your house.

You know, this house is not very comfortable. People who work in factories making guns live here! The good thing is that the houses are built in units of four, and I have the middle two. They're built in such a way that you can take some walls out, making the rooms bigger. The house is two-forty-five [metres] high. That's good; otherwise I wouldn't have space for my paintings.

How long have you lived here?

Twenty years. I never have enough space. It's terrible! I am planning an extension in the garden, but I haven't enough money to do it at the moment. The paintings I do are one-forty by two-forty [centimetres] which is exactly the size I can transport out of the house.

Do you imagine things when you're alone here?



There are some terrible noises here. It's noisy because it's wooden. If it's hot outside during the day, the wood creaks and pops. People who don't know that are paranoid. Sometimes you think there's somebody around. I once had three people here, the mayor of the town, me, and my agent. Mooki, my cat, brought in a mouse which went straight up my trouser leg! I've never had my trousers off so quick!

A FREE HAND

You've done record sleeves for people like Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Debbie Harry and, most recently, Steve Stevens.

That was not good. They made some changes. I wouldn't have had this lettering on top. That destroyed the painting and made me so angry. I wrote letters and things, but they wouldn't change it. It's awful.

Do record companies have preconceived ideas, or do you have a free hand?

They know a little bit of what they want. For instance, with Emerson, Lake and Palmer they said: 'do something with a waterfall, a mouth, and these lips'. I did about eleven renditions. However they changed their manager

'Sometimes I have short moments where I can see fantastic things, absolutely impossible to repaint or recreate because of the detail. I like to find out what's in my brain. I'm curious'

to a Swiss guy and he didn't want to use me, so it never happened. The album came out without my work. It's a pity.

What happened with the Debbie Harry solo album, 'Koo Koo'? You designed an Egyptian princess which you wanted on the sleeve...

No. I wanted to have it just how it is. I liked the one with the four acupuncture needles in

her head. We made a little film — a pop promo! I was the magician and we had this sculpture, this Tutankhamun sarcophagus, and I put these things together like in some cheap magical act. Then there's a noise — BOOM! — and the sarcophagus breaks into two pieces and Debbie steps out!

At the time of *Alien*, you said you liked to work with bones. Do you still?

Bones have very nice forms, especially if they are twisted a little bit. Bones in combination with metallics, with tubes. It's like a cathedral. Like Gaudi.

Have you any other 'Giger bar' projects?

No. Two are enough. I don't want to have one on every street corner! They should be unique. This one in New York should be very good. I would like to put in a lot of work to make it special. That's why I make all the furniture myself.

INVENTING SHADOWS

Tell us about the way you work.

When I work for film, I do sketches. A good director can see from a sketch what it will be like. I only have two airbrushes. One I use to

'If you draw pornographic things you show the people you are a pig! Many of the people who make the most noise about that sort of thing dream the most about it'

lacquer with, the other I do everything else with. It's mostly in black ink and acrylic paint on paper. It dries fast. I paint mostly from my imagination, so I have to think about where the light comes from. I have to invent the shadows. Sometimes I have short moments where I can see fantastic things, absolutely impossible to repaint or recreate because of the detail. I like to find out what's in my brain. I'm curious.

See this painting? [Gestures to one of his works on display.] This is the one they had so much trouble with in America. The 'Dead Kennedys' band had this painting as a poster in their record album. It's called 'Frankenchrist'. They didn't know I had an Oscar, or that I had done this fourteen years ago. It's been published in several books. It's not sexy, although it's probably difficult to explain to a child.

Do you still have terrible nightmares?

Yes, I once read that Stephen King had such terrible nightmares he always kept a light on when he slept. I laughed about that, and then some days later I had a terrible nightmare and couldn't find the light because I was in my mother's house. It was dark, and I was terrified.

Timothy Leary once said that you can only derive things from what is within you.

Many artists are too ashamed to, they do not want to show everybody what's in their hearts — it's too painful. If you draw pornographic things you show the people you are a pig! [Laughs.] Many of the people who make the most noise about that sort of thing dream the most about it. They don't want to show it. They're too ashamed, or blocked. If I show erotic paintings to my mother, there's always a little embarrassment.

You've read Aleister Crowley's Necronomicon?

Yes, I have a lot of these kind of books. You know *The Books Of Blood*?

Yes, Clive Barker.

That's good! It's crazy!

Does he know your art?

I once was going to do something on television. British television wanted to have me on a programme with John Carpenter, David Cronenberg and Clive Barker. Its theme was 'Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde'. They wanted me to draw pictures from the ideas they had.

Have you ever met a demon in your dreams?

Hmm. In *Necronomicon* I had this dream about the bath. A little boy about five years old was completely blue-violet and he had little horns.

Your demons are not 'Gigeresque' then? Are they more biblical?

In the way they look?

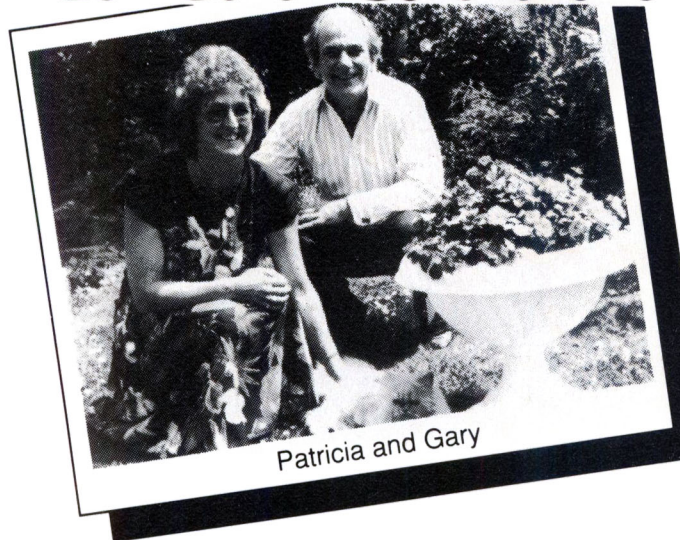
Yes.

That's strange. They look a little bit like Ernst Fuch's demons. He told me he can see demons like that. [Pause.] I think there are people, as Gustav Jung theorised, who share a common archetype.



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SEX AND THE SWASTIKA

In part two of his investigation into the dark realms of sexuality and Nazi imagery in the cinema, Julian Petley looks at post Sixties films to find the reasons for the common bond between sado-masochism and fascism.

The early Seventies saw a steady increase in the cinema's fascination with the links, real or imagined, between fascism and sexuality. One of the first films of the decade to tackle the issue was also one of the most intellectually serious and cinematically stunning. This was Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1971), which clearly suggested that one of the key components of the authoritarian personality is a repressed homosexuality. The beauty of the film is that this idea is suggested as much by Bertolucci's elaborate *mise-en-scène*, what one critic referred to as his 'ornate psychoanalytic poetry', rather than being spelled out laboriously by the script. Highly decorative direction, albeit of a very different kind, also characterises the nightclub scenes in Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (1972), one of which features chorus girls in pink corsets who suddenly mutate into Nazis and start to goosestep about the stage. Of course, the film is set in the pre-Nazi era, in Berlin in 1931, and the aim of this particular number is to ridicule Nazi imagery, not to fetishise it; nonetheless, it unavoidably introduces a sexual element into that imagery. Incidentally, it's remark-

able how many films about the Third Reich, from *Salon Kitty* through to *Triumph Of The Spirit*, show Nazis sitting down to enjoy Weimar-type cabarets which their real life counterparts found utterly 'decadent' and banned from the country almost as soon as they came to power!

NAZI NIGHTS

Undoubtedly the most important film from the Seventies for our purposes is, however, Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1973), which reunites Dirk Bogarde and Charlotte Rampling from *The Damned*, as a former Nazi and his victim who relive their concentration camp relationship in the post-war period. Few films can have divided the critics so thoroughly. For some it was just pretentiously arty softcore porn, a sort of *Last Tango In Vienna*. For others it was something even worse; Henry Giroux in *Cineaste* magazine denounced it as 'blatant neo-fascism', 'a high point in social, cultural and political barbarism', and argued that the film 'suggests that the millions of people murdered by the Nazis invited their own destruction by responding favourably to the 'virtues' of Nazi sadism and pseudo-strength'.

Clearly the juxtaposition of the concentra-



tion camp experience with directly and overtly sexual elements upset a lot of people. These elements include not only Max and Lucia's sado-masochistic relationship but also the decadent old countess who buys the favours of young boys, and the young male dancer who used to perform almost naked for the SS and now has Max arrange the lighting in his hotel room so that he can endlessly repeat his old number. Even the art deco trappings of the hotel serve as a suitably 'decadent' backdrop to the sado-masochistic action, reminding one of Susan Sontag's remark that art deco, with its 'blunt massing of material' and its 'petrified eroticism' represents 'fascist style at its best'. However, it would be unjust to dismiss Cavani, who had already made serious documentaries for Italian TV on the Third Reich and women in the Resistance, as a mere sensationalist. Like the work of respected authors such as Levi, Bettelheim and Wiesel, the film suggests that it is simply not possible for the camps' survivors to forget their experiences. What we see here are characters in the grip of their past, locked into a repetition compulsion, forced to relive a degradation of the self so vivid that it utterly dominates the present. As Lucia says: 'Nothing is changed... there is no cure'. As Teresa de Lauretis put it, in an extremely interesting defence of the film in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1976/7): 'Lucia and Max in *The Night Porter* are two people involved in the Nazi infamy, albeit at opposite ends, who cannot forget. In their obsessive repetition of past acts which once defined their total world and now reflect their self image, they live out a fantasy which is the only relationship they know, the only one their brutal world ever made possible for them to know... Those who live with that burden, and carry it in their flesh, and know that it endures in them and around them, cannot but consciously replay it to the fulfillment of ultimate regression and death. For them, time cannot go forward, it had already stopped long ago'.

If this kind of argument doesn't appeal, it's also possible to see the film as a study in sado-masochism which just happens to be set against a backdrop of the concentration camp experience. Looked at thus, the film makes no generalised statement about the Jews, Nazism or the Third Reich; rather, it's as if Cavani starts off with the desire to make a film about a sado-masochistic relationship and then thinks up the most extreme setting possible for it. Seen in this light, the film becomes a near relation to a study in female masochism such as *The Story Of O*, although Beverle Houston and Marsha Kinder in another thought provoking defence of the film, in *Literature/Film Quarterly* (Autumn 1975), make an even more interesting comparison: 'not since *Wuthering Heights* has there been so incautious, so romantic an attitude towards mutual enslavement and descent into the dark side of being'. It is, of course, precisely sado-masochistic pornography that has traditionally most eagerly celebrated this abandonment of self and self-preservation, as Houston and Kinder point out: 'the exploration of roles and the performance of extreme acts expand the self and make sexual deviance a form of creative expression that invites contrast with more conventional art'.

SADISM AND SALON KITTY

Whatever the case, it's hard not to regard *The Night Porter* as considerably more interesting than most of the films on the Nazi theme which followed it. In *Seven Beauties*, Lina Wertmüller explored the theme of survival in

the camps, and at one point has her anti-hero Pasqualino seduce the gross and sadistic camp commandant Hilde as part of his survival-at-all-costs strategy. Unfortunately, however, the film comes across simply as grotesque and raucous, and not the blackly horrific farce that its maker seemed to be striving for. It is, however, vastly preferable to the gallumphing, elephantine *Salon Kitty*, made by Tinto Brass in 1976. The story has its root in the historical fact of a brothel used by the German High Command to spy on, and check the loyalty of, its own officers, but Brass blithely ignores all the potentially interesting aspects of the story and concentrates instead (surprise, surprise) on the goings-on in the brothel, with the Nazis in the already over-familiar role of sadists and sex maniacs.

To make matters worse, Brass also tried to justify the film by drawing on all sorts of heavyweight names and notions. For example: 'I should like to make it quite clear that I



'The colour is black, the material leather, the seduction is beauty, the justification is honesty, the aim is ecstasy, the fantasy is death'

Susan Sontag, from her essay *Fascinating Fascism*

have no desire to make either a revival or a retrospective film as the trend is today, but I want to make an accusation. This accusation lies in the political-erotic context of the picture and has already been formulated in literature by Marcuse, Reich and Fromm. It is an orgy of blood and sex that should stimulate thought but not provocation. If anyone says that I want to make a violent and pornographic film, they are talking nonsense and standing up for Nazism without knowing it... The eroticism is often provocative in this film. By this I want to evoke a reaction in the audience against the atrocity of the monsters'. Oh yeah? Quite how the goings-on in the brothel scenes illustrate the ideas of Marcuse, Reich and Fromm remains unclear, at least to this viewer, but Brass seems to have even more exalted ideas about the film which, he claims, illustrates fascism's 'remorseless utilisation of people, who becomes mere objects'. Now there

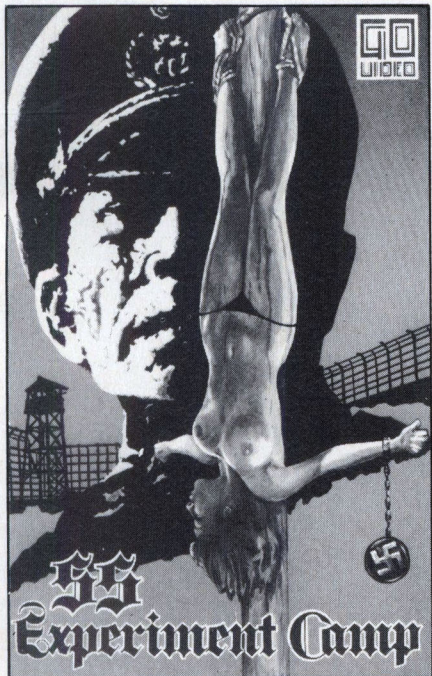
is a film which does this most effectively, but it isn't *Salon Kitty*, which itself isn't above using people (namely the female members of the cast) as 'mere objects'. This is *Salo* (1975), Pasolini's terrifyingly bleak, valedictory film set in the days of Mussolini's Italy and based on De Sade's *120 Days Of Sodom*. Talking to Gideon Bachmann during production, Pasolini said that 'my film is planned as a sexual metaphor which symbolises in a visionary way the relationship between exploiter and exploited. In sadism and in power politics human beings become objects. That similarity is the ideological basis of the film'. To emphasise his point, Pasolini uses a deliberately distanced, abstract, stylised *mise-en-scène* which never allows the viewer to become caught up in, let alone empathise with, the horrors on screen. The contrast with Brass' leering, voyeuristic approach couldn't be more pronounced.

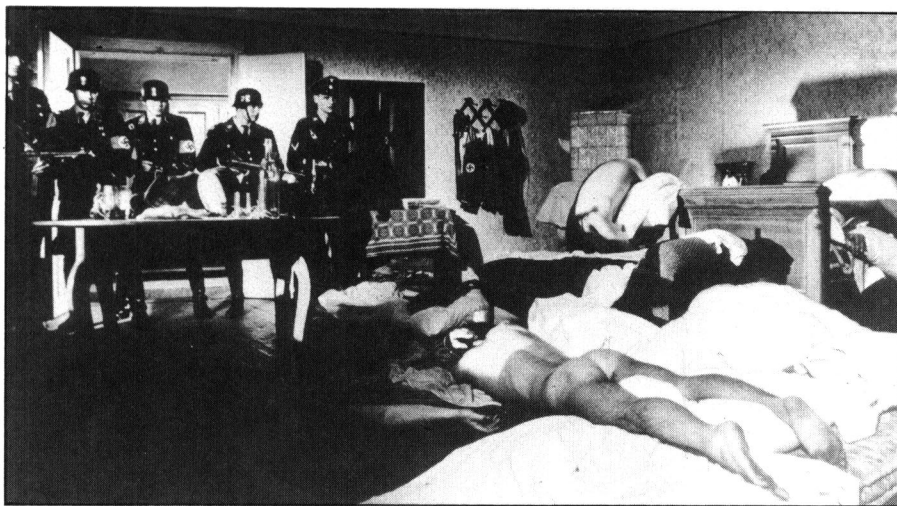


Studies in sado-masochism from Cavani's *The Night Porter*, starring Charlotte Rampling and Dirk Bogarde (previous page, above and right); pink corsets in Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (left); and sex in chains in *SS Experiment Camp* (below)

BOOT LICKING

Salon Kitty and *The Night Porter* are often blamed for unleashing the mid Seventies cycle of Italian concentration camp movies, à la *SS Experiment Camp*, of 'video nasty' infamy. However, the first film to use a Nazi camp as a setting for what is basically a soft core porn film with decidedly sadistic elements seems to have been *Love Camp 7*, an American production directed by R L Frost in 1968. In this hyper-unlikely story of two young female American soldiers who are infiltrated into a brothel for German army officers in order to gather some important information from a Jewish scientist who has been forced into prostitution by the Nazis (I told you it was unlikely), most of the elements of the later films are present: acres of nudity





Homoeroticism in Luchino Visconti's *The Damned*

(female, of course; all the men appear to have sex with their trousers not only on but also firmly done up), lesbianism, fetishisation of Nazi regalia (at one point one of the girls is forced to lick the Commandant's boots at some considerable length), and a good deal of torture, much of it with a sexual edge. One scene, in which a naked girl is strung up and whipped with a leather belt, looks disturbingly like the real thing, and one can only wonder at what kind of audience this is aimed. Even more sadistic, however, is Don Edmond's *Ilsa, She Wolf Of The SS* (1974), although the whole thing is so outrageously over the top, and so far removed from any known reality, that it's difficult to take the Nazi backdrop at all seriously.

In the Italian stakes, the main contenders are the famous *SS Experiment Camp* (Sergio Garrone, 1976) which paradoxically, considering the fuss made about it in the UK, is by no means the most unpleasant of the bunch; *Deported Women Of The SS Special Section* (Rino di Silvestri, 1977); *Elsa Fräulein SS* (Marius Lesouer), which may be the same film as *Trenno Infernale*, and may have been directed pseudonymously by Jose Franco, but is in any case simply a train-bound version of *Salon Kitty* padded out with a sub-plot about partisan warfare; *Red Nights Of The Gestapo* (Fabio di Agostini, 1976), which manages to weave its story of supposed Nazi 'decadence' around a plot to kill Hitler; *SS Camp 5 Women's Hell* (Sergio Garrone), which seems

to have been shot back to back with *SS Experiment Camp*, and distinguishes itself by using real Nazi atrocity footage under the credits; *Nazi Love Camp 27* (William Hawkins, presumably a pseudonym); and *Womens' Camp 119* (Bruno Mattei). One of the more 'up market' contenders is *The Gestapo's Last Orgy* (Cesare Canovari, 1977), which clearly rips off *The Night Porter* in its story of a post-war meeting between a former torturer and his victim (though here the ex-Nazi gets his just deserts, rather than more of the same). But although the film begins with a quote from Nietzsche (spelt wrongly on my copy), the production values are less tacky, there's a good deal of male nudity, not all the female prisoners are conventionally 'attractive', and there's even a would-be *Salò*-esque sequence, the film contains enough of the familiar generic elements to rule it out of court as a serious attempt to say anything sensible about anything. At the other end of the scale (admittedly a limited one) is the completely outrageous *Beast In Heat: Horrifying Experiments Of SS Last Days*, aka *Nazi Holocaust*, (Ivan Katansky), in which for no apparent reason the Nazis have created some kind of grotesque Frankenstein's monster with inordinate sexual powers, which is unleashed on various female prisoners which it rapes to death. Quite apart from the fact that the Nazis were trying to create a master race and not a tribe of troglodytes, the film is also massively padded out with partisan war footage, making it look like two separate films crudely slammed together. Not entirely uninteresting (in the same way as *Dr Butcher MD/Zombie Holocaust* has its fascinations), the film is probably best described by Stephen Thrower in the first issue of the excellent *EyeBall* as 'a hysterically tasteless piece of garbage which veers between dull stupidity and absurd misogyny'.

It would be pointless to discuss any of the above films in any great detail, as they are all so remarkably similar and all one would end up with would be a catalogue of tortures, humiliations and indignities, not to mention endless parades of nudity and various soft core sex scenes with healthy-looking, well rounded actresses replacing the starved, skeletal, disease-ridden victims of the real life camps. The truth of the matter is that these films have precious little to do with the Third Reich at all, let alone the sexual dimension of fascism. Most of them are little more than that old exploitation staple, the women-in-prison movie, opportunistically set against a Third Reich backdrop, and drawing on the sexual connotations which seem to have come to inform so many representations of that

particular era, one which was so sexually repressive and puritanical in practice but which, in the popular imagination, seems to have become a paradise for sado-masochists and uniform fetishists.

FASCISM IS THEATRE

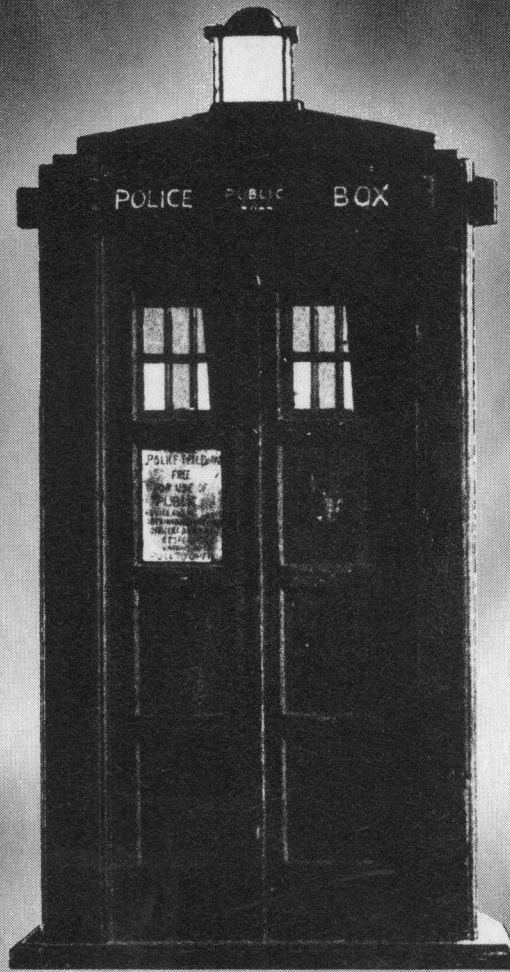
So, to return to the question posed at the start of the first article in this series, how has this paradoxical state of affairs come about? According to Ilan Avisar in his study of cinematic representations of the Holocaust, *Images Of The Unimaginable*, such 'reflections on the Nazi era serve to release the human impulse to play with the dark spheres of human nature' at a comfortable distance, helped by the 'inherent playfulness of the discourse of art'. This seems OK as far as it goes, but to get a fuller answer we need to return to Susan Sontag's essay 'Fascinating Fascism', in which she argues that 'between sado-masochism and fascism there is a natural link. 'Fascism is theatre', as Genet said [cf *Funeral Rites*]. As is sado-masochistic sexuality: to be involved in sado-masochism is to take part in a sexual theatre, a staging of sexuality. Regulars of sado-masochistic sex are expert costumers and choreographers as well as performers, in a drama that is all the more exciting because it is forbidden to ordinary people... the end to which all sexual experience tends... is defilement, blasphemy. To be 'nice', as to be civilised, means being alienated from this savage experience — which is entirely staged'.

Perhaps in our own secular society there is no longer any erotic charge to be gained from blasphemy in the Sadean or Nietzschean mould and today, as Sontag suggests, 'it may be the Nazi past that people invoke, in the theatricalisation of sexuality, because it is in those images (rather than memories) from which they hope a reserve of sexual energy can be tapped'. But why, specifically, the Nazi past? Well, first because of the very lure of the forbidden, the taboo, the offensive — the secular version of blasphemy. But also, as Sontag suggests, because 'never before was the relation of masters and slaves so consciously aestheticised. Sade had to make up his theatre of punishment and delight from scratch, improvising the decor and costumes and blasphemous rites. Now there is a master scenario available to everyone. The colour is black, the material leather, the seduction is beauty, the justification is honesty, the aim is ecstasy, the fantasy is death'.

But maybe we should conclude on a quieter note. Two quotes: the first from George Steiner, the second Jean Luc Godard. Writing of the Holocaust, Steiner warned that 'not only is the material vast and intractable; it exercises a subtle, corrupting fascination. Bending too fixedly over hideousness, one feels queerly drawn. In some strange way, the horror flatters attention'. Whilst Godard, writing in defence of his film *Les Carabiniers*, said: 'take concentration camps, for instance. The only real film to made about them — which has never been made because it would be intolerable — would be if a camp were filmed from the point of view of the torturers and their daily routine. How to get a human body measuring two metres into a coffin measuring fifty centimetres? How to load ten tons of arms and legs onto a three ton lorry? How to burn a hundred women with petrol enough for ten? One would also have secretaries making lists of everything on their typewriters. The really horrible thing about such scenes would not be their horror but their very ordinary everydayness'.



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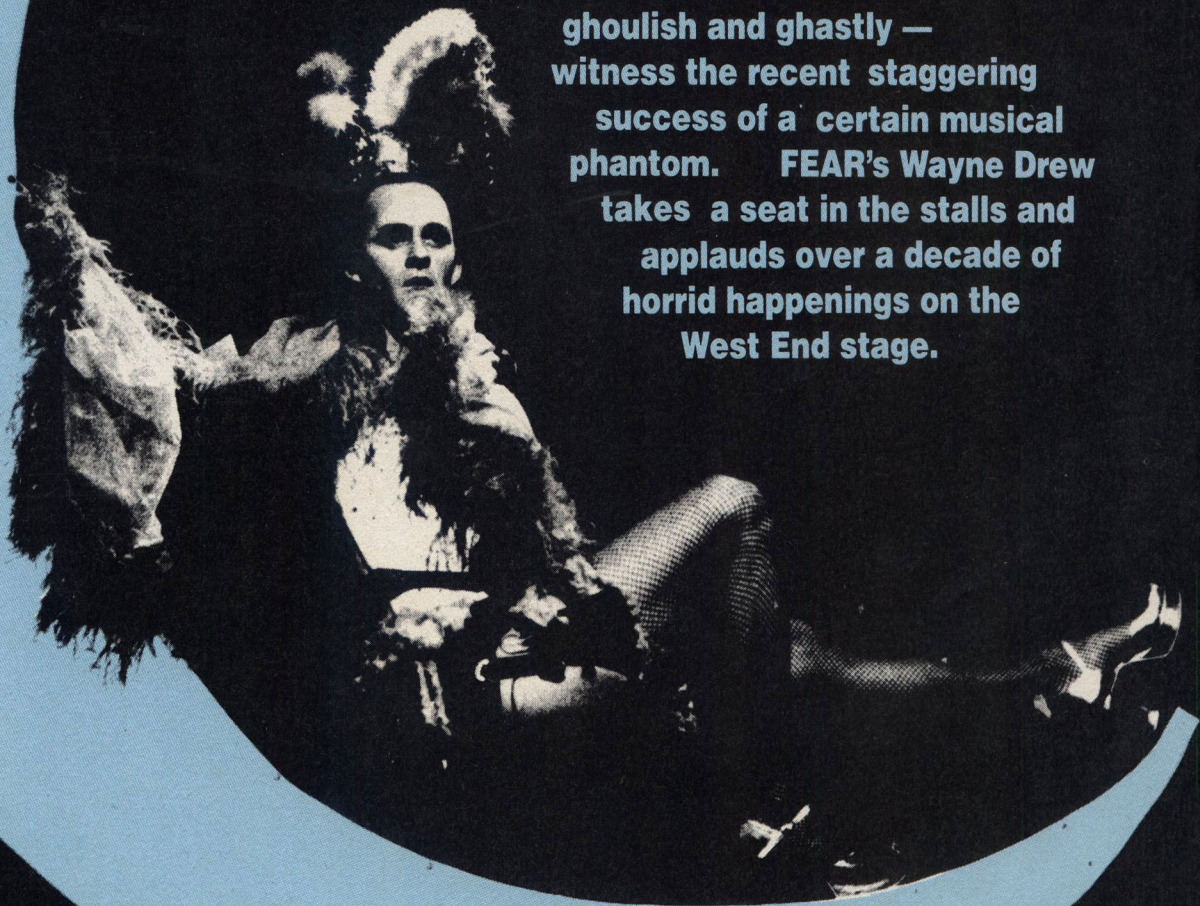
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HORROR LIVE!

Monsters and the macabre are not solely the province of literature and film.

Nowadays the theatre seems to be a natural home for all that's ghoulish and ghastly —

witness the recent staggering success of a certain musical phantom. FEAR's Wayne Drew takes a seat in the stalls and applauds over a decade of horrid happenings on the West End stage.





There really were ghosts in the eighteenth century: the London stage was infested with them. There were ghouls, demons and phantoms, the subjects of the popular gothic melodramas, and outlandish enough creations to suit all tastes.

'Monk' Lewis's *The Castle Spectre*, Planchet's *The Vampire*, which introduced a new form of stage machinery, 'the vampire trap', Fitz Ball's *The Devil's Elixir* and Milner's *Frankenstein, Or The Man And The Monster*, were just some of the plays on offer to a public looking for new sensations. They were expensive, spectacular and decidedly bloody. This fascination with things macabre was brief and lasted between 1792 and 1825, when the shows were staged in one of the three licenced theatres allowed to perform legitimate drama — Drury Lane, Covent Garden and, in the summer, when those were closed, the Haymarket. Then, after this comparatively brief upwelling of the grim and ghastly, things went dead again. 'The devil was no longer in fashion', as one critic put it, and the theatre became the middle class pastime it has remained until the present day.

It is only in the last decade or so that the theatregoing public has developed a fresh taste for the supernatural and terror has once again been allowed back on the boards.

At present in the West End there are no fewer than four major productions with decidedly macabre themes. Monsters from the Id rival fiendish females and sweet transvestites from Transylvania in an attempt to entice the price of admission from punters, already high on the joys of Andrew Lloyd Webber's operatic Phantom. The West End is riding the crest of a demonic wave which began its journey just over a decade ago.

PECKISH SPECTRES

Despite some aberrations, such as J M Barrie's moving and mystical *Mary Rose*, Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, where the vengeful ghost of a dead wife comes to play havoc with her husband, and *Gomes*, one of the most expensive disasters ever to hit the stage and boasting a huge glass set onto which phantoms were projected, today's fascination with things frightful really started in the mid Seventies. It was then that Don Taylor's play *The Exorcism* opened at London's Comedy Theatre to rave reviews. Starring *The Avengers'* Mrs Peel (Honor Blackman) and Brian Blessed, the play was a chilling tale of a group of friends who meet up in a small cottage in the country for a dinner party on Christmas day. As the meal progresses, the food turns rotten and soon they discover that the cottage is haunted by the spirits of some less fortunate souls who died of starvation there centuries before. The spectres are far from playful or forgiving, and all hell literally breaks loose. The play's special effects were most original and included the transformation of the high-tech twentieth century renovation into its sixteenth century counterpart. Yet the horror of *The Exorcism* was not to be restricted to the stage. A few days after it had opened, Mary Ure, the beautiful leading lady, was to choke on her own vomit following a suspected heart attack. The production ran for some weeks more, but Ure's death took its toll on cast and box office alike, and the play came off.

The Exorcism was followed by similar enterprises which did not really make it, together with a series of unusual productions at the Greenwich Theatre. These included *The Undertaking*, set in a gigantic marble undertaker's parlour designed by Saxon Lucas, in which Miriam Karlin, Lorraine Chase and Annette Crosbie tried to deal with

the undertaker himself, played by Kenneth Williams. Although it sounds as if it should have been, the play was not a comedy and Williams struggled bravely, but in vain, against his popular image. The play by Trevor Baxter was followed by a jolly piece of nonsense called *The Paranormalist*, where a member of the cast was made to float around the stage on a spirit-ridden chair, and a splendid production of *The Portrait Of Dorian Gray* adapted by John Osborne with Robin Phillips in the lead as the seducer whose painting hidden in the attic ages, while he remains the picture of youth and innocence. The modest success of these productions did not go unnoticed by managements elsewhere.

WELL DONE HOLMES...

The majors, too, dabbled in the occult and fantastic. The National Theatre staged a brilliant revival of *Blithe Spirit*, with a set which practically self-destructed in the final act. Then, in 1974, the Royal Shakespeare Company staged the first London production in seventy years of *Sherlock Holmes*. The grand melodrama was a stunning success and starred John Wood as the Baker Street sleuth. The sets were big and expensive and included mist-filled London streets, Professor Moriarty's underground office and, perhaps most intriguing of all, 'The Stepany gas chamber at midnight', as it was titled in the programme.

Sherlock Holmes showed that the public still had a taste for the mysterious and melodramatic and within three years another Holmes spectacular opened, this time on Broadway. Entitled *The Crucifer Of Blood*, it boasted some of the highest production values seen on the New York stage and was a breakthrough in the use of sound in the theatre. It was a new play by Paul Giovanni, based on various themes and ideas from the novels and



'If one victim's throat was slit there must have been ten others who shot out of the devilish barber's chair into the cellar, where Mrs Lovett transformed them into meat pies'



short stories, and with Paxton Whitehead as Holmes. Its six scenes ranged from 'The Red Fort At Agra' to 'On The River Thames, Late At Night', and the programme ended with a plea to the audience not to reveal the secret of the mystery. A few years later the production arrived in England in a fair, but rather less grand format, starring Keith Michell.

The same fate was true for the revival of *Dracula* which, by early 1979, was terrifying

the audience at the Martin Beck Theatre just off Times Square whilst also on tour in Australia as well as three other centres in the USA. The show was a miracle of production design and barely concealed eroticism. The black and white sets by Edward Gorey were stunning, and the Count, played by Raul Julia, was the perfect incarnation of seductive evil. Special effects included bats galore in the auditorium and several astonishing transfor-

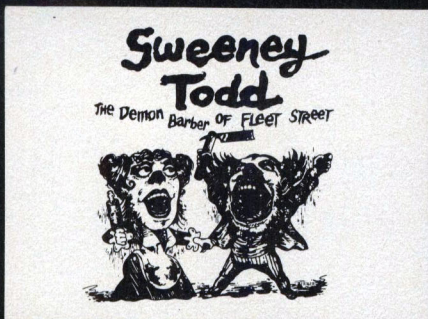
The Rocky Horror Show (preceding page); the spectacular Phantom Of The Opera (opposite); the camp Return To The Forbidden Planet (above); and, striking the balance between horror and farce, the Broadway production of Stephen Sondheim's Sweeney Todd (left)

mations. When the production arrived in Britain it was a disaster. With the elegant, but wooden, Terence Stamp in the lead, the show replaced romance with high camp, and high drama with comic absurdity. Similarly it was not helped by the fact that nearby at the Queen's Theatre heart-throb George Chikaris was wowing them in the stalls with his *Passion Of Dracula*, yet another reworking of the tale. But for a while *Dracula* was king in the West End and even the fringes had a go. The Bubble Theatre produced a jolly version which toured London in a tent, and there was even a musical version where a vampire appeared from a large chocolate box rather than a coffin!

Indeed, musicals have always been the home for things rich and strange. One of the best of these was a version of H P Lovecraft's tale, *The Rats In The Walls*, produced as an opera at the ICA in the Mall. With its chilling music score and script resonant with ancient lore and things best not spoken of, it proved a fine example of an almost perfect balance between form and content.

Similarly, Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* (1980) was a big budget show which achieved that synthesis and took itself very seriously. Based on a version of the classic melodrama of the demon barber of Fleet





Street by Christopher Bond, Sondheim's show, as directed by Hal Prince, must be one of the classic productions of the twentieth century. Entitled a musical thriller, it did just that, it thrilled and chilled even the most cynical member of the audience. Placing Sweeney as the embodiment of what vicious society can do to an individual, Sondheim spared us nothing. If one victim's throat was slit there must have been ten others who shot out of the devilish barber's chair into the cellar where Mrs Lovett transformed them into meat pies. The show was a consummate example of striking just the right tone and was forged on the knife edge between horror and farce.

CURTAINS FOR CARRIE

Not all musical versions have been so lucky. Richard O'Brian's *Rocky Horror Show*, now in fine form at its third revival in London's Piccadilly Theatre, was always a razor-sharp parody of Fifties sci-fi and horror movies. The original production took London by storm and had a definitive performance from Tim Curry as Frank N Furter. Unfortunately none of O'Brian's other shows worked and his treatment of the Tarzan myth, *TEE-Zee*, and his parody of disaster movies, *Disaster*, both staged at the Royal Court, were complete failures. They lacked the wit and style of *Rocky Horror* and are only to be rivalled by such shockers as the RSC's *Carrie*, for disappointment of the decade.

Carrie (1988) itself was an abortive happening based on the Stephen King novel with music by Michael Gore. True, it did have the wonderful Barbara Cook as Carrie's mum and Linzi Hateley (who went on faster than she had bargained for to *Les Misérables*) as the menstruating maiden herself. But that was about all it had in its favour. The show stank from first to last. It was a drab, dreary and thoroughly misconceived, sleazy production. Following its demise, one can only consider the RSC's attempt to make a musical out of *A Clockwork Orange* to be nothing short of a death wish. Although in no way as bad as *Carrie*, this new production was not a success and lacked any of the true horror and power of the original book and film. Indeed, the book's author, Anthony Burgess, who also scripted the musical, publicly condemned the stage show which, despite a brief transfer to the Royalty Theatre, quickly closed.

A much better, but still ill-fated production was Michael White's *Metropolis* (1989). Based on the Fritz Lang movie, the show was doomed before the first note was sung and once again folded within weeks of its opening. Still, the multimillion pound production did have much going for it. As the curtain went up the audience was confronted with a vision of a hellish future world of the machine. Designed by the legendary Ralph Koltai, *Metropolis* was a constant source of visual amazement. Steaming pipes disgorged nameless vapours into the auditorium. Giant lifts carried the faceless workers into the bowels of the earth while an elite ruled on the sunny

lawns of the surface world. The problem with the show was its book, which just did not work, and the subject matter which would not please the coach parties who, at the end of the day, are essential if a show is to succeed. The music, ironically, was very good.

Metropolis brings us right up to date and leads me to three outstanding successes which are now playing in the West End. They are all very individual and illustrate how totally different productions, with vastly differing budgets and styles, yet dealing with bizarre themes, can still work brilliantly.

CAMP CLASSIC

Return To The Forbidden Planet won the Society of West End Theatres Award for the best show of the year, and it deserved it. A musical based on the Fifties' film, which itself was based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, sounds a little outlandish to say the least. But the show which saw the light of day in the Bubble Theatre tent is a delight. That its success rests on the enthusiasm of the cast rather than the low budget staging and rather weak script, says much. Still, at the end of the day, this camp classic is destined to become another *Rocky Horror* and is guaranteed a run into the next year.

On a similar budget, and within a stone's throw of the Cambridge Theatre where *Forbidden Planet* is playing, is the Fortune Theatre, the home of Stephen Mallatratt's *The Woman In Black*. Now nearing its second year, the play, a virtual two-hander, tells of the journey of Arthur Kipps to the misty shores of the fens and of his encounter with the terrifying demon of the title. Actors Jon Strickland and Dominic Letts play almost



A gripping moment from *The Woman In Black* with Jon Strickland and Dominic Letts

'Following the demise of *Carrie*, one can only consider the RSC's attempt to make a musical out of *A Clockwork Orange* to be nothing short of a death wish'

twenty roles in this stunning adaptation of Susan Hill's grim novel. The set is simple but deceptively effective, for out of the darkness sinister shapes are conjured which are calculated to chill even the most hardened fan of the supernatural. The play is a ghostly gem and the perfect Christmas treat for the stout hearted. It can only be bettered by one other show in London and it is almost unfair to draw comparisons, for that production is already a legend!

The Phantom Of The Opera is in a class of its own. It is very fashionable, but totally unfair, to slam Andrew Lloyd Webber's dazzling show. With *Phantom*, one is transported back to the days of the great spectacular London productions. It is an astounding visual experience rivalling anything which was staged at Drury Lane in its heyday. From the opening, when a giant chandelier is hoisted above the audience, amid thunder and lightning, to the scene in the Phantom's lair, where he appears in a small boat which drifts across a lake dotted with candles, the show is a miracle of production. By now that celebrated chandelier will have crashed down something like 2,000 times to totally full houses, and is likely to continue its descent for some time more, as the show is booked solid into

the middle of next year! Sister productions blossom throughout the world and there is nowhere it has failed. Even now, in its fourth year, it is still worth a visit. The present cast is even better than that of the celebrated production which catapulted Michael Crawford to fame. To be truthful, Crawford was always curious casting as the deformed musician living in the bowels of the Paris Opera. He worked very hard at the role, but his voice was not really right for the part. Now, with *Les Misérables* lead Dave Willetts in the lead, we have an evening which will never be forgotten.

What does the future have in store? Are there any more macabre delights on the horizon, or is the trend towards terror behind the footlights on its way out? No, I am delighted to say that there are two new shows destined for the West End which should find favour with connoisseurs of the macabre. First, there is Lionel Bart's version of *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame*. This is a musical that the famed composer of *Oliver* has been working on for years. Bart went back to the Victor Hugo novel for inspiration and there he discovered that Quasimodo was very different to the creature portrayed in the famous film versions. There should be more news of *Hunchback* later in the year.

The second musical chiller planned for 1991 comes from another classic source, this time the pen of Robert Louis Stevenson. Frank Wildhorn and Leslie Bricusse's *Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* is already available on CD with Linda Eder and Colm Wilkinson in the leads. It is a great cast album with some fine numbers, strikingly interpreted. Whether *Dr Jekyll*, even with the help of Mr Hyde, can topple the Phantom from his pinnacle, we will have to wait and see. But whatever happens, we are guaranteed that there will be plenty of excitement coming our way and that things weird and wonderful are alive and well and ready to terrify audiences for the next few years at least.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURKEYS ?!?!?!?!?

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SURROGATE

Karla Dearsley

The mud sucked at Edie's wellington boots, making a noise very like the pigs smacking their lips in anticipation. A strong gust of wind, the tail end of the weekend's storm, tugged at the bin bag she carried at arm's length which threatened to scatter its evil-smelling contents across the yard.

Edie felt a twinge of guilt as she passed the rose beds. The earth was far too wet for digging. Not that she went in for that much any more; her arthritis refused to sanction such strenuous activity. Struggling against the wind to the sty was as much as she could manage, but her clients believed that the remains would be buried beneath the roses, and Edie couldn't look at them without feeling the need to justify herself.

Warm sour air greeted her as she opened the door to the sty. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the sudden gloom, but the excited grunts and pawings which greeted her entrance told her immediately where the pigs were.

'Here we are, then: dinner! And I hope you're hungry!' Edie upended the bin bag, and a bloody mess, looking in the half light like the entrails of some animal, slopped out. The pigs chomped at it eagerly, jostling each other to get the major share.

Edie leaned on the pen and watched with satisfaction. She starved the pigs for a day if she had a job booked, but always suffered a moment's apprehension that they'd reject the fare, or worse still, leave it half eaten. It would never do for one of her neighbours to call unexpectedly and find it there.

She considered her work a public service. It didn't take lives, but saved them. Not many people saw things as she did, however.

mother's eyes, Edie searched for some hint of knowledge or guilt. Her mother must have known. Surely she could feel the evil in her husband's hands, as Edie had when he touched her. Not just when he forced himself into her, but in the merest flick of contact as they went about their everyday lives.

They had rejected her when she could conceal the growing child no longer; they seemed to expect her to feel the shame they said she'd brought on them. Only the guilty can show such indignation. After the adoption, Edie had rejected both them and their philosophies.

With a brisk exhalation, Edie changed her clothes. There were things to get on with. In a way, she was grateful to her parents. Because of them she'd grown strong; strong enough to make sure others wouldn't have to suffer what she had.

By the time the doorbell rang, the kettle was on and Edie was setting out a tray of tea things. A Siamese cat wound itself around her legs, pleading in its near human voice for attention. It ran with her to the door.

The girl on the step looked haunted, as if some darkness had hunted her to that spot. Lines of weariness shadowed her eyes; her gaze flicked across her surroundings, not daring to rest on anything.

'I...I phoned for a 'reading'.' Her voice was small and rough with too many tears.

'Of course. Janet, isn't it?' Edie smiled and stepped aside. There was a moment's hesitation before the girl answered; few gave their real name.

All the young girls who came to her door were ostensibly there to have their fortunes told, and in a way they were. A 'Yes' or 'No' from Edie would change their lives.

The current one perched on the edge of an overstuffed armchair as if she hardly dared to breathe, let alone move. Immediately the Siamese cat claimed her lap.

Watching surreptitiously as she poured the tea, Edie noted the tension flow away as Janet stroked the animal. The cat purred and turned its wide blue eyes to Edie for approval.

'Don't mind Yang. Just push him off if he's a nuisance.'

The cat flicked its tail but continued to purr. This was a game they'd played before. Edie's instruction brought an enthusiastic response from the girl and for a few minutes they chatted about the ways of cats. It gave Edie a chance to assess her.

She was seventeen, if that, with the kind of looks that were bound to get any romantic girl into trouble. Edie had seen hundreds of her kind since she had started.

'Well, we both know why you're here, but I need a few details. I know it's difficult, but I'd like you to tell me all about it.'

Edie tried to present a strong motherly image of herself, as reassurance; it wasn't just an image though, Edie really regarded herself as a kind of surrogate mother to these girls who were so afraid of their actual ones that they couldn't confide in them.

Edie's cheek still tingled when she remembered the slap her mother had given her when she had tried to explain. She had called her evil and a liar, with a voice that could have breathed fire, before bursting into dramatic sobs and running to Edie's father for support. Edie's father: such a gentleman! So charming! There was no question that her mother would believe her. As she wilted against his shoulder, he'd smiled over her at Edie and the child would feel clammy fingers run up her back.

Under Edie's coaxing, Janet's hesitantly whispered answers became a torrent of relieved explanations.

'I hate him! Ever since I can remember he's made me hate him and it's all the worse because I ought to feel love. Maybe it's my fault, but I don't see how. How can a seven year old...I didn't even know anything about...about...'

Edie could have been listening to her own story. The tortured youngster of over thirty years ago had come to life once more before her eyes. Some of the horror she felt must have shown in her face. The girl, who had been leaning forward, drew back slightly.

'You don't believe me, do you? I don't blame you. I knew no one would, that's why I couldn't tell them. Now I've got his baby inside me and I hate it too! It's an invasion! I don't want it! Can't cope with it. I just feel so dirty...'

She broke off, clamping a hand over her mouth, her chest heaving convulsively. 'I understand you better than you could ever imagine.' Edie forced the words out, trying hard to be objective. She knew she had once felt as Janet did, but didn't want to relive the emotions.

Janet regained a little control. 'I shall go mad. Don't send me away.'

There was no question of it. Janet was desperate, and if Edie wanted to keep the lid on old horrors then she had to act straightaway.

'Let's get started.'

The girl's skin whitened and grew tight over her bones. Edie took the cup and saucer out of her shaking hands and led the way out of the room.



'So much for supper in front of the telly and an early night!' Edie scolded herself as she scrubbed down the table.

Converting the operating theatre back into an innocent guest room was an art Edie had practised until she could do it in minutes, but that night each task was a burden.

Shoving the empty bag into a corner with a jumble of gardening tools and sacks, Edie struggled back to the house. There was just time to tidy herself up a bit before the next appointment.

Stripped to the waist before the wash basin, Edie rubbed vigorously at the exposed flesh with soap and water. As she towelled herself dry she caught sight of her reflection in the mirror. Her face, framed now by thick grey hair, had always been handsome rather than beautiful, but it had withstood the years better than a soft, pretty one might have. Her figure had sagged in places but the overall effect was still pleasing.

For an instant her mother's eyes looked out from her reflection.

'You ought to make more of yourself, Edie. There's many a worse looking girl caught a good husband, but you won't get anywhere if you don't try!'

Edie hadn't tried, hadn't wanted to. If a good husband meant someone like her father, who would creep into her bed and force unspeakable acts on her, then it was something she could live without.

Still watching the reflection with her

She straightened up and massaged her lower back with her knuckles, remembering the look of the girl as she'd left. Oblivious to the miserable weather, Janet had almost danced down the path, her arms held out from her body as if she was light enough to float away. The sight had been worth Edie's backache.

Picking up a bin bag, Edie went down to the kitchen and studied the weather through the window. The prospect of struggling across the lake of mud in the deepening twilight wasn't something she cared for, but she could hardly leave the unfinished shape lying about the house.

A prickly sensation at the back of her neck told Edie she was being watched. She swung round. Her gasp gave way to an embarrassed laugh. The wide blue eyes of the cat stared at her impassively.

'Well, Yang, that's that! How about some dinner?'

Edie went to the fridge and took out a plate of raw liver; having gained her attention, Yang seemed to lose interest. He walked daintily across the room, shaking his paws with distaste where he encountered a damp patch, then began to sniff gingerly at the bin bag.

Edie chatted about the weather and how hungry he must be as she cut the meat into thin slices. Her talk slowed and stopped. Her hands hovered over the plate. She moistened her lips and swallowed hesitatingly. Slowly, she raised a sliver of the raw flesh to her lips. There was the sickly-sweet smell of blood. It was easy to imagine the feel of it on her tongue, to let the taste flood her senses. She shuddered and dropped the sliver to the cat now waiting at her feet.

'It's that girl! I haven't had a craving like that since...well, since! And why am I talking to you anyway?'

Shaking off the sensation, Edie bustled about the kitchen, rattling pans and cutlery, but a staleness still covered her palate. When dinner was cooked, she took it through to the lounge. Half an hour in front of some banal television programme should clear her mind.

It seemed that, no sooner had she put her plate down, than he was there. He made no sound, but Edie knew that when she took her eyes from the screen he would be standing in the corner.

As she turned her head slowly to meet his gaze, her father smiled. That smile...he didn't need to say anything. He looked towards the door. Edie felt herself obeying his commanding look, though she struggled to stay in the chair. Eventually she rose and stood beside him.

Her father ran his hand slowly over her breast, caressing the contours of her body. Edie clamped her teeth shut, trying to keep her fear and loathing secret, knowing the look of gratification that would enter his eyes if she

failed.

Her dinner plate was balanced on the arm of the chair and she struggled to reach the knife. It was as if she was trying to push her fingers through wet clay, the simple movement took forever.

Soundlessly, without even seeming to change his expression, her father laughed.

The sudden wail of a baby startled them both. Edie's father's gaze flickered once more towards the door. Instantly, Edie's fingers reached the knife; they closed about it and thrust it into his chest in one fluid motion.

He looked mildly surprised as blood blossomed over his shirt. Edie withdrew the knife and ran her tongue along the blade, savouring the sweet taste, reaching the verge of orgasm as the power of it flowed into her.

The baby wailed again.



The room was cold and it felt as if someone had been round it and moved everything a fraction of an inch. In the kitchen Yang was yowling.

Edie sat for a moment trying to work out whether or not she was awake. The cat's cries stopped and the soon sound of Edie's breathing was all that broke the silence. Then there came the unmistakable rustling of plastic.

Starting out of the chair, her movements jerky with anger, Edie rushed into the kitchen.

'Get away from it you...you...' Edie could not find words to describe what she thought of Yang at that moment.

The cat coolly avoided the blow she aimed at it and sat licking its paws a short distance away. A ragged gash in the bin bag spilled its contents on the floor.

The squashed and raw looking mess was still recognisable as a human foetus despite the disfigurement where it had been chewed.

Edie ran a hand through her hair.

'You — out!' She picked up the cat by its scruff and dumped it outside, then tackled the mess. Holding the plastic in such a way that she wouldn't have to touch the spillage, she tipped it back into the bag, tied the whole thing firmly and dumped it on the draining board.

Edie was not normally squeamish when she was working, but the tail end of her dream had made her feel queasy and disinclined to do more.

A few minutes later she snuggled beneath the covers of her bed, which creaked companionably with every movement, and turned off the light. She gave a deep sigh, expecting to be asleep by the end of it.

A noise disturbed her. She listened a moment, but heard only the sounds of an old house settling for the night. Pulling the covers tighter, Edie began to count sheep in time with her inhalations. Fluffy, newly shampooed ani-

mals leapt over five bar gates, smiling and bleating happily.

Edie smiled as she dozed. Eleven, fifteen, fourteen, fifteen... The smiles of the sheep grew larger, showing huge flat teeth in raw red gums which spread, rolling back the skin, until the whole head was glistening and bloody. The bodies transformed, becoming arms and legs with stubby digits and no elbows. Each creature jumped higher. Soon they would land on the bed. Edie tried to stop counting. The sheep only appeared when she thought of a number. The harder she tried the more rapid her breathing, the quicker the numbers came.

They vanished. The room which had been loud with figures shouting themselves in Edie's head now held a flat silence. Edie felt rather than heard the door open. There was a wet thud, then the sound of something slithering across the floor towards the bed.

She immediately thought of her father. He'd always entered her room when the night was at its blackest, and silently, as if he didn't want to wake her. But he did want to wake her — and more. Edie tried to flatten herself under the bedclothes, to still her breathing, hoping he'd think she wasn't there and then would go away.

The sound was closer now. It seemed to slop and suck at the floorboards. Edie remembered the baby crying. She told herself it was Yang, but this wasn't a cat.

Clumsy fingers scrabbled at the covers at the foot of the bed, wheezy breathes becoming heavier with effort. Edie felt the covers pull tighter on her legs, and knew it was climbing up.

Caught between wanting to turn on the light and dispel the nightmare and witnessing the terror should it prove to be true, Edie lay like a butterfly pinned on a card. She felt the it heave itself onto the bed.

A dark shape formed in the space between herself and the wall. Edie recognised the bulbous head, catching the glisten of mucus on its crown. The warm taint of unwashed meat made her want to vomit, already she could feel the slime that covered it filling her nose and mouth, suffocating her, as merciless as she had been to it.

Edie tried to free a hand to knock it away, but it began to slither under the blankets, hauling itself up on malformed limbs. Edie found she could breathe again. She was still terrified, but something in the motion of the shape against her body and its smell reawakened her earlier cravings.

She arched her back, and the discarded foetus slid between her breasts and down her belly. Reaching the moist lips between her parted legs it began to burrow. Edie gasped and writhed, at once guilty and ecstatic, terrified and pleased. Her panting reached a crescendo as the tautness suddenly gave way and the movement within

her settled. Her limbs wilted. Replete, she abandoned herself to the night.



Edie opened her eyes, then closed them again. She'd forgotten to draw the curtains and the sunshine cut a path through the room. Cursing, she swung out of bed, then grabbed the bed head to steady herself. If she's been to an all-night party she would have expected to feel that bad.

As she washed, flashes of dreams jumped into her mind. Edie couldn't remember them clearly, and didn't want to. Being a spinster, she'd grown used to her dream escapades and had given up blushing in the daylight. This one she vaguely knew had been rather different, but she was more concerned with the way she felt. There was never time to be ill when there were animals to look after.

'If a good husband meant someone like her father, who'd creep into her bed and force unspeakable acts on her, then it was something she could live without'

Upon entering the kitchen, the bin bag caught her eye. It was on the floor and when Edie picked it up she found it to be empty. With a choking cry she dropped it again. Her stomach heaved and she rushed to the sink.

Afterwards, she felt a little better. She splashed her face with cold water, enjoying the cooler air. Looking up she realised she'd left the top window open, only a fraction, but past experience had shown Yang's agile body to be capable of getting through it easily.

'Cat, one day you're going to outlive your usefulness!'



A week later Edie was beginning to regret her threat. Not that Yang showed any signs of fading, it was more that Edie now doubted he was to blame.

Any woman reaching her middle years had to expect her body to play tricks on her. Erratic periods, mood swings, flushes; Edie didn't need a manual to tell her about them. Nor did she need advice about the early stages of pregnancy, she'd seen far too many girls in that condition.

It began to dawn on her that something wasn't right. Apart from the

waves of nausea that made her mornings unbearable and the tenderness in her breasts, she recalled that many of her clients would talk of an inner conviction; they hadn't needed the tests, they had simply known that they were pregnant.

When the home testing kit showed positive, Edie just nodded. She was pregnant with another woman's discarded foetus. Wondering at her own calmness, she considered the next move.



The water was very hot, and the flesh up to Edie's waist was bright red. It had taken her several minutes to sit down, but now it didn't sting any more. The gin had seen to that.

Edie leaned her head against the tiles and sang softly to herself. Then she began to laugh. How ridiculous the situation was! In her fifties and about to have a virgin birth. No, not virgin, but the conception was fairly immaculate. There was no 'fortune-teller' for her to go to, so here she was doing just what she warned all the girls against. Taking a hot mustard bath with a bottle of gin and...

Concentrating hard to control her movements, Edie leaned over and picked something up from the towel. It was so homely and innocent that Edie burst out laughing again. A knitting needle, sterilised of course.



There was so much blood. Edie hadn't imagined there could be so much inside her, for a while she doubted she would be able to staunch the flow, it would just keep draining away until the floor was carpeted in red. Eight pints went quite a long way.

It would have been easy to give herself over to the darkness which began to fill the corners of her vision. She was cold and thirsty and so tired. Even when the bleeding stopped, Edie wanted to sink into the blackness, to let it cushion her. Only habit stopped her. She couldn't leave the remains in the house.

The foetus looked dead. Edie wasn't sure whether it was her imagination playing tricks, but it looked bigger than the first time she'd aborted it. There was no doubt that it was the same one, the disfigurement inflicted by Yang was still evident, and it had looked just as dead last time.

Until the pigs had disposed of the remains entirely, Edie dared not take her eyes off it. This time she had been lucky, but another termination in her weakened state would probably kill her.

She struggled, stumbling and sometimes crawling a few paces to the sty. The weather had cleared but it was

still cold. Inside, the sty offered drowsy warmth. Edie forced herself to stay awake. The pigs chomped and slavered over their feast. The sound was revoltingly like the one the foetus had made when it entered her.

Edie tried to concentrate on mundane things. The beasts were fattening up well. Before long they'd be ready for slaughter. Then there'd be bacon to cure, sausages to make, so much work to do.

If there had been anything in Edie's stomach, she would have lost it then. She would never be able to eat pork again.

Afterwards Edie made herself a cup of tea and went up to bed with a hot water bottle, not caring that it was still daylight. Her mind ran over a succession of topics both logical and illogical.

If she no longer needed the pigs for her own food, then she would sell them and put the money towards a holiday. She would go away, for the first since she'd left her parents. The furtive caresses of her father in the dunes had made her childhood trips to the seaside a thing to be dreaded.

Despite the hot water bottle, Edie felt cold. She would use the money to go somewhere warm, somewhere where the beaches were full of holidaymakers and coloured umbrellas. Edie could almost feel the sun on her face. It reflected off the scorching sand, reducing figures to black squiggles in the haze.

The sounds of the holidaymakers and the sea became muffled as though someone had shut a door between them, but the squiggles remained. Every wave cast up more of them. Something in the way they moved was familiar. The whispering and hissing breath of their efforts superimposed itself on the sea.

Suddenly, Edie knew what they were. She tried to cry out, but she knew it was useless, the holidaymakers would not be able to hear her.

The sand held her down, as if each grain was a magnet. All Edie could do was watch while hundreds of tiny unfinished forms made their way up the beach towards her. Not all of them would make it, but one at least would find sanctuary, claiming back its existence.

Already one was hauling itself over her thigh. Edie's breath started to come in gasps as the foetus began to burrow.



KARLA DEARSLY is a redundant post office clerk who lives with her husband and dog in Northampton. Her desire to write has been nurtured by the Cassandra Workshop. Although she has had various bits and pieces published, *Surrogate* is her first story to appear in a professional publication.

Graham Masterton

HURRY MONSTER



Illustration: Ronn Sutton (pencil) & Dan Day (ink)

Under a sky the colour of corroded copper Kevin came running down the path beside the river, his school satchel slap-slap-slapping against the back of his gaberdine raincoat. Spots of rain were beginning to rustle threateningly into the grass, and to draw hundreds of compass-circles on the surface of the river.

But Kevin wasn't running because of the rain. He was running because of the Hurry Monster, which was hurrying close behind him. He thought that he could hear the echoing castanets of its claws, as it rushed shapeless and dark through the alleyways, and down the narrow steps, and along the muddy track beside the river.

Just behind him, just out of sight — just behind the pie shop, just behind the bushes.

Hurrying, with nothing on its mind but blood.

Kevin was already gasping for

breath, but he knew what would happen if he slowed down. The Hurry Monster would snatch hold of him, and bite into his body, and worry him ferociously from side to side, the same way that Orlando worried the mice she caught. Screaming — then pumping blood; then tearing muscle and stringy guts; then *crunch-crunch-crunch and gglommp!* — swallowed.

He didn't dare to look back. He had left the playground more than five minutes late because he had been playing a last game of cigarette-cards with Herbert Thorpe. The Hurry Monster had gained all that time already, and if he hesitated even for a second to look back —

He passed the sweetie-shop on the corner. He hesitated for one agonising second, because he still had tuppence in his pocket from this morning, and he could see through the window that the sweetie-shop lady had opened up a fresh box of flying saucers.

But there wasn't time. He couldn't risk it. The Hurry Monster might catch

up with him, and be lying in wait for him when he came out of the sweetie-shop. Then — *gnarrgghh!* — and his blood would be spattered all over the York-stone pavement.

He rushed across the main road. A coal lorry honked its horn at him, and the driver said something he couldn't hear. It was ten past four already! Ten past four. His cheeks burned with the panic of being so late.

His mother had warned him about the Hurry Monster, last October, after Robert Browne had disappeared. Her face had been white and serious. That calm, almost featureless face, with black eyes that always reminded him of fresh glittering raisins. *Boys who dawdle on their way home from school get eaten by the Hurry Monster. So hurry, when you're coming home! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!*

The first day after she had told him about the Hurry Monster, Kevin hadn't been sure whether he ought to believe it or not. After all, he had never seen the Hurry Monster, even when he had taken off his shoes and socks and fished under the footbridge for frogspawn, for almost an hour.

But on the second day, after he had crossed the main road, and walked past the gates to Ayton Hall, he was sure that he had heard footsteps very close behind him. Scratchy footsteps, like a large dog walking on stone; and *breathing*.

He had stopped; and he had turned around, but there had been nobody there. No dogs, no Hurry Monster. Only the shadows of the elderly oaks; only the whispering of the afternoon wind and the hollow-jar rushing of the river.

He had shivered, and then he had run on; across the narrow wooden footbridge that took him past the pub and down the lane and home.

But every day since then, on his way home from school, he had gradually become convinced that the Hurry Monster was close behind him. He had heard it, just out of sight. It had taken its shape from shadows and stray reflections. It had taken its breathing from the wind and the trees and the sound of the traffic. He hadn't dared to mention it to his schoolfriends, because it wasn't true in the same way that aniseed balls were true, or school dinners were true. But it wanted him. He knew that it wanted him. It was waiting every afternoon behind the high stone wall opposite Captain Cook's old schoolroom, and when he ran for home it came after him.

Every day he ran home faster. He ran like the wind. The Hurry Monster was after him! And he knew that it must be real because his mother had never lied to him ever; she had always told him that lying was the gravest sin of all. And didn't she always turn and smile with such warm relief when he came bursting out of

breath through the kitchen door, into that safe aroma of pastry and lardy-cakes?

Didn't she always hug him tight, as if he had just managed to escape from the most vicious of demons?

The Hurry Monster even began to lurk on the edges of his nightmares. He dreamed he was running home from school and it caught up with him, and savaged him to death. The tearing of sinews; the crackling of pulled-apart fat.

It was after him today, and he was five minutes late.

School sandals pattering along the river-bank; torn-off grass catching in the metal buckles. He was sure that he could hear the Hurry Monster's claws, ripping into the earth as it ran. He was sure that he could feel its urgent breath. *Hah! hah! hah! hah!*

Once he reached the footbridge, he would be safe. The Hurry Monster was too heavy to cross the footbridge.

He was only five or six yards away from the footbridge when he thought he heard somebody shout. *Kevin!* the smallest of cries, as small as a man shouting into an empty tin mug.

He stopped, panicking, hesitated, turned. The day was so dark that he could scarcely see.

Kevin! the voice cried out.

There was something in the shadows by Ayton Hall. Something black; something that flickered. He ran on, and reached the footbridge, and rushed halfway across it before he dared to stop.

Then he turned around again, a small boy in a school cap and short trousers, on a wooden footbridge, with the shallow river sliding beneath his feet. Only a few yards away, vans and lorries passed on their way to Guisborough or Harrogate. North Yorkshire, on a thundery night in March.

The Hurry Monster had gone. Vanished, as it always did, when he reached the footbridge. He had outrun it again; and he was safe.

He was just about to continue on his way home when he saw something floating towards him in the river. It was dark, and heavy, and it left behind a trail of arrow-shaped ripples. He climbed up on the wooden handrail to stare at it. He didn't like the river that ran through Great Ayton, even though he often fished in it. All he had ever caught was frogspawn and peculiar fish that looked as if they had arms and legs.

But this was different, this thing that was floating towards him this afternoon. This was sinister and dark and very big. He stepped down from the handrail, and unconsciously retreated from it.

It slid slowly beneath the footbridge. As it passed through the shadow of the bridge itself, Kevin could see for the first time what it was. He was chilled

with terror, but all he could do was utter the tiniest of whimpers.

It was the body of a man, floating face up, staring. Behind him he stained the water with a deep crimson fog; and Kevin could see that the front of his suit had been torn open, and that bloody coils were lazily floating in the man's lap.

Worst of all, though, the man was still alive. Only just. But enough to look up at Kevin and give him the wannest of smiles. Then the current had carried him away, and he was gone, over the weir, through the deeper pools where Kevin usually swam, over the second weir, and round the bend in the river between the pollards.

Kevin was still standing on the footbridge when his mother appeared in her apron, her hands dusty-white with flour.

'Kevin?'

He stared at her as if he didn't know who she was. 'There was a man. He was floating in the river and he smiled at me.'

He sat on the high wooden stool in the police station for nearly an hour. He had described the man, and even drawn him, in crayon. At half-past six his mother took him home. They walked hand-in-hand beside the river, and across the footbridge. Round the bend in the river, two policemen in shirt-sleeves were still poking at the weeds with long sticks, watched by a crowd of Kevin's schoolfriends and some old men who had come, across from the pub with their pints of beer.

After tea, one of the old men came and knocked at their kitchen door. 'Thought you'd like to know that they found 'im, poor bugger. Two miles down the river, caught in the weeds. They can't work out who 'e is, though. No wallet, nothin'. And nobody's ever seen 'im before. But 'e was fair ripped to pieces, no mistake. Stummick ripped out. Terrible. That tea still fresh?'

Kevin sat at the kitchen table. He felt very cold, very *compressed*, as if the shock of seeing the dying man had somehow made him smaller than he already was.

Why had the man smiled at him? What can a drowning man with his stomach all ripped out — what can he possibly find to smile about?

He went into the sweetie-shop for twenty Rothman's and he was pleasantly surprised how little it had changed. The glass-fronted counter with the flying saucers and the aniseed-balls and the licorice-whips was still there; much lower down and much tinier than he remembered; but still the same.

There was a different woman behind the counter — red-haired, this one, with freckles all over her arms; and there was a television on the back shelf, switched to racing from Redcar. But the smell was the same; and even though the main road was ten times

busier, they hadn't widened it; and the river still ran as dark and reflective as it always had when he was a boy.

'I used to live here, years ago,' he told the red-haired woman. 'Just across the river, Number Three Brownlow Lane.'

The red-haired woman smiled. 'I'm from Barnsley, myself.'

He left the sweetie-shop and the doorbell jangled behind him. Outside he smelled rain in the air. He crossed the road and stood beside the river, and lit a cigarette. He wondered if those peculiar fish that looked as if they had arms and legs still bred beneath the weir.

Thirty years, first time back to Great Ayton in thirty years. His mother had met the captain of a merchant ship soon after he had left home, and she had died in Hull of all places. He had stood beside the captain while his mother had disappeared into the crematorium furnace to the strains of *The Old Rugged Cross*. The captain had smelled strongly of Vick chest-rub. They had shaken hands, and then Kevin had taken the first train back to London, and his job at Pearl Assurance, and his single flat in Islington, just round the corner from the Angel.

This week, he had been taking care of an insurance claim in Middlesborough. He hated Middlesborough, a grey dreary industrial wasteland, butchers' shops with nothing but belly-pork and working men's clubs with off-key rock 'n' roll groups and pints of bitter in straight-sided glasses. He had driven out to Great Ayton for the afternoon just to smell the moors and feel the creamy warmth of the Yorkshire village stone.

He finished his cigarette and flicked it into the river. He looked at his watch. He had a final meeting with the assessors at five, he'd better be getting back. Besides, it was beginning to rain quite hard now, whispering in the grass, drawing compass-circles on the surface of the river.

He was about to cross the road when he saw a small boy running along the pavement, really running. The boy was wearing a school cap and flannel shorts, and a school satchel joggled up and down on his back. *Look at that poor little chap*, he thought to himself. *Running home at full steam just like I used to.*

The boy passed the sweetie-shop, hesitated for a second, then darted across the main road. A coal lorry blew its horn at him, and the driver shouted out of the window, 'Silly young bugger! You could have been killed!'

It was then — to Kevin's horror — that he saw the reason why the boy was running so fast. Out of a shadowy alleyway not far behind him rushed a huge dark creature that billowed like a conjuror's cape. It flew along the



pavement with a soft clashing noise, crossed the road, and began to pursue the boy along the bank of the river.

Kevin froze. Then he started running, too. He was out of condition, he had been smoking too much, but he sprinted as hard and as fast as he could. The creature had almost caught up with the boy, and one dark arm was lifted, with claws that gleamed in the coppery gloom like razors.

'Kevin!' Kevin shouted. 'Kevin!'

The creature rumbled and billowed and immediately turned around. Kevin ran headlong into it. It was black and it was cold and its breath hit him like opening up a freezer.

Kevin saw eyes that were malevolent and narrow and yellow as pus. Eyes which had stared at him before, in nightmares. He heard a soft roar of triumph; a scissoring of teeth.

'Oh God,' he said. 'It's true.'

The claws sliced through waistcoat, shirt, Aertex vest, skin, fat, muscle. They were so sharp that Kevin didn't even feel them. He was hooked up in the air, sickeningly spun around. He dropped heavily onto the river bank, onto the grass. Rolled, blindly, helpless, into the river.

The water was intensely cold. He was glad of that, because it anaesthetised the pain, although he didn't like the feeling of it pouring into his sliced-open abdomen.

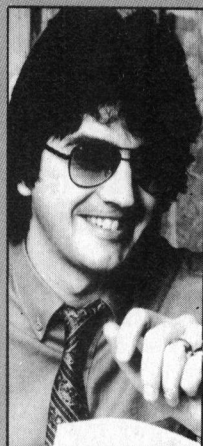
He was lying on his back. He knew that he was dying. He floated gradually downstream, hearing the river gurgle in his ears.

He passed under the footbridge. A horizontal bar of darkness in front of his eyes. Then he saw a small face staring down at him, wide-eyed, horrified.

Don't be frightened, he thought to himself, as the current carried him away. *You will do the same one day. You will save Kevin yet again. And yet again.*

He closed his eyes. He slid over the weir as lifeless as a sack. Then he floated around the bend of the river where his mother was waiting for him.

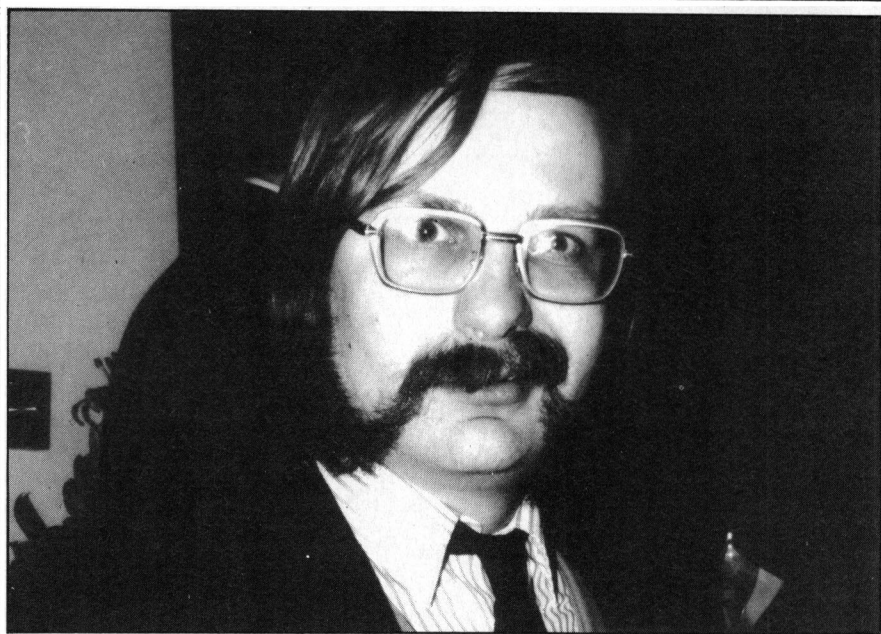
He was sure that he could hear her whisper, *Hurry, Kevin. Hurry!*



GRAHAM MASTERTON started his professional life as a journalist and became editor of *Penthouse* magazine before abandoning fact for horror fiction. His novels include *Night Warriors* and *The Manitou*. He has recently edited an anthology entitled *Scare Care*, published by Grafton in November, and has written a new book, *Death Dream* (the sequel to *Night Warriors*) which is scheduled to be published at Christmas.

FICTION FILE 21

KIM NEWMAN



The modern maestro of movie criticism talks to John Gilbert about the state of the art and his debut as a author of ripping yarns.

Kim Newman almost saw his first film, *First Men In The Moon*, in 1964, but due to a crying fit thrown by his sister, had to leave halfway through. Fortunately, his parents took him back again to see the remaining hour. 'It was an ideal first movie for me to see. It's H G Wells, who is one of my great passions, and Ray Harryhausen, a great figure in fantasy cinema.'

Film fascinated him from a very early age. 'I was always one of those people who took notes about movies. I started taking notes just on a list of films I'd seen in 1973 and some years later I started writing down little reviews.'

At the University of Sussex he completed a couple of film courses. He left in 1980 and found it difficult to get work, but in 1982 made his first professional non-fiction sale to a British Film Institute publication, the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. 'I had written for *Sheep Worrying*, a West Country magazine, for a couple of years as their regular film critic and that job got me work on *City Limits* [the London-based listings magazine]. The *Bulletin* and *City Limits* were the backbone of my film reviewing work for five or six years.'

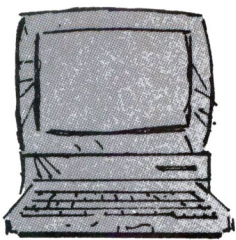
His encyclopaedic knowledge of film has pushed him to the forefront of the current critical wave, while non-fiction works such as the recently updated *Nightmare Movies*, *Ghastly Beyond Belief* and *Horror: 100 Best Books*, have associated him specifically with the horror genre. His regular appearances

on Channel 4's *Box Office* have brought him further acclaim as a critic and journalist. So it was only a matter of time before Newman was to try his hand at fiction under his own name and that of Jack Yeovil, whom he originally developed as a pen name for a series of Games Workshop fantasy/SF novels, in order to keep both markets separate.

His first Kim Newman novel, *The Night Mayor* appeared in hardback early this year and in paperback this summer, while his second hardback, *Bad Dreams* has just been launched. Both are, to some extent, spoofs and the former contains a large number of filmic references and in-jokes. 'That's because I'm a funny guy...In *The Night Mayor*, I was deliberately trying to write something like 1940s movies, where they wisecrack all the time. I wanted it to be like the Jack Warner movies where Bogart and Cagney were there and they would always trade insults — there's a line in the book about trading insults. That struck me as being kind of interesting.'

Bad Dreams is a very different book, though the central character tends to have that same ironic distance evident in *The Night Mayor*. 'You only know this girl for one day, and she starts off the day being told that her sister's just died, and I tend to think that that would put a damper over the whole rest of your day. So I had to make her the kind of person who would react with a certain kind of hysterical sarcasm just to make her bearable for the rest of the book...someone who could kick back.'

Kim's next novel, which he will deliver to his publishers in March 1991, is tentatively titled *Jago* (or *Jago: The Last Days*) and concerns 'a nice young couple who don't buy a haunted house but do move to a village where something nasty happens. It's a *'Salem's Lot*-sized book, set in Britain. It's a community novel set in an English village rather than a small town. So it's kind of like *The Archers*, with horror.'



HARD COPY

By Jim Marquez and Brian Mollner

Brian smiled. Tonight would be the night Jim would never forget. He approached the Brother Word Processor and seated himself before it. He began to type. It went something like this.

To Jim
July 17, 1989
9.30 pm

SHE STOOD FIVE FOOT SIX. LONG BLONDE HAIR. HER EYES SPARKLED BLUE. LIGHT BROWN SKIN, PERFECTED BY THE SUN. SOFT. FIRM BREASTS. SLENDER THIGHS. GREAT PERSONALITY. HER NAME IS HONEY. AND SHE'S WHATEVER YOU WANT HER TO BE.

He laughed. Jim, here comes seven-heaven. Enjoy. He almost forgot. He typed another four words:

SHE'S WEARING CLOTHES, OKAY?

The correction mode finished its job and the magic began.

Jim got in about three in the morning. Jesus Christ. Too much drinking. The light was blinking on the console by his Apple and that only meant one thing: Brian. He groaned. Not this again. He kicked off his Reeboks, sat with a heavy sigh at the keyboard and punched RETURN. Brian's latest letter appeared in a harsh, green glow, and Jim read.

'Not bad, Bry. Best one yet.'

Jim told her to take off her clothes. Instant erection. He put Sting's later version of 'I Burn For You' on the CD player and soon the music filled the

room, spilling into the dark corners, behind desks, under beds. She lay back on the bed, over the Peanuts bed-spread, and smiled and didn't say a word. A ceiling fan churned. The air was cool. They caressed. She cried. He thought of a great story idea when it became her turn to get on top. He often thought up his best material when making love to women, his worst when with men. He merely attributed these thoughts to divine inspiration. When it came time for Honey to turn over, and as he kicked his stuffed Alf doll off the foot of the bed, Jim realised how he would thank Brian for this. Yes indeed. As for Honey, he was done in about an hour.

Jim sat at his keyboard and typed in the following:

To Brian
July 18, 1989
4.15 am

IT'S SILVER. IT'S SLEEK. IT HAS FOUR WHEELS. NO, IT IS NOT YOUR MOM'S OLD PINTO. IT'S A BMW, MY FRIEND. BEST OF ALL, IT'S A CONVERTIBLE. I REMEMBER YOU TOLD ME YOU RODE IN YOUR FRIEND'S, AND, YOU WERE ACTUALLY TURNED ON BY IT. WELL, THIS ONE IS REAL FAST AND THIS ONE IS YOURS NOW. THE KEYS ARE IN YOUR RIGHT HAND DESK DRAWER. HONEY WAS THE BEST. THANKS. IT'S PARKED OUT FRONT... DRIVE ON THE WILDSIDE.

Jim hit the SEND button. He got up, turned, looked back at the bed, and of course Honey wasn't there. Jim then quietly passed out.

The bleeping on Brian's computer created a stirring in his dream-world. He awoke in a cold sweat. Too many horror movies. He wiped the wet-

ness from his forehead.

Brian made his way to the computer and made himself comfortable. He poured some Scotch. The clock read 4.30 am. Tomorrow is Saturday, he thought. He was prepared for some early morning fun. Don't disappoint me, Jim.

The computer read-out practically blew out his mind. Fair trade, amigo. A gorgeous woman for a gorgeous car. He reached across to the right hand desk drawer and pulled out the keys. Ticket to freedom.

He raced out front for the BMW. He leaped inside — ignoring the door. He started the car. Pure ecstasy. The Eagles' 'In The City' echoed in his ears. He smiled.

Fifteen minutes later, Brian inhaled the sweet, salt air off Pacific Coast Highway. He increased the speed. Eighty-five miles an hour.

Thoughts backtracked carefully in his mind, never missing a detail. Jim discovered their computer connection a week ago by mistake. Next thing you knew, they began to pass items through distance: parties, drugs, money, sex. Brian mused over the one drawback: the items lasted for only an hour. They would have to live with it until they figured out what they were dealing with.

Brian raced for his Glendale apartment. No room for a mistake. This car disappears on the freeway, he reminded himself, you're either going to be run over by a semi or have to walk home.

He pulled into the driveway with fifteen seconds to spare. He almost cried when it vanished. Next time, I'll ask Jim for money and buy one.

Morning mist materialised as Brian opened his front door and went over to his computer. Payback time.

To Jim
July 19, 1989
5.35 am

CHECK YOUR BRIEFCASE. A TERM PAPER FOR MRS SULLIVAN'S BRITISH LIT. NO MISTAKES. TEN PAGES LONG. BRILLIANT. SUBJECT: COMPARISON OF WRITERS IN VICTORIAN AGE. READ AND ENJOY. THANKS FOR THE RIDE. BYE.

Brian's fingers finished the process.

Midmorning: Jim flipped when he read the screen. Thank God. He had that paper due next week, Sullivan the Terrible rejected his other paper on Milton, said he didn't have enough 'passion' for him, so Jim was forced to swallow it and write a new one. The weekend was not enough time. And he damn well wasn't going to start now. Just what the doctor ordered, Bry. But first things first.

He scrambled a couple eggs, toasted some wheat bread, and brewed some pitiful coffee. He switched on his personal copier, read through the manuscript, then ran it through.



Perfect. The original had about ten minutes left to live. Guaranteed 'A' in seminar. He imagined himself getting it back from Sullivan the Terrible, imagined how she would kiss his ass for writing such a brilliant paper. Yeah. Real good summer ahead if he could pull a 4.0.

And as he safely tucked away the copy into his briefcase, and as the original simply became *not there* any more, Jim too thought about this wonderful new toy of theirs.

It was a genie in a bottle times a thousand.

They had both read that Stephen King story some years ago, about a guy creating things out of a word processor just by typing them out on the screen, but that was impossible. Only fools believe in certain 'things' as being impossible, Jim thought, then belched. Right. Fools.

Jim's disk drive jammed one night. Simply refused to obey commands. He put in a new story and wrote out a short note at the end for Brian. He wanted Brian to look it over, but Jim couldn't even get a print out. He couldn't save it either. Bugs were in the drive and he would have to clean it out. Frustration set in.

But a swift left jab to the side of the monitor and the screen went blank. Oh shit, he thought, I finally broke the damn thing. Not yet though. A flash of light appeared on the screen, filled it top to bottom then winked out slowly, like when you turn off the TV. And that's when the monitor shook. Actually started to shake! 'Fuck!' Jim shouted and pushed himself back in the rollaway chair and stood, staring, breathing hard. The monitor tipped from side to side, creaking and craning, moaning and almost yanked itself from the terminal, then stopped. 'What the fuck?' Jim peeped.

He walked up to his desk, half-stepping, ready to spring for the door if it should decide to pounce and devour him in one final swoop of machine disobedience, but it didn't.

He felt warmth radiating from the screen. He put his hands as if to warm them by a fire and that is when the transmission began. A five second gurgling, hum. Then silence.

The phone rang and Jim hit the roof. It was Brian: 'Jim! You'll never believe what just happened, man...'

Jim believed.

So now, as the British Lit paper left this world and went God knows where, Jim sat at his keyboard:

To Brian
July 20, 1989
10.40 am

A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY. VERY FINE. VERY SMOOTH. VERY EXPENSIVE. 500 DOLLARS. DRINK UP, BUDDY... I'M TIRED NOW, BRY. LET'S QUIT FOR A WHILE. I REALLY HAVE TO
44 December1990 FEAR

CRASH. LATER.

Jim stood up ten seconds later, flipped off the overhead fan, and fell on the bed, dead tired, to sleep and to dream.

His dreams were filled with violence.

Brian burped. He stared at the clock on his kitchen wall. Forty-five minutes of drinking and he was drunk. He moved into his bedroom. His legs were useless. Might as well cut them off, he thought. I'd be safer hobbling around on stumps.

Fucking bastard. Brian smiled. Tomorrow morning he would regret ever meeting Jim, not now though. At this moment he loved him. Liquor carried a wave of rare emotions through his system. Tonight love, tomorrow hate.

'I know he loves *Batman*,' Brian whispered to an empty structure. 'Saw the movie six times. I'll send him *Batman*.'

Jim said something about a break. Screw him. He'll love this.

To Jim
July 21, 1989
8.30 pm

BATMAG. HE'S A BADASS AND HE'S ALL YOURS. LATER.

The typewriter paused before sending the message and it thought this: Batmag. No such word. Bat. Mag. Bat — small, winged creature which appears at night. Mag — short for 'magazine'. Mag — short for 'magnum'. Unsure. Erase Mag. Keep Bat. Badass: slang. Real Mean.

SEND REAL MEAN BAT.

Brian never noticed the miswording in his drunken stupor. He would regret it later.

Something nibbled at Jim's neck. Honey, you've come back.

Jim tossed over onto his left side and brushed a hand at his neck. 'Cut it out,' he mumbled. 'Sleep... tired... go take a shower... or...'

The nibbling turned into a sort of sucking. Pleasure. Oh God that's good, Jim thought. Real fucking good. 'No...' he moaned. He began to grow. Oh shit, Honey, you're going to kill me.

The sucking turned into a sort of biting and he felt heat spill down and around his neck, to the pillow. Fully blown and ready to rock and roll, he lifted his hand and put it on Honey's head to stroke. Kinda leathery, he thought.

She squealed. High-pitched. Hey, Jim surmised, nothing human in that. And then he heard the rapid flapping. DEAR GOD WHAT IS THAT? He put his hand to the front of his neck and touched what had oozed over it a couple seconds ago. Honey's saliva, he hoped.

He slowly opened his eyes; blood. Lots of it. NO! He looked over his shoulder and into the red, screaming

eyes of a vampire bat hovering four feet in the air and about a half a foot from his raised face. 'JESUS CHRIST!'

It bellowed like the devil himself and flapped its giant, black, scaly wings in the air and stirred a torrent of hot wind. Jim threw himself, rolling, to the other side of the bed and belly-flopped onto the floor. 'GAAAD!' he barked as the air blew out of him. He heard the bat screech and slap the air again with its powerful wings. Jim got up and made a mad dash out of the bedroom with Bela Lugosi hot on his heels. He shot out of the bedroom, across the living room and banged up against the door.

UNLOCK IT, SHITHEAD!

Jim turned and ducked just as the bat dive-bombed toward his face. The monster crashed into the door head first. It cried and loosened its head from the hole it had cracked through the wood and took to the air again.

Jim reeled. He stumbled forward into the room, over the sofa, over the coffee table, and fell on his right knee. He fell forward. A collapsing tree. DOES A TREE MAKE A NOISE WHEN IT FALLS IN THE FOREST AND NOBODY IS THERE TO HEAR THE GODDAMN THING FALL?! When his face hit the Indiana Jones throw rug, that is when the bat clamped its jaws down on his shoulder.

'Noooo!' Jim stood up and danced towards the kitchen. He craned his head to the side and saw red spurting into the air.

Pain.

'GET IT OFF! GET IT OFF!'

Jim writhed to the left, using his right hand to slap on the back of the creature's head, but no luck. The bat bayed and howled and made slurping noises. It began to drink. Its wings beat feverishly against Jim's face. Scratches and gashes appeared and more blood was drawn. Jim could only see the blurred black of the animal's wings. OH GOD HELP ME! HELP ME! He then upped and threw himself to the floor.

The resounding impact of one hundred and eighty-five pounds thrashing against the floor caused the bat to loosen its grip a little and that was all Jim needed. He grabbed the back of the squealing head and peeled it off and away from his shoulder. It bit into his shoulder harder, trying to cling on, but Jim insisted.

Its fangs ripped off a chunk of Jim's shoulder blade as it was pulled free in one final agonising scream, and it became helpless.

Jim squeezed its overgrown, flea-ridden back in both of his hands. 'DIE FUCKER DIE! LET ME HEAR YOU SNAP!' But he underestimated its strength. It shuddered and convulsed. It bobbed and twisted in his hands. It cried. Jim felt it inflate, its muscles flexed, and its wings beat faster. It just about slithered out of his hands, but Jim ran. He raised the twitching bat

high over his head and ran full tilt over to the far wall, then abruptly stopped eight feet from it, bringing Bat over his head and across and let it go... slamming into the wall. An ear piercing yelp was heard as well as a CRACK! Plaster and dust sprayed everywhere. The bat froze, then dropped to the floor. Still. Lifeless.

Jim stood. Stunned. Shaking. Hyperventilate time. Blood soaked his Batman T-shirt. He turned away and promptly vomited onto the upturned loveseat.

A squeaking sound stirred him from his momentary lapse of breakfast. GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE, MAN! It squeaked louder. Bullshit. He turned and the bat was slowly, wearily, as if coming out of a bad trip, rising to the ceiling.

Jim staggered into the bedroom. 'GET A WEAPON!' He slammed the door behind him and the bat smashed into it. It bashed its head against it again and again. It wanted in. No time. Never any time. He practically yanked the chain from the closet light as he began to rummage around. WISHED YOU TOOK UP HUNTING NOW, HUH BOY? DIDN'T WANT TO LISTEN TO YOUR DAD! SEE WHAT YOU GET? He tossed out books and papers and shoes and a deflated basketball. Behind him the ever persistent bat finally knocked a hole in the thin wood. But this didn't scare Jim. What scared Jim was the realization that the only thing he had in his closet to kill a doberman-sized, man-chomping, flying rat was a Prince tennis racket with three strings missing.

THWACK! THWACK! He was knocked back to his senses. THWACK! And the wood busted, imploding, and the bat floated inward, shaking splinters of door off its feathery head, and hovered, quietly, facing Jim. Jim, in all the panic, had not gotten a good look at his attacker until now. Beautiful in a demented sort of way. And it spread its full endowment before him, as if a show of strength was needed before this final duel. Jim was all for that. He raised the racket and brought it down with a resounding blow against the archway between his bedroom and his writing room. The top part of the racket shattered into a thousand pieces and what was left was none other than a stake of pure, unbearably sweet wood. KILLING TIME.

The bat screeched. It didn't snort or wind its wings up to get ready, it just darted, dived, pushed its body full force and shot through the air with a blood-curdling howl loud enough to wake the dead. Jim screamed something unintelligible back and thrust the stake into the air and made contact. He jabbed and impaled the bat in mid air and blood cascaded over his face. Black blood gushed all over the bedroom as the bat tried to fly off, but it couldn't, it was dying, it was defeated. Jim jabbed

up into the air again and cut off the yell in mid-sentence.

He lowered the prize and it twitched slightly as he dropped it to the floor. He spat on it. He kicked it. Dead. No doubt about it now. Its heart was dangling at the other end of the stake and its pulse quickened then stopped. Jim bent down, pulled the stake out and used the sharp end to cut the battered head off — standard vampire procedure.

Words and images flashed through his head as he crawled to the bathroom sink. Wash off the... blood. Got to get the blood off... He sank lower and lower into unconsciousness, but one thought brought him around instantly.

Where did it come from?

No, It couldn't have... HE'S MY FRIEND, FOR CHRISAKES!

Jim staggered into his writing room and in horror gazed at the read-out on the screen of his Apple. BASTARD! Why, though? What did I do? He tried to murder me! Oh, of course I can't go in front of a judge and say, but Honor, he sent a raging vampire bat to suck my blood away. But Brian nevertheless did it. Jim brought the chair up to the desk and sat down. Blood smeared the keys as he sent his messenger of death. He punched in the following:

**To Brian
July 22, 1989
9.47 a.m.**

ALL RIGHT YOU SON OF A BITCH, YOU WANT TO PLAY THAT WAY AND I'LL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO COMPLY! KNOW THE LEGEND OF KING ARTHUR? HE HAD WITH HIM THE GREATEST KNIGHT EVER TO WIELD A SWORD. THIS KNIGHT SERVED THE KING AND DID WHATEVER HE DESIRED. I NOW COMMAND HIM TO TAKE YOUR LIFE AND DANGLE YOUR DUBIOUS BALLS UPON THE TIP OF HIS SWORD. HIS NAME IS SIR LANCELOT.

Jim grinned. He breathed heavy. He became excited. He wiped the blood from his brow with his sweaty forearm and grabbed a warm can of Dr Pepper from the book shelf on his left and drank. Then he waited.

Pitch black.
Interruption.
Sunlight.
Pain.

Brian peeled himself away from underneath the bedroom window and yanked the comforter from its foundations in an attempt to escape from the sudden release of brightness through open drapes. He curled up under the covers like a newborn child.

Alcohol tainted his breath. His hangover clung to his mind like a wet T-shirt in a barroom contest. He wanted to reach inside his skull and peel it away in one effort. He couldn't. He knew better. Time to ride the early morning waves.

The computer's cry sliced into Brian's thought patterns, erasing anything coherent. It begged for release. No more, Jim. Let me die in peace. No ceremony. Just me, myself, and I.

He stretched his arm in the direction of the computer.

Two aspirin. Please.

He pushed a single button.

'Can you tell me where I may find Sir Brian Nollner?'

Brian's eyes opened under the covers, his senses concentrating on a single voice: English? He licked his lips and drew back the covers.

Twenty-two years of life failed to prepare Brian for what stood before him.

'I beg the intrusion dear sir.'

The figure crouched on one knee before Brian's bed. Silver armor cascaded over virtually every inch of flesh. Where armor failed to protect, chain-mail stretched across the figure. His helmet cast a devilish image, angles leveled in pure evil. It remained at his left side. A sword of unblemished beauty lay to his right.

His round face carried a handsome quality. Curly black hair hung past his neckline. Grey eyes sparkled with untold tales of fair ladies, dragons, and quests. The lips were painted evenly above his chin.

Time for question number one:

'Who are you?' Brian asked.

'Sir Lancelot of King Arthur's Round Table.'

'You're Sir Lancelot?' Brian removed himself from bed. He pulled on a pair of grey jogging pants.

'I am he,' the knight responded. 'Can you tell me where I may find Sir Brian Nollner?'

'That's me.' Brian jabbed himself in the chest with his forefinger. 'Jim must have had a great time with Batman, huh? They probably went out and fought criminals and...'

'I'm here to take your life.'

'Excuse me?' Brian asked.

'Sir Jim Marquez has ordered your death,' Sir Lancelot said. 'I am here to comply with the order. I am bound through my code of honor to fight you to the death.'

'Just a sec,' Brian said, inching back from the knight. 'Let me figure something out.'

Sir Lancelot rose from his kneeling position, erect, facial muscles tense. He nodded, allowing Brian time to prepare. Last request.

Brian punched up Jim's message on the screen. As he scanned each line, his face contorted into wonder, then confusion, then anger, and settled on fear. What was Jim thinking? He knew the consequences of the message. Sir Lancelot would have to comply with Jim's request.

He wants me dead, Brian thought. Why?

'May we begin?' Sir Lancelot placed his helmet on his head, obscuring any remaining humanity. He gripped his



sword, point directed in Brian's vicinity. 'Give me a minute,' Brian cried. 'Let me check one last thing.'

He had to know what drove Jim to commit this act. Had something gone wrong with Batman? I need to know, he thought, before I face the greatest knight ever to walk across the fucking earth.

'No more intrusions, Sir Nollner,' Sir Lancelot proclaimed. 'It is time to face me in mortal combat.'

'Mortal? No. Leave me alone.' Brian feinted to the left and reached for his phone. I need to call Jim. Please, God. Give me the time.

God never responded.

Sir Lancelot swung the sword in a wide arc...

A quick twist of the Phillips, the screw pops out and off comes the back panel. Nothing unusual here. A few drops of blood hit the newspaper Jim had put on the floor for all the equipment and tools, and this startles him.

He reaches inside his sweatshirt and adjusts the makeshift bandage. He needs to get to a doctor. Gangrene will set in soon. Rabies or something. He needs to get it sewn up. No. Not yet. The bottle of rubbing alcohol he dumped all over the wound would have to work here. Just keep it covered. What the hell is he going to tell the Doc at the emergency room? Shark bite? Not right off campus. Wouldn't jive. Got to figure this out, Jim thinks. Maybe an hour, probably less.

Exhaustion is no longer his enemy. He is keyed up. Within twenty-four hours he's made love to the most beautiful girl he's ever been allowed to touch, accomplished a miracle for his seminar class, battled a vampire bat to his near death, and come to the horrible conclusion that his best buddy actually wants him dead. That's still too fucking far out to believe, Jim thinks as he picks up the disc drive and brings it up to his nose and examines it closely. Way too far out. But it's happening, and very soon Brian himself will be sliced and chopped up and whatever else a knight does to his prey. Too bad. They were just getting started on that screenplay. No time for tears though, Jimbo, you got to be ready if Brian survives. But he can't. He's probably hung over from...

Well, anyway the cops can't be called. A one way trip to the rubber outhouse would be their only reaction to a story like this. He can't simply get up and leave either, because whatever is sent finds you. No use hopping on a plane and going to Vegas. Sit tight and think. Relax. Think about Jane. No, better not.

'What's this?' Jim asks as he peers inside the disc drive. 'What the f...'

...He then tucked and rolled across the carpeted floor, ignoring Sir Lancelot's deadly weapon. Sir Lancelot drove the sword point through one of

the walls, pinning a poster of Sting, obliterating the facial area. He yelled in vain.

Sir Lancelot removed the blood-thirsty steel from its current holding place and continued to press forward, crushing pieces of plaster under his weighted feet. He swung the blade from his right side. Blood for the king.

Except King Arthur didn't exist in Brian's world.

Jim did though. And he wanted Brian dead.

Payback time, Jim. Real soon.

Brian noticed his hockey stick under his bed. He reached and pulled it close. Sir Lancelot drove the blade in a downward motion, filling a hole an inch from Brian's cheek. Too close.

Two days before his nineteenth birthday, Brian found himself playing against one of the finest hockey teams in Northern California. His team was losing 3-1. In an emotional upsurge of frustration, Brian spotted Scott McClay, forward for the opposition and scorer of two goals. Brian allowed Scott to move against the boards and smashed into him. Scott broke his hand. Brian never forgot the hit.

Brian held on tighter to the hockey stick which had allowed him to take his toll on Scott McClay. He rose and pictured the crowd, shouting and screaming either praises or four-letter-words. He rushed forward and threw his body weight against Sir Lancelot, stick first, held at chest level. Sir Lancelot crumbled under a combination of the body armor and impact of the hit. Brian felt the vibration. Just like Scott McClay.

The shoulder holster, occupied by a .357 magnum, hung on a peg from the hatrack near the fluorescent clock. Brian discarded the hockey stick and pulled the holster from the peg, almost bringing the hatrack down on top of him, almost pinning him to the floor. Relax, boyo. He flipped open the cylinder on his magnum, checking for rounds. Empty. Give me a break. One break coming up. Where are the bullets? Use your head while you still have it.

Sir Lancelot, obsessed with removing Brian's head from his neck, pulled himself to a sitting position with the aid of the bed post. The bed moved a foot from its origin against the wall, but proved to be steady enough to support the weight of the knight.

Brian moved through the bedroom door and slammed it shut. Without much thought, he tucked the magnum into the waistband of his jogging pants and pulled a couch in front of the door, followed by a lamp and a plant his grandmother had placed in his care. He would figure out how to explain all the damage later.

Sir Lancelot pounded on the door and it held. Maybe a minute or two longer, Brian thought. Just enough time to find the bullets and end this deadly waltz with an armored maniac.

Brian fumbled frantically through the drawers in the dining area. Scissors, paperclips, condoms, rubberbands, assorted receipts... Nothing silver and deadly. Deep breathing exercises. Think, dammit! You haven't been this nervous since the first time you got laid at Susan Reynolds' house on Halloween, costumes intertwined with sweaty bodies, her mother in the next room, baking cookies the shape of pumpkins.

Sir Lancelot buried his sword in the bedroom door. Wood chips covered the hallway, spreading out in abstract patterns. The noise became deafening, overbearing.

Brian tipped cans over in the kitchen until the bullets were released from a coffee can like hyper children on a playground. Jackpot. Brian managed to fill his hands with six of them and fed them hard into the hungry chamber. Lock and load.

PARTY TIME...

Sir Lancelot used his right foot to rid himself of any further obstructions. He emerged from the doorway, sword extended from his right hand. It appeared dull, almost useless in any capacity.

Brian held the magnum at eye-level with both hands in a stance his firing instructor would have nodded OK in approval. He pictured a target stencilled across Sir Lancelot's chest armor. No time for mistakes.

Sir Lancelot's feet proceeded without hesitation.

Brian fired.

Sir Lancelot's chest exploded. He screamed.

Brian laughed and fired again. And again. And again.

Sir Lancelot twitched like a marionette, no control, strings snapping. When the third bullet struck, he dropped his sword. The fourth, fifth and sixth bullet drove him over furniture. He remained still.

Brian approached Sir Lancelot and nudged him with his right foot. He failed to stir. It didn't matter. Brian could have cared less if Sir Lancelot reached up with his gloved hand and pulled him close, impaling him upon the sword, bathing the couple in warm blood. It wouldn't happen. Ever.

Sir Lancelot's face seemed unaffected by the violence wrought upon his body. His eyes were open. Knock. Knock. Anyone there? Brian snorted in satisfaction. Play time's over. Out of the sandbox. Time to learn. He bent over and caressed a pool of blood spreading out from the lifeless body. He bought it up to his cheek and made a straight stroke. Then he followed up with a shorter one perpendicular to the first, forming a cross upon his skin. Some of the liquid touched his lips. He licked them. And swallowed. He returned his hand to the blood and continued to cover his skin with the life-juice of his fallen enemy until Sir Lancelot disap-

peared.

Outside, a hawk cried out in hunger.

To Jim
July 23, 1989
12.40 am

WELCOME TO HELL, MY FRIEND. ENCLOSED IS A FIRE-BREATHING DEMON. HE'S ONE OF THE BEST. HIS NAME — LUCIFER. HIS JOB — TO ROAST YOU ALIVE. BYE.

PS: I'M ALSO SENDING YOU AN ADDED BONUS. ALONG WITH THIS DEVIL, YOU'LL RECEIVE THE WORLD-FAMOUS WRESTLER 'BONE BREAKER BREWER'. THIS ONE'S FREE...

...Jim yelped and stumbled over his decapitated body. He slipped in a nasty puddle of the big guy's blood and fell on his ass. The seat of his sweats became caked in the red, slushy stuff, and Jim decided that now would be the best time to succumb to whatever the hell accidentally took off Brewer's head, the same what-in-the-fuck-do-you-call-it that was ripping apart Jim's soul. No use. Miller time, boys. Elvis has left the building. Thank you for coming, folks. Drive safely.

But Jim couldn't accept that. Too neat. Too easy.

Smoke was going to overcome him. The curtains went up, the ceiling fan was melting. The fire crawled up the walls.

Jim took to the streets. he crowds were shuffling out of late showings of *Batman* and *Lethal Weapon 2*. The Hamlet was closed, the Armenian place across the street was lifeless, kids with cigarettes and motorscooters congregated on street corners, and the melodic pounding of Jim's Reeboks on the pavement was putting him to sleep.

Run. Run. Don't drop your little bundle of goodies, run. Where though? Stephanie. He'll be safe with her. He's always felt safe with her. Up Wilshire. Make a left and go on up Wilshire. She's in a tower. That's exactly where she should be. Keep on running. She's waiting. Nobody around you has noticed that blood is seeping through your sweatshirt. Nobody sees the gash across your forehead or the bandage stretched across your hand. Just run.

As he padded past a bookstore he heard that voice again. No God no. More like an animal's squeal. A little like the bat's but this one was more abnormal, an abomination of nature, a sound not human yet human. It was a joke on It's part. It took a human form to get around easily, but inside it had to be a castaway. Some kind of exiled beast. Whatever It was, It growled and Jim dropped to his knees, one hand covering his right ear.

'No...please.' It growled and snorted and a thundering roar shook the street underneath and store windows began

to vibrate. A hot wind danced through the streets of the Village and began to topple over news stands. Kids let their cigarettes fall to the ground and people began to whisper, then the whispering turned into screaming.

A girl, maybe seventeen, was the first to explode. Lucifer, or whatever form it took this time, a boy, appeared on Broxton and hurled a stream of fire from his outstretched palm and missed Jim by two feet, hitting the girl instead who had dropped her purse and run into the street to see if Jim was all right because she thought she knew him.

Anna did.

THAT FUCKING IDIOT MISSED, Jim screamed wildly in his head, just what happened to Brewer. Jesus. Jim then cried out and slammed his hand against the asphalt. Singes of burnt meat littered the ground like confetti, and those people who hadn't fainted or fallen to their knees to vomit ran as if to beat the devil. Run. Run...

Jim scrambled to his feet, picking up his hand-held personal computer and caught himself in the frantic flow of people who came out of doors to look, then decided to run as well. There was nothing else to do.

A dog trotted after the hurried mass of trampling feet then stopped and gazed up at a nearby movie house as the roof was shattered instantly into a thousand fiery pieces. Chunks of wood and metal splashed across the sky and spread out over the street, taking out groups of Villagers as the debris rained down upon them.

Jim sashayed through the torrent and was promptly pushed against a building. 'Where did all these people come from?' Jim asked the smokey sky. 'Where?' Somebody or some bodies threw him to the cold floor.

A parked Celica shot up into the sky, end over end, and came down in a billowing explosion, spilling fuel and charred pieces onto other cars. A chain reaction began. BOOM! A BMW went up. A Corvette. A yellow Mustang. A blue Nova. A grey Camaro. Straight on down the line, popping off like a goddamn shooting gallery. A stationwagon fell on its side and fire flew out of its belly.

Everything was incinerated. Parking attendants were roasted alive in their booths. Teenagers fell. Many, many teenagers still wearing their black Raybans simply ignited and ceased to exist. Like blowing out a Bic lighter.

Jim crawled along the sidewalk, and managed to curl up under the awning beneath the entrance to Pizza Hut.

Shrieks and that menacing roar that somehow began to sound like some kind of sick laughter rang in his ears. And he began to hate. Jim felt a trembling in him, a sparkle of absolute, free-wheeling ecstasy called hatred. It was good. It welled up inside him. He began to shake. 'No..' he mumbled and gritted

his teeth. 'Leave me alone...' And then a young boy fell on his face next to Jim and as the boy rolled to his side Jim saw that the left portion of this head was no longer there.

Jim screamed louder.

A woman who looked like Aunt Bea maneuvered herself down the street, past the wreckage, past the bodies, and shouted into the now horrendous, black wind: 'WHERE ARE YOU?! COME OUT, COME OUT WHATEVER YOU ARE! TIME TO PAY THE PIPER!'

Jim froze. He heard the scrawny female voice and pissed in his pants. 'Go away...' he croaked.

Manhole covers popped out of streets and made B-lines for pedestrians' heads, and the old woman continued to shuffle past burning metal.

She'll zap me and I'll die, Jim thought. I should have stood and burned in the flames of my apartment. Would've been easier. I'm sick of this shit. Let's go.

Jim picked himself up and stumbled out into the street. The hoardes of people had disappeared. Buildings around him were on fire. He thought he heard sirens off but he also thought he was making the noise himself.

Jim then looked down the street by the WHEREHOUSE and saw the demon in its true form. Jim sucked in air too fast and the world began to spin.

He saw the restaurant on top of that tall building overlooking Wilshire dislodge itself in a horrendous, blinding explosion and shattering of glass. The tiny specks of people that came away with it crashed onto the chaotic panic below. A new wave of screams echoed in the overrun boulevard. Escaping Porsches veered left and right, trying to avoid severed restaurant patrons, but only found themselves jumping the curbs and careening into the facade of the Avco and right on into the theatre itself.

This world was no longer here for Jim. His head spun faster now, faster, around and around, snatching glimpses of the ruined storefronts and streets and upturned cars and burning garages and decapitated parking guards and beached Rolls Royces and twisted metal and pulsing flames and faster and faster, spinning and spinning... And he saw George, that sonofabitch who used to chase him in the fifth grade and take away his *Baseball Digest* and make him cry, and he saw Caesar and that fuckhead Robert who used to hit him in the face and tear apart Jim's medium-sized leather keycase and he saw that abusive Mr Thompson who used to teach Jim's junior high lit class and he saw Marie fondling David's thigh underneath the table as he bent down to pick up his pink cloth napkin and he saw that whore's smile as she denied Jim his scholarship and he saw Richard making fun of his once bad vision and then saw him extending his hand and



saying, 'Praise Jesus Christ, Jim', and he saw that bitch high school newspaper advisor who thought everybody enjoyed administering a public castration as much as she did and he saw the bat and he saw Brian and he saw so much hatred he wanted to explode. And then he saw black.

Jim opened his eyes two seconds later in an alley. Cold. He was bleeding again. Dark and quiet. Where am I?

And for a minute he saw Suzanne sitting next to him on the oily, smelly, alley floor. My God she's beautiful, he noticed. She was wearing a light blue dress, the bottom billowing about her knees, and she smiled. Jim asked her if she was cold but she didn't answer. He told her he was sorry for not asking her to the prom way back then, it's just that I was afraid of you, he said. I was in love. But again, no response from the apparition. And that's what it had to be. What she was. A ghost. Something from his past that could not die. No. It was Suzanne. Here. Now.

He reached out to touch her. She brushed the hair from his forehead and moved closer to him. 'Jim, why did you leave me?'

'I love you,' Jim said, tears forming in his eyes. 'I need you. Don't leave me again.'

Suzanne smiled and a distortion of human flesh began to form over her shape. Jim screamed. Her skin peeled off her skeleton, twisted and rotting. Jim continued to scream. Claws replaced slender fingers. Golden eyes gleamed with delight.

'This is what you want, this is what you need,' the thing told him in a raspy voice. 'I am here for you. I've been in your dreams since you were a boy. Don't be afraid.'

Jim couldn't speak. My God, her voice sounds like Suzanne's, but it's not. Jim didn't remember dreaming about anything like this.

'Be still,' it said. It reached out its claw and placed it on Jim's knee.

'No,' he peeped. 'Please.' Jim felt his blood streaming faster, flowing through his veins and creating a puddle underneath him.

It leaned toward Jim, it wanted to kiss him, green tongue flicking, and for some strange reason, Jim did not resist.

But two bullets erupted through the demon Jim called Suzanne. A bluish liquid bathed Jim across his chest. He didn't mind. The creature appeared repulsed at his presence as it collapsed backward.

'You awright?' A young, stupid cop yelled from up the alley, gun smoking. 'Awright there, man?'

Jim raised a hand in reply and that is when the Suzanne-thing bounced back up and shot a glance at the cop and the gun simply blew up in the man's face, obliterating any distinguishable features. Jim kicked forward

trying to prevent the slimy thing from getting closer to him, but it advanced, laughing like it knew the meaning to a hidden joke, and Jim bawled out like a baby. Time to give up, peace of mind in exchange for a soul. Not a bad deal. Jim pushed up against a sticky trashbin and grabbed the back of his head with both hands as the thing finally vaulted onto him, and then it was gone. Like a candle flicking off. POOF! Not there.

Jim laughed, then stopped. He examined his hands for five minutes. He rubbed his eyes as if coming out of a dream and tried to stand. Pain. That horrendous body ache knocked him back to the ground. His body began to shake. Sweat broke out all over.

He looked around and found his pocket pc off to the right. He slithered over and placed it on his lap. He checked the disc, still there, and began to type, slowly at first. It was the disc that Jim had found slightly glowing in the drive back home. The program. Brian had one too. Jim had made an illegal copy for him, he ought to know. Where did I buy it? he asked the rusted fire escapes above him. Where? Doesn't matter now, boy. Nothing does. I love you Brian. Time to die.

The whole city heard the sirens and Jim didn't realize that Lucifer had been around an hour and two minutes before he vanished.

BRIAN

June 20...1985

1.27 AP

DON'T KNOW...WHAT HAPPENING BUT SORRY friand i love you have to die...stop living FUCKER!!!!WE'LL see you in... YOU CAN'T EXCAPSE NOW. TIRED!!! Brain...Invisible death...death

The sirens continued throughout the night, echoing deeper and deeper into Brian's mind. He wanted it to end. He wanted to place his hands on each side of his head and squeeze. Squeeze until bones popped, eyes bulging beyond restraint and eardrums bursting until complete silence rested upon his brow.

Was Jim finally dead?

Brian pictured Jim's burning body, the smell of flesh causing others to turn away in disgust, ashes floating up into the clouds, scattering pieces of him across Southern California, We regret to inform you, Mrs Marquez, but the reason we can't bury your son is due to the fact that we can't find the body. Here lies Jim Marquez. All that remains is a dark spot on a Westwood sidewalk.

I have to know if he's dead... It's been over two hours and no word. Brian slammed the magnum against the side of his head, drawing slight specks of blood. The sirens subsided.

A beeping carried over the noise of the continuous traffic. Ever so slightly

Brian cocked his head in the direction of the bedroom. He gazed at his watch. Better late than never, Jimbo.

The beeping stopped.

Brian tossed the empty magnum aside and rose from the beanbag. His impression remained behind. And what do we have behind door number one? Please, Jim. Make it worthy of me. I am bathed in the blood of Sir Lancelot. I am cleansed.

A clear gas seeped through the pitch blackness of the bedroom, engulfing everything; debris of the door, a framed print of James Dean, television and vcr, a stuffed teddy bear from his ex-girlfriend, Jeanne, pictures of his football days, and an endtable. Objects appeared to disappear into the belly of his newest enemy.

'Come and get me motherfucker!' Brian screamed, arms outstretched, desiring an embrace of life and death. It all depends on who squeezes harder, baby.

The gas hesitated. It reared upward in defiance, spreading horizontally with each passing second.

Brian studied the gas with fascination. Nothing surprised him any more. He was able to make out the opposite wall through its form. It carried no odor. Several objects disappeared within it and had failed to return in any shape or form. It has a personality of some kind. What the hell is this, Jim? Boy, would I love to read the computer...

It struck instantly, covering Brian's body in one shot, flooding the room in a wave, crashing into everything; the larger portion gaining momentum as it descended from the ceiling.

'No...' became lost within the substance.

Ocean spray upon my face. Flying fish dressed in walrus costumes.

A mermaid with a mustache.

A submarine eating a pizza.

Help me, sweet Jesus. I beg you.

Teeth bite into my lower right leg. I lash out, pounding on the rubber head of the shark. Flesh tears. I cry. My voice carries no authority over the love-making of the waves. I'm drowning. My lungs receive salt water. They protest. I no longer feel my leg. I reach down and it's gone. Teeth begin to bite my hand. I pull my hand out and the rubber shark is attached. I twist my neck and clamp onto the shark's neck. Blood fills my mouth. The rubber shark sings.

I go under the water, sinking into the blue. Blue becomes black, fading colors. Is any of this possible? Where's the giant rabbit? I fail to find any strength in my arms. My leg is still gone. I'm dead. Jim is number one. Top dog. No competition. I gave it the old Harvard try.

No...

I'm not going to let him win. Time to fight back. Just like Rocky. I reach up, clawing at the water which buries me. I strain my muscles. My remaining leg

kicks out, propelling me to the light above. Perhaps the light is heaven. I don't care. I continue my assault. I climb. My lungs are numb.

The light is brighter.

Fuck Jim. I rise ever so slowly. My arms drop to my sides, my leg goes still. I'm still moving. Up, up, and away. My eyes have narrowed to slits, enough to find my saving grace.

I touch the light. My head bangs into it, my body recoils. Something is preventing me from climbing into the light. Glass intervenes between the light and my life. I pound on the glass. Break. I no longer feel any pain. Time's up. I use my fists like a boxer, striking out, left, right, right, right. The glass breaks. I'm free.

An hour and a half has passed. Brian leaned against the outer wall in the hallway outside his apartment and pondered on this thought: I made it. The hour's over and I'm still alive. He wiped the sweat from his forehead and rubbed it on his leg.

What now, Jim?

I've always loved dinosaurs. What do you think? I would love to see the look on his face when he opens his door and finds a large beast with an appetite. One bite. Presto. No more Jim.

Brian stood up and moved for the apartment door. He withdrew his keys and unlocked it. He opened it without hesitation, concentrating on a variety of dinosaurs. I bet I still have old dinosaur books from my childhood. I never throw anything away. I wonder which dinosaur I'll send him? He stepped into the room.

Brian never saw the gas until it overwhelmed him in the doorway.

He suddenly wanted to reread his watch. It had been over an hour, right? You solved the mystery. Didn't you, Jim? I love you pal. He allowed the gas to pull him deeper and deeper into it. This time, he didn't struggle. Everything seemed all right.

Jim avoided the emergency vehicles, taking back streets, and made it to Stephanie's without incident. She wasn't home. He used the key she never asked for back, and let himself in. A vodka, a ham and cheese on wheat and an hour-long shower. Jim staggered over to her satin bed, smiled a reminiscent smile, fluffed up the pillow, and laid his head to rest and to sleep for three days.

Jim did not dream.

JIM MARQUEZ is 21 years old and recently graduated from California State University. He now works as an adult education instructor at a college in Los Angeles. **BRIAN NOLLNER** is 22, also a CSU graduate. He is currently working as a security guard, protecting the lives of the rich and famous.

FICTION FILE 22

JAMES ELLROY

Veteran crime writer James Ellroy talks to FEAR's Kim Newman.

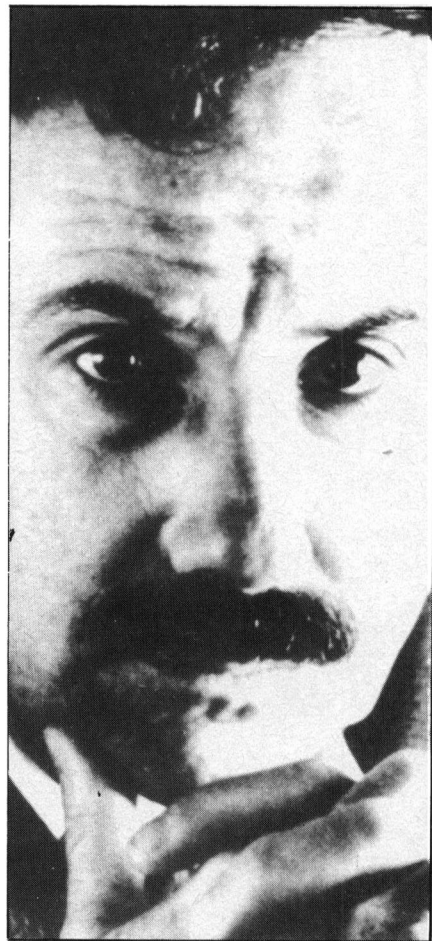
Thomas Harris and myself both trade in horror,' claims American hardboiled crime writer James Ellroy, when asked how close he thinks his brand of psycho-fuelled sleaze mystery is getting to the horror genre. 'I think Harris can get away with stuff that's frankly silly,' he continues, assessing the man who might be seen as his closest rival in the territory, 'the whole thing where Lecter breaks out in *Silence Of The Lambs* — preposterous silly shit, absolutely beneath him, beneath the man's remarkable insights into the aesthetics of horror, and the psychopathology of it. Serial killers have been done to death.'

Before they were done to death, Ellroy himself turned his hand to *Silent Terror*, the scary autobiography of a reasonable mass murderer, and also pitted a variety of mad murderers against Lloyd Hopkins, his no-less-insane Los Angeles cop protagonist, in a series that started with *Blood On The Moon* — filmed as *Cop*, with James Woods as Hopkins — and includes *Because The Night* and *Suicide Hill*.

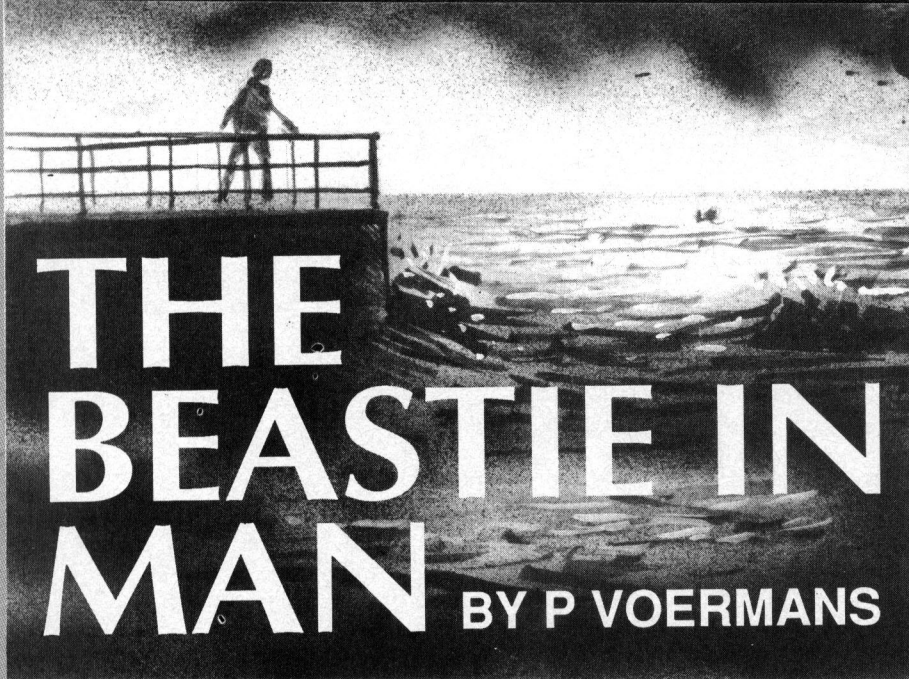
His first novel, *Brown's Requiem*, is Ellroy's take on the private eye genre, with golf and human filth mixed in, but the author's career really started cooking with a run of Los Angeles-based atrocity mysteries set in the recent past, the first of which was *Clandestine*, 'a maverick volume, it's a thinly fictionalised, chronologically altered account of my own mother's murder.' *Clandestine* introduced Dudley Smith, the Mephistophelean Irish cop who has come to the fore in Ellroy's recent novels, and also found him perfecting his 'truncated, sharp, fast-edged style' as he probed into his mother's death with a mix of police procedural and flagellating horror.

Then Ellroy seized on a famous real-life LA murder case of the Forties — inspiration also for John Gregory Dunne's *True Confessions* and the television movie *Who Is The Black Dahlia?* — and turned out *The Black Dahlia*, his turning point novel, a masterpiece of grime, crime and slime, which led to two increasingly horrid sequels, *The Big Nowhere*, *LA Confidential* and the forthcoming *White Jazz*. In addition to Dudley Smith, the series features a run of bizarre-to-monstrous LA cops: the appalling Trashcan Jack, the sneaky Ellis Loew, Howard Hughes' pimp Buzz Meeks... 'White Jazz is in the first person, and it's a policeman who's so vile and despicable he makes Trashcan Jack look like Mother Theresa. It's not quite as complex and not quite as long as the others, but it's even more dense because it's only in one viewpoint. Density in the art of crime fiction is expositing as much as possible in as few words as possible. It's a whole new language of explicitness. And I think it'd be good to kiss off the quartet with a high.

'I want to recreate America in the twentieth century through crime novels. The book



I'm doing after *White Jazz* is about the Kennedys and Marilyn Monroe, which is a real-life case, even though I don't think she was murdered. Multiple viewpoints, one of them Jimmy Hoffa. Then I want to do the Jewish gangsters, Siegel and Lansky and Murder Incorporated and the National Crime Syndicate and the founding of Las Vegas. That's definitely on my plate, but not for a while. I want to do a book about Huey Long. I want to do a book about the Wisconsin State Police. I don't think there's ever been a State Police novel. I want to do the Cleveland torso killings. That's a fascinating case. Elliot Ness was under a lot of pressure to solve that one and he burned out a lot of Hooverville shanty towns, dispossessed a lot of homeless people to do it. It's an unsolved case. I'd like to do a Scotland Yard novel. And there's one more big, the ultimate, LA crime novel I want to do, about 1942, and the internment of the Japanese and the LAPD's border patrol, where they'd go into other police force's jurisdictions and bust people without money headed for LA on the grounds that they'd turn to crime. I don't want people to say, Jesus, he's a one-trick horse. All he wrote about was these demonically-obsessed LA cops. I want to move beyond it. I don't want to be some godawful fucked-up one note financially secure crime writer.'



THE BEASTIE IN MAN

BY P VOERMANS

He ran away. All right, there was no place to go, but Nigel ran anyhow. Past the empty yacht club's glaring arcs he sprinted, over bodyprints left by Greek families, by a renovated loo which had been a beat and was now called 'Passion's', towards the hashish-perfumed speed-spiced cocaine-dusted ex-resort where stately mansions grew cheap takeaways and Dayglo sex shops on their front lawns, where men too timid or too wound-up to visit brothels prowled with windows down thinking every woman a whore, where musicians whose anger was by now strictly professional ground out deconstructed pop to white collar slaves and students sheathed in black, where derros nursed particular hurts and gays particular strengths, where punks paraded and yobbos derided and homeless kids sold blowjobs. It was a carnival powered by fear and defiance, a yell aimed vaguely at the South Pole. Not a solution, nothing new. He ran toward it regardless.

When after a kilometer or two his feet got wobbly, he thought he'd give it away. But before he could stop he tripped, went flying, scrunched into the wet sand face first. Nigel lay there panting, the Beethoven concert he had walked out of still belting through him, and after a while all he could hear were the sudsy noises of the bay. His clothes sucked water out of the sand.

It was probably the breakup with Marie which had caused this intolerable edginess. Still, there had always been a riptide in him; he knew what originality was and he was not an original man. No way. It surfaced in him and drove him spare. There was nothing new left for a bloke like him to do. Once he could have gone out and found the planet fresh; not now. Nigel wished he had been born two hundred years before. Now he was just another man with an arts degree. Wind up a teacher, of course.

He raised himself to his hands and knees, looked around, and crawled to a bluestone step by the beach wall. With no mind for the sand all over him he sat, eyes on the lights in the black bay. Which were ships and which buoys? As a child he had guessed, his sister and him, guessed where they were off to as well. Paris, London, New York, Auckland even. Anywhere but Melbourne. He felt for the sodden pack of smokes in his shirt pocket, found one intact and lit it.

Hang on. Someone was swimming out there. And in trouble. Nigel leapt to his feet, staggered and took a few paces down the slope. Although he lived a little way along the beach, he had never fancied a night dip: sharks have no bedtime. *Shit*, he thought, *you gutless wonder*. He flicked his fag away, kicked off his pumps and pelted down the scummy seaweed, tearing his shirt up over his head and flinging it aside. Bounding over wavelets, crashing into the first dumper, he plunged into the next. The water tasted foul.

About seventy metres out he realised he had lost the poor bugger; he trod water, jerking around in circles. If he didn't show soon, Nigel would have to dive and, as the cold and his imagination were catching up with him, he did not exactly long for it. But just as he had resigned himself to an extended dive for a blind grope, he saw a hand. Right beside him.

They say drowning people sometimes climb onto your shoulders or knock you senseless as they thrash about. Nigel found no such thing. As soon as he grasped the skinny wrist all movement stopped and a head shape bobbed up, so that he was able to slip an arm under the chin and sidestroke it for shore. Only at the point of giving mouth-to-mouth did it click that the person he had saved was not human: it had no mouth.

Marie looked radiant, worst luck. A pimple on the bum or a cold sore on the lip, just a weeny one, would

have been enough. He wished he had never let her get in with him. They were supposed to be finished. Just good mates again.

'All right, don't believe me. Scrub my back and I'll get out and show you,' he said.

'You're not seriously trying to tell me there's a Klingon in the house?' said Marie. Her broad face crinkled wryly.

'Where's the scrubber?'

They finished their bath as fast as Nigel could hurry a frisky Marie. Not much chop for Nigel, since he'd been up all night. Marie seemed to think that this was all a wacky attempt at one last fling. He had told her the whole thing, but as they went up the hall to the spare room, perhaps flattered by his invention, turned on in the bath, or simply out of mischief, she cornered Nigel and tweaked his nipples, tickled, groped, slapped and generally molested him. As loud as he dared, he whispered, 'Marie, if you will not take this seriously you can just go home; I'm not interested in your body and I did not ask you into my bath!'

She stepped back, hurt. With a gentle tug he removed his towel from her hand then wrapped it about himself. He reached for her, drew her to him. 'Come on, Marilla. Your a spunk. You're me mate for ever, aren't ya?'

Marie's chin drooped slowly to her freckled chest. She had been the one to ask for some space. Briefly, they kissed. She glanced at the door and tucked in her towel where it exposed one chubby breast, one thigh; she gave a short smile, ashamed to believe him.

'Look,' Nigel whispered, and opened the door.

The mind clutched at parts we seem to share, 'head', 'torso', 'limbs', without finding a hint as to their actual use. What pulsed and squeezed inside its three fat tapered 'legs'? Could they walk at all? That oval mesh which reached from 'chin' to 'hairline', holding back some pale wet gloop, looked most like tapioca pushed through a fencer's mask: face or arse, damaged or healthy? Odds-on those were hands, all three, yet with *holes* at the fingertips... It appeared to breathe with its middle 'leg', but how or whether it saw or talked — sheer mysteries. To say that it was decorated was possibly way off the mark, since the Kandinsky-like patterns all over it could have had, like a flower's or an insect's, any purpose. Overall, it looked more funny than scary, not what you might expect from such a grotesque shape. We are supposed to fear the unknown, but here lay a beastie which, because the mind tried to relate it to familiar sights — mother, designer couch, octopus, bird, knight, child, slug, painted tribal dancer — finished up a shade ridiculous, friendly even. Whatever had created this whoosis in its image might have been deranged, but not maliciously so.

Marie said, 'Jesus fuck me', revealing her Catholic upbringing. 'That's unreal.'

The alien said, 'Oracular window percolating laughing bells and small neon bolts in swarms, we eat the same cuticles.'

Nigel opened his mouth. Marie giggled, a hysterical burst with a dying fall.

'I...' Nigel got this far four times, then pulled himself together. 'Um...Welcome to our planet. Are you all right?'

'Shape does not boil off as the penultimate lampshade passes, so lizards neither scamper across my stem tortellini or otter.' The alien stood on its hands. 'We gallop a pirate ditty!'

Its voice came from no particular spot. It stretched for an instant, thinning, and contracted, bobbing with the recoil as if made from rubber. All of a sudden it had hands on what were now its upper limbs, which reminded Nigel of pink, seven-fingered rubber gloves, over inflated. They went okay with orange and blue striped arms though, he thought.

Its 'head' now hung between its two front supports, more like a scrotum, and gave a short 'Fssst', dripping some pale blue gunge from the tapioca that sizzled on the varnished floor.

'Rightberries,' it said.



Nigel and Marie had a huge barney about what to do. Later, they reckoned it was the tension. At the time, Marie held out in favour of the CSIRO, or so Nigel thought. A soon as he heard the name of the research organisation he lost it completely. 'Started ranting and stamping the feet,' was how Marie put it. The alien chipped in with its own charming balderdash, which silenced both of them. It turned out that the pair of them had been on about the same thing. They would keep it quiet a while. Who wanted to be poked and prodded and have weapons pointed at them? It'd be a disaster if they didn't manage to talk to the alien first. So they decided to move out to Marie's uncle's place in the bush. This set the alien burbling away delightedly until Nigel decided he could understand it, in parts, till Marie couldn't take it any more. She upset Nigel by telling it as much, though he forgave her when it began to follow her around, possibly intrigued by her outburst, doing walkovers like some tarted-up acrobat or rockpool dweller.

Nigel had worried about how to entice the thing into his car.

'How did you get it home?' asked Marie as Nigel nursed the battered station wagon out of the drive.

'We drift childlike on the light in luggage — dorsal caprice!'

'It means it's not as heavy as it

looks,' offered Nigel. 'Anyway, it's not far down the beach from here to where I found it.'

'Sure thing, buster,' said Marie. 'Goodbye smelly Elwood!' she called out the window.

Nigel cringed and looked around nervously, but no one was about. He delivered what he felt to be a killing look in her direction, but she just laughed.

'Furballs get behind!' boomed the alien in a voice which ran from bass baritone to beyond soprano.

Nigel stalled the car. He took a deep breath and turned the key; it laboured, then caught. With a sigh, he set off through the sunny streets towards the highway.

They drove mostly East for several hours, without a lunch stop, and started up the foothills in plenty of time to arrive before sunset. The mountain roads had dried enough to allow an easy climb; the thing in the back seat yakked but kept its coat and hat on. The ancient Ford ran without a whinge, and drew no attention from the constabulary. Gradually, Marie and Nigel relaxed. Hard not to really, when it was almost entirely national park out there. High plains of native herbs scattered with tiny wild flowers took turns with worn granite cliffs and thin waterfalls and mossy boulders, wrung snowgums in white and pale pink began to replace the lowland eucalypts. The views made even the alien shut up for a second, blankets of deep green tinged with purple, rolling into the distance...

Marie threw up her hands and surrendered to what she called 'The Beastie Blather': she gave it a go herself. It became a kind of travel game. Soon all three of them rabbitated on spiritedly, and occasionally came up with a sort of sublime bulldust that left logic way behind, speaking what Nigel thought were truths.

By the time they reached Marie's uncle's — a low weatherboard house with a verandah all around and a red tin roof — it was near sunset. Marie said if Nigel wanted a rest she would unpack the car, but although he'd been up for thirty hours now, Nigel knew he wouldn't sleep. The Beastie was cartwheeling idly along the verandah, round and round the house. Its hat dropped off. The coat it had discarded hours before. Nigel walked over and fetched the hat, a battered black porkpie, and headed for the field across the road, dusting the hat on his thigh.

Nigel strolled, the Beastie flick-flacked, across a roasted gold meadow of knee-high grass. Clouds the shapes of dreams whizzed by above. The Beastie glinted in the Indian summer light as it whirled past, all limbs, to wait fifty metres ahead for Nigel. It didn't seem to know about walking with someone; it was like an unleashed dog.

Nigel lay down and waited for the

Beastie to do likewise, if it would. 'Take a seat, my sextapoid booby; the grass is dry and contains no pricks to prise your doodly hide,' said Nigel.

'Maraschino sparrow we see, this blind iota keeps trevalley tapdancing for manque sands,' it answered. It plumped down beside him, wriggled all its limbs like a clutch of frantic eels, then played dead, a limp Bauhaus puppet.

Said Nigel, 'I can't keep this up.'

'Nude crowds sway needlessly.'

'You almost made sense then. Or was that me?' Perhaps sign language would work. Something unambiguous.

'Typical Bananas.' It reached over and took the hat from Nigel's knee, tossed it from hand to hand across its body as it spoke. Usually it sounded like whoever it spoke to, even the radio, but now it bubbled, like an evening chorus of cicadas: 'Float a Westerly bicep not to scandalise our lollipops. Perky pajamas, we carry up sad gulfs of ineptitude. Wicker tight.'

It was encouraging him. Nigel said, 'If you can understand us — wave your middle arms up and down.'

It waved all six at the eggshell sky; the hat flew into the light.

ET was on telly that night and thunderstorms were showing at the windows. This extraterrestrial seemed bored and chattered all through the film, but each time lightning flashed it shouted, 'Bottled knickers!' in the warble it used all the time now.

Flash. Rumble.

'BOTTLED KNICKERS!' yelled Nigel, Marie and the Beastie.



The two of them could not sleep together without sex; and that would muck up everything. Nigel and Marie agreed about this. The Beastie slept not at all and kept them awake for the first couple of nights with tireless conversation, which became a trial as the humans melted into the furniture. Nigel flaked first, he hadn't done more than kip for three nights now. So on that second night Marie revised all the 'hard' facts about the alien with the Beastie's cheery help, scrawling them for posterity in the cheap Chinese notebook she normally used to write about her kindergarten kids:

1. The Beastie understands English. Australian.
2. We can understand it too (we think!), though it seems to have swallowed a dictionary.
3. It can do teleportation. Beam me up, Scotty.
4. What it says about why it landed in the sea: 'Oopsy-daisy!' What a whacker.
5. It seems to speak using the entire surface of its body, like one of those flat speakers.
6. Parts of it are machines. This is how it teleports?

7. It has no right way up.
8. It comes from a place called either 'Garlic Book Twenty-three' or 'Wistful Kidney Palace.' Or both.
9. It is here for a bath???
10. I am tired and would like to creep into bed with Nigel Revet but don't trust myself just to cuddle.

The Beastie drew her attention to a few extra bits. Marie waved it away, saying that humans needed sleep. Often. *She* needed sleep right now. 'I can't understand you at all I'm so tired, or if I do I'm not sure I'm not dreaming it.'

'Blissful transformers we slide in. Our gusto anorexia whips to ameliorate practice. Shuffle by, piquant match. Shuffle by.'

'Shuffle by.'

He wished Marie had left for the shops five minutes later; it would be just bloody typical of the Beastie to stop the second she got back. Out on the cliff's edge, heedless of a bone-splintering drop metres away, it turned on a display to outdo any bird's courtship ritual or a whole troupe of modern dancers, a windmilling ecstasy which drew the eye like the core of a camp fire, at times as knotty as a watersnake in moult, then suddenly restrained, full of gravitas but so like flight that Nigel checked its shadow.

Its stripes, in rush and pause down the length of its limbs, seemed to imply whole bodies of knowledge in a language beyond Nigel, triggering as it did rapid swaps of the skewed perspectives on its torso, from six directions. Like a great actor, it 'threw' movements well past the limits of its body, to lend intimacy at a distance, to seem to grow or shrink. And the *colours*. Most of them, Nigel could not name. Hands sprouted and vanished, gravity was seduced and rejected, it aped forms with and without earthly names. Now bantam, now gekko, now tiger.

After what felt like hours but could have been much more or less, Marie had still not shown and the Beastie looked about finished. It stood stock still, its head-part tilted back to face

'She'll have sent me a letter bomb by then. I stood her up last time because of you, the least I can do is call her up. She's important too, you know.'

Nigel couldn't let it go. He went on about how the dance was so magical, how culture on its planet must be so advanced, implying that she was some kind of small worm to miss anything. All of which made her furious. They argued for half an hour. It reminded Nigel of the fights they used to have when they had lived together: he exhausted from all-nighters on late essays and she from too many children and too much drink. He tried to back off. But while he allowed that he had been tactless and just plain wrong in lots of ways, the situation was one they used to resolve in bed, it left him clueless. She departed in a thick quiet. He

went to see what their guest might be up to now; despite the row, he was still entranced. He tried to compose some Beastie Blather for it. It did cheer him up.

'Tarragon pennies trollop yellowly when your pearl musters lovers' trolleys, spasmodic sky chugger!' he called down the hallway. Grinning with anticipation at the Beastie's answer, he walked into the study.

The room was empty.

He panicked through the house, banging cupboard doors, running into a flywire screen at one point. A drop of sweat flew off his face when he caught sight of the Beastie in a backflip through the study door.

Had it been hiding?

'Uh — tarragon trollops pennies... where were you?'

It sank into the carpet like a sick camera tripod, saying, 'I merely stepped into the wardrobe to examine your stock of stationary. I am sorry if I perturbed you with my absence.'

'Well, no, I just wondered...'

Nigel made a miniscule squeak. For some reason he felt angry as well as confused. His mouth recovered before his brain.

'Uh, uh,' he said. Then, rallying his forces: 'Um...?'

'If you follow me I shall explain anything you wish. You must have many questions now that you have had time to think. Such an exchange is well overdue. Come.'

It cartwheeled away from Nigel and down the hallway, rebounding off the far door into Nigel's bedroom.

After a few moments, Nigel followed.

'You may wonder why I have not addressed you in this fashion before now,' it began, before Nigel reached the door. No burbles now, no frogs; ABC Australian. 'My excuse is a foolish one, I'm afraid: you might say I brought the wrong phrasebook. I arrived somewhat precipitously — my 'booking' was put forward without my knowledge and I had to make the best of what I could pack at short notice.' A limb waved in an unmistakable gesture of frankness. 'Please accept my profound apologies for the discourtesy. I rectified this error as promptly as possible. You witnessed my long distance call, I believe?'

Nigel nodded. A thousand questions rose in his mind, but they were all blown away by the alien's next words: 'Let me tell you about my planet, my people, our culture. I must ask you one favour; however, without which I shall be rendered incapable of speech — or much else, for that matter...'

Nigel nodded again, shy in the face of the distress in the alien's voice. He took a step forward. he would do anything to hear what the alien had to say.

'Please, I am stiff and sore after my efforts this afternoon; you can see, interstellar communication is no simple thing! I propose this: you give me what you call a rubdown (I will tell you

what to rub) and in return I shall massage your imagination, so to speak, with tales from my part of the universe. What do you say?'

Nigel's heart went out to the alien. He hardly ever danced in discos, never to bands, and the only time he had attended a yoga class he'd spent the entire time in agony and the next day in bed. And to be the first to hear about a real live alien planet — it was more than a dream, it was a reason to live.

'All right,' he said. He moved to the alien's side. At last, something original in his life.

Later, he could not recall much of the massage he'd given it and hardly anything of what the alien had told him. A few instructions like, 'Use your hand as a knife under the marking like a yacht, quite hard now.' The way it pulsed, a little like it had that afternoon, when Nigel hit the right spots, left magenta stripes lingering in his vision. The plastic feel of its flesh. And the sleepy smell which filled the room when he squeezed or pummelled. And that was it.

By the end, he was vaguely suspicious, but he couldn't find a solid reason for it and, as his mind drifted in and out of whack, almost to sleep at times, he lay back on the bed, thinking of Marie. She's been away for ages; probably giggling down the phone at Alice...

'I thank you for your massage and attention; I am almost completely restored. My tales, I fear, cannot sufficiently pay you for your energies. Allow me a small parting gift.'

Aside from the fact that he couldn't remember one iota of the 'tales' the alien was supposed to have told, Nigel felt there was something definitely wrong with the tone of that last bit. Something gloating. Nigel struggled to his elbows. Such a strain to keep the eyes open. A kind of euphoria gripped him, he sighed and sank back into the pillow, but the sight of the alien rising from the rug with tentacles outstretched snapped his eyes open as if a switch had been thrown in his spine, and he sat up.

'Don't upset yourself Nigel, this is a perfectly natural thing for us to do.'

the heavy autumn sky, singing an apparently wordless chorus, counterpointed by its colour and pattern shifts.

'Come home,' whispered Nigel, fervently. 'Come home.'

Marie did not. Nor did the alien finish, however; it sang something like a Gregorian chant for a chorus of virtuosos until the setting sun made everything copper.

A numb backside forced Nigel to his feet. As he tried to straighten his legs and back he heard the rumble of his car in the distance. Great. She'd never believe this without a look for herself. He purred for the front verandah,

almost tripping several times because he couldn't tear his eyes off the Beastie, and stopped before the final bend; one hand flattened to the corner-post, to fix a few more unique moments in his memory — which was how Marie found him, head craned back over one shoulder and one foot raised to step onto the porch.

'Hiya mate, you wouldn't be —'

'Shshsh!'

'What's that weird n...'

'Look!'

'Oh Nigel. Oh my...'

He led her to where he'd been sitting. Slowly, they squatted, and leant against the tree behind them. They held each other's hands while the sun set; wreathes of stars appeared; dingos moaned, currawongs chimed and were blended into the Beastie's song. Softer, the silhouette by the cliff carolled, softer again, to finish at no definite time. It left Marie and Nigel with tears in

'It plumped down beside him, wriggled all its limbs like a clutch of frantic eels, then played dead, a limp Bauhaus puppet'

their eyes, their ears intent on the music the land played naturally: crickets, possums, an owl, a brumby's whuff perhaps.

The Beastie was there, then gone. Marie and Nigel stared out at the empty cliff, at the darkling beyond.

Finally, Marie whispered 'Fuck, I, frozen.'

'Quivering midges!'

'Jesus Christ!' went Nigel; startled.

'Tryst intentions, fitful radiance. Cream?'

Supper waited in plastic bags on the side verandah. The three went back into the house.

Over canned whole peaches in syrup, Marie told Nigel she would have to telephone a friend she was supposed to meet for drinks later that night, a two hour round trip.

'Can't you call her tomorrow? We really don't have any time to waste,' said Nigel.

'I have to catch her soon; I know her, she'll wait hours for me and if I don't show up this time she'll spew.'

'But you'll miss out!' said Nigel. 'What if it starts up again after you go?'

'Thanks a lot,' said Marie. 'Have a good time Marie, drive carefully Marie. Thanks; now I feel great.'

'Look, this is a bit more important? She'll understand, when we finally tell everyone about all this.'

This was coming from somewhere

behind him and Nigel was turning, seeing an inflated pink glove with too many fingers and tentacles on the tips flopping gently onto his shoulder and pushing him down. So much strength for a comical children's toy of a thing. It was shrinking, its fingers plunging into Nigel's body; disbelievingly Nigel was trying to — trying to — and then not moving since nothing mattered any more. He might as well take it calmly, never mind how terrifying a part of him was finding it. Listening to a faint, 'Glup, glup,' the sound of the alien trailing pink fingers about in his stomach, sending ripples outward, striking irregular bits in his physique, just nose, toes, penis, nothing much, he was coming around to the fact (the alien was sighing 'Ahhh, the perfect temperature') that it was using him as a bath.

Then the alien was stepping into his body and lying down!

Little flakes of alien stuff were coming off and drifting around in Nigel's body. The alien, not fitting inside him very well, was squirming round for a comfy position. One tentacle was snorkling all over the place in the air but otherwise it was completely inside him. Nigel felt like exploding, he was tensing, or trying to, but of course he would never; it was following a plan. It was using him. It was capping off several days of deception.

Now the alien was lying still. Soaking. Nigel was counting steadily, passing five hundred elephants, but not going to sleep. Hoping: *I am going cold*, or the equivalent. Continued bathing from the alien. Soon not even the elephants were absorbing enough to be counted any more. The alien was singing a Barry Manilow song about first love true love and scrubbing, and slowly Nigel's consciousness was vanishing.

'It's gone.'

'Oh. Oh dear... Well, never mind.'

'You don't understand.'

'Oh, honey. I suppose it had to go; there was nothing you or I could do about that.'

'You should — I *shit*, ohhh...' A low wail escaped, so pathetic that she placed her arms about his shoulders, pulled his head down under her chin as he began to gasp. She said: 'Do you want a drink?' He gave a 'Mmmm,' and a nod. For a little while longer she stroked his hair, then extricated herself, dragged some pillows to his side and left him collapsed on them, bathrobe all askew, to raid her uncle's bar.

'Now,' she said, putting a drink in his hand she pressed his fingers around it, 'stick that down your throat and tell me what's wrong.'

'Uh —'

'Aht! Drink up.'

He turned wide, reddened eyes to her. After a glance at his Jameson's he gulped it, tipping his head far back until the last drop was gone. 'Can I

have another?' he asked, glass beneath her nose.

'Of course, dildo.'

When she returned, he was weeping. She held the tumbler near his cheek and waited for him to notice it. This took some time.

He sipped, she draped a freckled arm across his shoulders, her fingers played with his terrytowel collar. He gave a muffled laugh and said, 'I'm making my whisky salty.'

'Darling. It can't be that bad.'

'Et! I feel filthy. *Filthy*. And I can't — ever — wash it — off!' Ice and whisky flew all over the place as he gestured with a rhythmic clench.

Marie fell back into the couch, exasperated. 'Tell me what you wanted to say then!'

He fell back beside her. 'How's Alice.'

'Fine.' Marie waited. A light wind blew gum leaves across the roof: they sounded like rain.

'After you left, I went to see what it was up to and it wasn't there. I was frightened, snapped the anxious lighter in my soul but rancorous rinses curtailed it in my nose —'

'Darling, you're not making any sense.'

'It was *inside* me!' Nigel gripped the arm of the sofa with both hands and seemed at first to lie down across it, but actually he had propped one elbow into his abdomen as a fulcrum and balanced there, his body rigid, horizontal. He was able to gesture with both feet and one hand — and that didn't feel like enough.

'I can still *feel* parts of it drifting around inside me.' He slapped his forehead, a traumatised circus clown.

'Nigel!'

'Oh, Marie...' He gripped the arm with both hands again and swung back into a sitting position in one fluid move.

'Nigel, tell me what happened.'

'Biting peanuts, Marie, it was all a sham. All bullshit from first to last, every slide diagonal and piecemeal galah it spoke, all of it was designed to bring me — one of us — me, I guess, to the point where — where it could have a *bath* in me! It was an interstellar tourist and the hot natural baths were the walking headline nosegay. I whisper somnambulant poems so help me Carrot but the ringside auk colony salivate when rustling shamblers gulp their fire!'

It took a fair old while for Marie to get what had happened straight. Nigel held much more of the alien in him than he knew. The 'dirt' alone, particles of the alien's experiences on Earth, told him that. This 'dirt' gave fragmentary evidence of how Nigel and Marie had been set up, in the form of feeling Nigel could never mistake for his own, memories of minor strategems, idle musings. As bathwater, he also contained larger bits of the alien for which it had no further use.

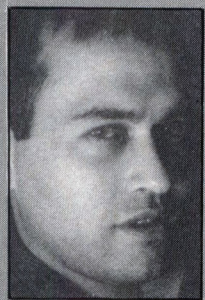
An episode or a dream would surface mid-sentence to throw his meaning out the window. Almost literally. He suddenly did handstands while describing how the alien had 'primed' him with its dance; he ran towards the wall and right up it, like Donald O'Connor singing 'Make 'Em Laugh', as he told Marie that the Beastie felt no more for them than they would feel for a wonderful view or a piece of fool's gold, which would have been funny had the thumps of Nigel's feet against the wall not sounded so painfully hard. When he listed the alien's lies he seamlessly inserted obscure particle physics experiments, types of doughnut, herbal recipes good for boils.

Though many parts remained muddy at best, Marie stopped Nigel after he caught a splinter in the base of his thumb from inside a kitchen cupboard. When she'd removed the wooden dagger, cleaned and dressed the wound, she dragged him back to the couch and hugged his arms to his sides.

He wept for quite a while, then. She waited for him to quieten some, and led him to her bedroom where she caressed him and shooed away the violent kinks in his body with her lips and breath, hands and hips. Their love-making was fumbling at first, disappointing, almost painful in its pursuit, brief in climax — but an act of solace. Neither slept. This wouldn't be repeated, not on their lives. The fling of good mates really was over this time. They didn't need to speak of it. While the false dawn bleakened the room, they spoke of their early childhoods. The alien flashbacks seemed to have abated, for the moment. Again, they debated their visions of the day they first met; so many years had passed they had both embroidered the story.

Tomorrow they would face Nigel's problem, the burden of unbelievable, wild, perhaps useless truth which had given his directionless days some motion at last. He now possessed an original mind. He wished he didn't. But that was for tomorrow.

At sunrise they sat on the wide, weather-stripped back verandah. Swaddled in a doona, they cuddled in silence, listening to the currawongs call one another, watching a white hawk soar then plummet after its prey, admiring the clear view of dusky eucalypt green which became deep blue and violet on the mountains that stretched away as far as far could be.



PAUL VOERMANS is a thirty year old Australian who has lived in England for three years. In Melbourne he worked as an actor, puppeteer and mime. His first novel, *Disregards The Rest*, was recently sold to Victor Gollancz and will appear next year. *The Beastie In Man* marks his English print debut.

FICTION FILE 23

CHAZ BRENCHLY

Romance and serial murder are not the most compatible of bedmates but, as Chaz Brenchly explained to John Gilbert, he combined both in his bid to become a thriller writer.

Psychoaths are no strangers to mystery thriller writer Chaz Brenchly. The author, who lives in Newcastle Upon Tyne, has created some really nasty characters in his past three books which include his first, *The Samaritan*, *The Refuge* and his new hardback *The Garden*.

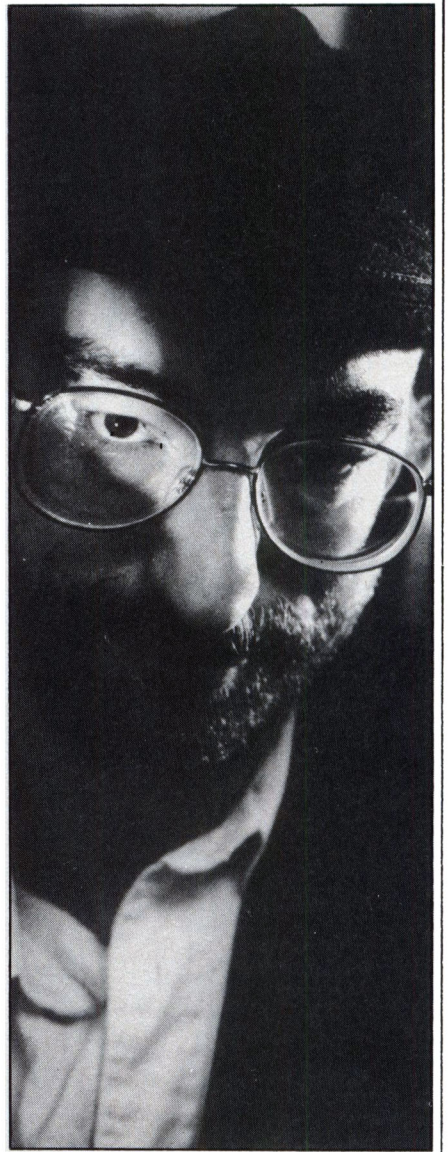
Oddly enough, Brenchly started his literary life in the field of romance. 'Back in the early Eighties there was a literary agent called Carol Smith who was handling a series of romantic thrillers that were related to the Mills & Boon type of market, but darker. I wrote to Carol asking whether she would consider me as a contributor to the series. She wrote back, said yes, and sent some ideas — it was good because the publishers had a list of suggested ideas.

'She sent me three synopses. The one I chose to do had a rather nasty couple of psychopaths in it, and I ended up writing it for the series.'

Unfortunately, the bottom dropped out of the romantic thrillers market, but Brenchly's agent urged him to write a serious book. 'In the romantic stuff there was just not the space to explore the characters of the psychopaths. Carol told me to go away and read Thomas Harris, which I did and I decided I wanted to write a similar sort of thing.'

Brenchly could be labelled as a crime writer, though he hates the tag, preferring simply to be known as a writer so that he can pursue any path he prefers. 'Somebody came up to me last year and said that I write sociological horror, but they're just labels. Every one of my books is different. I'm terrified of being tied down both genre-wise and regionally. Four out of the four-and-a-half books I've written so far are set in Newcastle or the North East, because I'm living here. Book five is different, though. It'll be the first one without a psychopath.'

My next question threw him slightly, and elicited a laugh. How do you make your psycho different from those that have gone before? His reply revealed much about his working methods, and indicated his preference for working on peculiarity of storyline. 'There are areas of psychopathy that I haven't explored yet. It's not a matter of thinking that you want to go around killing people, and how to make it different.' Instead, he tends to come up with an interesting plot and develop character from that. 'For instance, I haven't written or read a book about how it feels to be a close relative of a psychopath and to know that you're blamed for that psychopath.'



He must research a great deal in order to achieve the realism evident in his novels... 'I absolutely hate research. I'm a very shy, retiring little man, and I don't like approaching people. I write the book first, with no research, and tell the story the way I want it to be, and then start checking up and changing anything that's wrong. I have a wide circle of friends and I usually find that one of them can give me the information I want.'

His next book may prove too realistic for some people, but Brenchly feels that he has allowed a fair amount of time to pass before tackling his controversial subject matter. 'The fourth novel is 'gunman goes mad in shopping mall'. When Hungerford happened I thought I would have to write about it. I hung on to the idea for a couple of years and then found a way to get at it.'

Chaz Brenchly's *The Garden* is published in hardcover this month by Hodder and Stoughton.

FEAR REVIEWS

Not To Be Missed



Recommended



Fair



Poor



Diabolical



CINEMA AND VIDEO



HORROR

Aracnophobia
The Blob
Demon Wind
The Exorcist 3
Flatliners
The Gate
Ghoulies Go To College
Maniac Cop
The Night Stalker
Psycho Cop
Watchers 2



SCIENCE FICTION

Dark Angel
The Handmaid's Tale
Rising Storm
Salute Of The Jugger



FANTASY

She Devil
UHF
Upworld
Willow
Wizards Of The Lost Kingdom



THRILLER

Blue Steel
Deathstone
Dr M
In A Shallow Grave
The Krays
Lord Of The Flies
The Mad Monkey
The Reflecting Skin
Return Of The Family Man



HORRORS IN THE POPCORN

ARACHNOPHOBIA

Starring Jeff Daniels, Harley Jane Kozak, John Goodman, Julian Sands, Henry Jones
Director Frank Marshall
Distributor Warner Brothers
Cert 18



Like *Tremors*, this is a nearly perfect monster movie, balancing all the requirements of the genre with just enough sly humour to take away from its familiar absurdity, and graced with nicely-judged performances, a perfectly evoked but neatly satirised small town setting and some pretty effective scare sequences.

In a lengthy opening sequence that must have gobbled up a substantial portion of the budget, Dr Atherton (Julian Sands) is searching for new creepy-crawlies in a Venezuelan jungle, when a photographer happens to get bitten by a lethal new spider species which stows away in his makeshift coffin and is transported back to the peaceful township of Canaima, California, for burial. Also new in town is Dr Ross Jennings (Daniels), who is trying to escape the strain of the big city and immediately finds the country too stressful to stand, what with a house on the verge of falling down, redneck neighbours, an established old fart of a town doctor (Jones) who decides to retire and thus ruin Ross' practice, and his all-consuming, overpowering dread of anything with eight legs, compound eyes and a web.

The big spider mates with a native Californian arachnid and soon its deadly offspring are terroris-

ing the town, specialising in Ross' few patients and thus getting him a bad name. Things escalate, and the professionals have to be called in — with glamorous pony-tailed poseur Sands spouting hard-to-follow entomological theories, while down-to-earth exterminator John Goodman provides dry comedy relief and commonsense bugspray take over.

Similar in feel to *Kingdom Of The Spiders*, *The Birds*, *Frogs* and many another beasts-on-the-loose quickie, this is the high quality, Steven Spielberg-produced version of the same, with state-of-the-art spider wrangling and special effects, and a two-edged folksiness. Like *Gremlins*, this evokes delights of the traditional Spielberg/Capra small town, and then proceeds to show the horrors gnawing away beneath, lurking in the popcorn, the toilet bowl or the old barn.

As in the best of Spielberg's early work, *Duel* and *Jaws*, the climax finds an ordinary man standing alone, without any experts to help him, and facing his own phobia, plus the monster that threatens his home. And here first-time director Marshall, previously one of Spielberg's trusty producers, comes into his own with a squirmy, cheer-along sequence that finds Daniels duelling with the Big Daddy spider in his own basement, with only an ozone-unfriendly aerosol, a cigarette lighter, bottles of vintage wine and a nail-gun to protect himself. Outstanding.

Kim Newman



CINEMA

THE HANDMAID'S TALE

Starring Natasha Richardson, Robert Duvall, Faye Dunaway, Aidan Quinn
Director Volker Schlöndorff
Distributor Virgin Vision
Cert 18

Despite the disclaimers of filmmakers and publicists alike, Volker Schlöndorff's adaptation of Margaret Atwood's darkly satirical

novel is sci-fi through and through, and represents an impressive use of the genre's allegorical capacities. Placing a strong emphasis upon design (aided by visual consultant Jennifer Bartlett and designer Tom Walsh) Schlöndorff paints a bold and gaudy vision of a totalitarian future which combines the colours of Nazism with the pseudo-religious ritual abuse of the dark ages.

Arrested whilst attempting to cross the Gileadean border to Canada, Kate (Richardson) — a rare fertile woman in an age of sterility — is separated from her young child and set to work as a handmaid, providing children for the

wealthy but barren ruling class. Recruited into the household of fascist military commander Fred (Duvall), Kate is stripped of her identity, renamed Offred (Of Fred) and turned into a new-age battery hen. Yet when Kate fails to produce an heir for the desolate commander, her entire *raison d'être* is called into question, and she is forced to seek a lover to fulfil the demands of this decadent and decaying society.

Schlöndorff evokes a convincingly disturbing medieval future-world as a backdrop for this dystopian fantasy, effectively translating Atwood's

polemical source from small print to the big screen — particularly striking are the scenes of ritual intercourse which here become an exercise in horror, accomplished with precision and a fitting lack of voyeurism. Problems arise, however, in the latter half of the film, wherein Harold Pinter's otherwise acute script fails to overcome the shortcomings of an increasingly meandering storyline, allowing the proceedings to dip somewhat into unconvincingly romanticised escapism. Nevertheless, *The Handmaid's Tale* remains an intelligent, startling and firmly-footed (if occasionally flawed) exercise,

deserving serious attention from sci-fi fans and mainstreamers alike.

Mark Kermode



EXORCIST 3

Starring George C Scott, Ed Flanders, Jason Miller, Scott Wilson, Nicol Williamson, Brad Dourif
Director William Peter Blatty
Distributor Twentieth Century Fox
Cert 18

Strictly speaking, this is not a sequel; it is an adaptation of Blatty's own horror novel *Legion*. The Georgetown setting is the same, but George C Scott takes over Lee J Cobb's role as seasoned cop Lt Kinderman, this time investigating a series of brutal murders. Randomly selected victims have been tortured and mutilated by the cruelly imaginative Gemini killer. Meanwhile, a patient at the local mental asylum emerges from seventeen years of catatonia and claims that he is the killer. Perplexed by the patient's detailed knowledge of the murders, the sceptical Kinderman must decide whether he is an amnesiac nutter or, as he claims, the dead Father Damien Karras (who took a dive down some steps in the original *Exorcist*) now possessed by the evil spirit of an executed murderer.

The wordy, claustrophobic confrontations between a wildly overacting George C Scott and a quietly malevolent Brad Dourif (whose visage and voice represent the possessing spirit) mostly consist of explaining the plot and describing murders which might more sensibly have been shown. One has to admire Blatty's efforts to revive the horror of 'creaks and shadows', but the interminable dialogue does get a little wearing. More crucially, the climactic exorcism — which has obviously been grafted onto Blatty's original version and bears no relationship to anything that has gone before — completely destroys the film's carefully developed ambivalence. This piece of opportunistic butchery aside, *Exorcist 3* is for the most part a commendably serious, deliberately understated, and therefore deeply unfashionable horror movie.

Nigel Floyd



FLATLINERS

Starring Kiefer Sutherland, Julia Roberts, Kevin Bacon, William Baldwin, Kimberly Scott
Director Joel Schumacher
Distributor Columbia
Cert 18

A group of medical students, desperate for a field of research in which they can excel the hated 'baby boomers', experiment with near-death experiences, meeting in a highly convenient abandoned church on campus where, led by the fairly maniacal Nelson (Sutherland), they kill themselves under laboratory conditions, experience death for a few minutes, and are revived with an electric shock.

Each has a different experience in the afterlife, and they all find that when they return they are haunted by the physical spectres of their greatest guilts: driven nut Nelson and commonsense atheist David (Bacon) by the vindictive apparitions of children they used to bully; cold fish with glasses Rachel (Roberts) by her drug addict Vietnam veteran father for whose suicide she



■ George C Scott on the case in *Exorcist 3* (above); Julia Roberts, haunted by the afterlife in *Flatliners* (below)

feels responsible, and camcorder-toting Casanova Joe (Baldwin) by the video images of all the women he's done dirt to.

Meanwhile, any debate about what exactly happens in the afterlife is on an even more basic and patronising level than all that 'go into the light' guff from the *Poltergeist* movies, with all the Steadicam-whizzing flatline sequences functioning as flashbacks rather than flash-forwards.

Director Schumacher, one of Hollywood's slickest and emptiest craftsmen (*St Elmo's Fire*, *The Lost Boys*, Andrew Lloyd Webber's threatened *Phantom Of The Opera*), has here been handed a fascinating subject matter, a decent cast of appealing bratpackers, and enough resources to throw up some impressive sets, but still stumbles over the general incoherence of a well-written, well-structured script by Peter Filardi that annoyingly refuses to go anywhere. The result is an entertaining piece of tosh that comes a poor second to *Ghost* as a sentimental fantasy thriller, and consistently drops its intriguing ideas in favour of more pictorial razzamatazz. Quite apart from the near-death concept, there's a marvellous notion — suitable for Ramsey Campbell and Stephen King — that we're all haunted by guilt over the

way we treated other children, and the film pulls off one terrific scene — courtesy of Kevin Bacon and actress Kimberly Scott — where David tries to apologise to the grown-up who used to be the playground victim. But this is yet another dead end in a story that veers crazily all over the place, with pretty-pretty fog and water effects dominating almost every shot and an overwhelming sense of wasted opportunity. Also, as slobbering patrons of *The Abyss* know, it's highly inadvisable from a medical student standpoint to use an electrocardiac resuscitator on a leading lady without first taking off her bra.

Near-death fans would do better to look up Dennis Etchison's novel *Darkside*, which deals with the subject in a more ambitious way.

Kim Newman



BLUE STEEL

Starring Jamie Lee Curtis, Ron Silver, Clancy Brown, Elizabeth Pena, Louise Fletcher
Director Kathryn Bigelow
Distributor Vestron
Cert 18

Stylish, violent and wildly fetishistic, *Near Dark* director Kathryn Bigelow's cop thriller effectively fuses elements of the familiar 'sexual jeopardy' and 'psycho killer' scenarios. Coscripted by Eric (*The*

Hitcher) Red, it's short on plausibility but long on explosive action and fascinating sexual and psychological undercurrents. It's also living proof that women can direct action pictures, and that an actress can carry the lead role in a traditionally male genre.

On her first day of active duty, rookie New York cop Megan Turner (Curtis) surprises a supermarket robber and empties an entire magazine of bullets into him. Since none of the terrified witnesses can confirm that the robber had a gun (it has mysteriously disappeared), Megan is suspended for killing an unarmed suspect. Soon after Megan starts a tender love affair with wealthy, charming commodities broker Eugene Hunt (Silver), dead bodies start turning up all over the city, accompanied by bullet casings etched with her name. Detective Nick Mann (Brown) takes Megan under his wing, but then — in an outrageously perverse scene — Megan's perfect lover all but admits that he is the killer. Since there's no proof, however, a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse ensues.

Silver's psycho is a scary incarnation, hearing voices in his head and creating a fantasy world where his 'brightness' shines for all to see. Equally worrying, though, is the reckless and obsessive Megan, whose overreactions and errors of judgement suggest a dangerous instability. Is she a determined but naive rookie, or a rogue cop fixated with revenge against the lover who spurned her? Preserving these ambiguities throughout, Bigelow's seductive thriller delivers the generic goods and a good deal more besides.

Nigel Floyd



THE REFLECTING SKIN

Starring Viggo Mortensen, Lindsay Duncan, Jeremy Cooper, Sheila Moore, Duncan Fraser
Director Philip Ridley
Distributor Virgin
Cert 18

Leaving behind the violent playgrounds and mean streets of London's East End, the scriptwriter of *The Krays* makes his directorial debut with a film about 'the





nightmare of childhood', set against a 1950s Mid-West canvas of clear blue skies and golden fields of wheat. The opening scene sets the tone: having inflated a frog by blowing through a hollow reed, eight-year-old Seth Dove (Cooper) and two young friends hide by the side of a path and use a catapulted stone to explode it in the face of curious Englishwoman, Dolphin Blue (Duncan). Splashed with blood, Dolphin Blue's white face and dark sunglasses anticipate the real and imagined horrors that will erupt in this isolated prairie community.

Virtually ignored by his neurotic mother (Moore) and ineffectual father (Fraser), Seth creates a world of his own, one in which he imagines that the reclusive Dolphin Blue is a vampire, and that the foetus he finds wrapped in newspaper in the barn is his murdered friend Eben transformed into an angel. Meanwhile, Seth's father is accused of murdering the children who have gone missing in the area, and his brother, Cameron (Mortensen), returns from Navy duty in the Pacific with tales of a bomb that explodes like a second sun. When Cameron falls prey to Dolphin Blue's vampiric charms, the jealous Seth is forced to face up to the realities, pain and guilt of adulthood.

The painterly compositions recall the work of American artists Edward Hopper and Andrew Wyeth, but the unusual camera angles, saturated colours and loud operatic score are purely cinematic. Ridley also uses poetic language and sophisticated visual rhymes to create a heightened reality that pushes beyond obvious symbolism into a deeper emotional truth. A challenging but ultimately rewarding film from a new British director.

Nigel Floyd



THE SALUTE OF THE JUGGER

Starring Rutger Hauer, Joan Chen, Vincent Phillip D'Onofrio, Anna Katarina, Delroy Lindo
Director David Peoples
Distributor Virgin Vision
Cert 18

This film's disastrous British box office reception during August was, I suspect, less to do with general interest in the World Cup and more to do with its low interest level.

Rutger Hauer plays Sallow (by name and by nature), a Juggler, the player of a game much like American Football which utilises a dog skull as the ball and

a spike as the goal. He has been wandering from one shanty town to another, challenging each community to sessions of the barbaric sport which can leave players with crushed skulls, gouged eyes and broken bones.

In one town he meets Kidda (Joan Chen), an energetic girl who decides to leave her family and join the Juggers. She discovers Sallow's secret, that he once fought for The League, a team of softly treated players who sport in an arena in the Red City. Those Juggers wear silk, sleep with 'women who have no scars' and generally indulge in all sorts of excesses before a big game. Sallow, however, was thrown out because of his affair with a lady who was favoured by a lord of the city.

There is a chance that he can regain his place in The League, but first he must convince the city elders to allow a challenge, and then take on the brutal might of League players. A tough task, especially when the Lord who eventually convinces the elders to allow the contest is the one who had Sallow thrown out and who wants him broken.

Salute should provide skull-crushing entertainment, but fails to deliver. Most of the film is taken up with lengthy Juggler game plays, panning shots of Juggers trekking across the desert, moody scenes in which the principals talk about heroism using Juggler technical terms, and explorations. A cross between the Mad Max films, *Encounter At Raven's Gate* and *Hardware*, this movie fails to live up to even the moderate promise of those that have gone before. I found myself wondering why superstar Hauer had agreed to appear in this slow moving spectacle. Ah well, such are the mysteries of life.

Bob Rachin



DR M

Starring Alan Bates, Jennifer Beals, Jan Niklas, Hanns Zischler
Director Claude Chabrol
Distributor Hobo Film Enterprises
Cert 18, 112 mins

This is one of those movies you really wish was better than it is. Claude Chabrol, the now-ageing Nouvelle Vague director who did so well with the icy thrillers *The Butcher and the Killer!*, here turns his attention to the universe created in the Twenties by great director Fritz Lang in his *Dr Mabuse* films, and tries to do an up-to-the-moment version. The old *Dr M* has been replaced by a new one (Bates)

■ The nightmare of childhood: Jeremy Cooper in *The Reflecting Skin*



■ Juggler comes to naught: Rutger Hauer as the skull-crushing gamester, Sallow

who still carries out his plans from a Bahauss-esque superscientific lair located in a decadent Berlin nightclub — only the doomed patrons thrash to doomrock, rather than jitterbug to jazz — but now he uses subliminal messages in omnipresent video ad hoardings for a holiday firm to drive the citizenry to mass suicide. Jennifer Beals, the girl whose face fronts the deadly messages, is understandably upset that all the deaths are linked to her, and there's a hard-boiled West Berlin cop (Niklas) and a cool East Berlin spy (Zischler) on the case, gunning for the mad *Dr Marsfeldt*.

Problem Number One is the appalling casting of hammy and camp Bates in the villain role, turning all *Dr M*'s crazy philosophy into tedious waffle, and of the unresponsive Beals as the gloomy, uninteresting heroine. And Problem Number Two is a plot that straggles all over the place, here borrowing from *Halloween 3*, there from James Bond. And overshadowing it all is the accident of history which finds Chabrol trying to depict a near future Berlin still divided by the wall and a clash of ideologies that will inevitably lead to the end of the world as the news headlines undermine the basic premise of the movie. Lang himself tried a similar trick in his 1961 film, *The Thousand Eyes Of Dr Mabuse* — whose villain, Wolfgang Preiss, has a nostalgic cameo here — and also turned in something less than his best work, but at least that made all the points. Chabrol fumbles for while enjoying its melodramatic excesses. The current film

emotional problems (his wife has just left him) are exacerbated when he is drawn into writing a European movie for Paris-based producer Legrand (Ceccaldi). The precocious young English director, Malcolm Green (Fletcher) has only one erotic short to his credit, and only the flimsiest of outlines — a brief quotation from one of Gillis's favourite books, *Peter Pan*. Nevertheless, after Gillis's initially reluctant agent, Marilyn (Richardson) cuts him a good deal, he and Malcolm start work on a difficult, almost *avant garde* script. Surrounding the development of the project, however, is a tangled web of sexual intrigue, at the centre of which is Malcolm's androgynous 16 year old sister — an adolescent spider woman who acts as a catalyst for all the participants' selfish desires.

Handled with great assurance by Spanish director Trueba, the various plot threads are woven together into a dense tapestry of sexual obsession, lies and self-deception. And as the serpentine twists of the plot coil ever tighter, sexual fantasies and disturbing dream sequences give way to a frighteningly complex reality. A classy psychological thriller with a nasty sting in the tale.

Nigel Floyd



RENTAL VIDEO

RISING STORM

Starring Zach Galligan, Wayne Crawford, June Chadwick, Elizabeth Keifer
 Director Francis Schaeffer
 Distributor RCA/Columbia
 Cert 18, 95 mins

On his release from an American 'rehabilitation centre' in 2099, Joe Gage expects life to be different, but not *this* bad. His brother, Artie, has traded in his Buick for an unreliable moped, they work as menial waiters in a nightclub — until Joe gets them sacked — and they board in a packed, grubby residential hall which, like all public buildings, has a video wall. Upon this the highly religious American government enforces its beliefs on its citizens.

The police force, also devoted to God, are a tyrannical mob and during Joe's first night at the hall they storm in violently, searching for a criminal and her sister, Mila and Blaise Hart. The brothers rescue the women, and the four head for the desert. The Harts pose as antique dealers searching for hidden artefacts and promise the Gages a share of the profits. The truth is that Mila is searching for the home of Eliot Cropfield, a dead rock 'n' roll DJ whose ancient possessions and older music would bring the fun back into American life.

Although mainly an action adventure flick, *Rising Storm* takes a firmly cynical, tongue-in-cheek stance from the start. A plastic Statue of Liberty mouse is unearthed during the opening titles and Joe is beaten up by a hefty, kinkily dressed woman officer immediately before being released; copies of *Playboy* fetch £120,000, people sneak across the border into Mexico, but the real target is the cause of these things, the staunchly religious government. An undisguised attack on tele-evangelists, this film shows their influence to be so widespread that police officers accept their orders with energetic whoops of 'Yessir! Praise the Lord, sir!'

Indiana Jones-style excavations and artefact discoveries, chase and fight scenes with the police, and quips and quarrels between the foursome keep *Rising Storm* bowling along at a great pace, aided not inconsiderably by Schaeffer's sharp direction and a great soundtrack. Most of the humour is provided by Wayne Crawford as the indignant, chauvinistic Joe, though his three companions also put in fine, spirited performances and make an already amusing storyline highly watchable.

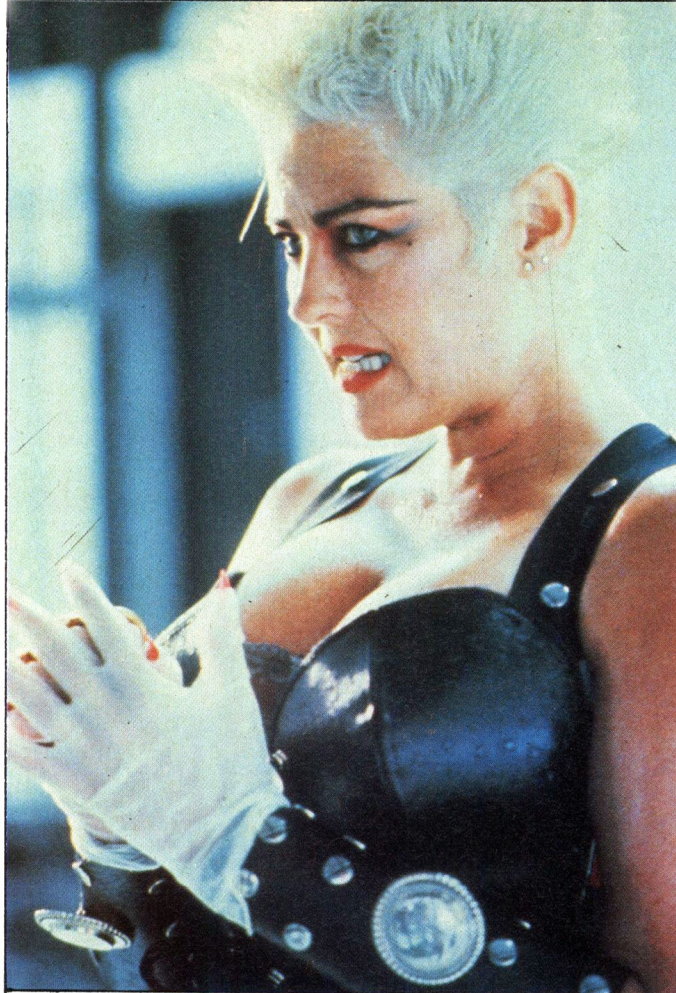
Warren Lapworth



SHE DEVIL

Starring Meryl Streep, Roseanne Barr, Ed Begley Jr, Sylvia Miles, Linda Hunt
 Director Susan Seidelman
 Distributor Virgin
 Cert PG, 90 mins

It is perhaps understandable that Susan Seidelman has opted for a broadly comic approach to Fay Weldon's dark fantasy about an errant husband (Ed Begley Jr) who deserts his fat, frumpy wife (Roseanne



■ Tongue in cheek: *Rising Storm*

Barr) and whinging kids for the charms of cheap romantic novelist, Mary Fisher (Meryl Streep). Screwball comedy is obviously this director's forte, and the first half of *She Devil* works extremely well, with the same combination of trashy camp style and tongue-in-cheek observations on life that characterises Seidelman's earlier films, the surprise mega-success *Desperately Seeking Susan* and the underrated SF comedy romance, *Making Mr Right*.

However, problems of casting and plotting arise as the movie progresses. Roseanne Barr, famous for her portrayal of a wisecracking housewife in the blue collar TV comedy series *Roseanne*, seems incapable of developing the character of the wronged, vengeful and demonic Ruth beyond that of, well, a wisecracking housewife. Her performance never suggests the evil implicit in Weldon's original novel, nor does Ruth seem to suffer the necessary crisis of confidence when husband Bob walks out on her. Instead, she gamely picks up the pieces, burns down the family home and begins to relish her new life as an avenging angel with customary goodnaturedness. As a result, the most convincing character here is Streep's Mary Fisher, a synthetic confection of romantic lust and breathless insincerity, whose pinkly perfect dream home is shattered by the arrival of Ruth and Bob's kids (together with the family mongrel) and Ruth's revelation of certain embarrassing secrets about the novelist's earlier life. But despite the movie's lack of malice, and even though Ruth's mission destruct does not have the devastating impact one expects, *She Devil* is an entertaining tale, wittily told, performed with glee and pazz with the usual Seidelman *shot*.

Patience Coster



DEMON WIND

Starring Eric Larson, Francine Lapensee, Rufus Norris, Jack Vogel
 Director Charles Moore
 Distributor RCA/Columbia
 Cert 18, 93 mins

1931: in a lonely village, a witch burns at the stake. Soon a woman living in a nearby farmhouse discovers that a demon spirit has entered her husband...

The present day: Cory (Eric Larson — doesn't he draw *Amazing Spider-Man* these days?!) and his girlfriend, Elaine (Francine Lapensee) are making their way to his late grandparents' farm. Stopping at a gas station/bar, they meet up with six friends before continuing the journey, against the advice of the locals. Exploring the farm, a ruin from the outside yet intact on the inside, they discover that its walls are covered with strange words. When the kids recite them, the fireplace blazes into life, the walls shake and objects smash. What's more, their cars won't start. They elect

■ Synthetic confection: Meryl Streep (left) in *She Devil*



to leave on foot, but a thick fog envelopes them and, when it clears, they find themselves back outside the farm. Like it or not, they will have to spend the night at the farm and face whatever is in store.

Like most aspects of this 'story', our supposed heroes' adversaries are of an obvious and hackneyed nature: zombies, their animation a result of attempts to summon the devil. This lame excuse for mindless violence wouldn't be so bad if the walking dead were at all threatening, but they look like scruffy victims of severe acne, and most of them are despatched with ease. The best death is when a female zombie pokes her long fingernails into a character's forehead, although not enough is made of that idea. It's not as if there's a shortage of dumb victims; the acting's so bad it seems that the whole cast are the living dead.

If you want to hire something in readiness for drunken night's viewing, *Demon Wind* has some appeal. There are enough zombies and gore to pass the time and you'll either miss the endless clichés, or laugh at them. Mind you, the drawn-out 'climactic' sequence and dimly yawn-inspiring 'shock' ending may have you nodding off sooner than you'd expect...

Warren Lapworth



THE GATE

Starring Stephen Dorff, Louis Tripp, Christa Denton
 Director Tibor Takas
 Distributor Medusa
 Cert 15, 90 mins

A preposterous tale of sulphur-belching holes at the bottom of the garden gives little boy Glen and his babysitting sister Al a few worries when faced with the demons of The Gate.

Starting with the usual dream sequence in which Glen sees a tree in his garden reduced to cinders by lightning, we are quickly drawn to the hole underneath it from which little demons begin to emerge at the dead of night. Only Glen's friend knows how to stop the menace from instructions he's got from the back of a heavy metal record cover.

Things really heat up when Glen's parents go on a three day vacation and Al has a party culminating in blood sacrifice and the resurrection of a workman who died on the job while the house was being built and was buried by his fellows to avoid an enquiry.

Half-decent special effects and

INTERGALACTIC INTERLOPER

DARK ANGEL

Starring Dolph Lundgren, Brian Benben, Betsy Brantley, Matthias Hues, David Ackroyd, Jim Haynie
 Director Craig R Baxley
 Distributor Entertainment In Video
 Cert 18, 90 mins



Dolph Lundgren plays down his hunk status in this all action science thriller in which a tall, blond, intergalactic drug dealer crashes to Earth like Milton's Fallen Angel and uses human beings as chemical labs to refine a very pure and illegal drug which is in demand on his home planet. First he injects a lethal dose of heroin into the victim, then he slams a needle device into the human's brain and draws off a hormone which has been stimulated by the heroin to form his pure drug.

Dolph, as detective Cain, enters the fray when his partner is killed during a meet with a drug lord. The meeting is further interrupted when the Dark Angel kills everyone at the scene and steals the case of heroin that is being used in the exchange. The drug lord escapes, vowing vengeance against Cain who now has two problems to solve: the murders, and the attempts on his life by the crime syndicate. As ordinary Americans fall foul of the Dark Angel, three people line up to help Cain in his fight: FBI agent Smith (Benben) is a sucker for rules but to get a result has to defy his bosses on this one, the lady medical examiner who is also Cain's estranged girlfriend, and a dark-haired alien



police officer who wants to catch the intergalactic interloper.

Although not entirely original in concept, *Dark Angel* is fast-paced and probably the one movie in Dolph's career in which he does not have to rely simply on brute strength. Here he shows that he can act, at least as well as Arnie, and director Baxley shows that he can produce tense thrillers with an odd turn of action.

John Gilbert



acceptable levels of acting are not enough to raise this film above the level of amateur production. Very young children might enjoy it as their first horror film experience — though I doubt it — but adults should surely look for something better.

John Gilbert



WATCHERS 2

Starring Mark Singer, Tracy Scoggins, Jonathan Farwell, Irene Miracle, Dakai
 Director Thierry Notz
 Distributor RCA/Columbia
 Cert 18, 93 mins



Once again Dean R Koontz has the misfortune to have a novel of his adapted into a movie. Henry

■ Sulphur-belching holes: The Gate

Dominic is responsible for the screenplay this time, and once again it's an intelligent dog, Einstein, that the plot revolves around.

Dr Barbara White (Scoggins) is testing the dog at the Anodyne genetic research labs while in the basement her senior colleague, Steve Maleno (Farwell), nurses his own experiment, a huge, ape-like monster, codenamed AE74. When AE74 kills two unexpected (and unsuspecting) government inspectors, the project is scheduled to be shut down. Rebelling against the decision, Maleno lets animal rights activists into the labs but in the confusion AE74 kills two of them. To disguise the evidence, Steve sets fire to the lab.

Meanwhile, US marine Paul Ferguson (Singer) is en route to a military prison, having been court-martialled for assaulting a senior officer. Einstein blocks the road, stopping the jeep near undergrowth where AE74 lurks. The monster kills Ferguson's escort, but Ferguson escapes, taking Einstein with him. Investigating officials believe Ferguson killed the soldiers... The psychotic AE74 has ties with Einstein... With so much trouble coming his way and only a smart dog to help him, can Ferguson survive?

Considering Mark Singer's previous roles, particularly that of Donovan in the V series, the answer is yes, of course he

can. When you bear in mind the unimaginative, unadventurous plot, it is obvious that the good guy and cunning canine will win. The only real surprise is that Ferguson doesn't get the girl; his ego probably *didn't* survive.

AE74 has good reason to tear people limb from limb — a man in a lumpy fur suit with a distorted proboscis, making exaggerated movements and theatrical growling noises, he looks pretty silly. Still, as most of his scenes are in virtual darkness, this doesn't seem to matter much. I presume the moonlit scenes are meant to set a tense, spooky atmosphere, but I was sometimes squinting at the screen wondering exactly what was going on; and, though this partially disguised the generally flat acting, Dakai as Einstein the dog puts in the best performance. Fans should avoid this watered-down interpretation of Koontz's novel as fiercely as they should steer clear of the first *Watchers* movie.

Warren Lapworth



DEATHSTONE

Starring Jan Michael Vincent, R Lee Ermey, Nancy Everard
 Director Andrew Prowse
 Distributor Bano Communications
 Cert 18, 90 mins



Deathstone is a nifty little thriller with acceptable special effects, in which ex-US Navy captain Andrew Buck (Vincent) is tossed into an adventure which sports psychopathic murder and the supernatural.

Narrated by Buck, the story is set up in the first ten minutes as an ancient Chinese warrior priest is killed (400 years ago) by a mercenary who wants the cleric's heartstone amulet which is said to confer supernatural powers to its owner. The priest confers a curse onto the mercenary's family before being burned alive and buried in a huge stone tomb.

Back to the present, and journalist Sharon Gale (Everard) is on hand at the opening of the priest's tomb. She steals the deadly heartstone and, shortly afterward, members of the rich and powerful Belfardo family start to die in suspicious circumstances. Events take a turn for the worse when a marine is suspected of one of the murders and local Filipino residents riot against the American Navy as the death curse rolls on.

Spectacular action combined with a mildly interesting storyline, little explanatory dialogue, well worked tension and competently-handled direction provides Jan-Michael Vincent and his cronies with an enjoyable low budget star vehicle. *Deathstone* is a perfect video B-feature for those nights when all the As have been rented out.

John Gilbert



LORD OF THE FLIES

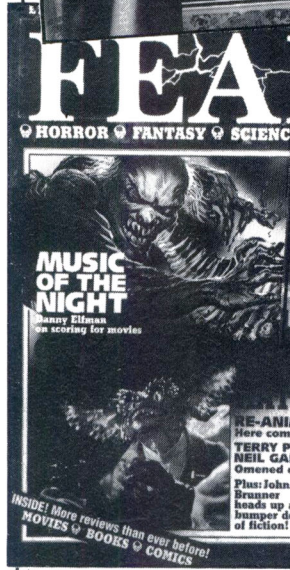
Starring Balthazar Getty, Chris Furrh, Daniel Pipoly, Michael Green
 Director Harry Hook
 Distributor Palace
 Cert 15, 95 mins



Sir William Golding's novel has never been so sourly treated, though the problems with this, updated, version of his classic rites of passage story lie more with the inadequacies of scriptwriter Sarah Schiff than with the cast or film crew.



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■ Primitive power games: Lord Of The Flies

The basic story begins when a group of American military cadets wash up on a desert island after surviving an air crash. One adult survives, but is little used to enforce the boy's isolation — as he does in Golding's powerfully emotive novel. The boys initially band together, sealed into a group by a conch shell — found by Piggy (Pipoly), a plump boy with glasses — and used as a symbol of leadership by 'colonel' Ralph (Getty).

Ralph is a serious kid who wants to instil democracy within the ranks of his new society. Piggy becomes the voice of reason, allowing his glasses to be used to start beacon fires. Primitive power games soon come into play, however, when one of the boys, Jack (Furrh), splits the group, forming his own tribe of hunters who eventually degenerate into common murderers before the marines arrive to rescue them. At the end, Ralph is left alone on the island, hunted by his fellows, and represented as a scapegoat for all the boys' woes by their new leader, Jack.

Golding's novel is indeed a masterpiece and there is little doubt that Hook and his band of little actors would be up to creating a fine film if it were not for the script, which is episodic, lacks tension and explains few of Golding's real themes. The significance of Piggy's glasses is left unexplained, even by inference; the monster in the cave, and its importance, are totally forgotten after a heavy build up, and the fierce finale is an effete scene featuring an abrupt rescue by the US military — just one more aspect of this film that lies unexplained as the credits roll. *Lord Of The Flies* is a missed opportunity, and a wicked waste of talent, all for the want of an effective screenplay.

John Gilbert



IN A SHALLOW GRAVE

Starring Michael Biehn, Maureen Mueller, Michael Beech, Patrick Dempsey
Director Kenneth Bowser
Distributor Virgin
Cert 18, 90 mins



Badly burned in the battle for the Guadal Canal during 1943, Garnett, a young soldier played with remarkable by restraint Michael Biehn, comes home to roost for a year in Virginia, USA. He takes on a black labourer (Michael Beech) to look after the house, and takes up his morbid interest with a local widow (Maureen Mueller) with whom he apparently had an affair before going off to war.

He won't go near her because of his horrific facial wounds, but takes the chance on employing a young drifter named Daventry (Patrick Dempsey) to write and deliver letters to her. Garnett soon suspects that Daventry is having an affair with the widow, but the younger man stresses that he can never love anyone because he's a draft dodger and killed two soldiers who branded him as a coward. As a result, he feels that some kind of retribution is due, and is awaiting the judgement of God.

The widow, on the other hand, is fairly keen on Daventry's bod, and begs Garnett to release him from service. This he does, but her lust is shortlived as the hand of God does deliver its verdict with surprising results.

A gentle love story, combined with the occasional psychotic interlude, in *In A Shallow Grave* examines the dark aftermath of war. Strong characterisation triumphs over lazy plotting in a movie that is for lovers of subtlety, and provides a welcome interlude from loads of vomit-inducing gore.

John Gilbert



UPWORLD

Starring Jerry Orbach, Claudia Christian
Director Stan Winston
Distributor Vestron
Cert PG, 88 mins



'There's something here that I've got to show you; this thing, it's little, it's hairy, and I don't know what to do with it...' says young cop Casey to his female working partner Sam at 4 o'clock in the morning. Who can blame her for hanging up? What he is referring to, of course, is Gnorm the gnome, a creature from the underworld, who has dug himself up into this unsociable world for the survival of his tribe. Every ten years a warrior from the tribe is sent on a mission to regenerate lumen, a great massive diamond, by exposing it to the sun. Without it, the tribe would be wiped out. Only Gnorm isn't a warrior, only a tunneller, and he's actually stolen the lumen on a mission to impress his gnome girlfriend. What's more, he's in trouble — unwittingly he's become a witness to a murder. Casey needs all the help he can get; if he doesn't solve the case, he'll lose his job. But things get worse. One of the thugs steals lumen from Gnorm. Now Casey and Gnorm are both out to nail the bad guys.

Upworld's alien doesn't come from far, far away, but from the deep depths of this earth. For all that, he's as alien to this world as ET was, but with no special gifts or abilities apart from being able to



■ Little... hairy... it's Gnorn the gnome...

turn into a power drill at a moment's notice and tunnel his way through anything. You just can't help but like this guy; he's stubborn, thick-skinned, barky, but also nimble, witty and cute. Casey and Gnorn make a perfect team. While Gnorn doesn't appreciate fast food — he just loves cardboard packaging — he certainly appreciates the finer things in life such as big popos and roundy bits on girls. *Upworld* is a magical treat unencumbered by too many special effects. It's essential viewing and, like lumen, will regenerate your spirits in no time at all...

Franco Frey



GHOULIES GO TO COLLEGE

Starring Evan Mackenzie, Kevin McCarthy, Eva La Rue, John Johnston
Director John Carl Buechler
Distributor Vestron
Cert 15, 93 mins

It's prank week at Glazier College where two fraternities, the Gammas and the Beta Zeta Thetas, try to outdo each other with the wildest practical jokes they can think of. Competition heats up for Carter (Beta leader) and Heilman (Gamma leader) when an old comic, *Ghouliah Tales*, is found and then confiscated by Professor Ragnar. The Prof's curiosity is aroused, and he finds that drawings and words from the comic match with those in a history book. Reading the comic's magical verse out-loud, Ragnar conjures up three mischievous little beasts (ghoulies) from a decorative toilet residing in Carter's home.

With *Ghouliah Tales* in his possession, Ragnar can control the ghoulies and get them to do his dirty work — and that means getting his own back on the Betas and Gammas. The

DOUBLE TROUBLE

THE KRAYS

Starring Gary Kemp, Martin Kemp, Billie Whitelaw, Tom Bell, Kate Hardie, Steven Berkoff, Susan Fleetwood
Director Peter Medak
Distributor RCA/Columbia
Cert 18, 115 mins

■ If a country gets the government it deserves, can it also be said to deserve the criminal underclass which it inadvertently shapes and makes? In a film that avoids the easy nostalgia which colours so much British product, director Medak takes an unusually graphic and unromantic view of Britain's recent past and focuses on the early lives of the Kray twins and their rise to prominence in the London underworld of the Fifties and Sixties.

Eschewing the police procedural approach to the Krays' crimes, apprehension and imprisonment, the framework of this film is closer than at first it may seem to that of a conventional biopic. The twins' childhood is etched in telling vignettes, where strong-willed women — in particular the boys' mother, Vi (Whitelaw) — are seen to triumph over gutless and frequently absent men. The Krays' calling to a life of crime and psychotic violence is seen as a direct result of their position in society and in the family — as the materially deprived, but fiercely loved centre of a working-class, matriarchal world. The biopic parallel figures most strongly in the orchestration of the twins' crimes — their 'craft' — and in the way that each brutal act serves to shed some light on their psy-



■ Married to the mob: Kate Hardie with Gary and Martin Kemp in *The Krays*

che, much in the way that the songs in, say, *Coal Miner's Daughter* or *The Glen Miller Story* comment on a particular stage in the lives of the protagonists. What makes *The Krays* fascinating is the way in which this conventional framework is distorted by Philip Ridley's brutal yet lyrical script to produce a bold and uncompromising movie, a strange and welcome sight indeed upon these shores.

Patience Coster



chaotic, dangerous but largely unobserved antics of the ghoulies set the fraternities against each other and ensure a prank week that no one will forget.

Much like its two prequels, *Ghoulies Go To College* is a typical slapstick

American teenage film. All the familiar characters are there: the boisterous hero (Skip) having trouble with his over-sensitive girlfriend, the greasy rival who steals the girl, the bungling cop forever on their tail, and the teacher with an axe to grind. The ghoulie effects are hardly

■ Japery and topless women: *Ghoulies Go To College*

stunning; the trio look suitably mischievous but are little more than sophisticated glove puppets. However, their voices and crude quips suit their



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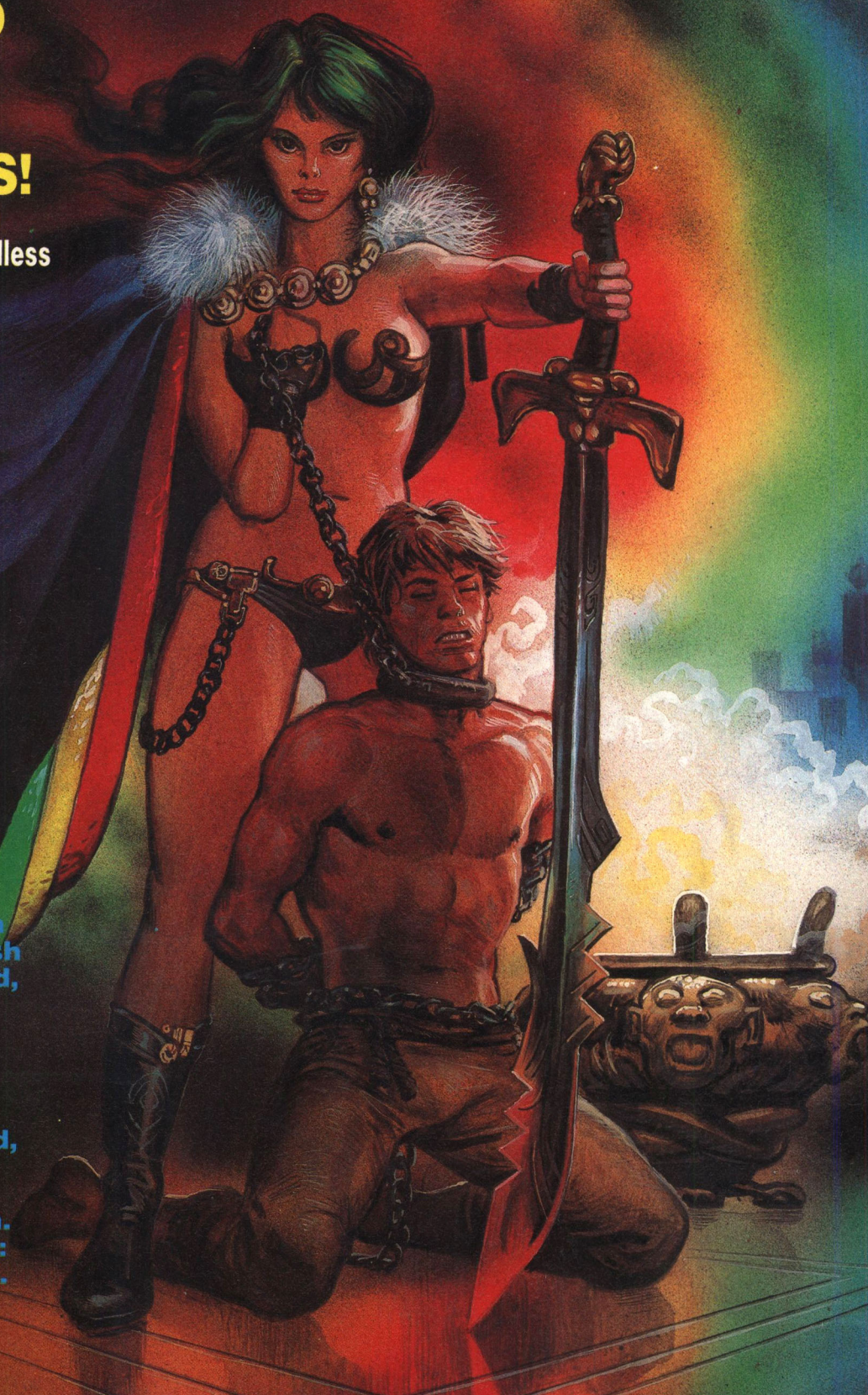
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■ The ever shocking axe-in-the-head shot: *Psycho Cop*

looks and actions perfectly, making them considerably more likeable than most of the humans.

If you're looking for something intricate in terms of plot, characterisation or effects, save your rental money. *Ghoulies Go To College* is exactly what its producers intended it to be, a whacky, energetic comedy with elements of horror parody. Performances are above average for such a movie and there's enough japey and topless women to keep you occupied for a night: a great movie for male teenagers (er, am I being patronising here?!). Hmm, I seem to recall a copy of *Ghoulies Tales* somewhere in my comic collection...
Warren Lapworth



THE NIGHT STALKER

Starring Charles Napier, John Goff, Michelle Reese
Director Max Kleven
Distributor Vestron
Cert 18, 90 mins

Stalking seems to be becoming more and more popular these nights. If you're into prostitutes, pimps and cops with a drinking habit, this is your chance. Charles Napier is the kind of brute cop that law-abiding citizens can only have nightmares about, who is put off the murder trail due to his excessive guzzling habits. Which is a shame since there is a killer murdering prostitutes out there who gains inhuman strength by absorbing the lives of his prey by performing some oriental ritual which includes painting his naked victims' bodies after having broken their necks. Meanwhile, our not so sober cop is worried about his ex-wife (who runs a helpline for working girls) and their adopted daughter, both of whom may become further targets of the night stalker. His partner ends up dead when checking on a prostitute, and our lovable cop suffers guilt pangs for letting down his buddy. From then on in, help is at hand from a psychiatrist, who recognises the hatchet work and points to a Vietnam veteran she has treated (what would the American film industry do without the Vietnam war?). The stage is set for the final showdown, where our

cop re-establishes his respectability.

The Night Stalker prowls a trodden path without any innovation. Charles Napier convinces as the booze-sodden cop who doesn't deserve the friendship of his partner and his ex wife. Unfortunately he is totally unlikeable, and script and characterisations are below any decent level of intelligence. Miss it! As the coverline suggests: 'You'll only see him once'. And that's once too many.
Franco Frey



PSYCHO COP

Starring Barry Ray Shaffer, Jeff Qualle, Palmer Lee Todd, Greg Joujon-Roche
Director Wallace Potts
Distributor RCA/Columbia
Cert 18, 100 mins



Let's not bother with the long intros explaining plotlines, sub plots, special effects and characterisations, this film can be summed up in one word: boring. That description may seem to be a bit tame when you consider the unoriginal storyline — six beautiful young Americans on vacation with a homicidal maniac dressed as a cop. It may even be considered a bit restrained, in view of the abysmal special effects which include such wonderful highlights as a stake through a body and the ever

■ Bringing it all back home: *Return Of The Family Man*



shocking axe-in-the-head shot (no doubt courtesy of the Halloween edition of *Blue Peter*). I may even be criticised for failing to convey just how utterly amateur this film is, but the adjective boring sums up *Psycho Cop* perfectly.

While other films may be derided but afford some enjoyment because you can actually wallow in their naughtiness, the same can't be said of *Psycho Cop*. It just meanders along with a lot of yawns on the way. How on earth can you be scarred by someone who walks around as if they've crapped themselves? As for the American teenagers, well let's just say it doesn't take long before you start planning who you would butcher first.

Psycho Cop is bad. I never want to see this film again. I don't even want to see it in a rental shop lest some poor unsuspecting soul hires it in the mistaken belief that he is going to be entertained.

Robin Candy



UHF

Starring 'Weird Al' Yankovic, Kevin McCarthy, Michael Richards, David Bowie, Victoria Jackson
Director Jay Legvin
Distributor Virgin Vision
Cert PG, 93 mins



George Newman (Yankovic) is a born dreamer, though he has his head so much in the clouds that he can't hold down a job. He is also a born loser until his uncle wins a run-down TV station called Channel 62 in a poker game. George is made manager of the company (despite his uncle's reservations), but the bad guys make sure that Channel 62's ratings stay low. Channel 62 faces financial ruin until one day bad guy and Channel 8 producer R J Fletcher kicks a janitor called Stanley Spadowski out of his station. George offers Stanley a job as janitor, but before long he appears before the camera, and a star is born.

Channel 62's ratings instantly rise and Stanley is given his own show, George also dreams up a load of other hilarious TV shows, including *Conan The Librarian*, *Secrets Of The Universe* (how to make uranium out of household utensils), *Gandhi 2* (complete with Kalashnikov and rocket launcher) and *Raul's Wild Kingdom* (live from his front room). George's daydreams are pretty weird too, pisstakes in which he becomes Indiana Jones, Rambo and a little computerised character in his version of the Dire Straits 'Money For Nothing' video (starring the Beverly Hillbillies). R J wants to get his hands on Channel 62, and he gets his chance when George's uncle finds that he owes

\$75,000 to a very nasty gang boss and is given two days to find the money.

Will George get the cash together in time to beat R J? You'll have to watch *UHF* and find out. Al Yankovic has certainly earned his nickname 'weird', this film is definitely warped with its hilarious dream scenes and TV show spoofs. It's nice to see a film with its tongue firmly planted in its cheek appearing when action movies are all the rage. I hope 'Weird Al' returns soon with some *Die Hard*, *Robocop* and *Total Recall* pisstakes. Now how did Raul stick that tortoise to the ceiling?

Mark Caswell



RETURN OF THE FAMILY MAN

Starring Ron Smerczak, Liam Cundill, Michelle Constant, Kurt Egelhof
Director John Murlowski
Distributor Braveworld
Cert 18, 88 mins



Who said life as a pizza delivery man was easy? Aldern gets involved in a gangland killing while despatching a deep-pan and unwittingly becomes a suspect. Too cowardly to go to the cops, he takes a vacation with two friends in the small, scruffy town of Borden. Their holiday home has been double-booked with American Adventure, a five-man tour group, but despite the cock-up and the run-down state of the house, they take remarkably little convincing from Aldern to stay. The vacation starts badly and gets worse. The locals don't take kindly to the visitors, then they learn they're staying at what was once the home of Mark Alan Schecter who, better known as The Family Man, killed his wife and children then several other families before being captured. That was ten years ago. But, just as our heroes settle into his home, Schecter escapes from a prison transfer bus, killing all the officers and prisoners travelling with him. And where else would The Family Man want to go than back to his family home?

The basic elements of this movie come together pretty quickly and thus prepare one for disappointment. The 'young people stranded with a psycho' ploy is perhaps the oldest in the thriller/horror book. When the heroes learn they're in a mass-murderer's house, they're not at all worried but at least when they discover the first body they run like hell, unlike the dummies in the vast majority of films of this nature. And, rather than wandering around like lost sheep, Aldern and friends construct weapons to defend themselves with.

The producers have realised what a crowded, overused market this is, so have injected a little tongue-in-cheek humour into the characters and situations (The Family Man is an ex-US defence minister). Performances are pretty flat and there are several stereotyped characters, but The Family Man himself is quite an intriguing murderer, gently scolding his victims and, later in the picture, calmly appealing to one of his targets for help.

An absence of on-screen violence and gore makes me wonder why this merits an 18 certificate but doesn't spoil the impact of any scenes. Through stylish direction and unusual slants on the basic stalking murderer idea, *Return Of The Family Man* injects interest into that desperately tired area and pokes its head above the crowd.

Warren Lapworth



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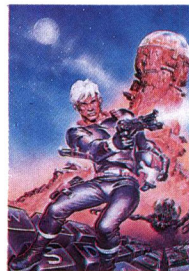
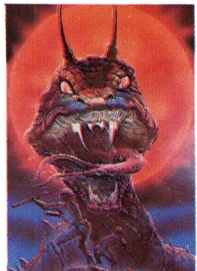
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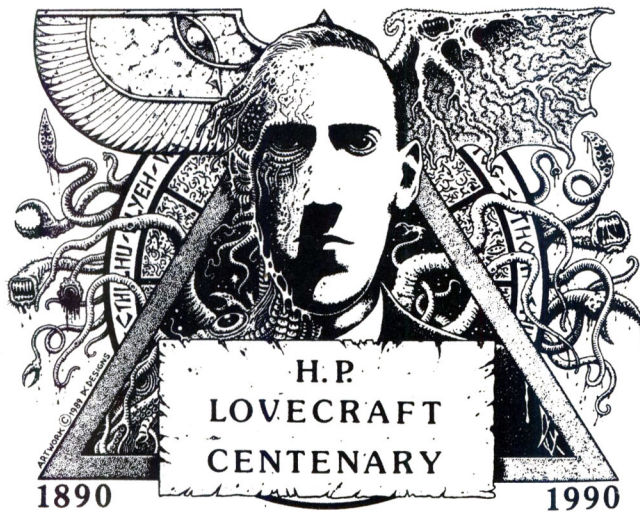


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THE BLOB

*Starring Kevin Dillon, Donovan Leitch, Shawnee Smith, Erica Eleniak, Noble Craig
Director Chuck Russell
Distributor Braveworld
Cert 18, 90 mins £9.99*

 Chuck Russell's remake of this SF classic contains some superb horror special effects, dwarfing the cast of unknowns and providing gruesome thrills every few minutes from about a third of the way through the film.

And here lies one of the movie's problems. The setup at the beginning is interminable as we are introduced to characters for whom we do not particularly care. Kevin — brother of Matt — Dillon plays McQueen's rebel with all the panache of an ironing board, while the love interest, played by Erica Eleniak, futilely spends most of her time with Donovan Leitch, who ends up as Blob bait as the real action begins. The rest of the wafer-thin story has the small cast of characters struggling against the mutant goo.

True to form with such monster movies, Russell sets this one up for a sequel, when a travelling evangelist scoops up a blob of Blob and plans to bring about Armageddon through its power. No doubt such a sequel sounded like a good idea at the time, but it hasn't arrived yet, so perhaps it's not going to happen. Hopefully...

John Gilbert

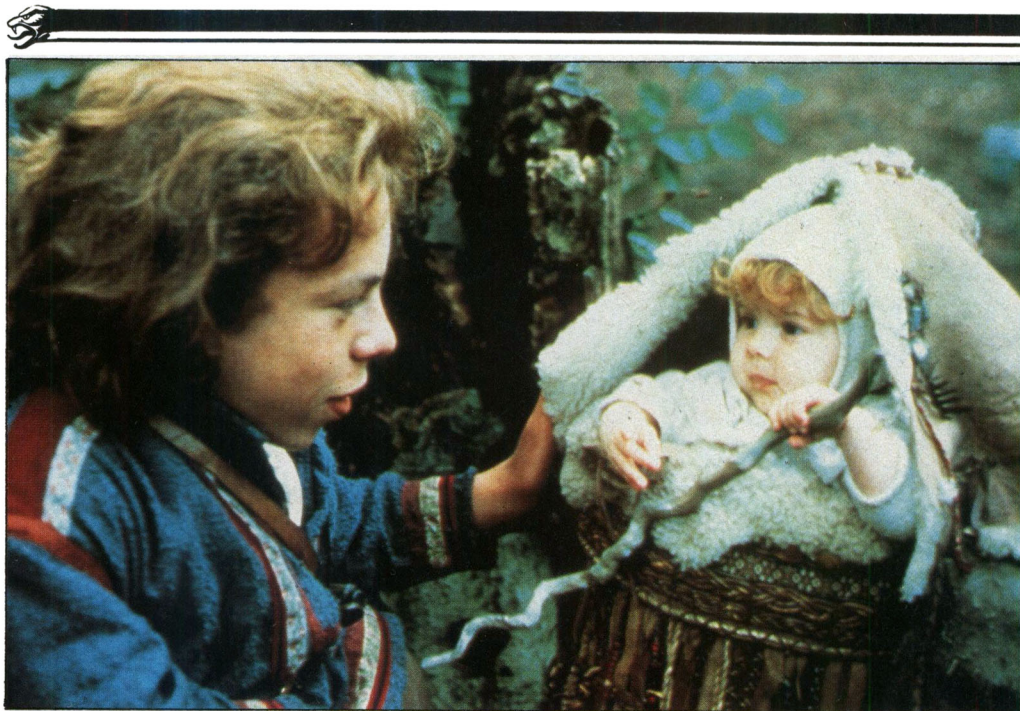


WIZARDS OF THE LOST KINGDOM

*Starring Bo Svenson, Vidal Peterson, Thom Christopher, Barbara Stock
Director Hector Olivera
Distributor Medusa
Cert PG, 72 mins, £9.99*

 Tylor's kingdom is not a happy one. His wife, Udea, has betrayed him in favour of his counsel, Shurka. Tylor and his magician are slain and Shurka's evil army takes over the castle. But all is not lost, for the great Ring of Magic is now in the hands of young Simon, the magician's son, and without it Shurka cannot gain complete control over the kingdom. But Simon loses the ring as he's magicked from the castle, so fate is left in the balance. Simon materialises in a forest far from the castle with only Gulfax (a tall furry beast of untold origin) for company. However, he soon joins forces with 'legendary hero' Kor the Conqueror against Shurka's minions. But who will find the ring first?


In this goody-goody children's fantasy film, there's never the slightest doubt against Simon saving the day — just disbelief at how appalling it can get. It begins badly, with a long and unnecessary narrative on the kingdom's past, then Gulfax makes his first appearance... A man in a big, fluffy white suit, sounding like a gargling Flowerpot Man, is not my idea of a lovable beast. It's the most stupid, unconvincing costume I've ever seen — Bungle in *Rainbow* is more realistic — although there's a cyclops, hobgoblin and mermaid in this movie that give it a



SORCERER'S APPRENTICE

WILLOW

*Starring Val Kilmer, Joanne Whalley, Warwick Davis, Jean Marsh, Patricia Hayes
Director Ron Howard
Distributor RCA/Columbia
Cert PG, 121 mins £9.99*

 *The Greatest Stories Ever Told* should be the title of this George Lucas fantasy. At its theatrical launch, critics blasted the movie because the storyline was constructed using a book on mythology by the anthropologist Joseph Campbell. The book, *God Of A Thousand Faces*, posited the view that all legends, religious stories and symbols could be traced back to one central mythic system which encompassed the Hero Myth, the Creation Myth, the cycle of Birth, Death and Rebirth, and so on.

Lucas used Campbell's book to create the *Star Wars* trilogy and, later, *Willow*. In the latter, Campbell's influence can easily be seen at work. The evil queen Bavmarda (Marsh) is out to kill all the baby girls in the kingdom because a prophecy proclaims that one of them will usurp her power. A baby, however, escapes and is sent on a journey

down river in a coracle and is rescued by a dwarf called Willow Ufgood who fancies himself as a wizard and wants the local sorcerer to take him on as an apprentice.

Failing the annual wizardry test by a finger's length, he nevertheless falls into an adventure when asked by the faery queen to look after the baby, who eventually will be the new ruler of the land. But Bavmarda has other plans and kidnaps the child in an attempt to banish its soul into the outer darkness. Willow and his companions, who include two Brownies (little people with a wicked sense of fun), a seemingly untrustworthy warrior (Kilmer) and a shapeshifting witch (Hayes) must save the girl and vanquish the evil queen's power.

Rather than diminishing the effect of the film in a plagiaristic way, the old legends and religious stories are reinterpreted to bring added power to the movie. Intriguing special effects and a strong cast which breathes humour into the darkest of scenes make *Willow* well worth seeing. It's a magic that should grab children and adults in any audience.

John Gilbert



run for its money.


Kor is a nice, jovial conqueror — even if he is a little old and lacking in musculature — young Vidal Peterson puts in a good performance and Shurka (Christopher) is a remarkably suave nemesis. However, they don't help the weak plot, hybrid soundtrack (it can't decide if it wants to back a Western, a high-tech thriller or the latest *Star Trek* movie), cheap monsters and effects, and generally insipidness of the whole production. I wanted to give up after ten minutes and I'm not sure the kids will last much longer.

Warren Lapworth



MANIAC COP

*Starring Bruce Campbell, Laurene Landon, Robert Z'dar, Tom Akin
Director William Lustig
Distributor Medusa/Channel 5
Cert 18, 90 mins, £9.99*

 One of my favourites from early 1988 is at last out on sell through video. Bruce Campbell stars as New York cop Jack Forrest, on the trail of undead police officer Cordell (Z'dar) who goes on the rampage after being wrongly imprisoned by the city's police commissioner. Cordell died in prison. He is now after all those who put him there and will allow nobody — not even good policemen — to stop his

vendetta. Jack Forrest is ostensibly out to stop him, but soon discovers that several of his buddies are corrupt, and ends up both as a suspected murderer and on a private police blacklist which could see him dead before he hands in his report.

The Larry Cohen script is deftly directed by William Lustig — one of my favourite filmmakers. The cast is strong and, so what if the end is somewhat of a slasher movie copout? Look out for the sequel and, in the meantime, go for this cult classic on video.

John Gilbert



GRAPHIC DE

Warren Lapworth peruses the latest comic books and graphic novels.

Ever wanted to know things about this planet's past but been too afraid to ask? Or, more likely, didn't want to be driven into a coma by tedious replies? Then look no further than *The Cartoon History Of The Universe* (Penguin, £9.99). It traces the Earth's history from the Big Bang and its creatures' evolution from the oceans' 'organic sandwich' (sic) to man, then follows the trials and tribulations of the earliest civilisations, ending with Alexander the Great's march through Central Asia.

Artwork, by Larry Gonick, is light and cartoony (of course), backed up by detailed and carefully drawn prehistoric animals. Text (also by Gonick) is mostly the straightforward telling of events but there are quips, usually in speech bubbles, to back up the visual humour. The earliest parts of the massive, 358-page volume, concerning evolution, are highly absorbing — hard to put down, in fact — and *The Cartoon History Of The Universe* as a whole is a remarkably readable account of the past.

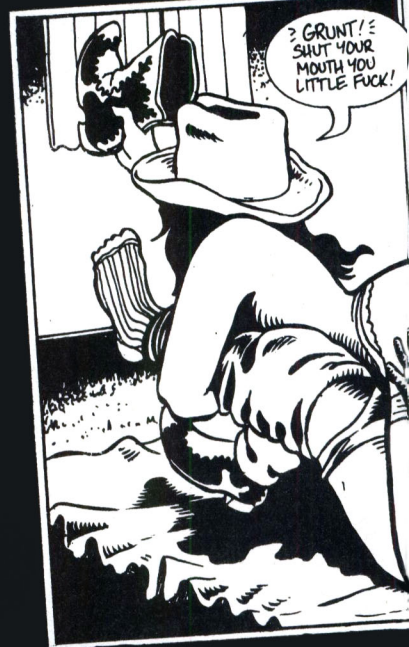
ASHES TO ASHES

Sandman 20 (DC, 80p) is a self-contained story, *Façade*, about Urania Blackwell, one of the metamorphs. Through concentration, she can change the shape and substance of parts of her body. This is little consolation as her natural state is a grotesque, pitted monster that can only be slightly and temporarily disguised. To brighten her reclusive life, she goes to dinner with a friend who knew her before an Egyptian god made her a metamorph. The dinner goes badly but when Urania returns home she discovers a dark, mysterious friend to console her.

The text which follows the story goes over-the-top, presuming 'you probably can't quite make out these words through the tears' and, if you haven't read the story yet, 'make sure you're not doing anything important right after.' But Neil Gaiman has really done himself proud here, with a very downbeat, depressing and, frankly, quite disturbing portrait of Urania's predicament. She desperately wants to be 'normal', to fit in — to be wanted — and, in different ways, that's how everyone has felt at some point in their life. Artwork barely rises above the functional but, although it won't make you cry, *Sandman 20* is still a great example of modern comic-writing. A highly refreshing change.

FLESH AND BONE

Gathering five stories from Australian *Penthouse*, *Bodyguard* (Aircel Comics, import) obviously isn't the



■ Clockwise from bottom left: Elemental my dear RA... The Sandman; Ah, those were the gays... *The Cartoon History Of The Universe*; a humping good yarn... *Bodyguard*; Jasmin fights the Umber Hulks in *Spelljammer*; 'Das ist alles Irisch für mich, Marlowe...' *The Wasteland*



sort of thing to leave lying around for the kids to pick up! Christine Fox is a policewoman who resigns after a professional cock-up and Clarry Wright used to be a minder for a boxer. Together they form *Bodyguard*, an unlikely 'heroes for hire' duo whose catchline is *Watch Your Arse!*

Each tale of *Bodyguard's* lighthearted adventures is a mere five pages long yet they all manage to contain a neat, amusing and well-rounded yarn. Sex plays a prominent part and *double entendres* abound, some of them quite sophisticated. There's a lot of graphic nudity but Glenn Lumsden's simple, jokey style of illustration is inoffensive. A surprisingly worthwhile read.

PRIVATE DICK

Marlowe's the name, Christopher Marlowe, LA private eye. In *The Waste Land* (Penguin, £6.99), his latest case, to find his partner, Miles Fisher, goes sour pretty quickly. The back of his head meets a heavy, blunt instrument and when he comes to he's in London. Crooked cops, dead poets, a drag queen and the Holy Grail don't make his mind any clearer.

The Waste Land, written and drawn by Martin Rowson, is based around the T S Eliot poem of the same name but contains many

TAIL



references, in both text and visuals, to various other works from literature and cinema. It's all wrapped up in a spoof of traditional Fifties detective movies/serials, particularly Marlowe's corny lines (just like *Blade Runner*...).

Artwork is nothing short of brilliant. Rowson is best known for his political caricatures in the quality

papers and he's my favourite artist in that area. His deft strokes define buildings, objects and characters alike with great realism yet in a distinctively quirky, dream-like manner. His shading and use of light and shadow is amazing; never mind the story (clever though it is), buy it for the artwork alone.

MAGIC-BLASTERS

A tribe have left their dying homeland and are in search of a fruitful new place to live when they discover a spaceship. Technology is foreign to them, as are the owners of the ship — the *SpellJammer* (DC/TSR, £1). The leader of the Jammer foursome, Pax, recounts some of their adventures then they relaunch — only to find there are stowaways. In issue two, problems really begin. Meredith, whose spelljamming is controlling the ship, loses control and huge, tusked Umber Hulks, soldiers of the Neogi, attempt to board the ship.

Obviously DC's allegiance with role-playing giants TSR, creators of *Dungeons And Dragons*, is a success, as this is their fourth title. As with sword and sorcery novels, I find these comics very much of a muchness; originality doesn't seem important as long as they are enough beasts, spells and mystical objects to go around. *SpellJammer* borders on



THING

the tedious and redeems itself with excellently coloured artwork — although the use of psychedelic photos as backgrounds is pretty tacky.

Once in a blue moon, a major comic reaches the big one-zero-zero, celebrated by a double-sized issue with a particularly exciting lead story plus two or three backup features. Other than its size, *Swamp Thing* 100 (DC, £1.40) doesn't live up to this. Back in present-day Earth, Swampy's daughter, Tefé, exists only in spirit form, unable to construct a body. If she hasn't regained the ability before her birthday in a few weeks, she will die and so be unable to save the polluted planet.

I was hoping DC would beg, bribe or threaten Alan Moore into scripting *Swamp Thing's* big number (pun intended — sorry!) but alas, it was not to be. Instead we've Doug Wheeler at the reins... with a drab, uneventful story... *Swamp Thing* wanders around... talking to elementals... plants... Very boring, over-philosophical.

Some pages are pencilled/inked by Pat Broderick/Alfredo, and the remainder by Kelley Jones, whose work is a lot more professional, excellently shaded, but Jones's *Swamp Thing* looks remarkably like his *Deadman*. Sheer waffle and a great disappointment.

NATION TO NATION

It's not easy being an alien. In the movie and now the *Alien Nation* comic (Adventure Comics, import), the Tenctonese know this only too well. Soon after their adoption of the Earth as their home in 1991, they were rejected by their hosts and housed in an LA suburb, 'affectionately' dubbed Slagtown by the humans. At best second-class citizens, at worst social outcasts, the Earth wasn't such a nice place to move to after all.

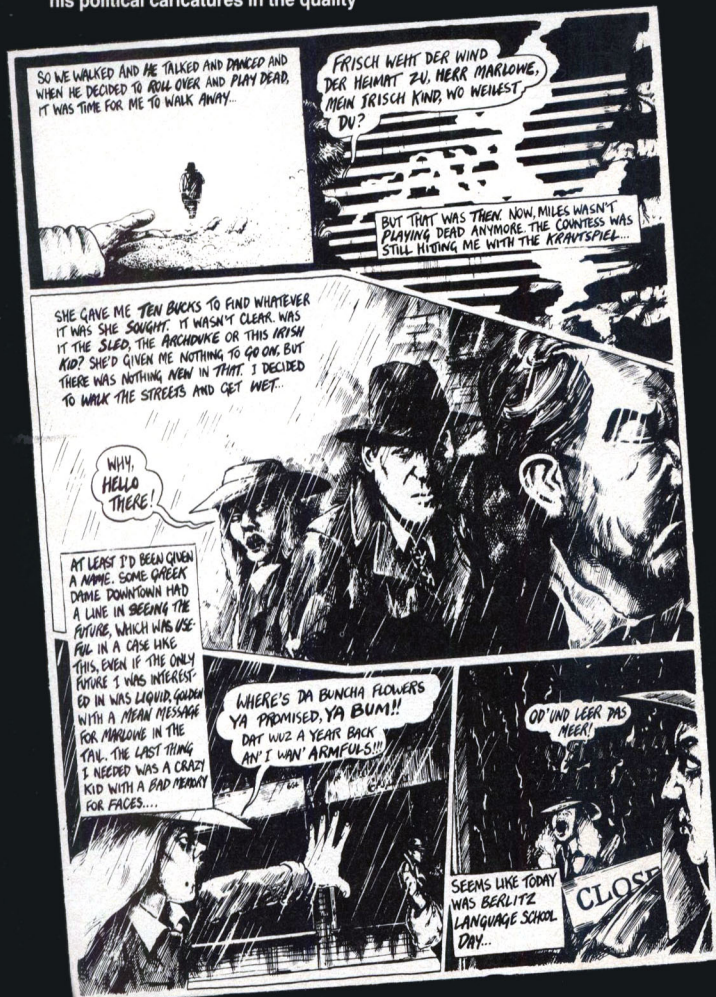
In the first episode of a four-part story, *The Spartans*, one of the Tenctonese, Harvey Wallbanger, becomes a client of Ruth Lawrence of the Newcomer Advocacy League. Harvey's brother, Art Deco, is missing and as Ruth begins to track him down she finds herself up against more than common xenophobia.

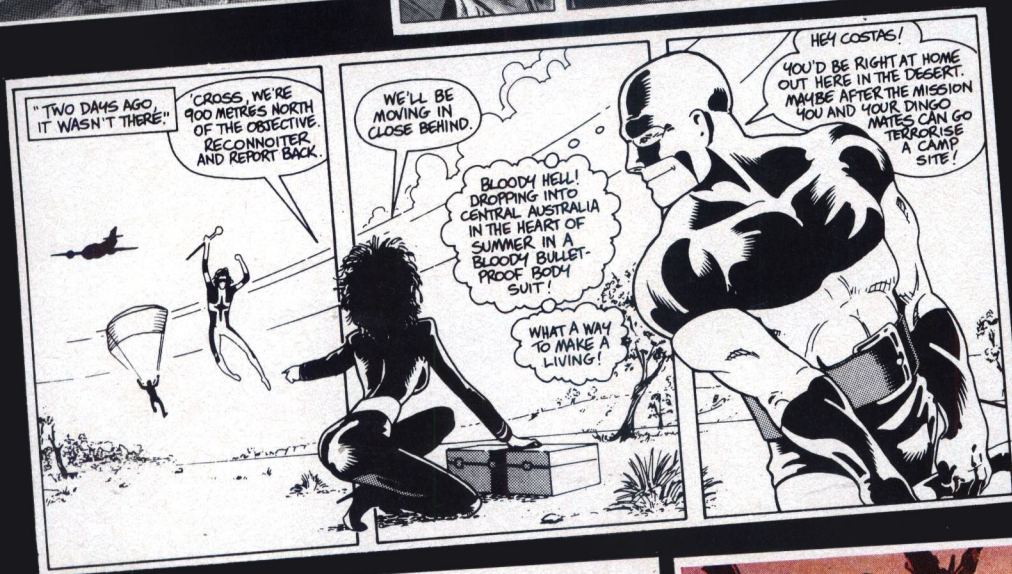
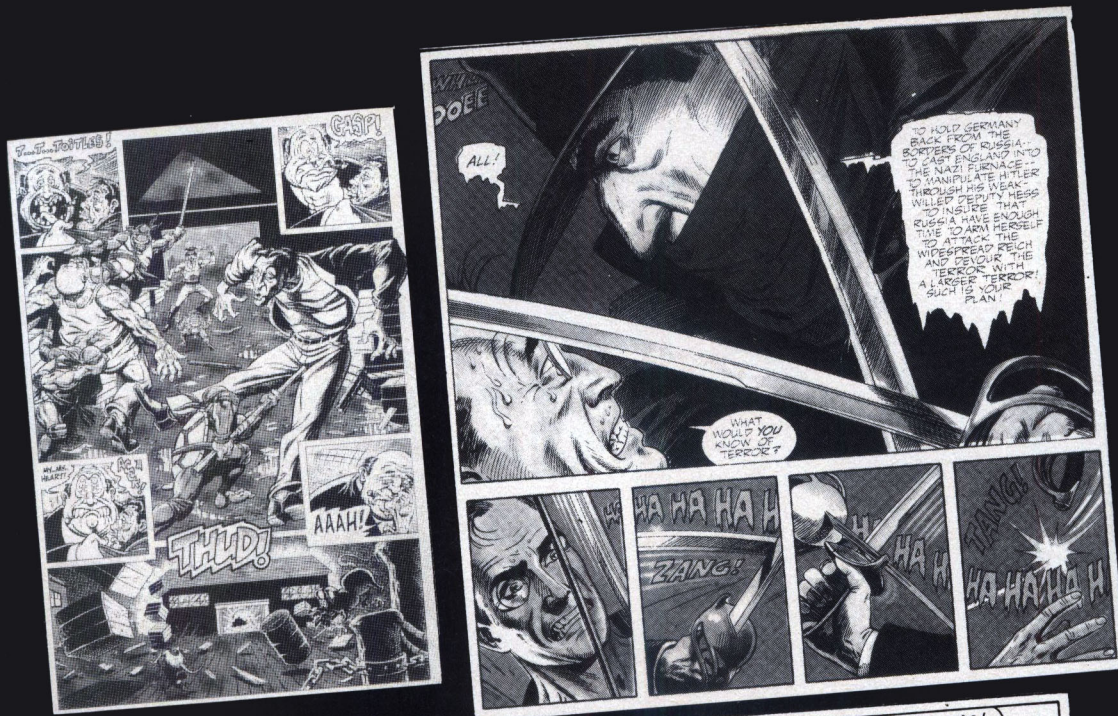
The setting is different as are some of the characters — bald and bulbous-headed people with leopard spots aren't common in any form of fiction — but, thus far, *Alien Nation* is nothing new. Some sort of detective running into brick walls and in physical danger while looking for a missing person is a commonplace premise in films and TV programmes and doesn't suddenly become fascinating because it's a comic and there are aliens in it. Artwork is more lightweight than the story. Hopefully, future issues will have more substance to them — the potential's certainly there.

TURTLE SCREWBALL

Joey is an unsettled man. His last illegal shipment was foiled by *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (book 34, Mirage Studios, £1.50, import), who stole his van. As he's trying to explain to his cigar-smoking boss, the 'toitles' (as Joey calls them) burst in and blow the whole operation sky-high — literally. It's too much for Joey who gets 'turtles before the eyes'.

Artwork's very good: detailed and jokey, if a touch crudely shaded in places. My only complaint is directed





■ Teenage 'toitles' on the rampage (top left), and terror all the way with The Shadow (top right). Laid back but not laid out: The Southern Squadron, and (right) Doom for the Demons in Triumph And Torment

at the turtles themselves: their heads are long and human-like rather than squat and their half-shells are diminutive and almost circular. An anti-turtle lunatic roaming New York is a nice if not desperately original idea so it's a shame that the concept has been squeezed into one issue. Given two or perhaps three episodes to develop, it could have been more than the pleasant but disposable tale it is.

OUTRAGEOUS OUTBACK

In their first mission as an official, independent Australian superteam, Lieutenant Smith, The Dingo, The Nightfighter and The Southern Cross — collectively known as *The Southern Squadron* (Aircel, import) — are sent to investigate unusual weather conditions south-east of Alice Springs. This wouldn't be a job for heroes except for the sudden appearance of an American mansion, home of *The Uncanny A-Men*. Having fled from the anti-superhuman/mutant States, they intend to make Australia their new home, but *The Southern Squadron* don't take a shine to the illegal immigrants.

It's pay-back time! *The Southern Squadron* is an unashamed jibe at American mainstream superteam titles, notably in this issue *The Uncanny X-Men*, of course, but with references to *The Avengers* also. The A-Men are an overweight Storm, ageing Captain America, a Hispanic Wonder Woman (a Madonna lookalike) and a hybrid Marvel mutant. Other than the cool, efficient Lieutenant Smith, *The Southern Squadron* themselves are as refreshingly laid-back and casual as the whole comic.

UPDATES...

I've wanted to include this section for a long time but haven't had the space until now; Updates will give a brief view of the latest issues of monthly comics and limited series I've previously reviewed, checking their progress or otherwise. Also titles that arrive too late for a full review or aren't smack in *Graphic Detail's*

territory will be mentioned here...

Greg Salinger has passed on his *Foolkiller* garb and gun to Kurt who now (issue three) begins his cleansing quest in earnest. Although simplistic in places, this Marvel title's really getting into its stride; good value... Based on Larry Niven's *Death By Ecstasy* novel, *ARM* (Adventure Comics, import) concerns the supposed suicide Owen Jennison 'via' a futuristic drug. Ex-mining colleague Gil Hamilton is convinced it was murder. A traditional (old-fashioned) sci-fi tale with simple artwork that I'm sure worked better as a novel... Available for some time through specialist shops, *Triumph And Torment* is now in the hands of Marvel UK. Doctor Doom's mother is in Mephisto's realm and teams up with Doctor Strange to rescue her — a strange duo indeed. A nicely melodramatic story with rough but effective artwork... In part two of *Breathtaker*, Chase was captured by The Man, who fell under her deadly love spell. Now (issue three) she's free but lost in the wilderness, while The Man discovers he's not the only superhuman around. *Breathtaker* falters in part three, especially compared to the brilliant second issue, but excellent artwork and involving characters maintain the title's high standard... April 1941, Nazi Germany is spreading its influence throughout Europe. *The Shadow* (Marvel) is a mysterious character in dark overcoat, hat and red scarf who, with his associates, plots against them. *The Shadow's* semi-historical setting means it's slower and a lot less fanciful than 99% of Marvel releases. There's plenty to get your teeth into if you persevere and its accurately drawn and tastefully coloured artwork gives it a great cinematic feel.



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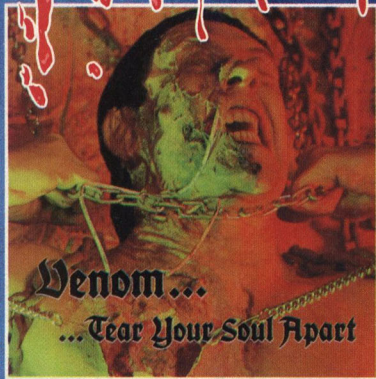
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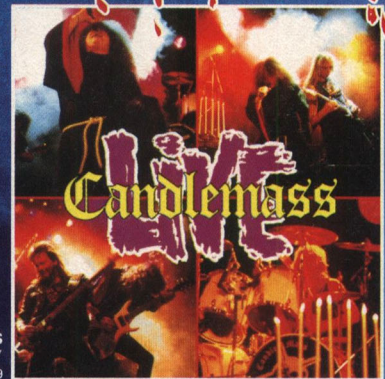
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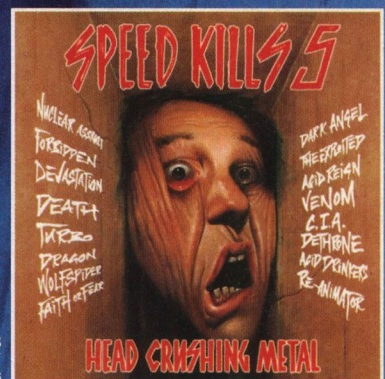
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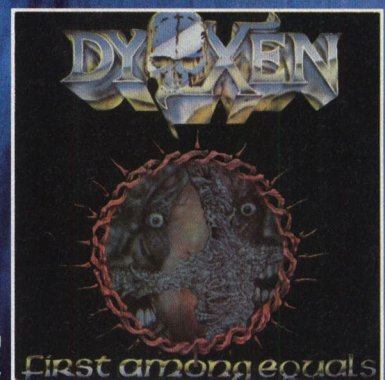
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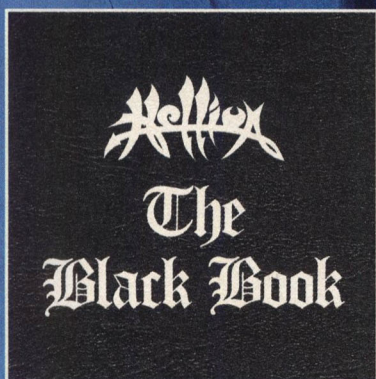
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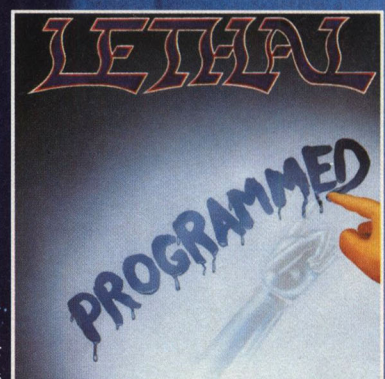
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MACABRE METAL



SPACE BANDIT

Band: Hawkwind
Label: GWR

Hawkwind have always been a vastly underrated Space Rock band and I doubt that their latest album will gain them many new fans, but once again they have managed to emerge with a highly original concept.

Dave Brock and friends journey into the spirit world of Black Elk — the last of the Ogala Sioux medicine men — whose 'true' tale is told to us by American poet John G Neihardt (known to the Ogala Sioux as Flaming Rainbow).

Introducing new member Bridgett Wishart on lead vocals, *Space Bandit* slams into comet crashing high gear — lashing out with a wall of brain-melting guitars before mellowing into a cosmic tapestry of tranquil keyboard, electric violin and, of course, tribal drums.

The song titles are typically SF with tracks such as 'Ship Of Drums' and 'Out Of The Shadows'. The album is altogether a heady mixture of highs and lows and probably best suited to headphones. It's a must for all ex-hippies and Michael Moorcock freaks. So, pour this onto the deck and glide into the hidden world of tribal magic.

Paul Thompson



FEAR kicks off a new section on the rock scene with an eardrum-bursting batch of new releases.

TEAR YOUR SOUL APART

Band: Venom
Label: Music For Nations

Satanic black metal outfit Venom's latest offering, *Tear Your Soul Apart* is the band's second release for their new found label Music For Nations and follows the excellent *Prime Evil* album. It is really a mix of live Venom, old Venom and new Venom, and starts with a live version of 'Skool Daze', a 12 bar blues track given the usual mayhem discharge of aggression and follows in the footsteps of their classic track 'Teacher's Pet'.

'Bustin' Out' first appeared on the flip of the 12 inch single 'Die Hard' and is also, for the purpose of this release, recorded live. Also live comes a very early song called 'Angel Dust' which is taken from their debut album *Welcome To Hell*, and also delivered with passion and fire. But where this EP really shines is with the inclusion of the two studio outings 'The Ark' and a tune entitled 'Civilised', both very polished and, in terms of the Venom of old, heavy but more accessible and obviously a taste of new material for the next album. Although a touch more level on the vocals would have made the words more audible, the only downer on the EP is a cover of the classic Judas Priest song 'Hellbent', which sounds like a race to the finish post after a knacker live performance, and the space could have been filled with either a classy

studio tune or something taken from *Prime Evil* and delivered live.

Evo



Next issue: Satanic controversy with mega-band Venom. Our first heavy metal interview!

DANCING WITH FIRE

Band: Cronos
Label: Neat Records

No, not the vampire hunter, but the former lead vocalist/bassist with black metal outfit Venom. This time old death breath branches out and goes for the solo deal, but the volcanic eruptions of the old Venom vocal have been polished up and fellow song writer and guitarist Jimi-C actually goes for a few harmonies, especially on the title track and the brainstormer 'Fantasia'.

This is Cronos's debut album and admittedly the production could have been much more in the face but, having said that, the ex-Venom front man has come up with an album of highly polished riffs and tunes, the songs are very heavy but never become absorbed by the Thrash element.

We even get a ballad which at first sounds a touch iffy but after a few plays becomes very infectious. The inner sleeve contains a cautionary note that this album contains guitar army mega chunk which sounds strange until you play 'Terrorize'. To keep all the old Venom fans happy, there is a song called 'Vampyr' which is back to the doomy satanic grunge that made Cronos a household name with metal fans.

Dancing In The Fire is a breath of fresh air and is obviously much more artistic in terms of delivery. Having parted company, both Cronos and Venom are much tighter outfits. It's a

■ Black Sabbath

shame that the tightness shown on both their debuts wasn't used on their fourth LP (*Possessed*) while the media interest was huge: Venom with Cronos could then have been as big as Metallica. But now both outfits are starting from scratch. Roll on the follow-up album.

Evo



RUST IN PEACE

Band: Megadeth
Label: Capitol Records

The fourth offering from the US quartet. Now I thought that the third, *So Far So Good So What*, was extremely well put together and included what could be described as songs, but the band's new album comes over as self-indulgent guitar hero type stuff which, of course, is okay if you get off on crazy mad riffing axes blazing at you from all angles — and if you enjoy at least ten different musical pieces rolled into one and then given a title.

As even the heaviest of my tastes uses melody lines, tracks like 'Five Magics' and 'Take No Prisoners' are just riff-laden juggernauts that pan from speaker to speaker, and it has to be said that band leader Dave Mustaine has only enjoyed the success that Megadeth have achieved due to his once being a member of Bay Area thrashers Metallica.

Metallica write songs whereas Megadeth write riffs. But if you want to check out the Deth at their best, go get the band's third album *So Far* with the likes of 'Liar' and the classic 'In My Darkest Hour'. *Rust In Peace* is much too bitty.

Evo



TYR

Band: Black Sabbath
Label: IRS

TYR — God of Battle, equated with the Roman Mars. The son of Odin and the supreme sky god of the Northern peoples; the god of war and martial valour, the protector of the community and the giver of law and order.

This disc came about due to the capitalising success of their previous album *Headless Cross*. The god TYR has inspired a collection of tracks moving back to the band's roots, steeped in the traditions of myth and folklore.

The lyrics guide us into the kingdom of Odin, riding through the cold winds and on to the land of eternity. Despite the departure of the devils and ghouls from deepest hell from Sabbath's last album, the driving force of their music, the noxious exhalation of things ungodly and uninviting in appearance, ensure the band's traditional fans will not be disappointed. Their darker side still prevails; inspired by a visit to St Basil's Cathedral in Moscow's Red Square, 'Heaven In Black' tells the story of how the architects were blinded after the building was completed to ensure they could never work on anything so beautiful again.

'Sabbath Stones' gives a nod to the very first Black Sabbath album and there is even a track, 'Feels Good To Me', that harks back further, to their blues roots in the late Sixties when John Osbourne's band was called Earth.

Colin Wall





BOOKS

Not To Be Missed



Recommended



Fair



Poor



Diabolical



BOOKS



HORROR

- The Best Of Modern Horror
- Dark Visions
- Dead In The West
- Fiends
- The Phantom Of The Opera
- Tempter



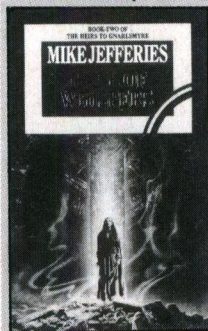
SCIENCE FICTION

- The Amtrak Wars — Earth Thunderer
- The Hemingway Hoax
- Out On Blue Six
- The World Inside



FANTASY

- Dark Hills, Hollow Clocks
- Hall Of Whispers



- Hocus Pocus
- Stone Of Farewell
- Truckers
- Wings



THRILLER

- Embryo
- In The Deep Woods
- The Kindness Of Strangers

STONE OF FAREWELL BOOK TWO OF MEMORY, SORROW AND THORN

Tad Williams
Publisher Century
Format HB £13.95

I can see this becoming an annual event, and despite my worry that constant reviews of trilogies and dekologies might bore those who are not reading them, there is nothing I can do about it.

FANTASY OF THE FUTURE

HALL OF WHISPERS

Mike Jefferies
Publisher Fontana
Format PB, £3.99



Exactly a year ago a book happened along that, after hundreds of Tolkien and Donaldson clones, renewed my faith in the inspiration of fantasy fiction. The book was *Hall Of Whispers* by Mike Jefferies, and I must berate him only for the time it has taken to get the second, and final, part onto the shelves.

In the first book Marriam, the elder daughter of Lord Miresnare, is faced with the task of winning her father's throne against great opposition. The only way in which she can do it, and defeat the prejudice against women in the land, is to claim the fabled Glitterspike, the goalposts in a game which is usually played out by the rough men of Gnarlesmyre in their attempts to be the heir.

No one believes that Marriam can become the Lady of Glitterspike Hall but, as *Hall Of Whispers* opens, she has won through and come into her kingdom. But after the initial thrill of her win and her assertion to rule wisely and kindly — unlike her grotesque father — she finds that the running of even the smallest kingdom has its problems. Everyone is out to get her and she can seem to do nothing right by her poverty-stricken people.

Jefferies' type of fantasy is definitely the future for a genre which, like the thralls of the Glitterspike, has become impoverished. Gnarlesmyre is a wonderful place, full of invention, and Jefferies is a very talented writer. My only complaint is that this is a duology, though I suspect he has something to equal the Gnarlesmyre books for next year.

John Gilbert



Tad Williams is quite simply one of the few bests in the fantasy field. His inventive slant on fiction, his marked abilities with character and location, and his obvious loathing of clichéd dungeons and dragons, make him the champion of all those who want to see the fantasy genre survive into the Nineties.

Stone Of Farewell continues to chart the rise of the undead Storm King Ineluki who intends to snatch his hereditary lands back from the humans and Quantacs whom he regards as trespassers and betrayers. The Stone is a symbol of hope, a rallying point for the straggling, defeated remnants of the human armies.

Away from the battle the main focal point character, Simon, has his fellows in the League of the Scroll start their final quests towards the heartland of their enemy, driven by puzzling dreams and magical forces which they cannot, as yet, fully understand.

Fans of *The Dragonbone Chair* will be pleased to learn that, despite its length, *Stone Of Farewell* is at least as important and well written a novel as that first book in the trilogy. I still very much stand by my much quoted

assertion that Williams will soon unequivocally be hailed as the new king of fantasy. If the third novel in this trilogy proves as good as the previous two...well, I can see them dusting off that crown already.

John Gilbert



OUT ON BLUE SIX

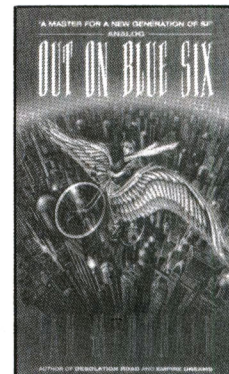
Ian McDonald
Publisher Bantam
Format PB £4.99



In his follow-up to the magnificent *Desolation Road*, Ian McDonald extrapolates some of the themes from his even earlier short story 'Unfinished Portrait Of The King Of Pain By Van Gogh' by taking us into a future formalised by computers into the 'Compassionate Society', a society in which pain, suffering and decision-making have effectively been outlawed. Transgressors are hunted and psychologically re-formatted by the Love Police.

Inevitably, there is opposition to this

'party line', principally represented by the anmesiac Kilimanjaro West, who seeks the meaning of existence; Kansas Byrne, of the self-styled artistic ensemble The Raging Apostles, a troupe whose performances have even the Love Policemen 'banging their mock-leather gauntlets together'; and the aspirational cartoonist and part-time dreamer Hourtney Hall, whose published work sends the Ministry of Pain into a veritable blue funk.



Blending the cinematically visual interpretation of Dick's coldly alien futures with the flamboyant literary pyrotechnics of Burroughs' *Dead Fingers Talk* and Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, McDonald sets out to entertain and regale us with a cautionary tale for the Nineties. But despite the fact that *Out On Blue Six* is unquestionably enjoyable, he's only been partly successful.

Just like some of the faster varieties of food available, you're left — having gorged the contents of the gaudy packaging — with the unmistakable feeling of only partial satiation. The book's moral is most eloquently summed up by the character of Jonathan Ammonier the First, King of Nebraska, when he refers to 'the real beauty of the Compassionate Society': 'Outside of itself, nothing matters. Such wonderful arrogance!'

Indeed.

Pete Crowther



DARK VISIONS

Stephen King, George RR Martin,

Dan Simmons

Publisher Gollancz

Format PB £3.99



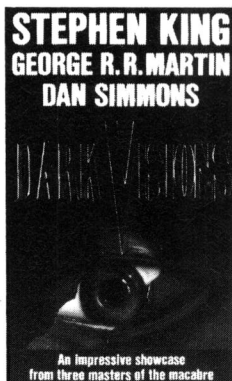
Dark Visions is the result of commissioning three top horror authors to write a third of a book's worth of new material. Stephen King is obviously considered to be the star attraction as his name is displayed on the cover somewhat more prominently than the other two contributors.

King kicks off the collection with three short stories. The first, 'Reploids', has to be the worst piece in the whole book: a man turns up on the *Johnny Carson Show* to host the whole shebang but nobody knows who the hell he is. He's hauled in by the police but maintains that he's done nothing wrong. Early on in the story it quickly becomes apparent what's up. So there's bound to be a twist at the end just to prove that you're wrong and that Stephen King isn't so predictable. But there isn't. All the ending does is confirm something you figured out pretty early on.

King's next story, 'Sneakers', is based around the novel idea of a haunted lavatory and a pair of ghostly sneakers which inhabit one of the cubicles. It's certainly an improvement on the first story but still not King at his best.

King's final contribution is 'Dedication'. Though it's billed in an introduction by Douglas E Winter as 'one of his most controversial works of fiction', I can't see why. It suffers from the same basic failure as 'Reploids', in that it labours to convince the reader about something in particular then ends rather lamely by adding another piece of evidence to reinforce that belief. Rather than chill you, the ending leaves you thinking: 'Is that it?'

So it was hardly with enthusiasm that I dipped into the first of Dan Simmons' three short stories. However, I was delighted to discover 'Metastasis' to be an original and well written piece. After a car accident, Louis Steig is convinced that he can see strange parasitic creatures, which he calls 'cancer vampires' and which are invisible to everyone else. As they enter people's bodies the person subsequently discovers that they are suffering from one form of cancer or another. Realising the futility of trying to hide from them, Steig changes tack and embarks on a final showdown.



'Vanni Fucci Is Alive And Well And Living In 'Hell'' is one of the highlights of the book. Comic rather than horrific, it features an inmate from hell sent back by his fellow cohabitants to appear on *Brother Freddy's Hallelujah Breakfast Club* to set a few things straight.

Simmons' third of the book closes with 'Iverson's Pits'. Straddling a hundred years of American history, it centres around the battlefields at Gettysburg and a betrayed captain's desire for revenge. It's not as immediately appealing as Simmons' previous stories but develops into his best piece. George RR Martin's contribution, the novella 'Skin Trade', is a tale of murder, mystery and lycanthropy that makes an excellent closing piece.

As a whole, *Dark Visions* is a good anthology. What stops it being an excellent one is King's disappointing contribution.

Robin Candy



HOCUS POCUS

Kurt Vonnegut

Publisher Jonathan Cape

Format HB £13.99

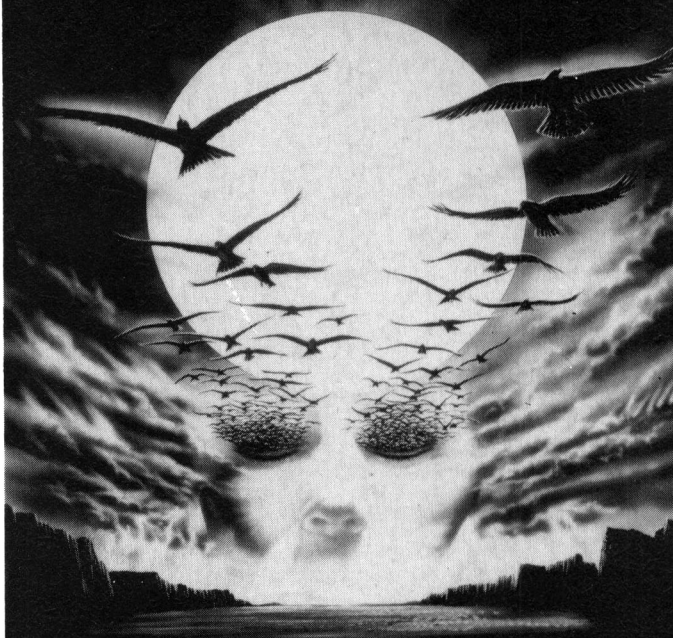


Languishing in a voluminous library awaiting trial for the insurrection and escape of 10,000 prisoners from the New York State Maximum Security Adult Correctional Institution, the consumptive Eugene Debs Hartke, ex-Vietnam veteran and former teacher of the terminally ineducable, uses an endless supply of writing materials of varying sizes to construct a book - a life story which reflects on the collective idiocies of war, commerce, incarceration, government, infidelity, death and madness — with the ultimate aim of establishing the words for his own burial marker. The sentiment? The connection between the number of people he 'legally killed' and the number of his adulteries.

Vonnegut's stance has long been to prod and poke into the fractured rationale of human behaviour, mercilessly dissecting it with a literary scalpel not at all blunted by his omnipresent acerbic deadpan wit. He is a master of the absurd and, at the same time, the self-styled custodian of mankind's destiny. In him there are elements of Bradbury's unashamed purpleness, Farmer's general out-of-synchrony, Lenny Bruce's barbed social commentary, Enid Blyton's simplicity, Hemingway's staccato homilies and a heady satirical mixture of Swift and Orwell.

The undoubted strength of Kurt Vonnegut — represented here by his best work in almost a decade — is his enviable eloquence at making the reader see great truths, previously only blandly accepted. That he accomplishes

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this formidable achievement within stylishly readable and immensely complex stories of real people and fantastically unbelievable situations, using a staggering economy of prose and an occasionally almost infantile and repetitive humour, is merely by the by.

Pete Crowther



EMBRYO

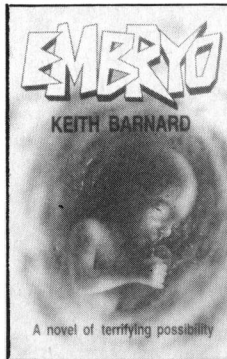
Keith Barnard
 Publisher Souvenir Press
 Format HB £14.95



Simon Robinson is the Senior Registrar in the gynaecology department of the Princess Marina Hospital where Gemma Randall turns up at the out patients' clinic for an abortion. Robinson performs a routine ultrasound scan to check the foetus's condition, and notices some very strange things on the monitor. Firstly, the foetus's development is more advanced than it should be at that stage of pregnancy and, secondly, it turns its head and gives him a malevolent grin. The next day Simon comes to perform the abortion and has a fit during the procedure which also results in Gemma ending up mute and paralysed. From here on Simon's life falls apart as he is suspended from work and his wife starts to behave erratically. Whenever he tries to find out more about the dead foetus, reports go missing or someone ends up dead.

Even without reading the dust-jacket it doesn't take long to figure out that Keith Barnard works in the medical profession, and what really hammers this home is his attention to medical detail. Whenever a character mentions a

medical term the plot is adjusted in order to explain what that term means. This can get a bit annoying at times, with whole pieces of dialogue taken up to explain things such as the difference between a chromosome and a gene when maybe the reader doesn't really need to know; it becomes detail just for detail's sake rather than something to enhance the story.



However, the book's biggest failing is with its characters. Take Gemma Randall, for example. Her life has been wrecked by Simon Robinson but at no point does she, by word or deed, show any resentment towards him. In fact, she is positively starry-eyed and ends up living with him! Meanwhile, Robinson fails to make a connection between Gemma Randall's and his wife's extraordinary pregnancies.

Much of the book points to evidence of some kind of evil non-human force at work, but the possibilities hinted at early on in the plot are never realised. By the end of *Embryo* there's a nice rational explanation to tie everything up. It's all very neat, but it leaves the reader

feeling disappointed.
Robin Candy



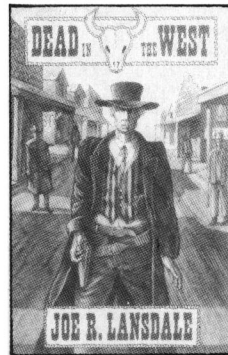
DEAD IN THE WEST

Joe R Lansdale
 Publisher Kinnell
 Format HB £12.95



Despite my immense admiration for the man and for the ghoulish relish that he pumps over his horror offerings, I must decline to go with the flow by saying that *Dead In The West* is a work of genius; it is not, and it takes more than dressing up a putrescent cliché in a cowboy hat and a long coat to send a shiver through my gonads.

Admittedly, the story is one of the most disgusting I have read — it can't help but be! Here we have a sleepy little Wild West town with a secret, a curse, sparked off when the lynching of an old Indian medicine man for a crime he did not commit brings back the dead as zombies. That's the storyline, and the rest of this short book is gobbled up with the gory details of how the rest of the townsfolk, including several of the primary characters, are torn apart by hungry hands.



We've seen it all before in Romero's 'Dead' series and even read it in Russo's competent novelisation of *Dawn Of The Dead*, so why-oh-why does this comparatively newly hatched master of the macabre go on harping about old news? Some fans might argue that it's the characters you should look at rather than the plot, but what an unpleasant lot they largely are, and sketched in lighter than the line from a 2B pencil.

There are much grander works in print by Joe Lansdale but few of them have reached publishing houses in Britain. So while I would normally advise against buying a less than brilliant book, especially in hardback, this is sufficiently superior to much of the other horror fare that stumbles onto the bookshelves and I would recommend it those who have yet to experience Lansdale's in-the-raw approach to the genre. Better still, go buy *The Drive In 1* and *2* as well, both of which are also available from Kinnell in hardback.

John Gilbert

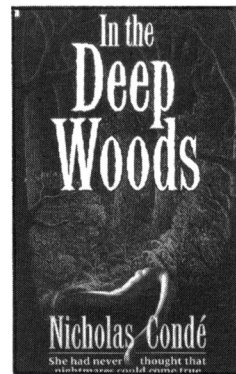


IN THE DEEP WOODS

Nicholas Conde
 Publisher NEL
 Format PB £3.99



You may remember a movie called *The Believers* about an American cop's run in with the voodoo-related religion of Brujeria? Well, Nicholas Conde wrote the far superior novel on which that movie was based and established himself as an author with an eye for the occult.



His latest book, however, takes a different track, still concentrating on violent death but without the overt trappings of the straight horror novel. The message of this tale is 'don't go down to the woods today', and its recipient is Carol Warren, a plucky lady who is the author of several dark fantasy books for children. She soon becomes involved in multiple murders by a seemingly madman whose latest victim, and Carol's friend, Anne Donaldson, was found stripped and strangled deep in the woods.

At first, Carol is content to view the killing as the work of a psycho, but the press must have their blood rites and it is quickly suggested that Anne was just another victim of a particularly perverted mass murderer. There is no reason to suggest that Carol might be on his hit list, but then the killer might be nearer to her than she at first thought.

A challenging mystery, *In The Deep Woods* can be viewed as a straight mystery or a psychological thriller in the tradition, though perhaps not with the stature, of *Silence Of The Lambs* by Thomas Harris. Conde is a competent writer with a flair for the unnatural — if not the supernatural. He's already big in the States, and I predict a huge success for him in Britain, if not with this novel.

John Gilbert

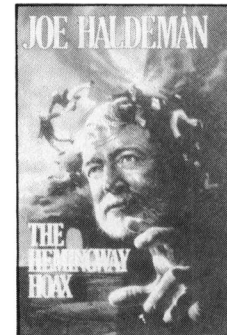


THE HEMINGWAY HOAX

Joe Haldeman
 Publisher NEL
 Format HB £11.95



You might accuse me of impartiality when I say that Ernest Hemingway is, along with Steinbeck, one of my favourite writers and that I'll show interest in any book that contains even a paragraph about that wonderful journalist and novelist.

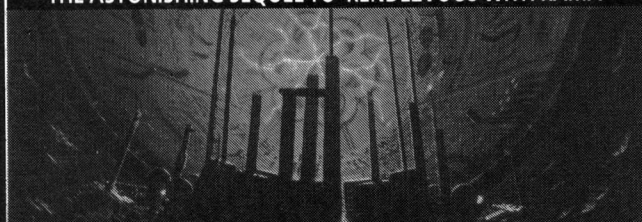


Well, tough. I am also probably one of the sternest critics of such books and when Joe Haldeman's latest dark fantasy, *The Hemingway Hoax* fell onto my desk in proof form...who could blame me?

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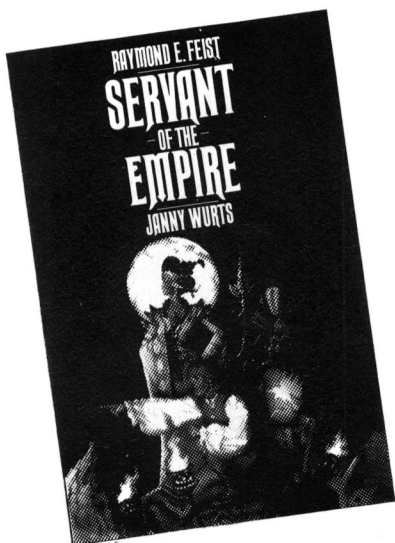
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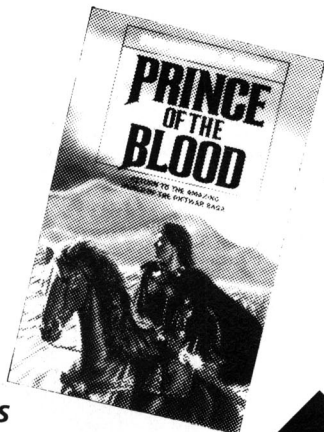
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enthralled by the Hemingway milieu that he lives in Key West, and breathes the author's fiction. A simple enough pleasure, but then Sylvester Castlemaine, con-man extraordinaire, enters his life and shows him how he can be more closely linked with the great man's work. All he has to do is aid and abet the forgery of Hemingway's Paris stories, supposedly lost works that would fetch a fortune on the open market.

Baird agrees, and the forgery takes place without a hiccup, but strange things are happening in the time/space continuum and this Hemingway junkie quickly realises that the effects of his deeds will have far-reaching consequences. An intergalactic literary critic who makes the Terminator look like a pussy cat is after his blood and, as the chase draws to a close and Baird sinks further into a fantasy world, he discovers that his greedy actions could have a devastating effect on the history of humankind.

Haldeman is obviously a huge fan of Hemingway and, indeed, this book serves as a kind of temple for his hero. Even the style in which parts of the book are written resonates with Hemingway's own. Haldeman keeps well in the background, letting his enthusiasm rather than his own distinct voice drive the text. It's a fascinating reading experience and an introduction to some of the most interesting characters I've seen for some time. Another Haldeman hit.

Mark Westerby



THE AMTRAK WARS — EARTH-THUNDERER

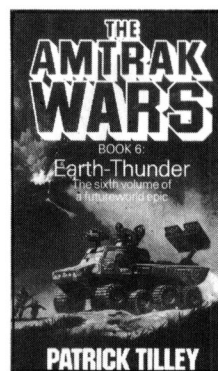
Patrick Tilley
Publisher Sphere
Format PB £3.99



For any fan of British writer Patrick Tilley's long-running future-world saga, *Earth-Thunderer* is an eagerly awaited read. Even more so, because this — the sixth in the *Amtrak* series — is also the concluding episode of the adventures of Steve and Roz Brickman, Cadillac M'Call and Clearwater. The plot pulls all the strands together, rushing toward the birth of Talisman, in the three areas of this post-holocaust world: the hi-tech 'Sand-Burrowers' of the duplicitous Amtrak Federation; the short-memoried warrior 'Mutes' of the Plainsfolk; and the honour-hidebound luddite Japanese of the Ne-Issan empire.

Roz and Cadillac are in Ne-Issan attempting to destabilise the Iron-Masters' geopolitical ambitions by plotting the assassinations of Shogun Yoritomo and conniving chamberlain Ieyasu by proving that they are secretly in league with the Federation, using radio devices powered by the forbidden 'Dark Light' — electricity. The sudden void in rulership of the reigning Toh-Yotas allows Cadillac's reluctant allies, the Yama-Shita, to launch a civil war. He's inordinately proud of his plan, of course, especially as Steve Brickman is back in the Federation pondering which side his bread's buttered on, and Clearwater, pregnant with Steve's baby, is imprisoned in the Federation underground. Who, or what, is Talisman?

The answer is both surprising — and a bit of a let down. Tilley's oddly quaint vision of America at the end of the twenty-first century has been consistent, and survived six books because there's a sense of honesty in the structure, not



to mention plenty of headroom for dramatic situations and well-timed cliff-hangers. All in all, a well thought through and lively written yarn. But I've a strong suspicion that book seven was hurriedly rolled up into the concluding chapters to get it all finished, and the rush therefore inevitably provides an anticlimax — a shame. Production values also suffer a mite, most confusingly when a character called Watanabe suddenly turns, momentarily, into Katanabe, rather similar to another samurai's name in the same conversation.

Nonetheless, *Earth-Thunderer* provides an end to a worthy science-fiction-fantasy work of some stature, and will be essential reading for *Amtrak* fans.

Roger Kean



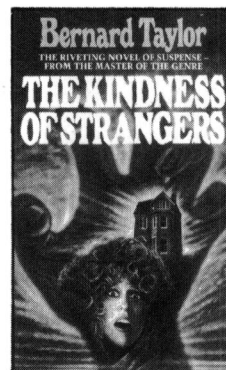
THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

Bernard Taylor
Publisher Grafton
Format PB £3.50



Maybe Grafton don't realise what a little goldmine they have as the publishers of horror author Bernard Taylor's books. Firm fans of the genre have known for some time that the eminently British Mr Taylor has got what it takes to knock 'em dead with his supernatural and psychological thrillers.

Earlier this year, his 1977 novel *Sweetheart* was published in paperback to the uproarious cheers of those who knew his work. Perhaps the publisher would do good by him and raise his profile on the publicity trail. No such luck, so I can only hope that the publication of his psychological chiller, *The Kindness Of Strangers*, will give him much needed coverage.



The subject matter is uncomfortably close to reality, with pretty young American film actress Shenna Preston coming to England to take her place in an art school. Thinking that the high and hectic life of her movie days is well and truly behind her, she hopes that she can relax and follow her artistic inclinations.

But fans have a tendency to dig at




BARGAINS GALORE!

TRUCKERS

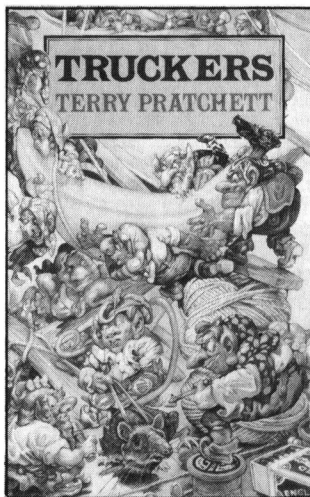
Terry Pratchett
Publisher Corgi
Format PB £2.50

WINGS

Terry Pratchett
Publisher Doubleday
Format HB £8.99

 With the publication of *Truckers* and its sequel, *Wings*, Pratchett concludes the Nome Trilogy, of which *Diggers* was the second instalment. Although pitched at younger readers this shouldn't put any over-16 year old off; it's just that there's no sex or violence, but the two novels are packed with Pratchett's singular brand of humour.

The nomes, whose adventures these are, are a wonderful bunch of characters, but life in a world sized-up for humans is hell when you're four inches tall and live in a hole in the ground. In *Truckers* the nomes leave their holes and arrive at the department store of Arnold Bros (est. 1905), where they meet the store nomes. To the store nomes, Arnold Bros (est. 1905) is the world and there is no outside. So, of course, their world of Haberdashery and Stationary is thrown into chaos when these Outsiders arrive and then, to top it all, discover that the store is to be demolished. The store nomes pray to their goddess Bargains Galore! for help, but find that the only way to survive is, with the help of the Outsiders, to steal a store truck and begin a new life. At least the store nomes will be free from the evil store monster, Prices Slashed!



Whereas *Truckers* involves two nome communities, *Wings* takes several of the key *Truckers* characters on a new adventure to find the real nome home. Assisted by the Thing, a black box which knows everything, the nomes discover they come from a planet far away. If stealing a store truck was a barmy idea, the adventures of the nomes as they stowaway on Concorde, hitch a lift with geese in Florida and hijack the Space Shuttle to call their spaceship is ludicrous — which is why it's such an enjoyable read. And there's a sub-story about small frogs and flowers, which explains a lot about life.

Pratchett addicts, who know what to expect from his storytelling, will revel in both books as they're both immense fun and suitably daft. And for readers who are not familiar with Pratchett, both *Truckers* and *Wings* are great introductions to one of the best comedy authors around. Two 'must buys'.

Richard Eddy



any woodwork in which you're buried, and Shenna soon finds that one admirer in particular wants to go a great deal further than asking for her autograph. Like mad Annie in Stephen King's *Misery*, this psychopathic murderer will do anything to have her, in one form or another, forever.


More mystery story than out-and-out horror, Taylor's latest paperback, which was originally published in 1985, ranks with greats such as Robert Bloch's *Psycho* and Ira Levin's *A Kiss Before Dying*. Like both of these novels, *The Kindness Of Strangers* contains a sharp flint of realism that keeps you gripped throughout. It's marvellous entertainment from a master of the macabre who should be getting wider coverage.

John Gilbert

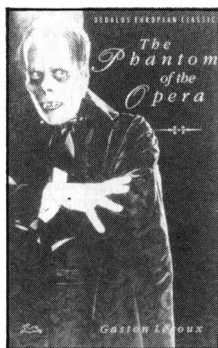


THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Gaston Leroux
Publisher Dedalus
Format PB £6.99

 It is perhaps odd to judge an acknowledged classic of horror literature against the modern mores of the field, but such a comparison is justified when the legend of a book outweighs its literary merit.

Leroux is, by no measure, a Victor Hugo, Edgar Allan Poe or Charles



Dickens. His work is nobbled by artifice and, on occasions, turgid in the extreme. Like Poe, his art was little recognised during his lifetime and it was only near the end of his life that the Phantom took his place amongst the great characters of our time — more because of the mystery surrounding the character than through any device of its author.

That said, it is usually incumbent upon horror fans to read the book at least once in their lifetimes. The latest edition is as good as any other, perhaps better because of the well researched and genuinely interesting ten-page introduction, chronology and bibliography by Dr Penelope Woolf.

The bibliography is of much interest because it shows that Leroux was a prolific writer. Novels such as *The Man*

Of 100 Masks, *The Mystery Of The Yellow Room*, *The Sleuth Hound* and *The Veiled Prisoner* are all well known to only a few ardent fans — a pity, because they arguably represent better literature than that found in *The Phantom Of The Opera*.


By all means buy this book. You should, it's a classic: but remember, it's certainly not reminiscent of the (better) films or the musical.

John Gilbert



FIENDS

John Farris
Publisher Tor
Format PB \$4.50

 Early last year I thought that vampires, and their derivatives, would be the next big thing to get the horror harps vibrating, and that we'd see an influx of hack novels trying to emulate Anne Rice's bloodsucking chronicles. I was wrong in one respect, in that horror authors are instead latching onto the british inhumanity of Brian Lumley's Wampyri.

Although John Farris's latest book follows that trend it would be unfair to say that it is a complete emulation. The vampires here are moth-like and use thorns on the tips of their fingers to transform their prey. They also use human skin to fashion winged robes, but will burn if they come too near to a

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flame.

They owe their existence to a legend about Eve's dirty children, those who were not presented to God during his visit to the Garden of Eden because they hadn't been bathed(!?). God became angry and ensured that they remained filthy and lived forever.

In the early 1900s, one of these filthy creatures ends up in a crate in the barn of the Horsfall family, hick farmers in small town America. Misrouted by a train crash, the box belongs to an anthropologist who is away in a far off country and cannot retrieve his property for a year. The Horsfall boy, Arne, becomes entranced by the box and begs his mother, ominously called Bira, to open it. She does so, with dire consequences. The vampire seed is released, taking Bira as its focal point.

Bira and her brood are eventually conquered and trapped, but events in the 1970s trigger off her release and a town which has become so much a part of modern day America, forgetting the dark legends of the past, is once again threatened with a supernatural menace.

Ranking most neatly with Farris's controversial magnum opus about possession, *Son Of The Endless Night*, *Fiends* builds slowly, developing the main characters and adding a hint of iron suspense just to make sure you know what's coming. And, as ever, Farris delivers with a knockout ending that belies the slow start.

Farris has accrued a huge following both in Britain and the States during the past twenty years. Like Lumley, he knows all the ingredients of bestsellerdom within the horror genre and, unlike so many other so-called masters of the macabre, he knows that all important secret that cooks his books — timing.

John Gilbert



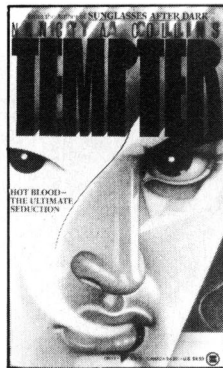
TEMPTER

Nancy A Collins
Publisher Onyx
Format PB \$4.50



An award-winning first novel such as *Sunglasses After Dark* *Tempter* takes some beating and, unfortunately, Collins has not quite lived up to expectations with *Tempter*, in which she tries to mix Voodoo with vampirism to create a new monster.

The attempt, which is more worthily carried off in novels like *Vampire Junction*, *The Vampire Lestat* and *Fevre*



Dream, belittles her powerhouse talent. It is as if she does not realise that it has all been done before. Whilst her style is constantly seductive, the story elements are no better than those found in pulp paperbacks.

Adam Rossiter, a clapped out rock star and ardent seeker of erotic sensation, is this time her antihero. Sex is the only thing that gets his juices going, whether it be with a beautiful, though suspiciously young, Voodoo priestess called Ti Alice or his latest find, Charlotte Calder, a 'brainy Yuppie with a hunger for success'.

Adam would not have got anywhere

in this story if he hadn't opened a mysterious leatherbound volume hidden away in the lounge of his priestess lover. Once opened, it provides a channel of escape for an evil spirit called Tempter, who was once a wealthy plantation owner with a penchant for black magic. Tempter was eventually trapped in his rambling home by the spells of the Ti's mother and seeks to gain revenge by possessing Adam's body through his dreams.

A further complication is tossed heavily into the arena when Collins hints that Charlotte is the reincarnation of Tempter's much abused wife. Of course, the spirit has to have her again, this time sacrificing her to his hot lusts which have remained unslaked for decades — poor thing.

The steely-paced telling of this tale is not enough to offset the shallow characterisation and cliché inherent in *Tempter*. Collins is, without doubt, a provocative storyteller but, with this offering, misses the horror stroke more than she hits. That said, talent will out, and I'm sure she'll be back with a tale to rival the tyro power of *Sunglasses After Dark*.

John Gilbert

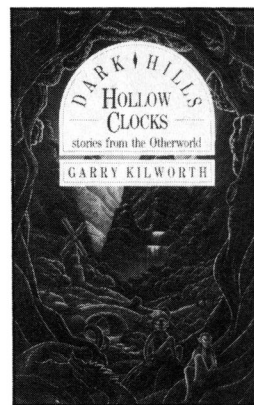


DARK HILLS, HOLLOW CLOCKS

Garry Kilworth
Publisher Methuen
Format HB £8.95



Dark Hills, Hollow Clocks: Stories From The Underworld is short. Too short — parents and readers take note. This reader wanted more, because it's brilliant! I have always been impressed with Garry Kilworth's short stories, and all ten of these wholeheartedly reinforce my view. 'Dogfaerie' (included in this collection) was, for me, the story which illuminated Diana Wynne Jones' varied but rather disappointing collection, *Hidden Turnings*. The competition here is quite a bit stiffer. Throughout we are treated to a vast array of mystical beings from all corners of the globe. You will be scared,



amused, saddened, but never let down.

When Garry Kilworth wants to describe something, he does it boldly without padding or florid 'literary' language. We see the situation and the characters with the immediacy required in writing for a younger audience. Opting for a direct appeal to children does not, however, compromise Kilworth's other gifts, and he has fully grasped the importance of myth and folklore in our understanding of humanity. Kilworth has used his extensive travels well and here he takes his readers into the Dragon-world of China as well as the faerie kingdoms of old England. Like all great

storytellers, this author puts himself into his characters' shoes so we have stories which are not only fascinating but also immediate and, above all, realistic.

Although £8.95 is a bit pricey for so short a book, this is a hardback and its durability will serve it well, for it deserves to be kept and passed on. Part of the royalties are going to the Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust, which is an added reason for investing in a copy. Above all, the book's economy of style, large print and helpfully simple vocabulary ensure a direct appeal to younger readers and will introduce them to good fantasy writing at an early age.

Benjamin Dowell



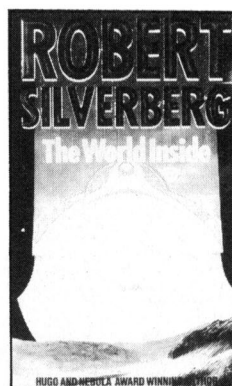
THE WORLD INSIDE

Robert Silverberg
Publisher Gollancz
PB £3.50



The year is 2381 and the Earth is populated by over 75 billion inhabitants. So how is so much room found for so many people? Instead of spreading all over the globe, humans have built their dwellings upwards; Urban Monads, or urbmoms, house over 800,000 people. Society has decided long ago to put aside its petty squabbles and work towards creating life rather than destroying it. Now people live together and contribute to the present day population boom. Each urmom is split into a thousand levels and each ten levels are named after old world cities like San Francisco, London, Paris, Warsaw and Rome. Rising up through each 'city', we discover that the 'lower class', the workers, live at the bottom, with the leaders at the top and the 'middle classes' in between.

The World Inside takes a look at the lives of several of the inhabitants of this feat of human engineering, in which large families are encouraged; so is nightwalking, where the men of the



urbmom leave their apartment by night and visit the inhabitants of other apartments (and they aren't just after a cup of sugar). By encouraging this openness it is hoped that mankind's natural aggressive tendencies will be quelled, although there are the occasional 'flippos', who crack under the pressure.

Robert Silverberg is an author previously unknown to me, but after reading this book I intend to search out his earlier work. In *The World Inside* the society he creates seems to work well enough on the outside, but the various adventures of the characters go to show that humanity's base instincts can't be controlled. SF fans could do a lot worse than fork out for this entertaining novel.

Mark Caswell



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from science fiction's
Grand Master

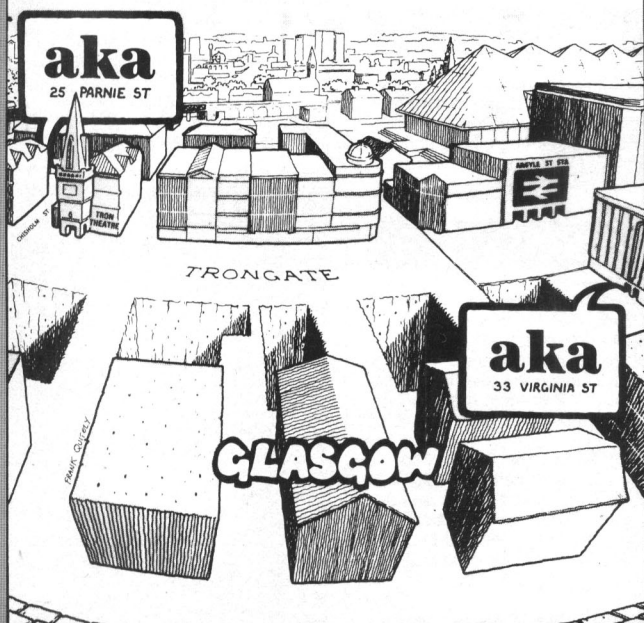
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Whispers, No. 23/24. Hardcover LTD ed, signed by Cave, Joe Lansdale, David Drake, Leiber, Schiff etc etc£15.00

Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos - H.P. Lovecraft and divers hands (Arkham) 1990 1st ed, fn copy in fn dw. Illus by J K Potter, 520+ p£15.00

H P Lovecraft - Dreamer on the Nightside by Frank Belknap Long (Arkham) 1975, 1st ed, fn in fn dw. Lovely account£10.50

KOKO by Peter Straub (Viking) 1988, 1st UK ed, fn in fn dw£7.50

Incarnate by Ramsey Campbell (Macmillan) 1983, 1st USA ed, inscribed by author, fn in fn dw£13.50

The Lost World by Arthur Conan Doyle (Hodder and Stoughton) 1st ed, 1912, with extra illustrated plates from the US ed tipped in. Hinges tender, edges rubbed with some splitting to spine edges. About g copy of an elusive but delightful lost race fantasy£12.00

The Books of Blood Vols 1,2 and 3. (Weidenfeld and Nicholson) 1987, omnibus, edition fine in fine dw. 'wherever we're opened, we're red'£10.00

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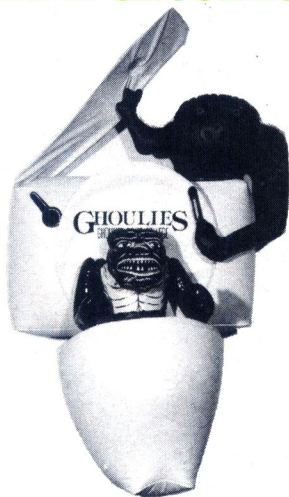


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Video, or their no doubt numerous relatives, will go straight in the bin — as

will any multiple entries we receive. **YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED.** Now,

we hope you make the grade.

FEAR FORUM

Got a ghoulish grouse or a grotesque gripe? Or maybe you just want to say how much you love us... If you're one of those desperate undead types, then send your billets-doux to: FEAR FORUM, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW.

DESPISED!

Dear FEAR

C D Ward raised an interesting topic in issue 22 when s/he referred to the tendency of mainstream literary reviews to ignore horror fiction. I think the question that needs addressing is not why *The Times* review of *Creed* contradicted FEAR's — reviewers within the genre will often have similarly opposed viewpoints on the merits of a given book — but how Herbert's book, from among the many likewise deserving novels and collections covered in FEAR, was the one reviewed by *The Times*.

The answer seems obvious: Mr Herbert is our bestselling horror writer. Yet it is equally obvious that *The Times*' criteria for choosing which books to review are not tied to the bestseller lists. The best explanation I can think of for this apparent inconsistency is that the paucity of horror reviewed in mainstream publications reflects the attitude not so much of snotty reviewers (of whom genre publications have their share), as of book publishers whose low opinion of the horror fiction they hope we will buy — whose low opinion of us, in other

words — results in horror either not being sent to perceived 'serious' publications for review, or being sent packaged in such a way as to scream 'Juvenile rubbish!' at the most open minded reviews editor.

James Herbert's sales have earned him the clout to overcome that opinion. When horror fiction is marketed as serious literature, it is usually treated as such by reviewers. But is that what publishers want?

Simon MacCulloch, Edgware, Middlesex

KIND WORDS

Dear FEAR

Just this afternoon I received the complimentary copy of FEAR containing my story *The Onion People*. I want to express my thanks to you for publishing it.

Your layout department did a superb job of presenting the story; the illustration amazingly conveys the initial nightmare image that compelled me to write it. It was that very picture — a woman and two children looming in the dark — that formed the germ of the tale.

Although I have had things appear in publications before, all on this side of the Atlantic until now, I can honestly say that FEAR marks the most professional treatment (both in terms of my story's presentation and in how you and your staff have dealt with me) I have ever received. That said, I look forward to working with you, and for you, again in the future.

Mike Newland, Garland, Texas

David Western responds:

Thanks for your kind words, Mike. It is encouraging to hear from someone who feels satisfied with the way their work has been handled, especially in an area as sensitive as this where each short story is evidently a labour of love. A word to all those who are less satisfied with FEAR (ie those who are waiting for some word on a story of their

own): the backlog of fiction on our shelves mounts daily, partly as the result of our policy of reading EVERYTHING we receive. We are sure that authors will appreciate this thoroughness in the long run, although waiting to hear can be irritating. Rest assured, if your story has been acknowledged as having been received by us then you will hear in due course. But please keep those phone calls to a minimum: the more you hassle us, the less time we have to devote to reading your fiction!

CRACK OF THE WHIP

Dear FEAR

I imagine this may be treated as a case of sour grapes, but it is not intended to be. I am referring to FEAR's short story section and its apparent lack of 'amateur' writers. I was under the impression that this section was for budding writers/authors, and not just another showcase for those who have already gained recognition within the field (ie J N Williamson (issue 22) who has had 36 novels published!). Against such professional competition, do I and obviously many others stand much chance?

I still admire and respect FEAR for its content, wit, layout, interviews and so on, but do feel quite strongly that others less well known in the writing field should be given a fair crack of the whip.

Mik Bridgeman, Exeter, Devon

We agree with you, which is why most of our fiction section is devoted to 'amateur' writers, and has been since its inception last year. We do, however, reserve the right to include at least one short story per issue by a 'known' author, as these appear to be popular with the majority of our readers. Admittedly, many of the better stories we receive are penned by people who have had something published somewhere, but we feel it would be editorial suicide to disqualify such authors on this basis.

NEXT ISSUE

FEAR

● **GOES WEST** to visit the set of *Grim Prairie Tales*, the horror genre's first serious cowboy picture. Child's Play and Dune star Brad Dourif points out the evil critters amongst the cacti.

● **TREADS THE TARMAC** to discover how Ian McDonald, author of SF novels *Desolation Road* (which has just been rereleased as a hardcover), *Empire Dreams* and the recently published *Out On Blue Six*, is taking to all the critic acclaim being thrust his way.

● **TURNS GOTHIC** with Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound*. We also have an exclusive interview with Brian Aldiss, the man responsible for the original book, and take a close look at the film which marks Corman's return as a director.

● **EXPLORES THE UNCANNY WORLD** of Les Edwards, the internationally famous artist whose intensely realistic paintings on a dark deluge of fantasy/horror books and recent poster work for films such as *Nightbreed* have put a high price on his skills. Be prepared for the weird and the horrific.

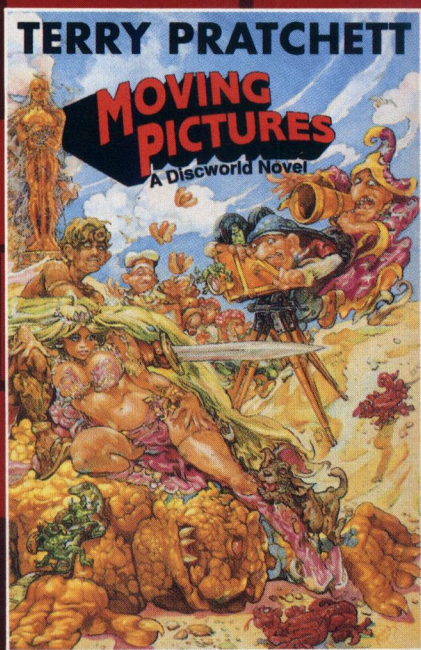
● **GETS STEAMED UP** in a brazen exposé of *Sex in Horror* with author Colin Wilson.

PLUS... Horror writer BERNARD TAYLOR shows that he's not just a Mother's Boy... SF author PATRICK TILLEY looks forward, after finishing his Amtrak Wars series...

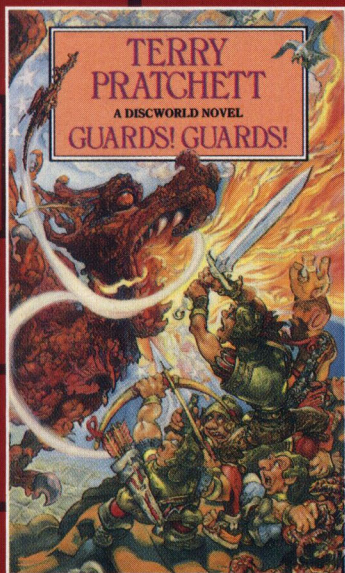
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PRATCHETT'S BACK



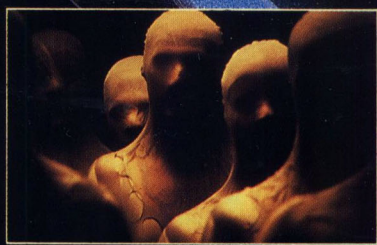
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