

THE HORROR SHOW

An Adventure In Terror



KATHRYN PTACEK

- Interviewed by Lionel Fenn
- A New Short Story
- A Look At Her Career

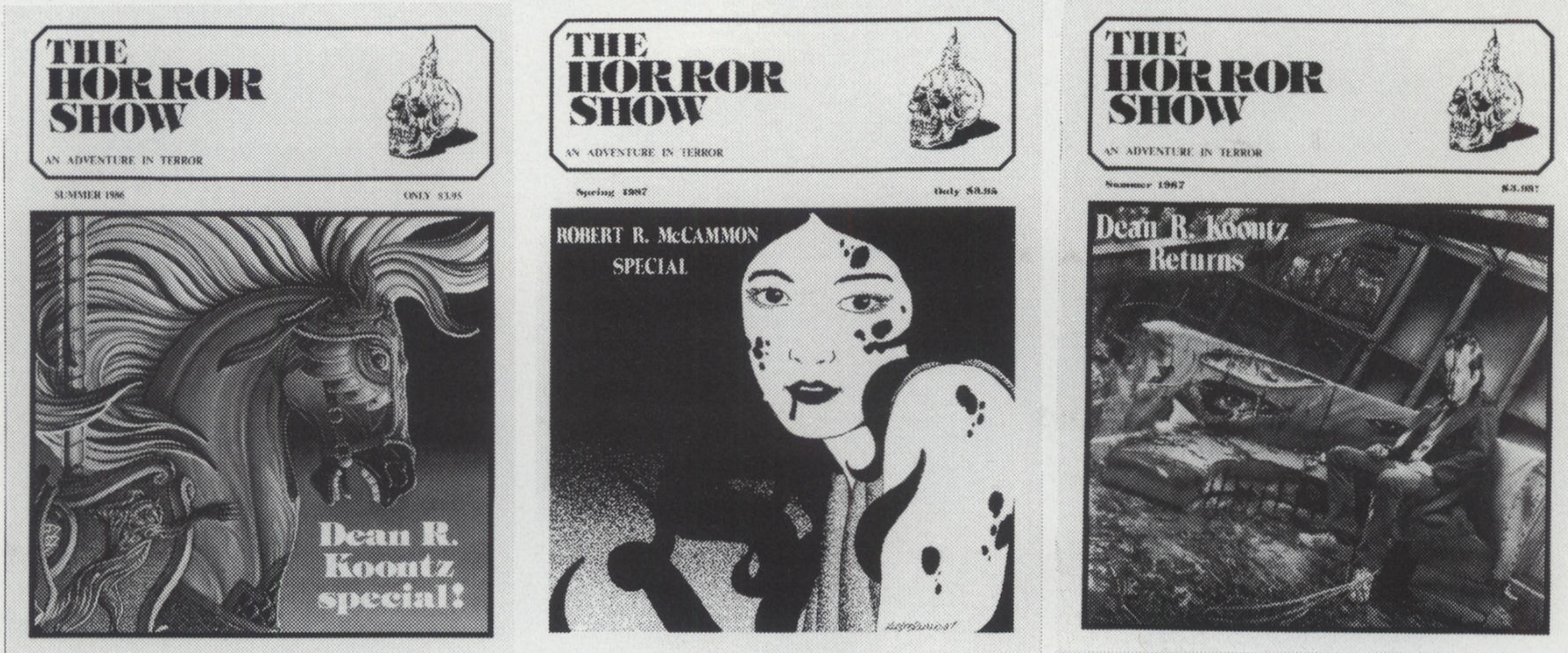
FICTION

- Rick Hautala
- Billie Sue Mosiman
- G. Wayne Miller
- Darrell Schweitzer



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An Adventure In Terror



SPECIAL AUTOGRAPHED BACK ISSUES

SUMMER 1986: DEAN R. KOONTZ

Includes "Down In The Darkness," an interview and a four-color cover. Other stories by David J. Schow, Bentley Little, Donald Burleson, and J.N. Williamson.

SPRING 1987: ROBERT R. McCAMMON

Includes an excerpt from McCammon's powerful novel, *Swan Song*. Plus an interview, a biography and story by Manly Wade Wellman, stories by Bentley Little and William Relling Jr.

SUMMER 1987: DEAN R. KOONTZ RETURNS

Includes two Koontz classics: "The Interrogation," plus a special interview with Koontz by his alter-ego, Leigh Nichols. Fiction by Joe R. Lansdale, Ardath Mayhar, Koontz (a reprint of "Ollie's Hands"), and G. Wayne Miller.

SPECIAL ARTIST ISSUES WITH PULL-OUTS

JANUARY 1987: J.K. POTTER

Includes interviews with J.K. Potter and Joe R. Lansdale. Also: a pull-out with six Potter illustrations. Plus stories by Poppy Z. Brite, A.R. Morlan, Joe R. Lansdale, and Bentley Little.

WINTER 1988: HARRY O. MORRIS

This one includes an interview with Morris which should not be missed. Plus a special pull-out poster. Fiction by Darrell Schweitzer, Ardath Mayhar, and Bentley Little.

The Horror Show, 14848 Misty Springs Lane, Oak Run, CA 96069

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- Spring 1987 Robert R. McCammon \$ 5.95
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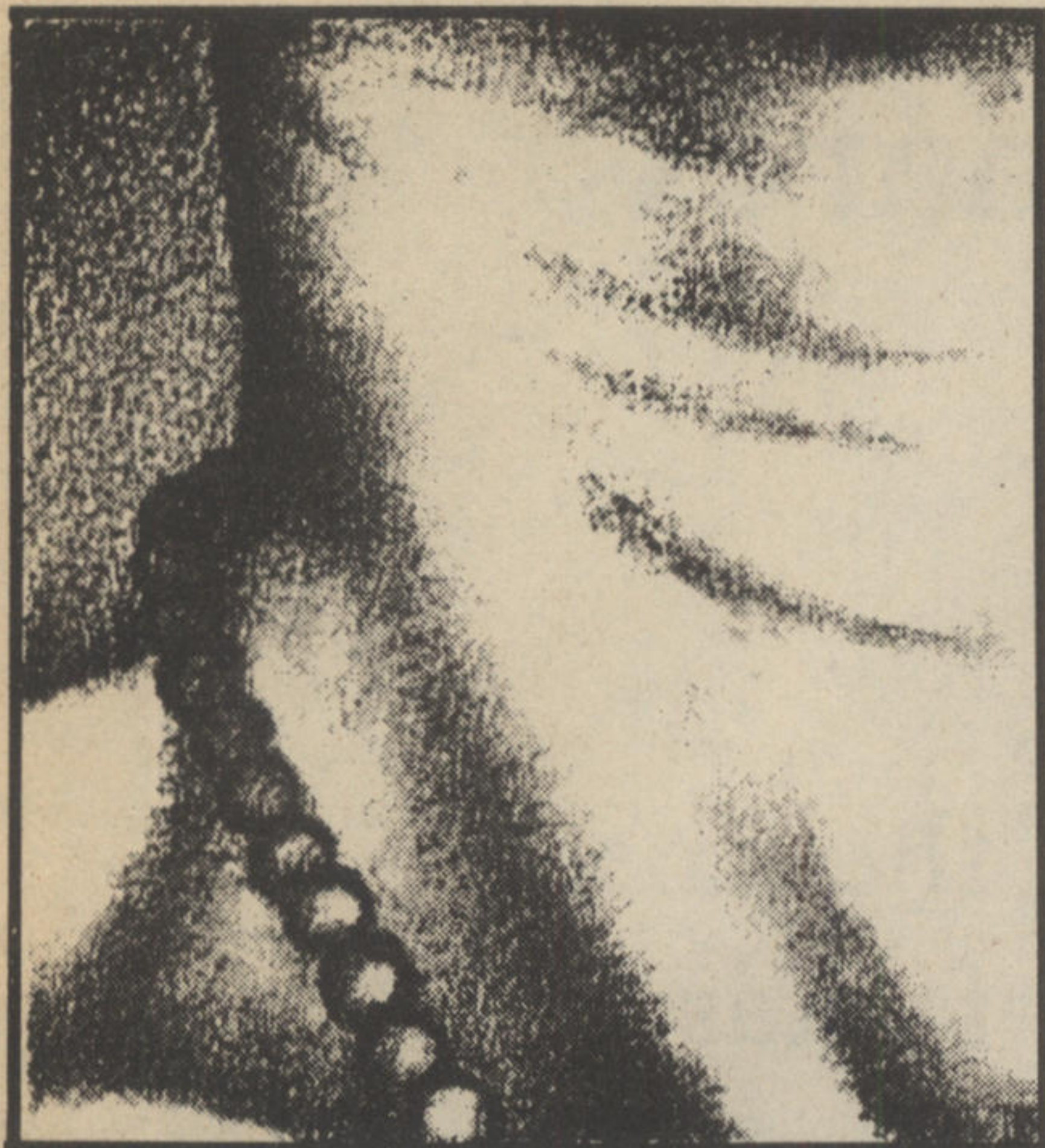
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THE HORROR SHOW

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HELLNOTES

DEAR FRIENDS:

Tomorrow this issue goes to press. Originally, I had another column written for you. A little piece about Pinhead (from the movie *Hellraiser II: Hellbound*) and how big-screen horror seems to have turned into a monster of the month club. But things change. Sometimes rather quickly, in fact.

As long as I've written this column I've never felt comfortable talking about myself or my family or my personal life. No only did all those things seem likely to bore you as a reader, but rarely was I able to put them into a context which related to the magazine. This column, however, is going to be a little different. For this column, my family and personal life have a direct relationship with the magazine.

Let me begin by saying that this issue is dedicated to the memory of my mother, who---after a long battle with cancer---passed away on January 21st of 1988. She was the first person in my life that I've lost, the first person who had been with me since birth, who had actually had an influence on who I have become. Her death, while not at all unexpected, has inspired a number of unexpected and unanticipated changes in my life. The house I was raised in (the house my father and grandfather built) has been sold. My father has initiated plans to retire and move further upstate. My sister is considering leaving her current job and moving her family to the Sacramento area. And after being away from home for nearly a year-and-a-half out of the last three years, I've decided it's time to return home again and refocus my energies on doing what I had originally set out to do before the magazine came along: writing.

Things change.

So, in case you missed it, I've made the decision to move away from publishing *The Horror Show*. Our Summer issue (a Rising Stars special) will appear as scheduled, then we'll be following up with a special double-issue next spring, and that will mark the end to our regular quarterly schedule. (If you read between the lines, you can see me hedging on this. This hasn't been an easy decision. And in case anyone out there might be interested, I *am* searching for a publisher who would like to put out an annual *Horror Show* anthology of new stories. I enjoy the editing part of this business; it's the layout, typesetting, order filling, etc. that steals much too much of my time without returning much joy.) Those of you who are subscribers will soon be receiving a letter from me, explaining the decision and offering you several options for settling the remainder of your subscription.

Since there will be a couple more issues, I'll have other opportunities to thank the people I should be thanking. For now, though, I'd like to say that I have absolutely no regrets about this magazine. I've met some wonderful people through these pages. I've learned about myself as an editor and a writer, as a friend and as a member of a family. I've had a chance to see what other writers are doing, what works for me, what doesn't. I've made lots of mistakes and discovered that, by God, life does go on anyway. And maybe most important of all, I've had a lot of fun.

I hope you've had a good time as well in these pages.

And I want to thank every person who ever invested his or her hard earned money in a copy of *The Horror Show*, took it home, and read it.

I hope it brought you a little enjoyment. But even if it didn't, thanks for taking the chance. There's nothing more I could ask of a potential reader than to take a chance with one issue. A lot of people were willing to do that, which is another reason why I've been fortunate and have no regrets.

For those of you who are writers as well as readers, please don't stop sending your work this way. I haven't accepted any stories yet for the final double-issue; in fact, I'm intending that issue to be the best issue of *The Horror Show* ever published. But it takes good stories to make a good issue, so please keep sending your best this way. And again, let me emphasize that I'm forever hopeful that I'll be able to find a situation where *The Horror Show* can still come out on a yearly basis. We'll just have to wait and see on that. (*Please ... don't send any money for issues beyond the 1990 double-issue!*)

I also want to take a moment to alert you to some of the other publications that are around and that might interest you. If you're anything like me, you have a hard time getting enough good horror. Some of the publications listed below may provide you with enough horror to keep you going. If you're interested, write and ask for more information from them:

New Blood, 540 W. Foothill Blvd. #3730, Glendora, CA 91740

Grue, P.O. Box 370, Times Square Station, New York, NY 10108

2 AM, P.O. Box 6754, Rockford, IL 61125-1754

Cemetery Dance, P.O. Box 189, Riverdale, MD 20737

After Hours, 21541 Oakbrook, Mission Viejo, CA 92692

Eldritch Tales, 1051 Wellington Road, Lawrence, KS 66044

Noctulpa, P.O. Box 5175, Long Island City, NY 11105

And if you sometimes have trouble finding that horror book or magazine in your local book store, you might also try these book dealers. They're my favorites. They offer good selections, prompt service, and they treat you with respect:

Weinberg Books, 151 Oxford Drive, Oak Forest, IL 60452

The Overlook Connection, P.O. Box 526, Woodstock, GA 30188

Night Winds Books, P.O. Box 28821, Kansas City, MO 64118

KATHRYN PTACEK

On another note entirely, I want to extend a personal expression of appreciation to Kathryn for all her hard work on this issue. Several hiccups occurred in the production process, and she was always there, a laugh in her voice, rolling with the flow of everything. Thanks, Kathy!

Also, a word of thanks to Lionel Fenn, who on short notice was able to rearrange his schedule and spend several days of conversation with Kathy, getting to know her a little better than most of the rest of us. As a result, readers this issue are in for quite a treat when they read her interview. Much appreciated, Mr. Fenn.

Guess that's all for this round. See you this summer. As always ... *better weird than plastic!*





SNOW

KATHRYN PTACEK

Jean drove away from the nursing home and didn't look back.

There was no reason to; her mother wouldn't be on the porch, waving farewell like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting.

No, she would be hunched over in her wheelchair, in what was called the common room, and tears would be streaming down her cheeks.

Just as tears streamed down Jean's. She wiped at them, futilely, with her fingertips; rubbed the dampness across the leg of her jeans.

Something small and white whirled by the windshield. A snowflake, she presumed, because that was what the weather forecasters on television had been calling for over the past few days. Only nothing like they'd predicted had developed yet. But of course the snow had to wait to appear until today.

Today, when she needed bright sunshine and clear skies and the cheerfulness that went with them.

No; today she got glowering skies and gloominess; the trees that arched over the road seemed to bear down upon her and menace ever so slightly, and accordingly her spirits sank even lower. They were, after all, not very high to begin with. On this day, this day when she had taken her mother to the HarborHouse Nursing Facility, the day should have been brighter, to help her ease the pain for them both, if that were at all possible.

A flicker brought her attention to the road again as another snowflake danced across the windshield, accompanied by a second, then a third, then more than a dozen. One stuck to the glass, and she shook her head.

She had a long way to go yet. The drive to the facility took approximately two hours; going back to her house would take even longer now. She hoped, though, that she'd be there before the storm really started. She didn't like to drive in the snow, which was sort of ironic because she lived in the east. But she had never been able to handle the slipperiness, the fog-like blowing flakes, the freezing temperatures.

Now, however, the weather was a reverse sort of ally, forcing her to concentrate on the narrow two-lane road twisting before her, rather than think of her mother as she had seen her before she left. Etta had been glaring at her, that accusing look in the cataract-pale eyes, and her peeling lips had been pressed into a thin bloodless line, a disapproving line

reflected in the hunch of her bony shoulders, the tilt of her grey head.

Her mother didn't want to go to HarborHouse; Jean had no choice but to put her there.

After all, what could she do for the old lady now? In this past year Etta lost control of her bladder and her bowels; her blindness had increased; she didn't know Jean or anyone else half the time; didn't want to do anything yet complained that she was bored; had lost so much weight that with her sagging flesh and protruding bones she looked like some ancient refugee from a WWII concentration camp; had, indeed, become argumentative and querulous and demanding. Had become impossible for one untrained person to take care of.

There was no other choice, Jean repeated to herself over and over. No other choice.

More flickering, and she blinked and focused once more. The temperature must be dropping, she thought, because the snow had begun to stick to the grass alongside the road. It was fast becoming more white than green. She even hit a patch clinging to the road and automatically raised her foot from the accelerator, letting the car slow gradually. She didn't want to go too fast, didn't want to end up embedded in a tree.

The wind gusted, shaking bushes and tree branches, and pelting snow in a crazy-quilt pattern.

The tires thudded against the pavement, a rhythmic sound that soothed Jean, the sort she used to fall asleep to when she was a child and her parents had gone driving in the country.

On the way to HarborHouse her mother had complained about the sounds. There was nothing wrong with Etta's hearing most of the time.

"This car is too noisy," Etta had said, as she gazed unseeing out the car window. "There must be something wrong with it."

"I just had it in for a tune-up, Mom," she said gently. "I think it's all right."

"Well, you're wrong. Something's the matter with the engine or something like that. I can hear it. We're going to get stuck. I just know it, I do."

"That's the tires thumping on the road," and she had wondered why she bothered to pursue this; the conversation wouldn't get her anywhere. Her mother would never concede that she was wrong. For that matter, neither would Jean.

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Etta snorted, a disgusting sound. "Well, that's what you think, Sissy."

She hated it when her mother called her that; Sissy had been the childhood nickname for Peggy, Etta's sister whom Jean could not tolerate for a variety of reasons, all of them long-standing. For years now Etta had been mixing them up. Jean thought she got the short end of it.

Momentarily, the car wobbled. White covered the blacktop, obscuring the dotted line, and she braked even further. There were too many twists and turns in these backwoods roads, and she knew she couldn't afford to take a corner too fast. God knows what would be coming around the turn then. Too many big trucks used these curving backroads rather than face the clogged interstate, but they never seemed to obey the lower speed limits.

She sighed, finally switched on the windshield wipers. They blurred the glass momentarily, then swept it clean. Back and forth the blades went, their swooshing added to the drum of the tires.

Casually she glanced into the rearview mirror and for an instant saw cloudy-pale eyes glaring back. She blinked, and the eyes were gone, and she was staring into her own green ones.

She shook her head. She was letting her guilt affect her now. And she did feel guilty, even though she kept telling herself--just as her friends kept insisting--that she shouldn't feel this way. But it was easy to say, not so easy to follow. She knew she couldn't do any more for her mother; she knew Etta would be better off in a home that would provide around-the-clock attention; she knew that she was at the end of her rope mentally and physically and emotionally.

But.

There still remained that lingering "but". But maybe she was wrong; but maybe she was acting too hastily; but maybe things would work out somehow; but maybe she should give it a bit longer.

But maybe she wasn't wrong.

It had already been six years--more than six years--since her mother had come to live with Jean, and things had not improved. In fact, they had worsened. Back six years ago Jean had been engaged to marry, but when she brought her mother into the house, her fiancée had given her an ultimatum--if they married, Etta would have to go into a nursing home. She could not stand that idea, not then, and knew she had an obligation to take care of her mother, at least for a while.

She and Peter had broken up then. Occasionally they saw each other, in social situations, and he always smiled pleasantly. But he was married now to someone else, and each time she saw him with his wife, she felt

a tightness in her chest--something else she blamed on Etta.

Of course, she didn't know if even now she would change what had happened, provided she could. She had a duty, after all; a family obligation that she had had to take on; she'd had no choice. If only, she thought and not for the first time, if only Peter had been a little more understanding. If only he had waited a while, then she might have come to the realization that her mother needed more help than she could give her. If only. But he had made her choose right then, had forced her back to the wall, and she'd had no alternative.

Her friends told her she was crazy to let Peter go, but she kept saying, Don't you understand? My mother has no one but me. One or two of her friends proved sympathetic, but the others kept saying what a shame it was she was throwing her life away for an old woman.

But it isn't just any old woman, she insisted, it's my mother.

Still, they shook their heads.

And that made her feel worse. Worse that she was in a way destroying her life, and yet she couldn't abandon the old ailing woman. Not yet.

Not until today.

She rubbed one eye, then glanced at the speedometer. The needle hovered just under 25.

The snow had thickened, the wind roaring like a train through a tunnel as well, and she sighed. There were still forty miles to go, and it was going to take hours to get home. She would be driving in the dark, too. What great conditions--darkness and snowy roads. Swell. She wanted to be home, curled up on the couch, wrapped in a crocheted quilt, a cup of tea on the table in front of her, and able to sit and cry all she wanted to. But all of that would have to wait.

Momentarily the tires lost traction, and she spun the steering wheel to get herself out of the slide. The car righted itself after a heart-stopping moment, and she cautioned herself to be more careful.

The clouds seemed to be pressing down upon the treetops; they looked so low that she thought she might be able to stretch out an arm and touch them. They were dark, forbidding; and promised a lot more snow than they had released already. Maybe this would be the first blizzard of the season.

Curious, though, that she hadn't heard anything like this predicted on the news. Of course, that didn't mean anything, either. The forecasters didn't have much of a track record these days, not after a couple of missed hurricanes and non-appearing storms during the past two years.

The white outside the car was as chalky

as Etta's eyes had become. Several years ago, she had been diagnosed as having cataracts in both eyes; the ophthalmologist and Jean had explained to the old woman what this meant, and how the cataracts could easily be corrected so that she could see again. But for some reason she wouldn't share with them Etta had refused the surgery. Distressed, Jean had gone over the procedure with her and said it wouldn't take long for her to recover. Again Etta refused.

And nothing would change her mind. So, little by little, she lost what vision remained to her. Now she could scarcely distinguish between light and dark. And yet this situation--one of her mother's own making, Jean thought--did not prevent her from making accusatory remarks about the problems of being blind.

As if it were all Jean's fault.

Of course, Jean's aunt had thought she should have forced Etta to have the operations, but Jean kept insisting that she couldn't forcefully take her mother to the doctor's office. It wasn't morally right.

Her aunt had called her a fool.

Maybe.

People, she noted ironically, were always very quick to offer advice about Etta, but she didn't notice any of them volunteering to watch her for an hour or two while she ran errands. Or taking Etta in for a weekend so that Jean could just be by herself. Again, she reflected, it was far easier to advise than to actually do something about it.

A shadow passed across her field of vision, and she peered out. The trees seemed to crowd closer to the road with each passing moment, and she thought it was by far too dark for this early hour; sunset was still an hour away, at least. She switched on her headlights, which sliced only a few feet ahead through the falling snow.

She sighed again, the tightness once more in her chest, as she remembered telling Etta that she would be going into a nursing home. The old woman had remained silent for a few minutes, then had turned her head away and said, muffled, "You don't love me any more."

Jean had expected this sort of thing, but it still hurt to hear those words from her mother's lips. "Of course, I love you, Mom. You know that I do. That's why I took you in six years ago."

"Then why are you abandoning me?"

"I'm not." She wished there could be more conviction in her voice.

"You are," the old woman accused. "You're going to take me to some hell hole."

"It's not a hell hole. It's a nice place, with some really great people. There'll be physical therapy, and people your own age that you can talk to, and during the holidays schoolchildren come in to sing Christmas



carols and--"

"You've been there. You've already made up your mind. I don't have a choice in this." Her mother's tone had become more childish now.

"That's right, Mom," Jean said, forcing herself to reply calmly. "You have no choice in this. I can't take care of you any longer, and Aunt Peggy isn't willing to put her money where her mouth is and take you in, so I have no other options."

"You are a hateful daughter. You're no daughter of mine."

Ah, but she was. Why else would Jean have gone through all this hell for the past six years?

And even though Jean loved her mother--most of the time--it was not always pleasant.

There were the times when Etta didn't tell Jean in time that she had to go to the bathroom, the times when she had diarrhea and Jean had to bathe her completely from chest to knees, and when she was all nice and clean and in fresh clothing, she'd have it again, and they'd have to start over. There were the times when her catheter leaked, and soaked the bedding, so that Jean had to strip the hospital bed and take the urine-reeking sheets down to the basement and put them in the washing machine. Again. Just like she had the day before.

There were the times when somehow Etta had maneuvered her wheelchair around the downstairs while Jean worked or was out running errands. One time Etta had managed to turn up the thermostat, and when Jean came home from the grocery store heat blasted her when she opened the door. Her mother had set the temperature at 85, a good eighteen de-

grees higher than Jean normally set it. Another time, Etta had manipulated her wheelchair around the room and had managed to pull out her catheter, which drooled urine on the good oriental carpet Jean had purchased only a few months previously, and then she had rammed the metal chair into the china cabinet, knocking down the old plates and dishes inside.

Of course, Jean had been glad her mother wasn't hurt, but the urine stains had never really come out, and she couldn't replace the china, which had been passed down from her Scottish great-grandmother and was the only thing they had from the old country. Not to mention that this had occurred on a weekend when the visiting nurse had gone home early from the office, and so Jean had had to diaper her mother until the following Monday morning when the nurse could come out.

Another time Etta tried to telephone Peggy, and had reached someone out in California, and had become frustrated and left the receiver off the hook. The line was still connected when Jean came home. Still another time Etta had turned on the stove somehow, put the tea kettle on and when Jean came downstairs, she found the water had boiled out. Luckily she had caught it before there was any sign of a fire. She shuddered to think what would have happened if she had been out that day.

Little things. They were all little things, really, but they soon became frustrating. Every week something happened. Sometimes they occurred two and three times, and if Jean scolded her, Etta would pout and call her a damned bitch.

And that made Jean cry. Or at least ini-

tially it had, but after a while, after the next few times, she realized that her mother really didn't mean it--or did she?--and she shouldn't let it upset her. But it did, and so did the odd incidents, and the leaking catheters and the diarrhea, and the blindness and all of it.

Bothered her until she couldn't sleep at night. Bothered her while she tried to work. Bothered her until she realized she had to do something before she lost her mind.

Which meant the nursing home.

To be perfectly fair, there were good times, too. Good times. Jean knew there had been, but when she tried to remember them, she couldn't. Those pleasant memories were fading, too quickly replaced by the disagreeable ones. And she resented that as well.

The car lurched.

Jean blinked, bringing her mind back to the road in front of her. The wind whipped a branch on an immense tree by the road back and forth, and the limb clacked, and she thought of her mother's gnarled fingers, distorted by age and arthritis.

Snow muffled the sounds of the car's engine now, and she thought it was almost as if the car wasn't moving. But it was--she could see trees going past, then an open space where she could glimpse a field of snow. She should have come to the turnoff by now, or maybe she hadn't come as far as she'd thought. Or maybe while she was daydreaming she had missed it.

Great.

She checked the rearview mirror and saw nothing but whiteness behind her. There was whiteness ahead, too, and to the sides, and for a moment she felt as if she were being suffocated by a colorless blanket.

She shook her head, dispelling the feeling.

The process to get her mother into the nursing home had been fairly complicated; after all, Jean was dealing with a bureaucracy, and there had been any number of papers to examine and fill out and sign. Knowing how slow bureaucracies tended to be, she had thought she would have months before her mother would leave for the home; as it turned out, it had only taken weeks.

And then the day had come too soon, too unexpected for all her preparation. She had dressed her mother in her best dress and put shoes on Etta's feet, even though her mother no longer walked, and she had taken her down the ramp to the car in the driveway outside. She had managed to get Etta in without any problem, and they were ready to go. She had already packed her mother's suitcases the day before and put them in the trunk ahead of time. She figured there would be the minimum of fuss that way.

And then the two women had driven in relative silence to HarborHouse, and when

Jean had seen Etta settled in after a few hours, and had finally decided she should leave, Etta had whispered, "Don't leave me."

"Mom," Jean began, then stopped. She didn't know what to say, because she was going to have to leave, and that was all there was to it.

"Don't."

Jean closed her eyes against the tears that burned there.

"I'll be back," she said, as she walked away. She refused to look back.

"Don't leave me."

She swallowed a lump, then hurried out to her car and away from the nursing home.

And now, as she drove through the snow, all she could think of was her mother's last words, and the tone in which she'd whispered them.

"Don't leave me, don't leave me, don't leave me," the words thrummed in Jean's mind with each rotation of the car's tires.

She blinked away tears, slowed the car again as her vision blurred. She had to be careful. It would be dark soon, and she wasn't too steady driving right now. She didn't want something to happen.

The windshield wipers whispered, "Don't leave me, don't leave me. Don't."

The snow had thickened in the past few minutes, until it was like a curtain that hung across the road. The car crept forward, hesitant on the slippery blacktop. Again it slid, and she concentrated on getting back into the right lane.

She could only see a few feet ahead now, and she wondered why she hadn't seen any traffic on the road since leaving HarborHouse. Perhaps most motorists had heard the forecast and decided to simply stay home. Which she should have done.

Except that she couldn't put off any longer what had to be done.

"I had no choice," she said aloud, and the sound of her voice seemed strange.

The wipers still worked, but now they made no noise, not even a whisper. She couldn't even hear the tires on the road any longer. There wasn't even the sound of the wind rustling through the trees.

She would be glad to get home. Home, which would seem too big with just her in it now, and so empty. She would be alone for the first time in six years. Free to do whatever she wanted without disturbing her mother who always complained about Jean's "racket" -- her whistling, her off-key singing, the music she enjoyed listening to. It didn't matter what it was, Etta complained about it; everything was always too loud.

No, she couldn't think about that. Had to look at the road and watch the snow and worry about ice--

At that moment a clearing appeared on

her right, and automatically she glanced toward it and saw an ice-covered pond. And something else, and as the car swept past, she reacted with a small motion that translated into a jerk of her arms, and the car swerved. She fought for control as the car spun around and around. Finally, it plowed into a snow-bank off to one side of the road, and slammed to a stop, snapping her forward. Luckily she wore her seatbelt, and so wasn't too badly shaken up. She suspected that she would have more than a few bruises tomorrow morning, but at least none of her bones were broken.

For a moment she sat there, trembling, her eyes tearing from nervous reaction. She put her head down on the steering wheel and wept a little. After a few minutes she felt better, and she wiped at her face with a wadded up tissue she found in a coat pocket.

She took a deep breath. She had to do something now. She tried to back up the car, but the tires spun hopelessly, digging into the snow even deeper. She swore, and hit the dashboard with the palm of her hand, and cursed more at the pain. She closed her eyes and leaned back and told herself to count to ten. When she reached twenty-five, she tried to move the car, putting it into first, then quickly into reverse, then back to first, then reverse again, hoping the rocking motion would loosen the snow's grasp of the car.

But it didn't.

Finally, she turned off the headlights and the ignition. She didn't want to wear down the battery, not if she were going to have to spend the night here.

She wondered about walking back to the nursing home. It couldn't be that far. She glanced at the dashboard. She must have come seven or eight, maybe ten miles. No, surely it must be more than that by now. She would walk that, not easily, on any given day, except a snowy and cold one. Today that would seem like a hundred miles or more.

She huddled inside her oversized coat and stared ahead at the gloom and tried to figure out what she should do. She couldn't just sit here. She was a few yards off the road now, and she feared that if anyone came by, they would miss her. She ought to get out and signal someone. Just in case.

But it was so cold out there, and the snow was falling even more heavily than before. She breathed deeply, watched as her breath frosted.

She had no choice.

She had to get out.

Besides she should go back to that pond. Had to find what she'd thought she'd seen. A light from a house across the pond maybe. Some sign of civilization. Help of some sort.

She got out, and thrust her car keys into her pockets. She didn't bother to lock the car.

Who would think to stop and steal anything during a snowstorm?

Snow blew into her face, and she shook her head, as if that would get rid of it. Then she pulled up the hood of her coat and started traipsing back to the spot where she'd lost control of the car. She reached the place--it wasn't hard to find--after a few minutes and glanced toward the pond again. There was a light there. A house? She hoped so.

Jean clambered down the small slope to one side of the road's shoulder, slipping and sliding a little. Finally she reached level ground again. It was difficult to walk rapidly, because the snow was deep already, and it sucked at her feet, slowing her down.

She kept her head tucked onto her chest; she didn't like the snow blowing into her eyes. Every so often she glanced up to be sure the light was still ahead. Once, she thought she ought to give up and return to the car, but she had come this far and there was no sense in giving up. Not yet at any rate.

She tried to whistle, but the sound died in her throat. The wind brushed across her face with a chilly caress, and she thrust her hands deeper into her pockets.

There was no panic, despite the storm, the cold, the longing to be home--she never thought she would not get out of this situation. After all, things--good and bad--had always worked out in the end for her. Always, during her life. This time it would be no different.

The light seemed closer now, although it was hard to judge distance in the snowstorm. She kept plodding onward, and when a quarter of an hour had elapsed, she stopped and stared at the light which came from a building not so far away.

It couldn't be, she told herself; she had left that behind hours before.

But it was.

HarborHouse.

And there, just a few yards in front of the porch, a dark seated figure, snow collecting on it, icicles forming on the metal, waited.

Jean approached, reluctant, yet compelled to see who it was.

"Don't, don't," the wind breathed while ice crackled around her.

Jean reached for the nearly fleshless claw held out to her.

"Don't leave me," her mother whispered.

Jean took the cold and trembling hand, and she bent over as the snow gathered at her feet.

"Don't," the wind soughed. Overhead the branches clacked like bare bones. "Don't."

"I won't leave, Mom," she promised. "Not this time."

The wind sighed.

The light on the porch winked out.



Almost every wall of her Victorian house is covered with custom bookshelves (how many bodies walled up behind them, Montresor?) and in these bookshelves are thousands of horror novels and cassettes of every description. The rest of the wall space is laden with original horror art, including art for her book covers.

LIKE A FINE WINE

THE FICTION OF KATHRYN PTACEK

NANCY HOLDER JONES

Appellation Controlee

I first met Kathryn Ptacek in New York, at a dinner New American Library was throwing for their romance writers. We were sitting next to each other, but we hadn't spoken. A waiter came by for wine orders; I asked for Burgundy. When he asked me what kind I wanted--meaning, I discovered later, red or white Burgundy--I said, "Oh, just bring me the House of Usher blend."

Kathy activated. There's no other word for it. It was as if an electric charge had shot through her. She turned to me with an inquisitive look--Kathy is nothing if not inquisitive--and we began to talk of horror (as it was always called then, and not "dark fantasy.") She seemed to be working on twenty things at once; she had a ton of ideas; she was interested in everything. And that consuming curiosity of hers, I think, is what makes her fiction so interesting. But the horror is *activated*.

Vitis Vinifera

Why is her horror so strong? In her decade-long writing career, Kathy has written in other genres (under other names): romance, fantasy, and recently, the Western genre. She's set her work in such disparate locations as the Southwest, Regency England, Victorian India, and "a China that never was." In her romances, she used simple, linear storylines, then moved into complex, interwoven plots with her horror and fantasy. Her tone has varied from ornate, old-fashioned 'twas-es and forsooth's to a sharp, spare style reminiscent of her newspaper days. And all these plantings, all these roots and vines and juicy fruits, have yielded a tangy harvest of House of Usher wine.

She's gotten good because she's tried a lot of things, figured out what works for her as far as her horror goes, and most important, she keeps cultivating her skills and grafting her interests--history, the Southwest, China, a thousand other things--onto each other, and just plain keeps growing. Besides that, she really loves horror. Almost every wall of her Victorian house is covered with custom bookshelves (how many bodies walled up behind them, Montresor?) and in these bookshelves are thousands of horror novels and cassettes of every description. The rest of the wall space is laden with original horror art, including art for her book covers. She also has a laser disc system and has seen almost every available for it. Dark fantasy activates her. She wallows in it like Bacchus in a wine vat. She's a horror-holic.

As of this writing, Kathy has produced five horror novels and numerous short stories. She has won both the silver PORGIE (for "paperback original," in the fantasy category) from *The West Coast Review of Books*, and the gold: the silver for *Shadoweyes*, and the gold for *Blood Autumn*. Her short stories have been published in the *Grey-stone Bay* anthologies, and one will soon appear in the *Post Mortem* an-

thology, co-edited by the publisher of this magazine. She has scads in progress. The range in her work is amazing, and yet I feel there are three ideas, or themes, that Kathy returns to in almost everything she's written--a blend, as it were: the underlying varietals that produce this fine wine, Chateau Ptacek.

One of these is her approach to women characters.

Cultivation

Back to Kathy's romance novels (written under the Kathryn Atwood and Kathleen Maxwell pseudonyms.) In retrospect, it's interesting that these novels were referred to as "dark," and centered around ideas like the hellfire clubs of aristocratic London. But what's more interesting is that her heroines were uncommonly liberated for their times and genre. (Though I must point out that romance heroines in general are far more independent than they used to be. Indeed, if most of these characters had actually lived in the times in which their tales are told, they'd probably have been locked in garrets or popped into the stocks or thrown into the river to see if they floated.)

But Kathy's heroines had an extra dose of dash. They fought and shouted "Stand and Deliver!" with a pistol in each hand. Kathy, who was swathed from head to toe in black at the romance conference the day the organizer asked everyone to wear pink for the TV cameras, has no patience with wimpy girls. And since she, like many writers, believes villains are more interesting than heroes, she's given the best parts of her horror novels to very powerful, very frightening women.

This wasn't a conscious decision. When I pointed it out to her, she was surprised. There's been an evolution of this, starting with her first horror novel, *Shadoweyes*. Throughout the book, Kathy refers to the monster(s) as it (they). Then, at the end, the hero, Chato, faces off the monsters using Indian magic. He thinks he's vanquished them, but we learn that he's unwittingly impregnated one of them:

"They had sucked him dry, those evil creatures; they had taken away his emotions, his humanness ...

... From the shadows of the branches it watched, its eyes bright in the darkness. In its bulging belly the embryonic life it had been given stirred ..."

This "it" is, or becomes, a mother.

In *Blood Autumn* and *In Silence Sealed*, Kathy's villains are less ambiguously female. The first horror novel she read, at the fertile age of fourteen, was *Dracula*, and what fertilizer it's proved to be! Kathy's monsters in these two books are lamiae, beautiful seductresses who enthrall men, making them their sexual slaves, and then killing them black-widow style when they have drained them of their vitality.

The point Kathy makes, at least to me, is that female sexuality begets power. It's not simply that the evil creatures in these books are sexy vampires. Their awareness of their sexuality and their exercise of it is what gives them their strength. They are more like Stephen King's Carrie than the Live Girls of Ray Garton. Carrie came into full use of her powers after she became a woman--after she became aware of her sexuality. So do Kathy's dark ladies, who know exactly what they're about--and reveal in it. "I am no hulking, slaving monster who rips out the throats of men," a lamia tells one of the characters--a woman--in *Blood Autumn*. "No," the woman replies, "you're not as honest as that." But she is honest, she is. And so are her victims, who acknowledge exactly what kind of power the evil women radiate:

"Leaning back, Bryon sipped his drink thoughtfully. 'Do you know what the worst aspect of this is?' he asked, his tone ironic.

... 'It is: Despite what happened to my friends, and others, despite what I know about my sisters, I still desire them.'"

---In *Silence Sealed*

The pattern continues in *Kachina*. In this story, set in the Southwest (as is the majority of Kathy's horror work), a young, passive woman is transformed by Indian magic into an avenging goddess. In the beginning of the novel, she's newly arrived in New Mexico, married to an older man who has never told her he loves her, and for whom she feels no passion. She meets a virile young man, Carlos, and begins to have dreams in which sex and power are intertwined, in which she'd both desirable and omnipotent. In her waking hours, she becomes more assertive, more willing to oppose her husband's directives and her own

genteel upbringing. Others in the novel comment about her growing sense of self, especially after she falls in love with another man. Aware of herself and her passion, she transforms into a creature who revels in her power and her sexuality. At the end of the novel, she rises from the dead and seeks out her lover. Though he killed her, her overpowering presence fills him with love and he rushes to her, "his lips warm, hers cold as the grave."

Kathy's also explored this idea in her short fiction, especially in "Power." The protagonist is an Indian who has returned to her hometown, Greystone Bay, where she lived with her grandmother, who was something of a shaman. The protagonist was tormented as a child because of her race, to the point of being raped by three boys. After drifting for years, she's come back to avenge herself, guided to do so by the spirit of her grandmother. She muses that:

"We all have our special power, and it's particularly strong in women ..."

Summoning this power, she discovers she's able to command the elements of the forest, killing her rapists in a horrible way. Then, her mission accomplished, she simply disappears, as if becoming elemental--and eternal--herself.

In another short story, "Dead Possums," a man is faced with the transformation of his wife from a traditional helpmate to someone whose passions have been directed elsewhere--to causes and to an affair with another man. In the protagonist's desire to hurt her, he takes their child and leaves town. In his haste, he runs over several possums, so many he comes to believe they're deliberately placing themselves in front of his car. The nightmarish ending--of his lying helplessly in the road while car after car runs over *him*--takes on a more sinister tone

"Jeter's writing is impressive, intense, vivid, and unflinchingly honest."

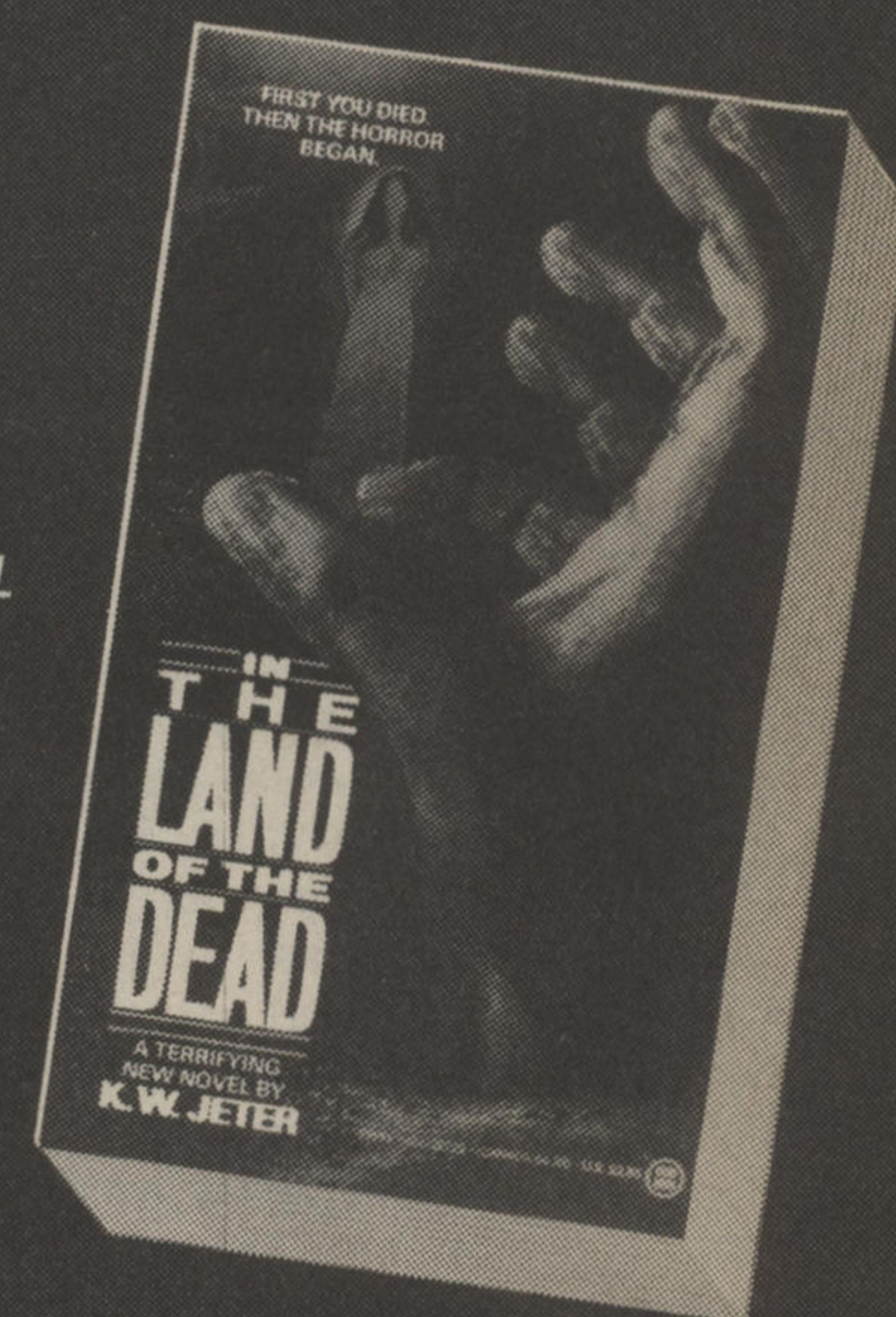
—RAMSEY CAMPBELL

"IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD is so powerful, it's numbing. Jeter's prose is lean as a scalpel and cuts to the bone."

—JOE LANSDALE

IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD
By **K.W. Jeter**

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when one connects that his wife's latest passion is animal rights. Having violated her laws, he's suffering her brand of punishment.

Fermentation

All those who labor in the vineyards of horror are interested in death. The maggots that feed at the base of the roots; the squirming things that drown in the casks of Amontillado--these make for sweet bouquets and deep, rich color. Kathy's particular death varietal is the horror of lingering death, one's awareness of it and helplessness to avoid it. It is not being dead or even dying that holds fascination for her, but dying slowly. Of being aware of disintegration.

There are countless frightening instances in her lamia books, for instance, where the victim is visited repeatedly by the evil sisters: he hears their step, their laugh, knows what they have already done to his friends or even to him, and yet he cannot save himself. Most potent is the interchange in *In Silence Sealed* between Lord Bryon and the beautiful, dreadful sisters, who have some at last to put an end to him.

Bryon's been bled with leeches to the point of stupor (a gleeful Kathryn Ptacek has told us in preceding paragraphs just how many pounds and ounces of blood--good God!--the physicians have drained out of him.) He's in terrible pain from the wounds the leeches have left (on his temples, near his *brain*), and he's so languorous he can barely speak. He knows what the sisters are up to. He's seen his own death in the corpses of his friends, and he's tried to warn others against a similar fate--in fact, the book is cleverly framed as Bryon's telling of the deaths of Keats and Shelley at the hands of the lamiae, and his conclusion that he, Bryon is next. A sort of *noir* Tales of Hoffman, as it were--and there he lies, exhausted beyond endurance, while the monsters taunt and caress him in prelude to his murder.

Kathy takes up this same theme in her short fiction, as with "Dead Possums," and also in "Living to the End," coming out in *Fantasy Tales*. In this story, a man in a hospital is dying, but thanks to the "heroic" efforts of his doctors--or is it simply his own will?--he manages to escape death by entering the being of another person on the verge of death. This happens to him several times--dying again and again, until he finds himself back in his original body, which is being *buried*--and still he lives, like Roderick Usher's sister, caught in the twilight between life and death--but in his case, lingering there forever.

But it's in Kathy's story, "Each Night, Each Year," that I think she handles this theme with the most skill--and the most terror. This is her most poignant, unsettling work, autobiography cloaked in fiction. In the story, the narrator is haunted "each night, each year," by the ghost of her dying father. Not her dead father, but her dying father, whose three-year battle with cancer was so agonizing and brutal that the protagonist lashed out in anger at him while he lived. Now her guilt and remorse for the things she said and did, and didn't say and didn't do--her impatience, her disgust, her grief--have summoned up his ghost and all the attending memories of his pain, of his humiliation over his own awareness of his disintegration:

"I prayed for his death. I didn't want him to live any longer, not when it was like that ...

"... Yet he would look at the flickering images so that he wouldn't have to look at me ...

Helping him into the bathroom; seeing--just once--his colostomy bag; changing his sheets; listening to him groan, quietly, in the night--this is the real horror. *Knowing* death. Watching it crawl up and into you. And then the ultimate horror of it all: realizing that the same thing can happen to anyone.

To her.

To you.

Aging

As wine-drinkers know, too much acid yields bitterness; there must be some sweetness in the bottle to please the palate. And while the third theme I find in Kathy's work isn't sugar, or saccharine, or optimism, or anything like that, it is this: sympathy, or empathy, for her characters.

Kathy was raised in New Mexico, and as I mentioned before, she's set more of her horror fiction there than she hasn't. Starting with *Shadoweyes* and moving to *Kachina* and her newest book, *Ghost Dance*, she has shown the plight of the American Indian, both in the past and the present, with great sensitivity and skill. The theft of tribal lands and heritage, the resultant poverty and disintegration, not of a dying man but of a dying culture, move these oppressed ones to take action. And since their efforts in the temporal world haven't been successful, they return to the Old Ways--to the ghost dance, to powerful fetishes, to the magic of their ancestors. The victims use the monsters, or become the monsters, in desperation. "The darkness is better, far better," an old shaman tells Chato, the hero, in *Shadoweyes*. In *Kachina*, when one of the characters is telling the protagonist/villain, Elizabeth, that there are no old people in his village because they died of despair:

"And you have hope.

His dark eyes stared into her, and she repressed a shiver.

'Yes, I have hope that things may one day be as they once were.'"

As Keats said, "Wine is only sweet to happy men."

In *Blood Autumn* she describes the British raj in India with an unflinching, critical eye. The unrest, the prejudice, the poverty, are clearly delineated. In England, friends of one Lieutenant Hamilton discuss his as-yet unseen bride, wondering if he'd do something as outrageous as marrying a "wog." And yet, as these men die, one by one, we feel the jeopardy ourselves, having gotten to know them--one by his efforts to deal with his stuttering, others by their eccentricities and peculiarities, their sorrow over their friend's death. In *In Silence Sealed*, there are a series of touching scenes as Keat's friend, Severn, nurses him through his fatal illness: changing his soiled linens and his nightdresses, trying to cheer him while inwardly despairing. And in these books, the deaths of children are *very* hard to take.

Again, Kathy's strongest work to date in this department is "*Each Night, Each Year*". But this element is present in all her work--even in *Gila!*, a satirical "bug-eyed monster" book that pokes fun at the giant-ant days of film and novel--if it weren't present, the humor of the book would fall flat.

Kathy's also shown her empathy for fellow women writers by inaugurating a series of anthologies called *Women of Darkness*, presenting short stories written by women. And she's edited a Western anthology of stories by women. And plans others.

Decanting

Ah, the joys of uncorking a bottle of Chateau Ptacek and letting it breathe through our eyes. Such marvelous genies have been let out of the bottles. So, drink and be frightened--and savor the unique perspectives Kathryn Ptacek offers in her work, and the skill with which she presents them.

A sante.

"I've wanted to write since I was 14.
I wrote my first novel when I was 17.
It was 500 pages long, sort of a political novel, and it really was bad."

KATHRYN PTACEK

WOMAN OF DARKNESS

BY LIONEL FENN

My name is Lionel Fenn, and I'm in serious trouble here. On the one hand, *The Horror Show* has graciously asked me to do an in-depth, hard-hitting, no-holds-barred, don't spare the horsepower and the hell with egos interview with Ms Kathryn Ptacek, who hates interviews; on the other hand, Ms Kathryn Ptacek is my landlady and I don't want her to get mad at me and raise the rent on my humble basement apartment.

I am not used to moral dilemmas. They are scary and stop me from sleeping at night. Yet, I suppose I am bound by a higher calling, a dedication to Truth, Justice, and lower rents for widowers who are forced to live in humble basement apartments while landlords and landladies live in luxury in the rest of the house.

With that (and a possible rent cut) in mind, I girded my loins, begged Ms Ptacek to buy me a tape recorder because I don't write very fast, and joined her and her husband on a trip to the glitter and excitement of the casinos in Atlantic City. Along the way, I learned many things. I learned how to drive (and not incidentally, how to pray), how to use those toll collection things, and how casinos make money.

I also learned that Ms Ptacek was raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and attended the University of New Mexico (majoring in journalism). She met her husband, Charles L. Grant, in Fort Worth, at the World Fantasy Convention where she was Harlan Ellison's date and Grant wasn't. She met Grant again five years later in Denver, at the World SF Convention, after being introduced by Robert E. Vardeman, who has since paid for his sins by getting married himself. She remembered Grant; he didn't remember her; she moved to New Jersey one month later; four months after that, they were married, the celebration completed when the town's water pipes froze and burst and they had to melt snow so their guests could use the toilet. They have been married for seven years, have two cats, a lot of squirrels, tons of books, and a starving writer in their basement.

Grant remembers her now.

When asked why she was a writer instead of a reporter, considering her college major, she told me to keep my eyes on the road, and said:

"I never really wanted to be one. Back when I was 14, I decided I wanted to be a fiction writer, but at the time I didn't know anyone who wrote short stories or novels, and I didn't think you could make a living at it. So I thought the next best thing would be to become a journalist. I was wrong. I disliked journalism. I took it through high school and college and kept wondering why I couldn't get more enthusiastic. My high school journalism teacher told me I shouldn't try to be a writer because I had absolutely no writing ability. I was so upset, I came home in tears. My mom wanted to call and tell the woman off, but I wouldn't let her. The teacher didn't like me, though, because she would attack my friends when they weren't in class, and I would stand up for them, so I always got yelled at. This probably contributed to my dislike of journalism."

Your instructor at UNM, however, was the famous even then mystery writer, Tony Hillerman.

"Yes, and he was very encouraging. He thought I was a good

writer, with promise; I thought he was kidding. We still keep in touch, and he's still encouraging me."

I swept over the Raritan River and let her know that I knew that when she graduated from UNM, she didn't write anyway, but went into the advertising game.

"No. It was telephone solicitation for the New Mexico Association for Retarded Citizens. That's a great-paying job for a college graduate--I don't think it was even minimum wage. They weren't going to hire me at first because I had a degree, yet I turned out to be one of the better telephoners. No, wait a minute, I didn't do that yet. I worked for a political party. There was an opening for a secretary and I applied and got it. It was boring. I read a lot of books."

Unsatisfied, and sensing her unease because of my hard-driving delving into her past (and possibly the fact that I was having a hell of time staying on those dotted white lines on the highway), I asked her why she did all that.

"Because I couldn't get a job on the papers. I didn't have any experience. I had an internship at the university, but for some dumb reason I took it in public relations, and instead of interning at the *Journal* or the *Tribune*, the two Albuquerque newspapers, I went to this dumb PR office, which didn't help me get a job afterward."

Aha! Then you went into advertising.

"No. When the political party fired me, my very first job out of college--which was terribly reassuring--I went to unemployment, which I found out I couldn't get because I wasn't at the political party job long enough; then I went to part-time telephone solicitation; then advertising; then the University of New Mexico computing center.

"Then I started writing to be a professional. I read in *Writers Digest* an interview with the two women who made up Fern Michaels, the romance writer, and I thought, well, hell, I can do that, I'm more educated than that (as if that matters). That was back when romances were a hot item. I, of course, did not read romances, I read regencies mostly, but that didn't stop me. Did I study the market? No. Some people read the books and outlined the chapters; I didn't do any of that."

Shocked by her unprofessional approach to writing, and finally figuring out those dumb white lines, I demanded, as politely as possible, a history of her desire to write.

"I've wanted to write since I was 14. I wrote my first novel when I was 17. It was 500 pages long, sort of a political novel, and it really was bad. Then I wrote an sf novel--actually, sf/fantasy--when I was in my early twenties, and that was really bad, too. I submitted the political book and got it back. The sf one went to Jim Frenkel. It sat there for about two years."

Then you sold *Satan's Angel*, and it became a bestseller.

"Right. *Satan's Angel* was my third novel."

The Garden State Parkway rolled by in leafless blacktop splendor. Grant snored in the back seat. Suddenly, Ms. Ptacek said, "Aren't you going to talk about the mission school?"

Mission school?

"Sure. We had to play Scrabble with lizards. We painted the letters on their backs, but the problem was, they kept crawling off the Scrabble board. No TV, you see."

A likely story. Instead of allowing myself to be drawn into frivolity and duplicity, I cleverly switched gears and asked about her family. Her mother suffered a severe stroke nine years ago and, at the same time, her father was diagnosed as having cancer. When her father died, she and Charlie brought her wheelchair-bound mother back to New Jersey, where Kathy could care for her.

"My dad worked for Sandia Labs, a government contractor--all sorts of things including weapons research--and he didn't have a college education: he taught himself electronics back when radio came into prominence, then studied television when he saw that that was coming in. He was remarkable. He had an idea for VCRs long before they came on the marketplace, but he never did anything with it. I don't think he had enough drive or enough belief in himself. He was at the nuclear tests in Nevada in the early '60s, but worked down at White Sands in the early '50s, which is where my mom got the radiation that mutated me. Actually, my parents told me Martians brought me. I believed it for years."

I suggested that, because Ms Ptacek was an only child, and a daughter to boot, they probably were somewhat over-protective.

"Yes. I came late in their lives. Mom was almost 39 when she had me, and my dad was almost 43--they'd already been married 16 years, which is a long time to get your life established into a pattern and suddenly have a baby disrupt it. It's all because they went to Alamogordo and she got the radiation."

I realized this interview was getting out of hand, so I grabbed the steering wheel, got back on the road, and asked about that support she received from her family.

"I never got any from my dad. I think he was proud of me. My mom told me that he would brag about my grades to his boss, but I'm not sure if he was really pleased with me or if he was just rubbing it in--that he, a guy who never went to college and was in a somewhat inferior position, had this daughter making all A's and B's while his boss, who went to college and had lots of degrees, had all these sons who couldn't get a grade above C.

"Dad never said anything about my writing, except that when I quit my job at the computing center, he didn't think I should do it. He was envious, in a way, because he told me he wished he could have quit his job years ago to do what he wanted to do.

"My mom, on the other hand, was always very supportive, and I think it's a great sadness that my first book came out after she had her stroke and she couldn't read it. When she was in the hospital in a coma, I would take chapters of *Satan's Angel* in and read them to her. We didn't know if she was going to live or die, and I thought maybe she'd hear that."

At that point, I had to change tapes. I was driving. Ms Ptacek was counting trees and staring at water. No one, especially Mr. Silva, ever told me interviewing required such manual dexterity. However, grit and determination enabled me to note that she'd been in New Mexico for three decades before coming East.

"Right. I decided Horace Greeley was wrong."

A telling response. Note that her husband was still sleeping in the back seat. Then, after passing through the Ashbury Park Toll Plaza, I decided to take off the velvet gloves. I reminded her that *Gila!*, under the name Les Simons, was her first book out of the romance genre, that it is a spoof on "bug books" and New Mexico politics, and I questioned her contention that she had never seen the classic *Attack of the Giant Gila Monster*.

"I didn't. I never saw any of those movies. We didn't have TV at the mission school. Actually, I didn't watch a lot of movies as a kid. We didn't have a movie-type channel that showed films. I'd see an oc-

casional Japanese sf movie or something, but I just didn't see a lot of films. And my parents weren't filmgoers, and they gave me such a hassle when I wanted to go to the movies, it was easier not to go."

So it appears that, unlike with many other writers, including the guy sacked out in the back seat, the horror films of Ms Ptacek's youth didn't have much of an influence on her work.

"No."

Maneuvering carefully over the Mullica River, less than 30 minutes now from the glitter, the stars, the elegant women and bused-in pros of Atlantic City, I questioned her claim that horror films don't scare her.

"That's true. There are things that get me, sure, but not whole films. But then, I never was spooked by things that other little kids or girls were spooked by. I was spooked by the broom sequence with Mickey Mouse in *Fantasia*, for example, but the 'Night on Bald Mountain' didn't bother me at all."

Remembering how terrified I had been by the hippos in the tatus, I reacted somewhat savagely by reminding her that she, not being easily grossed out, forced her husband to watch *ReAnimator* while they ate supper. When she finished laughing, I pressed her for something, anything, that makes her queasy.

"Okay, centipedes. Spiders and bees don't bother me. Cockroaches and centipedes do. I'm not afraid of them, but they do gross me out, although I always have to kill most of the flying insects in our house."

Big deal. She should see what lives in the basement.

Is it true she does a great imitation of Sylvester the cat?

"Yesth. Oops, I just spit all over the dashboard."

[the interlude in Atlantic City produced nothing worth repeating, save that I lost more money than she did, and her husband slept in the back seat all the way back to Newton. We reconvened the interview at the dining room table, after Ms Ptacek unlocked the basement door]

In my best hard-hitting manner, I asked what was the best thing about being married to a guy who writes the same thing she does.

"I don't know. We have similar interests, which is really nice. We can share a lot."

Very domestic. So what's the worst thing?

"I really can't think of anything. I've had nothing but support."

You don't feel--

"Overshadowed? No. I mean, he's been in the field for soooo long. I don't compete with other people. I never have, I guess that's why I was never a team player, never cared for sports, never cared for any sort of thing where I have to compete with anyone. I just won't do it."

So you're not jealous of him, hmmm?

"No. There's no competition, no jealousy. I know a lot of people think I started writing horror after I married Charlie, but I was working on *Shadoweyes* before we met, though because I was finishing up a historical romance, my second one, I didn't get around to working on *Shadoweyes* until I moved back East."

Ever suspicious, I wanted to know what had changed about her writing since she moved to New Jersey.

"Well, I can't go as many places because I don't know as many people back here as I did in New Mexico--"

What, I wanted to know, does that have to do with your writing?

"Well, if you'll just let me finish the damned statement. I have more time to work than I ever did, even though I have this husband who's always whining about his socks and liver."

Why don't you cook him liver once in a while?

"Because he's a big boy and he can find the skillet himself. I don't eat it and I don't see why I should cook him something that he's going to eat and I'm not, unless he does the same for me."

This is obviously a hardhearted, tough, independent woman here. Quickly I retraced my steps and said, let's be a little frank here--

"I thought we were a little Lionel and a little Kathy."

Silva, I vowed, is going to pay for this.

The doorbell rang. I bought some Girl Scout cookies. I returned to the table and asked if she makes a conscious effort not to write the same kind of horror as her husband.

"I think our interests are different enough that I wouldn't. He was brought up in small towns and much of his horror lies in that kind of atmosphere. I don't understand small towns. Newton's the first one I've ever lived in. Most of my stories are set in the Southwest or historical times. The biggest difference between us?"

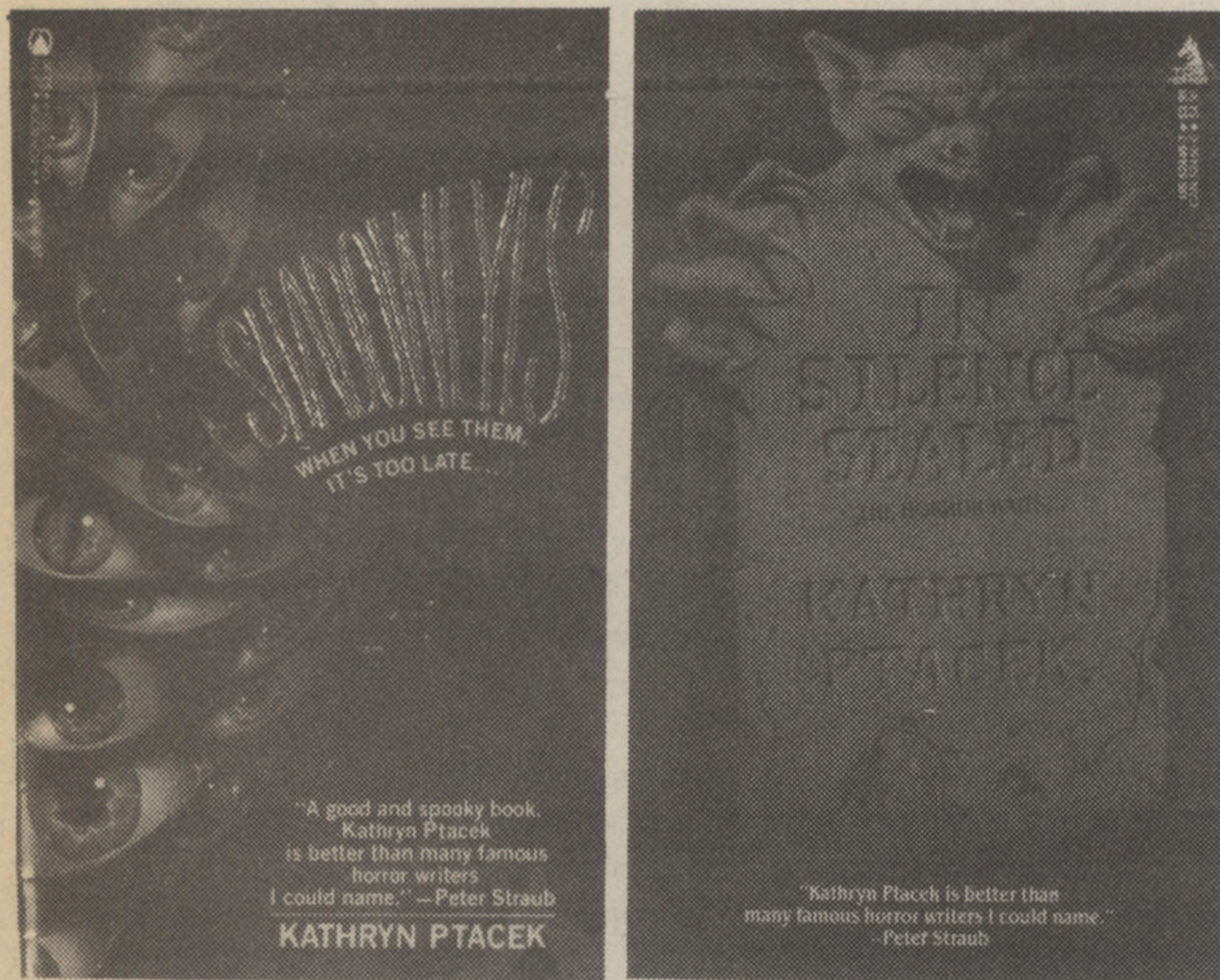
I was astounded that she knew I was going to ask that.

"His prose is smoother and he has long sentences and lots of semicolons; I have short choppy sentences."

Yes, but it is clear from my extensive reading that her work is much more violent than his.

"Yeah, that's true. Pretty gruesome in some respects. *Shadoweyes* had a lot of hideous stuff in it. I guess I'm a ghou. At least, people over the years have told me I am. My short stories are much quieter than that, though."

Once again, my interviewer's instincts sensed controversy and lots of letters for this magazine. I circled cleverly and, given what Ms Ptacek had just said, asked why she is so opposed to the violence in the



so-called splatterpunk movement.

"I think they're doing it just to be doing it. To say, look at me, ain't I different. But they're not."

I leapt--so why do you do it?

"Because I think it's appropriate for the book. I also don't go into incredibly nauseating descriptions about skin being stripped to the glistening muscle underneath and blood gushing and that sort of thing. I don't think you have to. A lot of times it's more effective to let the reader see the violence or its results, in his or her mind, rather than put it on the page. I don't think what a horror writer writes will ever be half as horrific as what occurs in the reader's imagination. If you can fill in the details in your mind, particularly what bothers you, it's really powerful--but a lot of times, when you see it spelled out on the page, it looks pretty silly."

I then reminded her that she is also known in some quarters for her erotic horror.

"Yes, smut horror. Smutpunk. That's true. And my romances are pretty erotic too. No holds barred there, folks."

Then perhaps she has run afoul of the censors?

"In my horror, no. Believe it or not, yes, in my romances. Once, I had a woman atop a man and the editor crossed it out. I guess she

didn't believe that could happen. I put the scene right back in. I guess she thinks it's a twentieth century invention. That was for one of the Kathleen Maxwell books. I was really surprised by that. Other stuff too, like, I used to write 'penis' and they'd put in 'manhood,' but that's the romance euphemism."

Diligent research had uncovered the fact that her horror novels have been very well received critically. A shrug of self-deprecation led me to ask if, after ten years of professional writing--she's still insecure about her work.

"Sometimes I am, sometimes I'm not."

"Last year I came close to burning out. I was seriously thinking of quitting the field, quitting writing, quitting every damn thing. A lot had to do with my mom being home and needing constant care, and me not getting my work done ... after nine years of taking care of her, I was exhausted--emotionally, and creatively. Just this year I got my confidence back and I finally said, I don't care anymore, I'll do what I want to do and have a good time too."

Why did that confidence return?

"Doing the anthologies really helped, I think. I see a lot of different kinds of writing, and I'm the one that has to do the editing--it was scary doing the first ones (*Women of Darkness*, and *Women of the West*). Oh God, I thought, how can I judge these, how can I select stories? What if what I select everybody else laughs at? Then I realized that I could pick good stories, and that gave me confidence."

"And getting good response on *In Silence Sealed* was a tremendous boost. I've gotten far more good word on that book than any other. Unfortunately, it got lost out there, as so many books do."

"Lastly, I also found a solution to my mom's situation, and that gave me the confidence that not everything was dark for the future."

I hefted a copy of *Women of Darkness*, and, since she brought it up, asked her why she got involved with such a project.

"One day, I was standing around, staring at our bookshelves, and I started looking at the anthologies. It sparked an idea I'd had for some time, but I hadn't really researched it--I started taking them down, the anthologies--modern ones, not those done twenty years ago--and began counting the number of women writers in them. Almost every one, with the exception of one series, had only one or two women writers at the most and the rest were men."

I suggested then that the anomaly might just be a reflection of the ratio of women to men in the field.

"No. I think, these days, it's closer to half-and-half. Most of the women now, though, aren't very established because they haven't been around very long. There are a few that have been--Tanith Lee, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro--but there aren't many in that category. But that doesn't mean there aren't a lot of good women writers out there."

Nervously I asked if this was a feminist anthology. When I received no answer, I began to doodle my will on a 3x5 card.

Then: "No."

But it does have all women, doesn't it?

"Well, I thought it was strange there weren't many women in these other books, and I thought it would be nice to showcase them. I don't know that anything about women defines it as being feminist. I mean, if that is the definition, then I suppose it is feminist, though I think in this country that's a killer word, and that's a shame. It shouldn't be."

Not being insensitive enough to ignore steam coming out of a woman's ears, I looked at the array of books which constituted her publications to date and noted that there were romances, a regency, a "bug book," horror, and the first two volumes of a Chinese fantasy. I was puzzled. I was bewildered. As a relative novice myself, I wondered why she wrote so many different kinds of books. Didn't she think that--

"No."

But doesn't she fear--

"No."

I believe I lost it then and told her to belt up. She did, but I ducked. And from beneath the table, where I was bitten by one of her damned cats, I wondered if she was laying herself open to charges of hackism. I also noted she wore purple socks with white hearts.

"No. I have a lot of interests--horror's not my only one--and I don't see why I should be tied to one field, one type of book. I'm sure there are people who call me a hack, but I don't think an average of two books a year makes me one. To someone who writes one every ten years, maybe it does look that way. But I have a lot of things I want to look at, to write about."

But, I persisted, if you had your choice of anything you wanted to write--

"Horror, of course. And straight historicals, the Cecelia Holland type of historicals."

I retook my chair and commented that she was now working on a YA (that's pub talk for Young Adult) book. Why?

"Because it's there."

I ventured that she was a pain in the ass.

"Yes, I've been told that too."

Was this, I wondered, the independent Western woman I've heard so much about?

**I've made enemies
without doing anything,
so I'm not about to curtail
my beliefs and actions
on the slim chance
that I might offend someone.
That doesn't mean
I'm going out there
to try to piss somebody off.**

"Yes, and the independent Kathy Ptacek. I get it from my parents. My family is so independent, we moved 800 miles from the rest of the family [in Nebraska, where Ms Ptacek was born until she was two years old]. They didn't want us around."

[the doorbell rang; I bought more Girl Scout cookies]

With all those novels, I asked her why she wrote, aside from having to pay the bills, even though the rent she charges me would keep most ordinary humans in clover for a century or two.

"Because I enjoy it most of the time. I write because I have something to write. But I don't think I have any deep messages for anybody."

What is her horror supposed to do?

"Scare the pants off people."

What? No human turmoil, no human condition, no Aristotelian stuff?

"Well, in the lamia books [*Blood Autumn*, *In Silence Sealed*], I guess I'm exploring the relationships between men and women."

But the women always win, I adventurously protested.

"Yeah, unlike life."

Then I asked about being before the public eye.

"I don't like to be on panels and do interviews, I don't think I have anything interesting to say that anyone would want to hear."

Yet, I chided, she is outspoken. Nay, even blunt. Except, of course, in this interview so far, and through no fault of the interviewer, Mr. Silva, sir.

"What do you mean?"

You didn't name names.

"Okay--Simone. Annabelle. Nathan. I'm naming names."

Right. Does it bother you that you might make enemies?

"Ha! No. I already have enemies. I've made enemies without doing anything, so I'm not about to curtail my beliefs and actions on the slim chance that I might offend someone. That doesn't mean I'm going out there to try to piss somebody off. I'll be political when I can, but sometimes you just can't be tactful, you have to be blunt. I don't know if that's coming from the west or the way I was raised."

Well, then, I thought as I rubbed my hands in evil delight, let's see what we can do to get some blood on the walls here. I recalled a reaction to *Blood Autumn* that, oddly enough, pleased her very much.

"Oh yeah! Andrew Greeley called it a perversion. I think that's funny. He must be dead in spirit or something. I guess the things that upset other people don't upset me. Now, of course, this is from a priest who writes about adultery and drug use and alcoholism, and he's getting all excited about my book? Seems a little hypocritical to me."

But a priest is, in fact, a major character.

"Yeah, but he didn't know he was screwing his mother, not until the end. And for those who haven't read it, that wrecks the end of that book."

I then wanted to know what influences her husband, my wonderful landlord, had on her writing.

"None whatsoever. How can he? He gets embarrassed by all the dirty parts. He does read most of my stuff before it goes out. He makes suggestions which I don't always take, because they're just that, suggestions. We had an idea once to collaborate on a historical series, but when we wrote down what we liked, we found that nothing on the list matched. We do have lots of similar interests, like dumb horror movies, which we see by the drove. I can't think of anymore. There are, but I can't think of them offhand. But he doesn't influence my writing."

Okay, scratch Grant. But does she think Clive Barker is the cutting edge of today's horror?

"Nah. He's a hot item now. Pretty soon there'll be another hot item. How come these guys are always men?"

So what about splatterpunks?

"I think it's a lot of hooey. Read my article. I already said all this."

So what's the difference between male and female writers?

"Gonads. Pretty hard you know, putting ink on gonads."

What gets you really angry?

"Nothing."

That was a lie, since she had already taken half the table apart with her bare hands. I pressed on, forcing her to tell me what really ticks her off about the field, something guaranteed to set her off on a tirade.

"Anthologies that have no women in them, for one. And really stupid things."

I begged for an example.

"Funny you should ask. In a certain book that came out in the past year or two, these people go camping. This half-crazed mountain man rapes a woman. All right, I can buy that, that's fine. But then the guy goes off with an ax in his head or something, and her boyfriend comes into the tent, probably not more than twenty minutes after she's been raped, and she says, 'Make love to me.' Right. Now, this woman has just been abused physically, emotionally, psychologically, any which way you can get--she sure isn't going to let her boyfriend touch her

arm, much less sleep with her.

"Christ, this guy just raped her, she's going to be in pain! It's so stupid, so unfeeling. Does the author really think this means nothing to a woman, to be raped, that this is not a horrible thing, that it's like getting a hangnail or something? I started skimming after that, and the woman goes home after the weekend; her roommate asks how the weekend was and she says, as she's going to the refrigerator or something, 'Oh I've been raped,' or words to that effect. And she's not talking as a woman in shock, or one who might not mention what happened. It was like her saying, 'Oh, and I scraped my elbow after I fell off the boulder.'

"This is one of the most insulting scenes I have ever read. I stopped reading at that point and slammed the book down on Charlie's desk and said I'm not going to read this trash anymore.

"And what's worse, why did the women editors at this publishing house allow this to go through? Didn't one of them say, 'You can't do this, dope, it's completely unrealistic?' If he couldn't take his woman character off to a doctor or hospital to have her taken care of, he shouldn't have had that scene. He should have just had the guy knock her around, not rape her. Why was she raped anyway? Maybe she gives birth to a half-crazed spawn at the end of the book. I don't know. I didn't finish it. But it's ridiculous. Every woman I know is angry about it. I guess it goes back to many people seeing women in horror movies as being a victim. And often they are. So here's this woman again being a victim, although I should say this could have been in any kind of a book, not necessarily a horror novel. But I think it's simply garbage to have that sort of unfeeling, and unrealistic, thing in there."

Once Ms Ptacek came down off the ceiling, I asked if she might be able to generalize for the field.

"That one just sort of leaps out. In general? I think too many people are trying for shock effect. There's nothing wrong with shock, but use your damn brains! A woman who's just been raped isn't going to want to fuck her boyfriend, to put it bluntly. Jesus. What's the use of having a shock effect if it isn't even halfway realistic? Now I know we're in a genre that deals with things that are not terribly realistic--like monsters, the supernatural--but given that we suspend our disbelief, people in the books have to respond in a realistic manner. They have to respond the way any usual man or woman would do. I'm sure the author will hate me for this, but I don't really care. I find his book incredibly offensive.

"As I've said, I'm not anti-violence, there's a lot of it in my books. That doesn't bother me, but this sort of meaningless incident without any thought behind it ... in a way it makes me wonder if these guys--and it's virtually always male writers who do it--don't regard women as two-dimensional, 'we can do anything we want to because they aren't real.' This might go back to--could this be why there aren't many women showing up in anthologies?

"I'm beginning to think there's a tendency to dismiss women writers because men think they write 'women's stuff.' And they're *wrong*. I think women write every bit as strongly, if not more so, than men. I don't think that one sex or the other is an inferior type of writer, and it would be a damned shame if certain men believed that. Just as not all men write violent and explicit or quiet stuff, women don't just write all quiet stuff. A lot of ours is gut-wrenching without the guts spilling out on the page.

"I didn't want it to get into a man versus woman thing, which it easily could. I like a lot of women's horror and a lot of men's horror. I just wish some of the men would be as realistic with their women characters as they are with their men. I read somewhere once that men have trouble writing women characters. Okay, so they ought to talk to women more, take some notes."

Was she saying that horror, aside from the supernatural, has to be as realistic as so-called mainstream fiction?

"Yeah, I think so. Otherwise it gets pretty silly."

So what, I swiftly pondered aloud, is the best thing about the horror field right now.

"The best thing is, it's opening up and it's not strictly supernatural anymore, not just about ghosts or vampires, as it seemed to be in the past."

And the worst thing?

"Too many damned bad books out there, with those stupid hologram covers, and stupid children and skeleton stuff, and those damned things stay on the stands for months while ours go away after a few weeks; especially the paperbacks."

In all innocence, I swear it, I mused aloud about why she hadn't yet had a hardback novel.

"I don't know. I thought that *In Silence Sealed* was good enough to be a hardback, and I've been told that by other people as well. I don't think that's terribly egotistical of me to say--I thought that was a really good book. To repeat: I have more good things said about that than any of my others, probably more than all of them combined. Really strange, but it's mostly women who have been giving me the compliments. It must have spoken to them or something. Or maybe they just like to see women kill men."

Skipping gingerly to the next topic, I asked what, in her opinion, was the best thing about working with an editor.

"The good ones catch things I don't. I have a tendency to leave out words, for example; or I'll see a scene in my head, but it's not in the book, the action skips, and they catch it."

And, dare I say it, the worst thing?

"Some editors really think they are the one writing the book. Or they really don't know what they're doing and they butcher it."

Ah, so are you one of those who say that when the manuscript is turned in, that's the way it's got to be published, no changes, no compromises?

"Don't be a jerk. That's prima donnish. Writers are prone to making mistakes, like everyone else. You're really close to your subject, you've sat with it for months, and you don't always see the things that go wrong. I don't think an editor ought to fuss with your style, though. I've had my style messed with a lot and I don't like that. There is a point beyond which editors shouldn't step. If they point out holes in the plot and things that can't work, that's fine; but when they start messing around with your word choice, your sentence structure unless it absolutely doesn't work, that's dead wrong. I have a sort of short choppy style; editors try to smooth it out, but that's *not* how I write. I don't write with semicolons. You know, I once had an editor accuse me of using too many, so I counted them--43 in a 560-page book. Boy. I think many times an editor can see things we can't, but too often they edit just to edit--they're frustrated writers. Because they are not writing, they're going to leave their marks on our manuscripts."

Do you find they get really silly with things in a book?

"Yes, sometimes. Chato, for example."

[Chato Del-Klinne is an Apache, in case you're churlish enough not to have read either *Shadoweyes* or *Ghost Dance*, which isn't out yet but that's no excuse]

"An editor said about Chato, 'But he doesn't talk like an Indian.' God. This is a guy who has a PhD in geology, was a university professor, and has lived in the Anglo world most of his life. Christ, he doesn't talk like Tonto! Another editor said, 'I always thought Indians talked in a noble fashion, using thees and thous.' I said, they're not Quakers, you know.

"For the most part, I've had pretty good editors, but sometimes they just slip up on the strangest things. I was once criticized for having bad Indians in a book. Well, for God's sake, there are good and bad Indians, just like there are good/bad blacks/Anglos/Asians, etc. I think people somehow have this idea that all Indians are good, a reaction

against the perception of a century ago, when the 'only good Indian was a dead Indian.' They're people, just like you and me, yet there's a mystique associated with them. You know, Indians are one with nature. So, what about one who's grown up in the city all his life?"

True, but as a writer don't you have a responsibility to dispel stereotypes?

"I'm trying. I don't want somebody to come to Chato and say, 'Hey, you speak pretty good for an Indian,' although I probably could get away with it. In the book I'm doing now, *Ghost Dance*, almost everybody is Indian. I have only two Anglos; the rest are minorities. Some good, some bad. It's deliberate. The fact that the book is about the resurgence of the Ghost Dance means it has to be centrally about Indians, of course. But for the other roles, I deliberately chose minority groups."

Why?

"Because I wanted to do something different, and to show that they're people just like everyone else."

I wonder why the interest in Indians. Actually, I don't, but otherwise the following exchange doesn't make any sense.

"Because, I guess, of where I grew up."

I understand you always root for the Indians on TV and in the

boring interview questions, like if she considers her books horror first and fiction second. Fiction, as we all know, is supposed to be some sort of mirror on reality and the horror throws in some kind of relevant unreality.

"That sounds good."

When *Ghost Dance* is done with, what's next for Ms Ptacek?

"I'm not one of those writers who say they can't talk about it because it'll go away into the great ether. It's lamias in the Civil War. That's about all I have right now. And another adventure for Chato."

Another lamia book; how curious. She's already done two.

"Well, I like them."

But why does Ms Ptacek like lamias?

"I think they're very intriguing."

Why?

"I don't know."

The interviewer gets testy. What do you mean, you don't know?

"Okay, because they suck the vitality out of men."

Aha! Another sexist book!

"Damn right."

Undaunted, I continued the boring interview questions while working on my will: what were your literary influences.

"None."

Fascinating. So what kind of books does she read when she's not writing them?

"Mysteries, and dark fantasy and horror, straight historicals, and non-fiction."

Considering her love of mysteries, I noted there weren't any among the books she herself has written. Why not?

"Haven't gotten around to it yet."

Not often being allowed out of my humble basement apartment, I glanced around the room and wondered about her other interests.

"I like to scrape up dead possums off the highways. Sun-kissed possum--we just love that in our house. I also do needlepoint and cross-stitch. I have my pens and coloring books. And reading. The occasional computer game or two. I like to beat up on my husband in my spare time, and feed peanuts to squirrels. Stuff like that."

Except for the time I had an affair of the heart (among other things) with Jasmine the Exotic Dancer, I do not travel very often. Ms Ptacek does. On my rent money, I might add. So does her husband, and often without her. As she does without him. More than once, this arrangement has gotten them odd looks.

"Yeah, and I think it's funny. When he was in England one year, I went down to Cape May, and everybody kept asking me, 'Oh, is your husband here too?' and I said no, and they all gave me such looks. I think it's funny because I don't have to travel with him and he doesn't have to travel with me. We are two separate entities, which people seem to forget once they're married. But we haven't. We travel together occasionally, and we do things together. But God, we're together all the time in the house, and we've got to get away from each other once in a while. A lot of the reaction has to do with people still thinking that a woman can't travel by herself--or a married woman can't--oh, she has to lean upon her husband. What a bunch of bullshit."

So then I wanted to know what she wanted to do when she grew up?

"Make millions of dollars."

Now I know why these are called boring interview questions. Brother. But I persevered, and asked what advice she would give to new writers.

"Use wide margins and don't type all the way to the bottom of the page. Keep submitting, even though it's incredibly discouraging. And know your market before you send something out. Don't let your friends read your writing unless they really know something about writing. People who don't necessarily know something about writing will

KATHRYN PTACEK

born September 12, 1952; was raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She received her B.A. in journalism, with a minor in history, from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, where she was graduated with honors in 1974.

Ptacek has worked as an advertising layout artist and a technical writer and editor, the latter at the University of New Mexico Computing Center. She became a full-time writer with the sale of her first novel in 1979.

Ptacek's interests have strongly influenced her work. She has written historical fantasy, historical romances (under various pen names), and five horror and dark fantasy novels, including *Shadoweyes*, *Blood Autumn*, *Kachina*, and *In Silence Squalid*. In addition, Ptacek has edited three anthologies.

She is married to horror/dark fantasy author Charles L. Grant, with whom she shares not only a hundred-year-old Victorian clapboard house in Newton, New Jersey, but a birthday. The house is also occupied by two Oriental shorthair cats.

Ptacek is currently working on a new dark fantasy novel.

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Women of Darkness

Nancy V. Berberick	Carol Orlock
Wennicke Eide Cox	Cary G. Osborne
Conda V. Douglas	Rachel Cosgrove Paves
Sharon Epperson	Kit Reed
Karen Haber	Patricia Russo
Melissa Mia Hall	Lucy Taylor
Nancy Holder	Melanie Tem
Rivka Jacobs	Lisa Tuttle
Tamith Lee	Joan Vander Putten
Elizabeth Massie	Wendy Webb

movies. And animals, too.

"True. My mom used to get mad at me when I was a child because I always rooted for the animals to make it, I couldn't have cared less about the humans. The animals were more important, I thought. I was always getting upset about horses falling down and fretting about the dogs and cats. Even today, when I read a book or see a movie, the first thing I think is, damn, now I'm going to have to worry about that animal. Like in *Alien*, I worried about that cat. I didn't care about the people, but I had to fret about that cat."

Sighting a contradiction on the horizon, I pounced on the fact that there are *no animals* in her books. Why?

"I don't know. I've wondered about that myself. I did have a cat in *Shadoweyes* but the editor made me take the scene out because it wasn't going anywhere. She was right. There are animals in my YA, though."

Nuts.

[the doorbell rang. I did not buy Girl Scout cookies. I came back, we talked, and now she's ticked because I pressed the "play" button instead of "record." Nearly an hour of such brilliant interviewing that I could cry]

Realizing that the interview was about to end with either the death of the interviewer or the end of the tape, I instantly leapt into the really

either praise you too much, or get overly critical, and that can destroy your writing before it gets going. I would also advise keeping a daily writing log. Every day write down what you do--it's good to look back over a week's time and see what you have accomplished or not. When I first started writing, Bob Vardeman recommended this practice. I'm now working on my 22nd notebook."

And advice to established writers?

"Wide margins, don't type to the bottom of the page. And keep that daily log."

Dare she include editors?

"Can I say drop dead? I don't know what to say. I have no opinions on this garbage."

You're lying, I accuse courageously. You're just too chicken to give them.

"No, I'm not."

Splatterpunks.

"A lot of hooley. Read my article. I already said all this."

I happen to know that Ms Ptacek uses an AT&T 6300HD and WordStar. Lots of people think working with a computer isn't writing, that one must use a typewriter.

"What the hell do they know? Why aren't they using quills and ink, then? I knew this writer in Albuquerque--I was interested in getting a computer at that time, they were \$25,000 bucks then--he said, I don't think if you write with a computer it can be true writing. But he had a little typewriter, and I said, so why don't you use a little quill pen, that's the same analogy. He wasn't amused.

"I think your writing is what you make it. Don't quote me."

[interviewer chuckles madly]

"A computer is just a tool for doing things efficiently. It speeds up the more monotonous chores, like the last draft. When I did *Satan's Angel*, the final draft was 836 pages long. It took me a solid month or more of typing every day from about 7am to 10 or 11 at night. I guess I took time out for dinner, things like that, but I'm not sure. But I didn't go anywhere, I sure didn't do anything, I just sat there and typed, day in and day out for thirty days. I have to say that's not really creative, that's drudgery, a chore. It's much easier now to type a couple of commands into the computer and have the thing printed out in an hour or less, with the laser printer.

"There's also the theory that artists have to suffer for their art. You can't be successful, you can't live in a nice house, you have to live in an attic, eat peanut butter and dead mice you find in the corner. 'Take money for my art? I can't do that,' they say. But it's hard, when you're suffering, to be creative."

Smugly, I asked if she, a self-professed lover of sun-kissed possums, considered herself an artist.

"I am an artist, but I'm not an *artiste*. I think an *artiste* does things simply for the form, for the way it'll all look. I don't think they really care about what they're doing. An author doesn't really care about writing books and stories--he wants to be interviewed, to be on talk shows, all the so-called glamorous trappings without the work."

So I suppose she thinks it's all right to take rent money from a starving but humble writer, but doesn't think it's demeaning to take money for her artistic work.

"Nope."

Then what, pray tell, will she say to someone who says it isn't the money that's important, it's the work. If they offer you only a dollar, take it.

"Well, it's pretty hard to live on a dollar. If you're going to be an artist, you have to be practical as well, unless you want to live on peanut butter and live in garrets. You're going to have to take money--oh what a terrible thing, taking money. There's nothing wrong with that. I come from a very artistic family--dad was a painter, mom did crafts, several aunts were painters, but I'm the first one to make a living

at it."

And most of that money, I have already noticed, goes not into making basement apartment improvements, but on books. And I also notice that a lot of them don't have anything to do with what she is working on currently. Like, for God's sake, foot-binding in ancient China.

"Well, it isn't ancient China. Foot-binding didn't start until the Manchu invasion."

I am humbled by my ignorance, but Ms Ptacek did stick her tongue out at me (albeit in a dignified fashion).

"The books I buy may not be for my immediate interest or even the one beyond it, but they will eventually come in handy. For example, I've been collecting books on China for over ten years, and finally wrote *The Land of 10,000 Willows*, the Chinese fantasy trilogy. I knew I was going to use those books some day, and I didn't want them to get away. In Albuquerque it was easy to research because of UNM's library, but now I live in a measly little place and it's not as easy to do research as it used to be. Sometimes I think my library is better than the town's, in fact. I could go into New York City, I suppose, but I've only done it once, because it's such a hassle to get there from here."

At that point I was curious (not really) why Ms Ptacek has only recently begun to write short stories.

"Before I sold my first novel, I was writing short stories. I thought I was writing sf, that I was going into the sf field, but I realize now that I was really writing horror stories, and sending them to the sf markets which, of course, doesn't work too well. All my ideas were horror, and I got nowhere very quickly. I didn't know the field, I didn't really know how to write a short story, and so I decided to concentrate on novels, they being a more lucrative form and something I knew a little more about.

"I would get a short story idea maybe once a year, but just in the last year I began getting lots of them. There are lots of dead and dying people in my stories--pretty depressing. I guess I'm working out things about my family, death and illness, all that dark and gloomy stuff. I don't do it in my novels, I don't think. In the short stories, though, it's a way of getting out frustrations and anger and, I guess, sorrow I have about my mom and dad. But I'm going to start writing about something else. I have some mystery short stories in mind, comedies set in a nursing home, maybe. I've had some of these ideas forever, but now I can get around to writing them."

Modestly excluding myself, I asked her who the new writers in the field were that editors ought to look for and encourage?

"Betsy Engstrom and Maxine O'Callaghan are very good, as are Lisa Cantrell and Melanie Tem. As a short story writer, Nancy Holder is very good, I wish she would write more. I wish they would all write more. Lee Duigon, too, who wrote a vampire novel set in New Jersey. I thought that was really good. There are a lot more women writers who I think are good--go read the two volumes of *Women of Darkness*, and you'll see."

Odd, that these writers are all women.

"Well, unfortunately, a lot of the new guys are splatterpunks, that dreaded word again. I confess I haven't read Kelley Wilde's book, I want to. A lot of the guys I haven't read, though, they tend to be or are associated with splatterpunks, like Ray Garton and Richard Laymon. I did like Skipp and Spector's *The Scream*. I liked the granny a lot. The characters in that were very good. I admit I haven't read all these people's books, but then people always love to tell me, 'Well, I haven't read any books of yours,' as if I'm supposed to be pleased or something. They say: 'Have I read anything of yours?' I don't know. 'Have you written anything that's famous?' Yes, *War and Peace*, *The Idiot*, *The Cherry Orchard*.

"Hey, there's an influence--Russian writers. I was very interested in anything Russian from about age 13 or 14 on. I even wanted to put a

Soviet flag up in my room, but my dad wouldn't let me. I started to learn the language--two years of it in high school; and I went around trying to look as nihilistic as I could. I sort of immersed myself in the music too. That appeals to me--all that dark, gloomy stuff. I guess because I'm dark and gloomy myself."

I reminded her again that this is her tenth year in professional writing, and, just as she's had on me, I wondered if she feels she has some influence on the newer writers?

"What a stupid question. I guess. I don't know. I would hope that younger writers, male or female, can say they can talk to this woman, or write and she'll write back. I don't want this to sound sappy, but I really do want to help. I didn't get a lot of help at the beginning of my career, and I wish there had been somebody I could have talked to about some things. So I want the newer writers to know that if they want to talk to me they can. I can give advice and I can give encouragement."

Could this be construed as taking a short-cut?

"No, not really. They're still going to have to go through the same things we did when we started. But why make it any harder than it has to be? God knows the field is not as expanded as it used to be, things are tightening up, there aren't as many publishers as there used to be. When I got in, it was fairly easy to get a book sold; now it's not. What I'm saying to these people might not make it easier, but they might be able to find their way a little bit better, I hope."

Suppose that I, a new writer, come to you and say that my editor wants me to change this and change that.

"Okay, so do the little stuff so you can negotiate the big stuff. I'll go ahead and change the small stuff without a problem, but the stuff I really believe in I'll keep. I've never had a problem there. *In Silence Sealed*, because of its structure, you know what's going to happen almost right away, no way you can get around that. My agent and editor made suggestions to make it less a problem, I did it, and it did make the book much stronger.

"See, you change some things and stand up for others. I don't know what the criterion is, how to decide which is which--I get a gut feeling. If it's going to change the flavor of your book or story, if it isn't yours anymore, then you should stand up and say, this is the way I wrote it--if I wanted it the other way, I would have done it that way. Sometimes I think some editors feel they have to justify their existence by making changes."

Mercy. Ms Ptacek courts a reputation for being difficult to work with, does she not?

"I've been wondering about that. I guess I could, but I don't think I will. I've never had serious problems in the past, and I've been altogether pretty amiable about changes. It's just recently that I've been saying no. I'm getting cranky, I guess."

It is obvious even to the cats, and to the husband snoring in the living room, that the cranky answer isn't going to cut it.

"All right. I've been getting more confidence in my work. I mean, it has been ten years, I must have learned something by now. I think I've learned to write a lot better. I hope I have. I hope I'm not writing at the level I was. I thought I was a pretty fair writer then, but I think I'm a much better one now. I don't think I'm the greatest writer, I know I'm not, but I'm not a novice either. And I'm a little tired of some of these things, these dumb changes. I will give in to the stuff that makes sense, but the stupid-ass stuff I just don't change. Period."

Are we talking politics then? Is it a matter of clout, or should a first novelist dig in his heels and scream and carry on?

"No, because there might not be a second book. I think, when you're new, you have to be sensible and give a lot more, you have to put up with a lot more shit. Remember, you're just getting into the field, you don't know what's what yet, you don't know quite what your agent is supposed to do, what an editor does. I'm not saying you

should give your book away for \$5, for God's sake, just use a little common sense."

Publishers, of course, try to take as much as they can even from the established writers. On a similar subject, Ms Ptacek has some definite opinions on what they are doing wrong in the field she loves.

"Flying body parts. It worked for the cover of *Shadoweyes*, it did not work for *Blood Autumn*. It was a historical horror novel, an erotic horror novel. But the buyer looks at it and says, 'Oh boy, a book about flying vampire lips.' I think these people take the easy out--something gross, something readily identifiable to buyers as a horror novel. They got so enamored of foil and die cuts and embossing they lost sight of what they were doing.

"Another thing--the damn sales force dictating to the editorial staff what titles should be or what books should be about. The editorial staff should make these decisions and the sales force should go out and *sell* the book. Of course, it doesn't seem to work that way. I think more people would buy horror novels if they weren't as gaudy as most are now. And they don't have to be. People buy mysteries, and they don't have any of this crap on them; they buy westerns without foil."

I quickly steered the subject back to her husband and wanted to know, since I was once married to a writer myself, what she believed was the worst thing about living with a writer.

"Nothing, because we understand how really peculiar we are. A lot of nonwriting spouses have trouble dealing with that."

My goodness, are we really different?

"Yes. We live in our heads. We make up people, we make up scenarios and plots and whole worlds and societies. You talk to the average person on the street, they'll ask where do you get your ideas. They truly don't understand how a writer gets an idea, so of course we're different."

So where, the interviewer asks cleverly, do you get your ideas [boring interview question number 3479]?

"*Weekly World Reader*, for one. A lot of times, when I'm watching a movie, a scene will leap out at me--"

I protested vigorously that she stole the movie bit from her husband.

"That's right, but it'll be in print before he can say it. It, the scene, will remind me of something. Or I'm reading a book, and I think that's neat, but what if the character had done this and I start thinking about it, and by the time I'm done it's nothing like what I've read. Lately, I've gotten a lot of ideas from things that have happened within my own family. There's nothing like having sick parents to give you ideas for horror stories. People write and say 'I can't send you something because I don't have any monster stories or vampire stories.' But that doesn't scare me as much as looking at my grandfather or mother, watching them growing old and infirm. That's horror, too. Horror isn't just monsters, it's all sorts of things that happen to us."

The tape winds down, my rent goes up, and as we part, I ask Ms Ptacek what she wants to be known as, when all is said and done and her work is left alone to be judged on its own merits and not with the author standing over the interviewer with a whip and a bat.

What, Ms Ptacek, do you want to be known as.

"A good teller of tales. Just really good tales with really good people. I don't want to change things, just tell good tales.

"Or maybe the busty lust queen."

And thus do I retire to my humble basement apartment, humbled and even further cowed and wondering when the husband is going to wake up and fix the damned furnace.

Silva, I'll get you for this.

*As for a theme to this article, there is none--just like life.
In both, you just muddle through somehow and come to the end, sooner or later.*

(A) MUSING

KATHRYN PTACEK

When I was taking journalism back at the University of New Mexico more than a decade (gasp) ago, I had a teacher who taught Magazine Article Writing, which I eagerly took and which proved to be one of the most practical courses I ever had.

The teacher was Lois Duncan, a well-known writer of suspense and juvenile novels. One type of article she told us about was called the "string of pearls," where the writer lists incidents or anecdotes that are somehow related to the theme of the article.

When I was asked to do this piece, I wasn't sure what to write about--lots of topics popped into my mind, but I didn't know what to settle on. But I got to thinking about various things, and decided that that "string of pearls" would fit just right.

So, I don't know that any of the half a dozen items I've listed below are related, except that I think about them upon occasion and am known to have moderately strong opinions about them.

And as for a theme to this article, there is none--just like life. In both, you just muddle through somehow and come to the end, sooner or later.

There are just things I want to discuss, things I've been thinking about for awhile, that bother or intrigue me. And now I have a forum for 'em.

1. WOMEN WRITERS, AND IN PARTICULAR, WOMEN HORROR WRITERS.

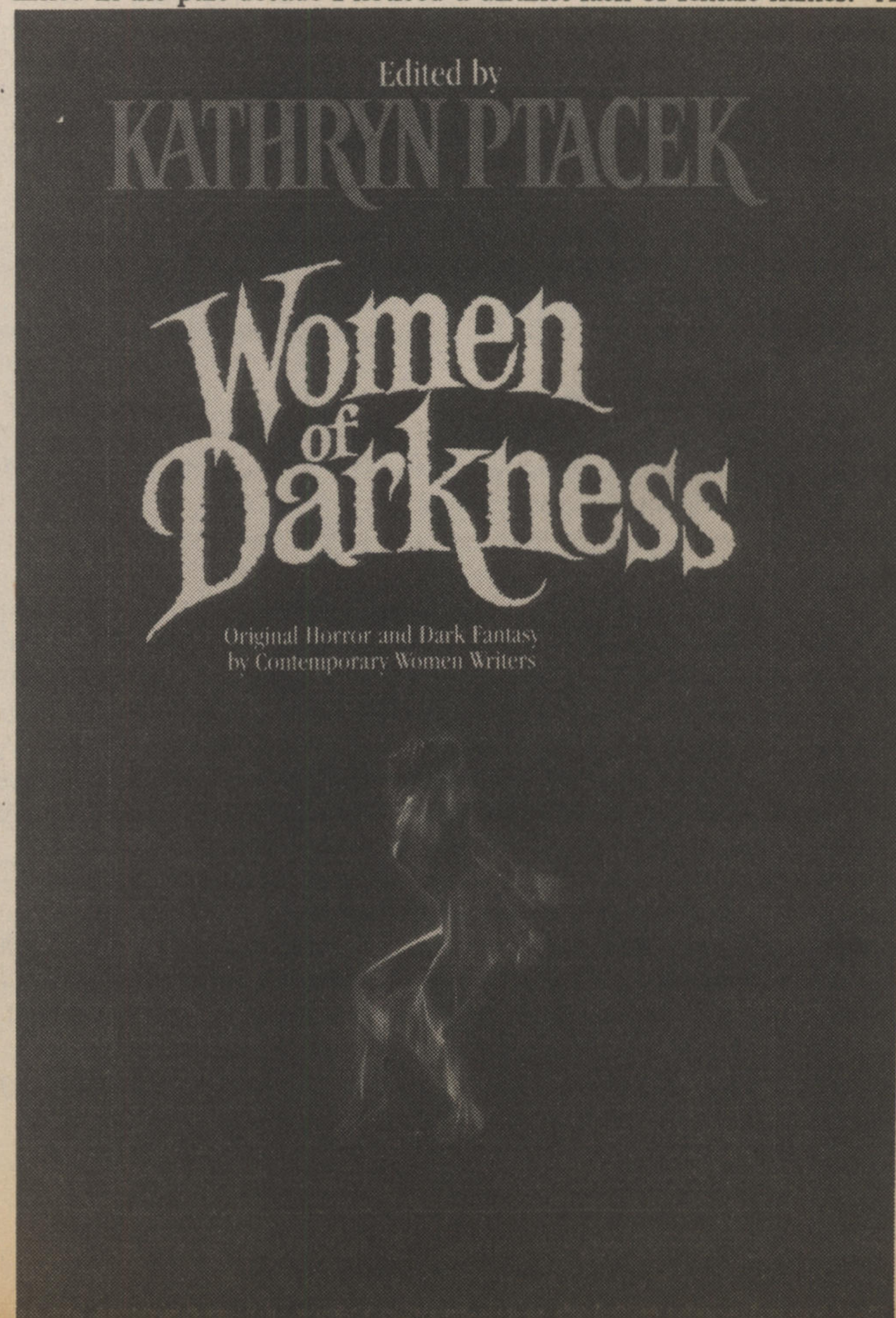
I'm very encouraged (yes, indeed, I am) at the number of women writing horror/dark fantasy these days, as opposed to when I started in those prehistoric days of the early '80s. Here's a sidenote before we even get going: Before those semi-enlightened days, things were even grimmer. Back in The Old Days of the '50s and '60s, there was Shirley Jackson and ... and Shirley Jackson and ... and she was just about it for women horror writers, and even then her stuff was designated "literature," and not horror, and that tells you something about the status of the field in the past twenty years. There's more horror than ever in bookstores and libraries, but almost without exception none of it is looked upon as "literature," as opposed to that "genre stuff."

Where was I now? I've lost my place. Oh yes. I think that the genre used to be regarded as a strictly male province, with the occasional woman such as Jackson "straying" into it (this goes for science fiction, fantasy, mysteries, thrillers/espionage and westerns as well, which up to recently with a few exceptions remained a bastion of Maleness). For far too long people--editors, writers, readers, whoever--have thought horror was simply shock value: buckets of gore, grisly wet-looking special effects and skin-shredding intestine-popping monsters, all of which would somehow appeal to men ("those macho guys") and not at all to women ("those frail flowers"). Of course, we all realized by now that not every man likes his raw eyeballs on a la shish kebob, and certainly there are women out there who do relish blood and guts. Of course, we are also fairly enlightened souls who grasp also that horror is not only shock/gore/gunk, etc. We maintain it encompasses much more. In fact, in my editing I am seeing more and more

psychological horror stories and fewer supernatural ones, perhaps because some of the supernatural topics have been done to death in the past decade (thanks in large part to the film industry where little if anything is ever handled in a subtle manner). However, there is always new territory to map out with the human psyche.

Perhaps with the perception of the apparent widening of the genre--which was never that narrow to begin with--women have realized that they can write stories and novels that fit within the field. As of this writing, there are a growing number of women horror novelists, although that number is still far less than those who are known for their short stories. Still, most of the short story writers I talk to seem to have a novel in the works, so maybe in the near future we'll be seeing dozens of women horror novelists.

I compiled the two *Women of Darkness* anthologies because I thought it would be fun to showcase the talent of modern and still-living women horror writers, who have perhaps not received the notice that they should have. And lest I be called sexist (which I have been accused and which I do not think I am) I also thought it was a good idea, because when I scanned the content pages of the anthologies published in the past decade I noticed a distinct lack of female names. At



most, there seemed to be two women writers involved; usually there was one. Big deal. I thought that was a little unjust considering that there had to be more than one or two or even five women writers out there working away; I don't know why this inequity happened; it just seems to have.

I have thoroughly enjoyed putting the two anthologies together, and along with *Women of the West* (which contains stories about women living in the west, written by women), I have read in the past two and half years some 800-900 short stories. That's a lot, believe me. That's probably more than I ever read in my life before then. Well, maybe not. But it's a hell of a lot in that limited time. But I liked all of it--even the ones that weren't written all that well.

The stories I have received sometimes seem to fall into two categories: great ideas with not-so-good writing, and really good writing with not-so-hot ideas. Only a few of the stories I've received have been absolutely terrible. And only recently I was reading a story and kept wondering what made it seem strange, but I couldn't pinpoint what bothered me. I finally realized that it was single-spaced. This is the first time I've ever received a story like that. As I said, I've had a lot of fun, and if TOR wants to do more volumes, I'd be more than happy to continue editing them.

Most of the stories were about personal horror--what people do to each other, or what we do to our own selves. A few were gory; most were not. And most, it turned out, were about relationships.

Although for a while I did get a spate of what I called dead-cat stories. Every time a cat appeared in the first few pages of a story, I knew its fate. And sure enough, that cat would be dead by the end. Maybe I should do an anthology of dead pet stories.

2. CLOSED ANTHOLOGIES

By the time this issue of *The Horror Show* is in print my first market report for the HWA Newsletter will have been published. And everyone will have seen me griping there about closed anthologies. Well, I'm going to complain again, but at greater length. I really think the guys (and let's face it, generally the culprits are men because so far only a handful of women have done anthologies) who edit closed anthologies should open them up to other writers, and not just a handful of "names," either.

I know that publishers like to get "names" for an anthology; boy, do I know that after my own experiences. But you can edit a good, even outstanding, anthology without filling it with stories by prominent writers who have appeared in just about every other anthology ever published. There are a lot of excellent writers--men and women who've been around a while as well as those who are brand-new--who deserve to be recognized. Why not open the anthologies to them as well? So what if the editor gets flooded with submissions; that's all part of the job. Hey, you editors out there--you can't be afraid of a little reading, can you? Surely that's not it.

And now onto the second part of this gripe. And if these anthologies aren't filled with oft-reprinted stories by the well-knowns, then they're half filled with stories by dead writers, and most of the time these tales have been collected in anthology after anthology. And I begin to wonder why so many stories by deceased authors appear in these volumes at the cost of stories by writers still breathing.

Is it because the stories are really so good? Or is it because *DEAD WRITERS DEMAND NO ROYALTIES*? Stories in the public domain cost the editor nothing, so then he can spend more money on other writers (don't we all wish?), or as the case probably is, pay himself more (you don't get rich editing an anthology, believe me). Further, you don't have to exert much energy to select a public domain story--you just browse through all the other anthologies (with the same old

writers, same old stories) on your bookshelf until you find a story you want--instead of reading all the stories the living writers are sending you.

I have nothing against dead writers; after all, we will all be dead writers some day. It's just simply that I wish that some editors would try a little harder to find stories by living writers--it would be nice to honor them a little while they're still breathing.

3. SMALL PRESSES

I like a lot of the small press publications around--don't get me wrong now--and I do think they fill a very definite need, but I have to say that I believe that the small press publications have done a lot of beginning writers a big disservice in one way.

And this is why: Small presses want stories very short (2500-3000 words is "long") because generally they can't pay much nor do they have the room for lengthy stories; and yet a writer cannot always pare a story to its absolute bare bones and have it be successful. Many of the stories I have received for the *Women of Darkness* anthologies seem somewhat rushed in their telling--you know the tune and so does everyone who's ever sent me a story that I have rejected--"this story was just too short to fully develop the character, the plot, the tension, the suspense, the atmosphere, the etc."

But I know, too, that many of the stories I pass on will find homes in some of these publications. And that's good that there is a place for them to go; God knows, there aren't many so-called professional markets left any more, particularly with the demise of *Twilight Zone Magazine*. I just hope new writers will realize that they can use lots of words in a story, particularly when it's going to be a market other than a small press; they *can* go well past 10 pages, even 15--maybe even 30 or 45 or beyond if the story demands it--and the narrative won't suffer. Above all, new writers shouldn't be afraid of description, or plot and character and suspense development, of actually telling us something, and showing us as well--in other words, *of taking their time with a story until it comes out right*. And that's all I have to say on the matter. I guess that's the end of that lecture. For now.

4. THE OLD GIRLS' NETWORK

I must be painfully frank. I don't think an old girls' network exists. I'm sorry to have to acknowledge that, but there isn't one, at least not like the old boys' network. Now, the old boys' network implies that these guys all buy and sell short stories to each other, which sometimes seems to be the case (see closed anthologies above)--but I'm suggesting something different for an old girls' network, something called support. It's there among the men writers; anyone can see that. However, I don't think among the more established women writers (and we're talking here about "bestsellers") there has been a commitment to other women writers, and that's not because they don't want to help (I hope), but because traditionally women writers have been more isolated and less inclined (reluctant?) to identify themselves with a movement. Previously I have seen individuals who want to help, but as a group ... no. Which is a great shame.

Only recently have there been a large number of women horror writers attending conventions, only lately has there been a growing sense of "sisterhood," if you will, of women writers. Maybe now we'll see a network formed. I hope so. I think we (as writers who have "made it") ought to encourage new writers. After all, it's all too easy to recollect when we were just starting out and didn't know much about anything.

An interesting sidenote to all of this: Two years ago I was at the

World Fantasy Convention in Nashville and I arranged a semi-impromptu breakfast Sunday morning for those contributors to the first *Women of Darkness* anthology who were attending, as well as those women who'd sent me stories which I'd rejected so we could all get to know one another a little better (maybe an old girls' network, right?). There were about twenty women sitting at the tables; every one of them was a writer--at least that is how each would have described herself--and with the exception of two, not a single other husband had accompanied his wife to what she thought was an important conference. And the two husbands who were attending were also writers in their own right and always came to the World Fantasy Convention.

So, folks, does this tell you something? It seems to me that some of the husbands don't think their wives are terribly serious about their writing--even though the women spent a lot of money and effort coming to this convention, and to others as well. Which means that these writers probably aren't getting the support and encouragement that they should. Which just goes back to my hope that we get an old girls' network started--somehow--so that there is the support that the women writers need. I do have an idea about this, but I need to work on it a little, so stay tuned. Just remember the name "The Mary Shelley Society" and where you saw it first mentioned.

5. SPLATTERPUNKS

Are they real? Are they figments of our crazed/oxygen-starved imaginations? Do they dance about in our heads because we are taking too many medications that shouldn't be mixed together, much less with apple spice wine coolers? And how come they're all male and all white? Hmm. I don't know the answer to that one (well, yes, I do, but I have decided to be tactful; I know, what a surprise.), and I'm not even sure I really care. Let's all worry about this in fifty years or so, once we've made sure the earth has survived. I think it's plain dumb to splinter a group (horror writers) that is already looked down upon by writers in other genres, as well as critics, publishers and the general public. Why don't we bitch about someone we all have problems with--like editors, for example--instead of each other?

6. CANNIBALS

Okay. I admit it. Freely. No arm-twisting need apply. I have a particular, if somewhat unfathomable, fondness for cannibal films and literature--and me an almost-vegetarian. I keep insisting to the owner of our video rental store in downtown Newton that he really ought to stock more cannibal films; he always giggles when I bring up this subject. I don't think he believes I'm serious; I am. And just recently my thirteen-year-old stepson told me he was reading *Alive!*, the true account of those college rugby players who were stranded in the Andes by the crash of their plane and forced to eat their dead friends to survive. I can hardly wait until he finishes the book and we can discuss the clinical (and gruesome) details.

Now, I don't think I like cannibals because I'm a ghoul, although I have been accused of that, too. It's just one of those things I like--such as the color red, cinnamon-flavored anything and gila monsters. It just is.

It's true, too, I have a proposal for an anthology of cannibal stories making the rounds of the publishing world. Or at least it was. I got this idea and I started writing people to get their reaction. The response was incredibly enthusiastic. I came up with some witty titles for proposed stories, then set up the proposal for *Square Meals* like a menu, sent the package to my agent, who thought the project was great. And then *Square Meals* (to be "tastefully edited" by me) went to the editors.

They all loved it. The writers loved it. I loved it. My agent loved it.

So, why hasn't it sold? Well, the publishers got squeamish, I was told. So, why didn't they let the editors buy it since the editors wanted it? Who knows why editors' hands get tied? I sure don't. I have to confess that I truly don't understand what the problem is--after all, there is an anthology of zombie stories coming out and no one got grossed out by that, and zombies munch a lot on living people (cannibals usually wait until the people are dead) and are probably not as fastidious as true cannibals, either. I wasn't going for the complete gross-out in this anthology. Really. Honestly. I wanted all sorts of stories--maybe a western, a mystery, fable, science fiction, fantasy, historical, mainstream, horror, romance even (that brings up all sorts of possibilities, doesn't it?), New Age, you name it.

And of course the stories couldn't depend upon the cannibalism being revealed at the end, because everyone would know from the beginning what these tales were about. So that meant the writers would have to work a little harder.

I still think *Square Meals* is a super concept; I hope some publisher out there reads these heartfelt words, and his/her heart melts. I hope that all the writers who read this clamor for my cannibalism anthology. I think its time has come. And meanwhile next time you drop by for dinner, we'll pop a tape in the ol' VCR and watch a movie--say, *Motel Hell* or *Soylent Green* or *Suddenly Last Summer* or *Eating Raoul*--as we eat. You bring the coldcuts. (Or rather, you bring the chips; I'll supply the coldcuts.)



SPWAO/NECON DUO CONVENTIONS

This year, the Small Press Writers and Artists Organization (SPWAO) convention will be held in conjunction with NECON, July 20--23, at Roger Williams College in Bristol, Rhode Island.

Celebrating its 9th year, NECON has a reputation for attracting the crème de la crème in the writing, art, and publishing fields. Under the direction of Bob Plante, Guests of Honor are: Lucius Shepard, Chet Williamson, and Jeff Jones with Stanley S. Wiater as Toastmaster.

Organizing the '89 SPWAO convention is Kathleen Jurgens, assisted by Marthayn Pelegrimas. Activities begin the afternoon of the 20th with a "Haven't I Met You Somewhere Before?" mixer. A tour is tentatively scheduled to visit Providence, where both Poe and Lovecraft lived and wrote. That evening, John Grey and his band, the Tofu Trio, will play for the SPWAO party/award ceremony. A very informal party will follow.

Beginning at 9 am on the 21st are back-to-back panels. Some featured panelists include: Peter Gilmore, Christine Hoard, John Benson, Augie Wiedemann, Jeff Osier, Lisa Lepovetsky, Wayne Allen Sallee, Noel-Anne Brennan, Bob Plante, Jim Kisner, Peggy Nadramia, Joe Cherkas, Judith Holman, Lucy Taylor, G. Wayne Miller, John Maclay, Ree Young, Janet Fox, George St. Louis, H. Andrew Lynch, Roger Gerberding, Marge Simon, Charles Fabrizio, Kitty Pedone, Bob Hadji, Charles Dougherty. George Hatch, Mark Rainey, Barbara (Seidenstein) Abrass, John Rosenman, and John Grey.

SPWAO is extremely proud to announce that our Guests of Honor are: J.N. Williamson, John Skipp, and Craig Spector. J.N.'s novel, BLACK SCHOOL, is due out in February from Dell. You'll also recognize him as editor of MASQUES. Skipp & Spector's latest novel, DEADLINES is a Bantam release. They are also editing an anthology, THE BOOK OF THE DEAD.

NECON officially begins the evening of the 21st and continues through noon on the 23rd. Return the attached form with fees as soon as possible; membership is limited to 250 for each convention. Send your check or money order to: Bob Plante, Box 3251, Darlington Branch, Pawtucket, RI 02861. For additional information, call Bob at 401-728-9861. Contact Kathleen Jurgens, 379 Lincoln Ave., Council Bluffs, IA 51501, phone: 712-322-9125 for SPWAO CON information only. Our art show is by invitation only. Questions regarding the art show or dealer's room should be directed to Bob Plante at address above.

FEES: SPWAO CON <u>ONLY</u> :	Double:	\$81.50 ea.	(2 nights - 4 meals)
	Single:	\$92.50	" "
NECON <u>ONLY</u> :	Double:	\$99.00 ea.	(2 nights - 6 meals)
	Single:	\$108.00	" "
NECON & SPWAO:	Double:	\$148.00 ea.	(3 nights - 9 meals)
	Single:	\$159.00	" "



SPWAO/NECON DUO CONVENTIONS

July 20--23, 1989

Roger Williams College, Bristol, Rhode Island

REGISTRATION FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____
 (street no.) (city) (state) (zip)

Phone: (_____) - _____ Number attending _____ Amount enclosed \$ _____

Lunch is not included on the 20th. Indicate if you wish to purchase lunch in the cafeteria that day: YES ___ NO ___

Are you interested in visiting Providence? (optional fee) YES ___ NO ___

Then ... well, of course, we heard about the baby in Oklahoma City.
Just the idea of a baby with no finger- and footprints was pretty freaky, to say the least.
But when we heard more of the details, what was at first "interesting" or "weird" became really scary.

EVERY MOTHER'S SON

RICK HAUTALA

I was there at the beginning--or, at least, the beginning of whatever the hell happened at the hospital where I work. What happened there was happening--is *still* happening--all around the country and the world. I even heard a report of several instances in Russia, but naturally, they were denied. The first physical hint of it was when that baby was born in a hospital in Oklahoma City. The baby, a boy, entered the world with everything just the way it was supposed to be except for one small detail: he didn't have any fingerprints or footprints.

When it *really* began ... who can say? If you listen to the pop-philosophers on the television talk show circuit, it started the day--the *instant* the scales shifted.

Shifted from what to what ... well, just hang on a minute or two and I'll tell you. First, I want to tell you a bit about myself. Not that it will really matter to you, but ... well, if something *does* happen later, I want some kind of record.

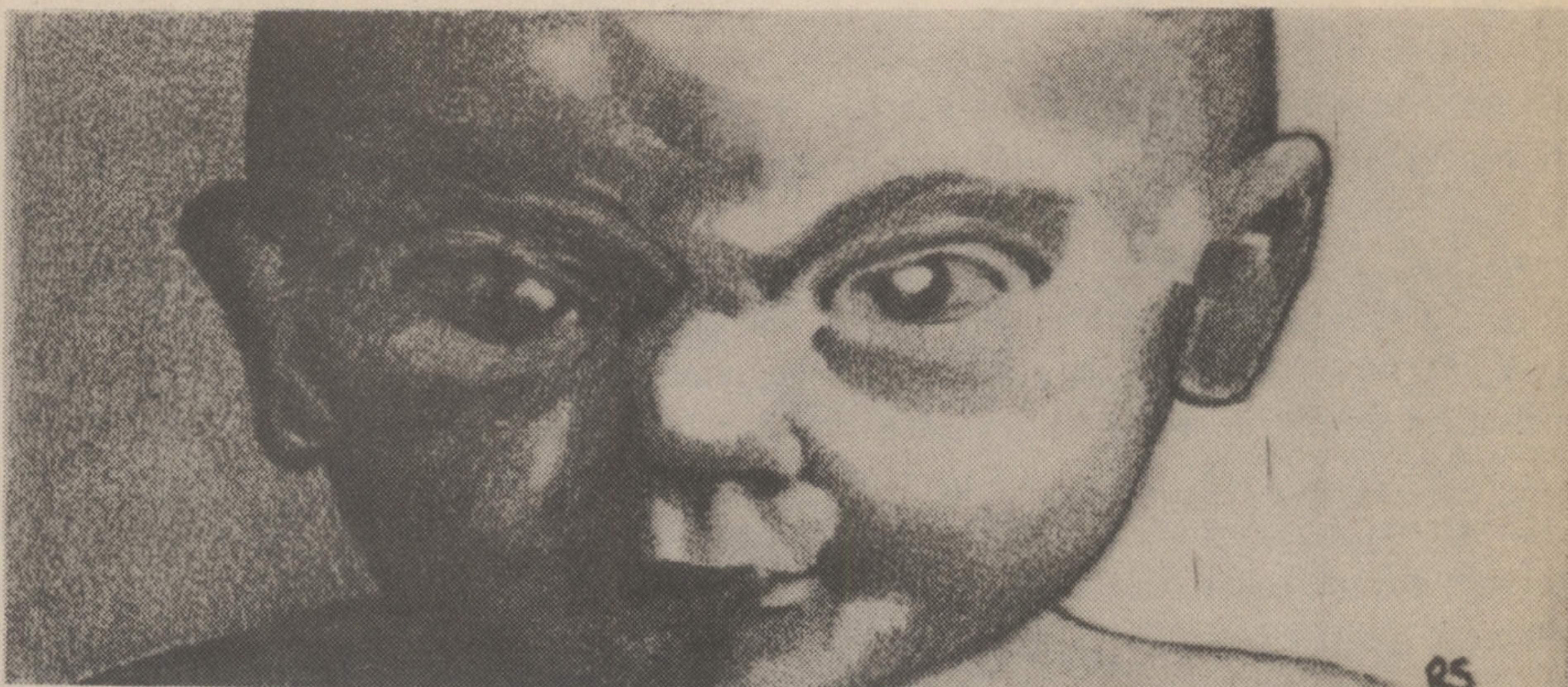
My name is Judy Morrow, and I'm a nurse at Southern Maine Osteo., in Portland, Maine. I got my nursing degree from B.U. Medical School nine years ago, in 1985. I guess wanting to get away from "big city" pressures, I honestly thought moving to Maine was the key to my future happiness ... and it was, for awhile.

The only opening I found was working the second shift in the o.b. at Osteo., and since I've always liked babies--and thought I'd never be able to have my own--I didn't mind ushering the little sweethearts into the world. Of course, most parents-to-be have innumerable fears, both rational and irrational, but the vast majority of cases are normal ... and so are the results of anywhere from two to twenty-two hours of intensive labor.

... Mostly.

I suppose it's time to mention Doctor Thomas Jacobs. He was one of the residents--*the* resident, actually--who set most of the nurses' hearts aflutter whenever he was around. "Aflutter?" What a stupid word, but that's the best I can do. The night I met him, after I'd been on duty only three nights, my heart literally skipped several beats, and I was as tongue-tied as a junior high school girl.

Look, I was young, but I was a "city girl."



I'd been around and I knew the score. Damn! I wish I didn't keep resorting to these cliches, but--really--that's how I felt. I *said* I was young!

Anyway, at first, Dr. Jacobs--Tom--and I would just sit together now and then in the staff room (with that cute little sign: BEWARE OF STAFF INFECTIONS!) and shoot the breeze. I knew he was married; hell, he wore the gold band, and I saw it. He told me he hadn't started med. school until several years after college, with a stint as a medic in Viet Nam in between, so he was quite a bit older than I was--what, almost twelve years older. But, like I said, I was a city girl, and I thought that more or less evened us up.

So what started out as just a doctor and a nurse chatting over a cup of coffee turned a bit more serious--a *lot* more serious after a while. Long hours, working double shifts--the usual pressures of the job, especially in the rare instances when "complication" occurred--all of that more of less brought us together, and after a while--hell, I won't mince words here--we started sleeping together. Never at work. (Although, now and then, an empty bed in an unoccupied room tempted *me*, at least.) Just a couple of times at my apartment ... and once out in the backseat of my car in the parking lot. I teased him a lot about *that*, telling him I was the "kid," and he should know better. And we laughed a lot ... I remember that.

Then ... well, of course, we heard about

the baby in Oklahoma City. Just the idea of a baby with no finger- and footprints was pretty freaky, to say the least. But when we heard more of the details, what was at first "interesting" or "weird" became really scary. Rumors travel fast in the medical field, and we started hearing about how that baby in Oklahoma City was acting ... different.

I know it sounds like something out of a cheap, paperback horror novel, but word got around that the baby supposedly "looked" dead. Its eyes, so the rumor mill said, looking like a dead person's eyes. Oh, it was alive all right; make no mistake. It ate, slept, cried--did all the basic functions of a human baby, but we heard that the baby looked like he had no soul ... like he was *empty*. The husk of a human being, but not the contents.

Then reports started coming in from all around the country, and soon--within weeks--we heard of nearly fifty cases of babies being born like that: no fingerprints, no footprints ... no *soul*!

Six weeks after the baby was born in Oklahoma City, we had one born in Portland; and believe me, all the grist from the rumor mill didn't prepare me that baby. It was *cold*!

Now backstepping a bit here, I don't intend to analyze what brought me and Tom together--chemistry? work pressures? fate? the "problems" he was having with Becky, his wife? All of those ... some ... none. Who cares? I *do* know what broke us up, though; it was when Tom found out that--*surprise*--after three years of trying, Becky was preg-

nant. He dropped me like a bad habit, as they say. You also might say I was crushed, but hey! Be realistic, I kept telling myself--you don't have an affair with a married man and *really* expect him to dump it all--lay his marriage, his life, his career on the line for ... for what, truthfully, was just a couple of nights of fun.

Because there's this thing about life I've noticed--you *always* have to pay for your fun.

Like I said earlier, parents to be have all sorts of worries. Most of them, I know from experience, are groundless. But with what was happening lately, and new reports of more instances being flashed just about every day ... well, Tom got pretty uptight. That's putting it mildly. He was in a state of near constant terror that *his* baby would be born with no fingerprints.

The media didn't help any. It rarely does. They'd picked up the stories and were running them everywhere. The last big scare like that that I can remember was the big panic about AIDS a while ago. TV talkshows and newspapers at the grocery checkout counter were the worst--as they always are. They started in with explanations ranging from Soviet plots (remember fluoride?) or pre-invasion tactics of Martians to astrology or reincarnation.

It was the reincarnation angle than got Tom, and after listening to him, I have to admit, it kinda got to me, too. We had stopped sleeping together, but we were still close, and many a slow night in the staff room, we'd talk ... and talk ...

Tom became convinced that the reincarnation angle was the right one. That's what I meant at the start about the "scales tipping." The basic idea was that, with all the improvements in medicine, with life expectancy being extended well into the eighties and nineties, the universe was running out of souls. Babies, so the theory went, were still being born as a part of nature, but there were too few souls to put into the bodies. "Nobody in the body," as one headline blared. Fingerprints were like the soul's identification card number. There was no way to stop babies from being born, so the cosmos or whatever just kept churning them out, but it had to leave out the "contents."

Does that make sense? Well, to me as a nurse, trained in science, of course it doesn't. But if you read and believe the sleazoid newspapers it might. No worse, anyway, than Amazonian Frog Boys or a B-52 being found in a crater on the moon. What amazed me was that Tom, an educated medical man, would embrace such a cockamamie idea. And I'll be damned it, after spending several nights talking about it with him, he didn't almost have *me* convinced, too.

But Tom wrapped himself around that

idea like Ahab, embracing Moby Dick before he goes under. Did I surprise you with that literary allusion? Tom grasped that idea and took it to heart so much so that ... well, this is what finally happened.

Tom got in touch with a supposed expert on this theory, and after much admittedly hazy philosophical discussion, became convinced that the "problem" occurred at birth. Never mind that the embryo's fingerprints are formed much earlier in development. The "soul," so Tom was told, didn't actually enter the baby until the moment of birth--not at the moment of conception. (I know that idea doesn't sit well with Right-to-Lifers, but hey, you believe what you want to believe.)

Becky carried the baby well. Tom told me--often enough to keep the pangs of jealousy tingling--that she was "textbook perfect."

"Great! Good for her!" I'd say, but beneath it, I knew he was scared ... terrified to the core that when Becky delivered, the baby--*his* baby--wouldn't have any fingerprints! No footprints! No *soul*!

I didn't know what he planned to do about it. If I had, of course I would have tried to stop him. He planned it with all the skill and finesse of a murderer; and actually that's what he was--except he was a self-murderer.

He was in o.b. the night Becky went into labor, and textbook perfect or not, she--like any woman--went through some things that night that she had *never* expected. The labor was intense and basically unproductive. It stretched through the night, through the next morning, and on into the afternoon.

Tom, textbook perfect husband and father-to-be, stayed by her side the whole time, doing what he could. But, truth to tell, I think he might have known too much--he was *much* too close to the situation to be effective as a doctor. 'Round about six o'clock that evening, he suggested giving Becky a squirt of Petosin, to see if they could get the labor going. Becky was an exhausted, sweating wreck by this time. There's nothing like childbirth to strip you to the core of your humanity.

Tom gave his wife the shot, and it seemed to work some. Nobody--at least at the time--saw what Tom did with the empty hypo. He must have pocketed it then. Anyway, when Becky's labor finally started kicking in, once she entered transition, Tom backed away, asking the intern there to take over for him. He excused himself because of lack of sleep.

Becky was--finally--fully dilated, and the stand-in doctor told her she could start pushing. Face infused with blood, beet-purple, the only sounds in the delivery room were her heavy breathing and the steady *beep-beep* of the fetal monitor. As I remember it now,

there suddenly were two new sounds: the sudden, mewling cry of a baby, and the soft *thump* of a body hitting the floor.

I had been there for the whole delivery; I wanted to be there, and not just out of some vindictive desire to see the woman Tom wouldn't dump for me reduced to a sweating, screaming mess. I wanted to be there, if nothing else than to help Tom see it through--I still felt something for him. And hell, yes, I'll admit it, I *did* want to see if the baby had fingerprints!

When I heard the soft *thump*, I turned and saw Tom sliding slowly to the floor. I thought at first that he had fainted, but--even with the quantity of blood involved with a delivery--I was stunned to see a thin ribbon of blood lacing down his arm and dripping off his cuff.

Even before I reached him, I knew he was dead ... and I knew *why* he had done it. With the empty hypodermic needle, he had injected a bubble of air into his vein; he knew right where to hit, and it didn't take long for the embolism to kill him. I'm convinced he killed himself at the moment his daughter was born so there *would* be a soul available for her.

Crazy, huh?

But who's to say it didn't work? Elizabeth Marie Jacobs was born with a full complement of fingerprints and footprints.

Of course, the shock of a suicide--a *doctor's* suicide--in the delivery room put the entire hospital into an uproar that lasted weeks--months! It didn't do much for Becky Jacobs' mental health, either; but she, at least, had baby Elizabeth--a part of Tom--for herself. In time, I knew that would help her get over it.

The next day, Mark Dufresne, one of the orderlies, and I were looking at baby Elizabeth through the nursery window. I was on some pretty heavy medication at the time in order to help me deal with the shock. I had also resigned that morning although I didn't have another job and couldn't hold onto my apartment for long without one. I remember Mark commenting that Elizabeth had her father's eyes.

I remember saying to him, "More than you realize ..."

I didn't tell him--at least I don't *think* I told him or anyone else until now--that just three weeks before Becky delivered, Tom and I *had* made use of one of those empty beds during a slow night. For old time's sake, he had joked with me, and I hadn't minded.

I mind now, though. I'm wondering if, when *our* baby is born, there will be another soul available.

ABIDING DEPTHS

BILLIE SUE MOSIMAN

He had vomited worms. Oh yes. And worse. Rats slimy with stomach juices one time. But mostly worms white and blind as wood grubs. Standing upright at the kitchen sink staring down into the rubber cover of the growling garbage disposal, he'd watched the flapping about of each monster in turn as it swirled through rushing waters down a black hole.

He fully expected to do something about this affliction given the world and time enough. Given the blade and the courage to complete the work.

The muck had run amok. Oh yes. He watched the news, the congressional hearings, the campaigns by the frivolous and phony leaders of men. He had read all the books about dirty works and dirtier deeds.

The planet was a cesspool. A corrupt stomach sewer rife with worms and rats ripe for disposal.

During the six o'clock news there came a knocking at his door. Mad interruption! Would they never leave him alone to devise a plan!

"I thought you'd never open the door," she said.

He squinted at her in the shadowed portico, sure she must have mistaken him for someone else. "I beg your pardon?"

She pushed him aside and took the living room by storm. She snatched the remote control for the television and hit the mute button, turned on her heel with a glowering look. "Well? Have you sold anything yet?"

Now he recognized this harpy. Oh yes. How could he have forgotten so easily the misery of her long acquaintance? "Mother, please don't start that again."

"You've gone to Yale. You've won prizes for your plays off Broadway. And no one will hire you at the Hollywood studios? When will you face the music and realize they don't want real playwrights out here? When will you cease chasing this unrealistic dream?"

He sagged onto the sofa, covered his eyes with one trembling hand. He gagged, feared he might have to rush to the sink right in front of her, let her see the horror lurking deep inside him. He swallowed the beastly thing down hoping it would slumber. "They'll like my next script, wait and see."

She whipped around looking at his apartment. All her movements were snakelike, a

cobra's strike. She had made him nervous as a child. And still did.

"You need a maid. I'll send over mine this afternoon. You can't go on living like this." She sniffed, walked to the draperies behind the television set and pulled them apart. "Even the swimming pool has rust rings and who-knows-what floating in it."

"Don't send the maid," he said, thinking of the small Hispanic woman in his mother's employ and how when she bent over to retrieve something, he always wanted to pound nails into her broad behind, tie her to stakes set in hard ground and dust her bulging eyes with insecticide. Yet she was not the enemy. She was a victim much as he. Guilt produced by his dreadful fantasies made him hate her all the more. Why must she be so fat? So grubby, like a red-brown earthworm wriggling maniacally through pockets of darkness.

"I *will* send the maid. And you'd better let her in. If she reports to me that you pretended not to be at home, I will personally bring a cleaning crew over here tomorrow and have them throw out all your papers."

Threats! This silk-suited and gold-encrusted woman who happened to be his mother knew all the right buttons to push. His papers! Papers she called them when they were his work, his lifeblood, his very brain matter. If anyone ever got rid of them, he would have to kill them. That was all there was to it. He had to take a stand somewhere. True none of the pages littering the sofa, the floor, the coffee table, the desk, meant anything any longer. He was sick and dying. He would never finish the great screenplay of his life now, not with worms and rats slipping up his throat.

He reached for the remote control where she had laid it on the end table. He brought the flickering images to life, sound filling the room. Fire, they said. A nightclub in L.A. set fire deliberately during a punk rock concert. Dozens dead. Piled at the blocked exit door, one atop the other like hot dogs taken from the grill and stacked on a plate.

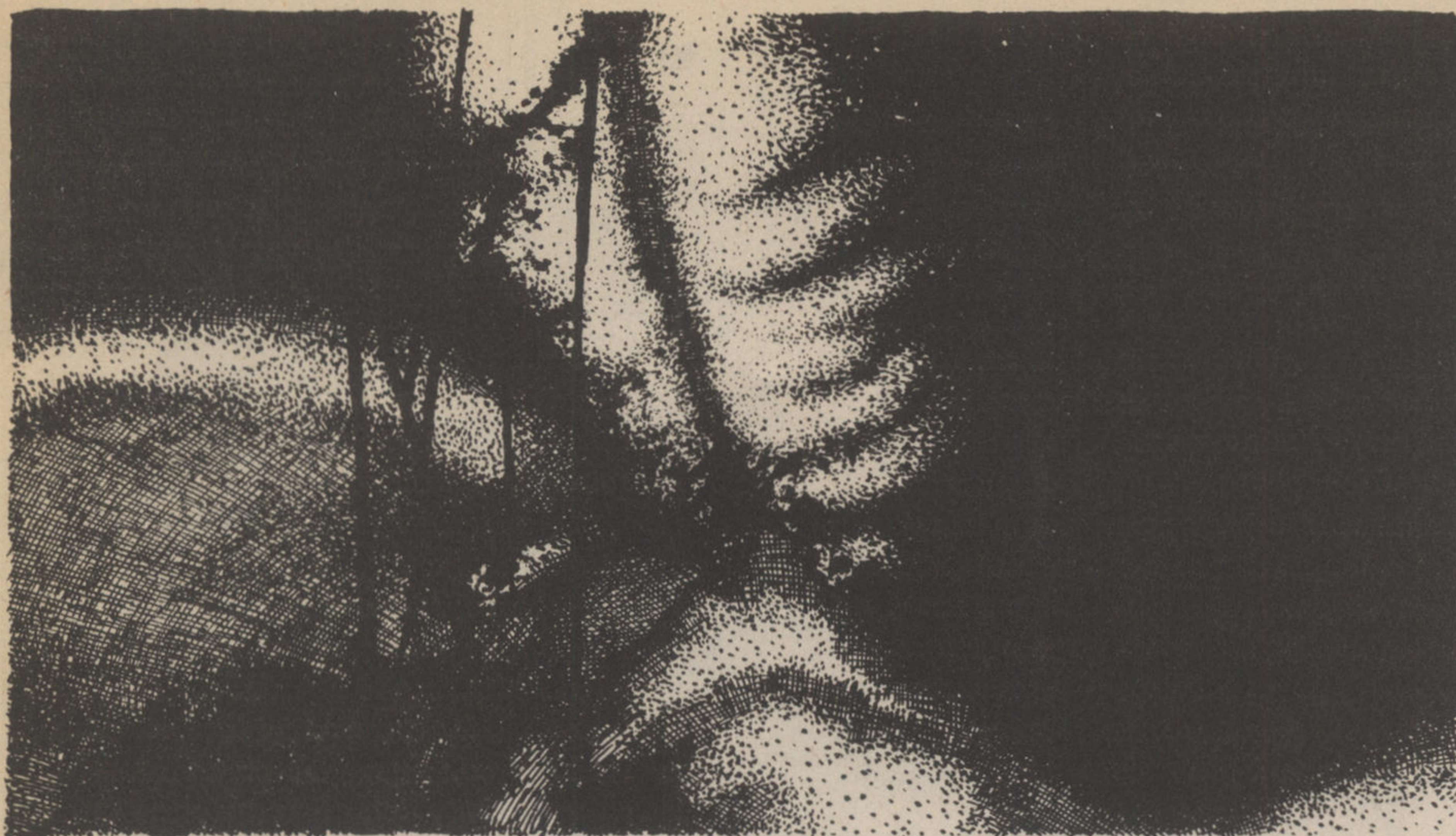
"Turn that thing down," she said, coming toward him. "I don't want to hear it."

"People are dead," he intoned, tapping the down volume twice.

"Yes, I know. People die. It's terrible, but it makes you morose. Don't watch the news."

He gagged,
feared he might
have to rush
to the sink
right in front of her,
let her see
the horror lurking
deep inside him.
He swallowed
the beastly thing
down
hoping it would
slumber.





"An earthquake's expected soon here in California."

She flitted past him to grab an empty saucer, a cup. "Stop it."

"The European nations are meeting secretly in preparation for creating a United States of Europe in 1992."

"I don't care," she said from the kitchen.

"Don't look in the sink," he shouted.

"Why not?"

She was looking, he knew that. Had he ground them all up, every snaggly piece? Would she notice the blood? More importantly, would she notice the knife honed to a bright silver hue? It awaited him.

"Smells bad in here," she said, returning to the living room. "You never clean the place. How can you write anything worthwhile in this mess?"

He almost asked if she had seen the giant worm turning, rolling in his gut just below his shirt, but decided against it. She saw nothing but what she wanted to see. Certainly she did not see the state of the world as he saw it. She ignored the news. She was a trivial, loose-brained woman.

"I'm going now," she said. "I can tell you're more interested in the news than in me. Remember to let Juanita in when she rings."

He clutched at his gut as he heard the front door slam. Who had that been? What was a mother anyway? What were they good for in the end?

Just before the orange ball of the sun set behind the bougainvillea riddled back wall of the apartment complex, he heard the doorbell chime. He muted the TV. Rolled onto his stomach on the floor where he had been struck down with pains for hours. He had hurt so badly he could not switch channels and was forced to lie bathed in sweat, listening to the frantic idiocy of one sitcom after

another. The doorbell chimed. Chimed. He waited, breathless.

Soon she went away. Tomorrow when a cleaning crew arrived he would be long gone. There would be nothing for them to clean except the sink. The sink might be clogged and overrun by then with crawly infectious things.

The pain finally subsided enough that he could lurch to the kitchen for the knife. He pried it from the wood block where he had stuck it, carried it back with him to the sofa, slipped it between the cushions, caressed the handle idly. A plan. He needed one.

If the affliction let him, he might take down a few before he died. They were out on the streets. The enemy were the people -- the pale, apathetic, glassy-eyed masses who swarmed after dark down the canyon streets like legged worms, writhing in agony against the Santa Ana winds. They had caused all this. They had let the world come to this impasse. They had relinquished control to a favored few, the monied, the powerful. It was because of them he had written his plays, won his awards, tried to break through to Hollywood producers who could bring his message to fruition. But he was blocked. Hampered. Shut out, his days numbered. Conspiracies were afoot as surely as the gut-wrenching sickness that had overtaken him.

The truth was he had been poisoned by those he hoped to bring down. That was the only thing that could have happened. Word had leaked, he suspected, from one coast to the other, from California to Washington, D.C. They had sent out an emissary of death and given him something ... new! Something ... radical. A just end. It had to be biological in nature to make those horrid things grow in his belly until he was forced to regurgitate into the sink. Who would believe? Who would ever help him now?

Above the roar of the television he heard glass shattering. He came erect, knees weak, hands shaking against his thighs. The sound had come from the bedroom. The one window in there fronted the sidewalk where sleazy enemies lounged like hungry lizards after sunset. He had watched them when he could not sleep, their elongated shadows dancing macabre against the shades. Now they were invading, like roaches. Why was he surprised?

A shadow embraced the doorway between bedroom and living room. In the flickering TV light the image wavered like a good, honest ghost. Then it stepped forward, laughing.

"Man, you look shitty!"

"Wha ... what do you want?"

The apparition took solid form the nearer it approached him. It was not a ghost, but a tall youth clad in torn jeans, ripped tee-shirt, black motorcycle boots. The face leered forward as the man stuck his neck out toward his host. "You got any money? What I want is money."

"I don't have much money. What I have is in my wallet in the bedroom. On the dresser. Take it."

The youth started back, halted. "You got a gun, man? I didn't know you was home, you know? I seen that fat chick ring the bell and go off. You ain't got no gun, do you?"

The knife flashed silver sparks in his thoughts. At least it was hidden from prying eyes between the sofa cushions. He might as well begin the death dealing now, here, with the slime who wanted his money. He realized the man was waiting. He shook his head. "No gun."

The youth, satisfied, disappeared into the darkened bedroom. He returned with the wallet open in his hands. He pulled out the bills. "Turn on a lamp. Shit, how can you see anything in here?" He walked nearer the TV and leaning down, counted the cash aloud. "Ten, thirty, thirty-five." He glanced up. "This it? I mean, man, is this the whole take? What kinda shit is this, thirty-five lousy bucks? I saw that old bag come in here today. She must've been worth bundles. Rings on that lady's hands weighed a ton. She don't give you nothing?"

Sitting on the sofa near the knife, he said, "That was my mother. She believes in letting me rot. That's all I have."

"Jesus, what a freaking haul, thirty-five bucks. You got anything else? Turn on the light!" He rushed toward the end table and snapped the light switch. He glared down at his captive. His face was smooth, pretty, a baby face. It was only in the eyes that fury and despair burned like twin candles lit from within a damp, cobwebbed dungeon. "What you do, man? You work or what?"

"I've been trying to write scripts. For movies."

The youth laughed, threw the empty wallet into his lap. "Another Hollyweird Hopeful. You guys make me puke."

The mention of vomit brought acrid wind up the throat and something wiggled down past the esophagus. It made him grimace and lean over his knees. Perspiration broke out on his forehead. He gagged, put one hand over his mouth, held back the urge to let the worm or the rat, whichever one it might be this time, up and out.

"Hey, I said you make *me* puke. What's wrong with you anyhow? You sick? I don't wanna catch nothing so you tell me if you got that AIDS shit or something. I don't want it! I keep my ass clean, man, no matter what the cost!"

Bringing the reflex under control he sat back, shut his eyes. "I don't have AIDS," he said. "I have something worse."

"Ain't nothing worse under the sun, what you talking."

"Believe me, there's something worse. And I've got it."

The youth backed off. He stuffed the three bills into his right front jeans' pocket. "I'd kill myself, I got sick as you look. Even dogs, man, they know what to do they get bad sick. Now gimme your watch and that ring on your pinkie finger. Betcha yo mama gave 'em to you." He snickered. The dialect might have been mannered. The boy could be playing a role. A lot of them did that these days.

He unbuckled the watch, slipped off the Yale ring. Handed them over. "There was a fire today," he said levelly. "It killed a lot of people."

"What do I care? I care for shit." He stuffed the jewelry into the other front pocket and looked around the apartment. "Where's your VCR? Where's your camera, your stereo?"

"I don't have one. All I have is a typewriter."

The boy laughed again and kicked at sheets of typing paper on the carpet. "Yeah, I see you got a typewriter. What I want a typewriter for? Ain't worth the metal goes to make it up." He stooped and lifted a paper. There was a pause while he read. "Total crap. No wonder you ain't doing so good."

The cramps re-occurred, but weren't as bad as they had been. He massaged his belly with one hand, felt down the side of the cushions with the other, eyes on the intruder, wondering if he had ever noticed the landslide of filth he moved in, the drugs, the crime, the vacant worminess of everything earthly.

From the kitchen where the youth had wandered, a light flashed and illuminated the

tiny hallway. He heard the refrigerator door open and close. Cabinet doors banging. "Hey, man, you don't even have any cookies or ice cream or *anything* worth eating. You must live on air. I almost feel sorry for you."

That was it, the limit. Streetsmart thug feeling sorry for him. He should feel sorry for himself, for South African blacks, for cloned fetuses, for calves standing in their own excretions, anemic and waiting for the slaughter and the table. He had no right to feel worry for a man stripped of all illusion, a new man with sensibility.

The knife handle felt warm to his palm. He stood straight and strong for the first time in days. He walked toward the kitchen, the blade behind his left thigh, hidden from view.

Standing at the sink drinking from a quart carton of chocolate milk, the youth heard his advance and turned in time to see the blade rise and steady itself, frozen in space, barely disturbing molecules of air. He dropped the carton. Black milk ran over the tops of his scuffed boots. He shrieked. "Wait a minute, now. That's a very dumb move, man. You don't want to cut nobody for thirty-five bucks, do you? I'll give it back." His hand went to the pocket.

The worm turned. And turned again. He felt it gather itself into a ball then stretch out all rubbery and segmented as it began its tremulous climb from gut to mouth. He choked. His face mottled then blued. He waved the knife back and forth at the intruder, signaling him away from the sink. The boy edged aside, eyes wide and staring.

"Jesus, what's happening?" he asked of the walls, the tile floor, the ceiling. "What the hell's happening!"

He hung over the sink, his eyes tearing, his diaphragm contracting horribly from the thing working its way out of his body. He had the knife tightly grasped, pressed against the counter. Its sparkle caught his attention, drew him into its depths as into a polished mirror. He heard the boy at his side screaming, felt him pounding his back as if to loosen a bit of lodged food. He thought of all the measures taken over the centuries of time to do away with people like him, people who knew the score, who were determined to right the scales of justice.

And still the worm drove forward wave after wave expanding muscle and bone and cartilage as it slithered toward the waiting stainless steel basin. His heart grunted and shook with the effort. His lungs shrunk in on themselves, seeking oxygen.

There was nothing to do, but end it. He had been out-smarted and out-maneuvered. The machine did not allow for cogs. Disruptions were not countenanced. They were sealing off his voice, forever and ever. The thing growing in him was larger than he, greater

than sin, darker than godless space. They had won. The drums were banging slowly, the coffin lifted, the grave yawning. He was a defeated man and had not really known it until now.

The blade glittered, beckoning with promise of sweet release. It might be a lie. Everything in his life that led up to this moment had been a lie, but it was all he had left.

He cranked his arm forward. He twisted his wrist. He turned his vulnerable neck toward the blade. His mouth was open in silent surrender. His blood rushed scarlet over his fist and warmed the joints of his fingers.

And still the boy at his side screamed, jumping up and down, grappling with his arm. He was calling on God, knowing full well there was no entity who might change events.

He opened his hand and heard the knife clatter to the metal sink. He hung his head. Done. Finis. The thing would have to find its own way out this time with no help from him. He would not vomit it into existence ever again.

He slid down to the floor, the boy falling to his knees with him, blood mingling with milk. Though his vision dimmed, he saw the dark creep closer until it enfolded him in its tranquillity.

"Damn you," the youth said between gasps and cries. "Damn you," he said again and then again in hysteria until silenced by the sight of a monstrous blind worm thicker than a man's arm. It slipped through the gurgling neck wound and lay palpitating in all its white, glistening glory, in all its bloody victory beside the cooling body of one more disenchanted man.

Oh yes.



*It was one of his wife's clocks.
As long as her clocks were here, she was too, in a way.
All her life, Edith had collected clocks.*

CLOCKS

DARRELL SCHWEITZER

He returned to the house again on an evening in November. He had been away a year, but nothing had changed. The house stood pale and dark among the trees as the twilight deepened, as the walls, trees, ground and sky all faded into that particular autumn grey which is almost blue. He paused in the cold air, listening to the rain hiss faintly on the fallen leaves, wishing he could remain there forever, that time would cease its motion and this moment would never pass.

But, inevitably, as he did every year, he made his way along the leaf-covered path to the front porch. Again he stood procrastinating, fumbling with his keys until his fingers, by themselves, found the key he needed and his hand had turned it in the lock before he was even aware. Then he stepped into the dark house, the door sweeping aside a year's worth of junk mail he had never been able to cancel.

Behind him, the rain whispered, and when he closed the door there was another sound, a faint ticking. He stooped to gather the junk mail into a basket, and noticed the clock on the mail stand, a few inches from his face. It was a cheap, plastic thing, decorated with figures of shepherd girls, like characters out of *Heidi*.

It was one of his wife's clocks. As long as her clocks were here, she was too, in a way. All her life, Edith had collected clocks.

He wound it, and it seemed to tick louder. Then he stood up and wound a row of little golden alarm clocks that stood along the top of a bookcase to his left. They had stopped, and now they added to the faint, rhythmical ticking. He didn't set the time on any of them. That wasn't the point.

It was only after he had completed this task that he turned on the lights, surveyed the hallway, and stepped to his right, into the living-room. The ticking followed him, until it was lost in the deeper sound of the grandfather clock that waited in the shadows by the fireplace. He remembered how they had found that grandfather clock in an antique shop once, long, long ago, how Edith had raved over it, begging her to buy it in her joking-but-earnest way, until he relented (even though they *couldn't* afford it). There had been weekends spent polishing, repairing, finishing. In the end, when they were ready,

when the thing stood dark and gleaming in the living room, it had been like a birth. Or that was how he remembered it now.

He flicked on one small light, and saw in the semi-darkness another clock humped on the mantelpiece. There was a story about that one, too, and as he wound the clock, once more the memory came to him.

Then he sat down by the empty fireplace, exhausted and sad. He put his feet up on a little stool and stared into the fireplace for a while, listening to the clocks. The house was stirring, the soft tick-tick-ticking like the breathing of a great beast turning in its sleep.

He dozed off, and when he awoke it was dark outside. He heard sounds from the kitchen, dishes touching gently, a cabinet door closing, but he remained where he was, listening to those sounds and to the clocks. The grandfather clock chimed softly.

A few minutes later he did get up, his joints aching. He realized that he was still wearing his hat and coat. He left them on the chair and walked through a narrow hall, past the dark basement stairway, into the kitchen.

There was a steaming cup of tea on the counter by the sink, and two slices of warm

toast on a plate, both buttered, one with jam, one without, the way she had always fixed them for him when he worked late at night. He turned and stretched to wind the clock on top of the spice cabinet. It was a smiling metal Buddha with the clock face in its belly, a ridiculous thing (again, full of memories), but she had put it there once, long, long ago, and there it remained, gazing down at him serenely as he ate his toast and drank his tea.

He was almost crying then, but he held back his tears as he went from room to room, winding clocks, until their sound was like that of a million tiny birds outside the windows, gently, very patiently pecking to get in.

Upstairs, a door closed.

In the library he found a brush with long, blonde hairs in it, discarded on a desktop.

He used a key to wind an intricately carved wooden castle of a clock, where armored knights appeared on the battlements at the ringing of every hour.

The ticking was still gentle, but more insistent, unyielding, like the sound of surf on a quiet night.

When he had made a circuit of the first floor, he came to the front door again, but



turned away from it and slowly climbed the front stairs. He was sobbing by then. The sounds from behind him seemed to rise, to propel him up the stairs.

He found his wife's furry slippers at the top, neatly together by the bathroom door where she often left them. He wept, and leaned his head against the wall, pounding softly with his fist.

More than anything else, he wanted just to leave, but then he heard the singing from behind the bedroom door, and he knew that, of course, he could not go away. The song was one he had taught Edith before they were married, long, long ago.

He entered the bedroom and she was there, and she was young and beautiful. She helped him undress and pulled him into the bed, whispering softly as she did, then silent, and for a while he was completely happy, suspended in a single moment of time.

A clock ticked on the nightstand.

When he awoke it was morning and she was gone. The empty half of the bed was cold, the covers thrown back. He wept again, bitterly, deeply, cursing himself for having continued the cruel, miraculous farce, for torturing himself one more time, for doing this, somehow, to her, once again. He held up his hands before his face, and he saw how wrinkled the backs of them were, how age-spotted. He touched the top of his head, run-

ning his fingers through his thinning hair.

She had still been twenty-six and beautiful. She would always be twenty-six and beautiful.

And the memories came flooding back with horrible vividness, until he was living them again: the rainy night, the screeching tires, the car on its side by the road's edge, Edith in his arms while one set of headlights after another flared by and nobody stopped for what seemed like hours.

He turned over in the bed and pressed his face into the pillow, crying like a small child, and hoping, absurdly, that he would eventually run out of tears.

He tried to tell himself that he wouldn't come again next year, that this would finally cease, but he knew better. When he got up to dress and found a note stuck onto the telephone by the bed, it was only a confirmation.

The note said: I LOVE YOU. -- EDITH.

He was still crying, but softly, as he went down the front stairs, around and into the kitchen, and from there down the dark, creaking stairway into the basement. At the bottom he stood once more, wishing he could stand there motionless forever, that he didn't have to go forward, but, again, he knew better. He flicked on the lights, revealing the thousands upon thousands of clocks that

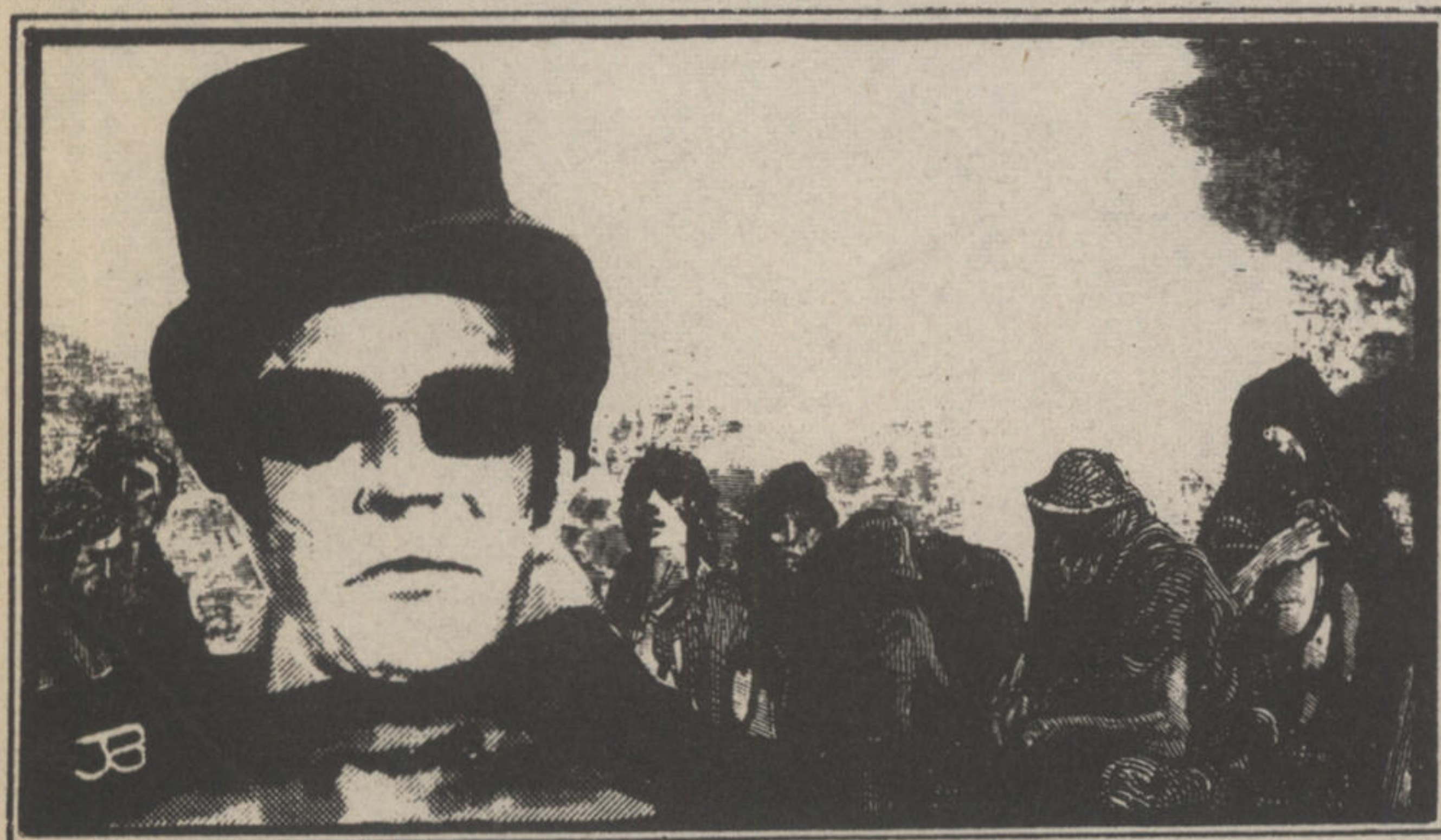
filled the basement, crowded on shelves, standing against the walls, spread across the floor, and holding in their midst by a fantastic spiderweb of wires a closed coffin that seemed to float a few inches above the rug. It was as if the clocks had grown there, proliferating. He had long since give up wondering if there were more of them now than there had once been.

His mind could supply no explanation, but he knew that somehow, if even one clock in the whole house remained running -- and somehow, in defiance of all reason, one or more would always keep running for a whole year, awaiting his return -- on this one night in November time would stop, or perhaps slide backwards, and Edith would be as she had been the night before her death, loving him, never aware of any future, forever young while he continued to age. He didn't know if it was real or not. There no longer seemed to be such things as real and unreal.

But he could never, never bring himself to put an end to it, and he wept as he made his way gingerly among the clocks, winding each one. Their voices grew louder and louder, resonating in the cramped basement, while he wept and trembled and worked with furious, desperate care, and in the end the sound of them was like screaming.



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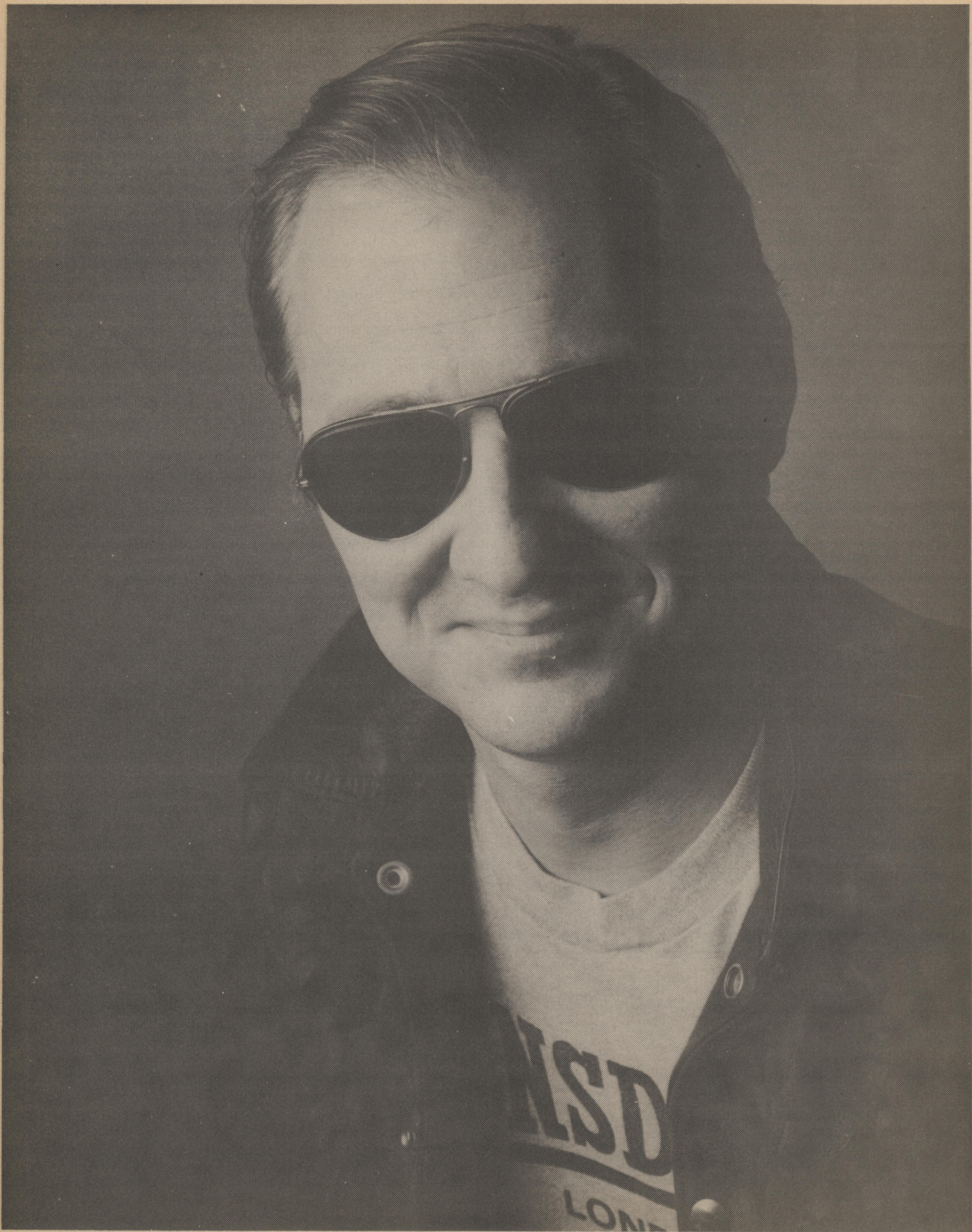


Photo credit: Shelly Stoll

"My teachers were Harlan Ellison, Ursula Le Guin, Avram Davidson, Terry Carr, Robert Silverberg, and Vonda MacIntyre. Ellison sent one of my first stories to the Clarion anthology and they published it in an NAL book, *Clarion III* -- my first professional sale. Since then I've mostly lived off writing." Charles de Lint profiles ...

JOHN SHIRLEY: ALIEN VIEWPOINTS

Heatseeker.

No, we're not talking about some new Star Wars missile or other futuristic weaponry, but about the new *Scream/Press* collection of the short fiction of John Shirley.

Oh, yeah. That sf guy.

No, again. Or at least, not entirely. Though Shirley has written sf, his is a voice that seeks a broader canvass than just science fiction.

Like any artist concerned primarily with communication, Shirley has ruffled a few feathers with both his very vocal stance on what constitutes a worthwhile artistic endeavor, as well as the sheer power and ideas of his prose. He doesn't deal in lightweight concerns. And if much of his fiction takes place in our near future, that doesn't lessen the horror of which he's warning us. For again, like the best imaginative fiction, the primary relevance of his work is rooted in the present day.

Take "The Gunshot," in which a TV producer is driven a little crazy by cinematic visions of his own death. We start off being very sure as to where reality begins and lays off. But as the story progresses, the boundaries blur, until we realize that nothing is necessarily what we've all agreed it to be.

Or "Triggering," in which an agent from the Federal Department of Transmigratology is sent out to investigate a forty-one-year-old trapped in a four-year-old boy's body. The surface story, dynamic though the plot line is, still has to take a back seat to the underlying concept of what *causes* the eventual all-too-real outcome -- the ghosts and baggage that we all carry around with us.

Or how about "I Live In Elizabeth," in which a young man ends up sharing his young lover's body with her when his own dies. Shirley does a fascinating job of both building up the story and realistically extrapolating exactly what it would be like.

Or the intriguing "Wolves of the Plateau," a quintessentially-cyberpunk story, in which a group of prisoners combine their miniature thought-linked computers to form a group mind for their escape attempt, a linkage that brings them close to the Plateau, an enormous "cyberspace" grid made up of the whole planet's computer systems.

He specializes in alien points-of-view--the girl in "What Cindy Saw," the professor in "The Peculiar Happiness of Professor Cort"--but these viewpoints are alien *only* because the protagonists view the world from a different point of reference than do "normal" people. The right or wrong of it all is left up to the reader to decide. What remains particularly intriguing is the view itself and how sharing it, however momentarily as if it leaps from written word to reader's mind, changes *our* points of reference by allowing us to view *our* world differently.

Not every story in here's a gem. In some of the earlier work the prose is a little crude as a younger Shirley struggles to capture the flash-point sparks of his imagination onto the written page, succeeding in the prose's power, but leaving style a little to be desired. But the greater part of these stories are superior works indeed.

Shocking, and thought-provoking, yes, but entertaining fictions as well.

John Patrick Shirley was born in Houston, Texas, in 1953, and

grew up mostly in California and Oregon. He went to McNary High in Salem, Oregon, but: "I was expelled from school (after being suspended a record number of times) for locking a teacher in the closet and taking over the class. And also because I distributed a high school underground newspaper, something I edited and wrote most of, called *The Phoenix: Rising from the Ashes*. It was highly critical of the school and of the Vietnam War, etc. etc."

The Phoenix was actually Shirley's second foray into journalism. He started his first underground paper when he was twelve in junior high school, a mimeographed effort called *The Sniper*, because the school paper was called *The Piper*.

After high school, he didn't have much luck holding down a job. "A few times," he explains, "I worked doing 'temp' jobs and once worked as a sort of secretary/typist for a New York PR firm. I was fired for writing at work.

"As a teen-ager and in my early twenties," he goes on, "I lived off Social Security which I wasn't supposed to be getting -- essentially I was defrauding the government. I've since paid them back for it. Later, they made an accounting error in my favor and sent me too much money one month, and I used it to pay for attendance at the Clarion Writer's Workshop. I was about 19.

"My teachers were Harlan Ellison, Ursula Le Guin, Avram Davidson, Terry Carr, Robert Silverberg, and Vonda MacIntyre. Ellison sent one of my first stories to the Clarion anthology and they published it in an NAL book, *Clarion III* -- my first professional sale. Since then I've mostly lived off writing."

There was a period when Shirley was involved in some endeavors that weren't, as he puts, "legitimate work. I was young then; essentially a juvenile delinquent. I was habitually antiauthoritarian, but it was mostly because of a personality disorder, I suspect, rather than out of any real conviction. But it did make it impossible for me to attend college. I am an autodidact."

He was married twice before his current marriage. "Once to Jay Rothbell (now Jay Sheckley, having married Robert Sheckley after me) who is an up-and-coming horror writer herself. I was also married to a French artist, Alexandra Allinne, and lived in France with her about 1981-82, in Paris and the south of France, which is part of the reason that much of *Eclipse* is set there. Alexandra and I had identical twin boys, Byron and Perry. Besides child support and looking at their pictures, I have all too little connection with them now, which is a great burden on me."

His present marriage partner is Kathleen Woods-Shirley who is studying law. They have a son, Julian, who is going on two. They lived, for a time, in Thousand Oaks, California to, "Escape from the pressures and horrors of Big City Life. I liked cities more as a young man, but at thirty-five, they have worn me down and defeated me. Also, I can't abide smog." Nevertheless, they moved recently to Alameda, "Which is on the very edge of Oakland and San Francisco. We moved here so that Kathy can go to the law school of her choice."

Like many writers, Shirley has been a compulsive storyteller for as long as he can remember. "I told stories when I was a kid to the other



Artwork by Harry O. Morris, from Shirley's *Heatseeker*

other kids. I would tell them that I'd had a vivid dream -- and then I'd make the whole thing up. I think there are people who are intended genetically as storytellers, no doubt filling some kind of sociobiological niche, and I am one.

"The first story I remember putting down was published in a high school underground paper (not my own). The fact that someone published the story encouraged me; a publication in a 'grown up' underground paper, *The Stranger*, encouraged me further. The underground paper milieu in those days was a fertile field, and wide open, and doubtless helped lots of writers get their chops."

Although best known for his science fiction these days--particularly the ambitious "Eclipse" cyberpunk trilogy--Shirley has produced a large body of eclectic work over the years since those first few sorties into the world of underground press. Not all of it is readily apparent as a Shirley work.

"I wrote about sixteen books under pseudonyms," he says, "but they don't count as they were action adventure novels written in three weeks apiece because I needed the money. They had numbers on them--*So and So #3*, etc.--and I disown them."

Other early works under his own name had different problems. "Terry Carr published me in *Universe* and then asked me to write a book for some wretched series he was doing for, I think, 'Laser' books.

At some point the book, called *Changeworld*, was lost or destroyed before publication. I don't recall how, but it was probably the act of a benevolent god for which we should all be grateful."

His next book was *Transmaniacon*. "It was at least partly strung together of several strange novelettes which I had been unable to sell -- they were either too offbeat or too rough in writing quality. I correctly guessed that I stood a better chance of getting the stories into print if they were part of a novel, as there were many more markets for novels. I believed in those stories, so I wove them together, and the book took on a life of its own.

"This was my first published novel. Zebra Books bought it for \$1,500, and for this pittance bought all rights to it forever. Thus it remains out of print."

Zebra also bought his next two novels, *Dracula in Love* and *Three Ring Psychus* for the same price and on the same condition. "Roy Torgeson was the editor, but it wasn't his fault. He was working for greedy parasites. I was young and foolish--I'm still foolish--and knew no better. I didn't understand contracts except for two things: the part where my signature went, and the part that had the money in it. It was a lot of money for me then."

Other books followed: *City Come A-Walkin'* from Dell Books, a powerful exploration of sentient cities; *The Exploded Heart*, a rock 'n roll fantasy novel that remains unsold at the moment, but will be forthcoming in a much revised form from Scream/Press; *The Brigade*, a psycho-killer story in which a town gets rid of its police and decides to police itself with vigilantes.

Shirley still had problems with his publishers in those days, but they weren't always the publishers' fault. "I was a person of rough edges back then," he explains, "even more than now, and rather abrasive. I basically was a street kid, you see, fresh from the world of drugs and other kinds of sordidness, and not very well adapted to the social realities of dealing with people in the business world.

"You have to understand, I was the lead singer of several punk bands back then. I thought punk was the way to be; it was the only honest attitude. In terms of a publishing career, it was a mistake, but the concerts were fun -- though occasionally I had bottles broken over my head and had to have stitches."

The bands were Sado Nation and Obsession -- the latter recording for the Celluloid label. "That cultural hue," Shirley says, "the drugs and my street background, made my writing career a rough one."

But he did continue to write.

Avon published *Cellars*, a horror novel Shirley describes as "an anti-travelogue on New York City; it was written to make certain social criticisms. Not that I don't like New York -- I do -- but the place is aquiver with events like those in a paranoid's teeming brain. *Cellars* is a book about exploitation, about people exploiting people, making them into cattle, but it's also about dealing with guilt, and about our sense of being lost in a world we've lost control of, of a city as an entity grown beyond our comprehension."

More recently, Signet/Onyx published *In Darkness Waiting*, a novel which had been kicking around in a different version for a few years under the title *Insect Inside* -- a title Shirley still prefers. "Thematically the book is about dehumanization," he explains. "It's an allegory about the way we all too easily abstract people into things--racially, socially, or through outright hatred--in order to make it easier to dispose of them.

"In the novel, someone discovers that certain people carry within them the capacity to become insectlike in their ruthlessness to the degree that it begins to change them physically, so that they produce strange insectlike sub-beings which can break free of them and infect others with this monstrous ruthlessness and cruelty, a consciousness where sadism seems logical and necessary.

"I don't believe anything of this sort is going on literally -- but metaphorically, we are capable of becoming insects inside when it's

convenient to us. The Nazis were just human beings, caught up in a depraved state of consciousness. It could happen here too. It goes on. It happened in Uganda and Vietnam. It goes on in Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador. Here in the States men are selling crack to ten-year-olds, destroying them effortlessly and without hesitation. They know what they're doing to people. The point is, how can people bring themselves to do these things? What changes in them? How do they suppress their empathy?

"*In Darkness Waiting* offers an allegorical answer to that question."

No matter what its focus, no article on Shirley can ignore his recent science fiction, particularly his "A Song Called Youth" trilogy which deals in a kind of horror that, while it's set in the near future, is unfortunately all too possible. So far two volumes have appeared--*Eclipse* and *Eclipse Penumbra*--with a third, *Eclipse Corona*, due shortly; all three are and will be published by Questar/Popular Library.

The *Eclipse Books*, as Shirley prefers to call them, "are thrillers, essentially warning people about a political mindset we could be sliding into, and certainly warning them about the danger of a return to fascism. They are not 'the German Nazis come back' books. They're about the particular brand of fascism we are most likely to encounter: One part National Front jingoism, one part Fundamentalist Christian narrowmindedness, one part KKK-type racism and one part bogus-sociobiology racism.

"When I was in France I saw that the Front National, the new French Fascist party, was growing more and more powerful. It is now a major force in French politics. Its leader, Le Pen, claims that the Holocaust didn't really happen and basically advocates French Apartheid. I see similar movements elsewhere in Europe and the potential for them here. And the potential for the horror within them."

Two other books of Shirley's need to be mentioned: *The Black Hole of Carcosa* is a real change of pace, a satirical potboiler based on characters created by Michael Reaves that reads like a Robert Parker or Chandler mystery, except that the detective happens to be a sorcerer as well. "It's 90% humorous," Shirley tells us. While he wrote it for fun, another recent title, *A Splendid Chaos*, is a more serious work.

"I had a proposal for the book that was very different," Shirley explains. "It was essentially a cyberpunk book that spilled over onto another planet. But it didn't work that way; it was a case of split personality. So I broke it up into two projects--"Shaman," the cyberpunk part, appeared as a novelette in the November *Asimov*, while *A Splendid Chaos* came out from Franklin Watts as an interplanetary fantasy."

It's a book that Shirley regards as his best sf or fantasy novel. "I think it's a badly misunderstood novel. It's certainly my most imaginative book."

But for all the serious thematic thrust of his novels, Shirley doesn't believe in preaching. The reason is simple. "It's difficult to be didactic without being dull," he explains. "The only way to get a message across without preaching is to preach it mostly to the subconscious of the reader, using symbols, using parable, and using character. The characters undergo epiphanies and we learn with them. It all has to be of a piece, one unit: Character and story and theme.

"I used to be mostly interested in a combination of powerful imagery and a racing plot. Now I'm equally interested in developing character, and in stories where the plot emerges from the nature of the characters. I've always tried for an appropriate and highly controlled style, a musical style, something that evokes a kind of background score as you're reading, but sometimes--as I'm such a compulsively fast writer--I fall short of my goal.

"Rhythm is very important to me in terms of pacing a story and evoking sentence structure. I try to write in scenes, and to evoke cinematic imagery in the reader's mind. In the early days I wrote almost like 'automatic writing' -- I was influenced more by the surrealists, and I tried to get a fusion of input from the subconscious and the ra-

tional mind. I was interested in shaking people loose from their assumptions by challenging their sense of what was real.

"Nowadays, I work mostly within the confines of the real world and challenge sociopolitical assumptions instead of the consensus reality as to what is 'real.' Far from indulging in 'automatic writing,' my writing now is increasingly controlled -- but then so were Jim Hendrix's guitar solos, or John Coltrane's sax solos, in a way. Controlled madness. Orchestrated apocalypse."

When asked about short fiction, he says, "Writing short fiction is very constraining, even maddening, and doesn't pay very well, but I do it if I'm feeling particularly inspired. I have a story coming up in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* called "Screens" and one in an original anthology that Lew Shiner's editing for Bantam." And then, of course, there's the aforementioned *Heatseeker* collection from Scream/Press.

Shirley is also known for his outspoken columns and articles in the small press. "I do them for fun," he says, "and for promotional reasons. Sometimes, perhaps, I use that writing to woodshed ideas to be used in fiction; more often it's to burn off frustration. I need a forum for ranting."

Starting work at ten in the morning, and working through the day until five, Shirley tries to get some work done every day. "I find I have to keep a sort of momentum going, and keep the muscle of articulation in shape."

He has been doing some screenplay writing, including a draft of William Gibson's "The New Rose Hotel" for Pressman Productions which will be directed by Kathryn Bigelow, who also directed *Near Dark*. Gibson, himself, is writing the final draft. Others include an action picture based on his own *A Talent for Revenge* for Limelight Productions and Warner Brothers, *The Source*, a thriller about the drug business for some independents, and there's talk of *In Darkness Waiting* being filmed.

Upcoming literary projects include the completion of *The Eclipse Books*, a new horror novel called *The Users*--"which is about the horror that is Hollywood"--a revision of *The Exploded Heart* and a mainstream novel about California eccentrics called *Something Real*. But he's finished with science fiction.

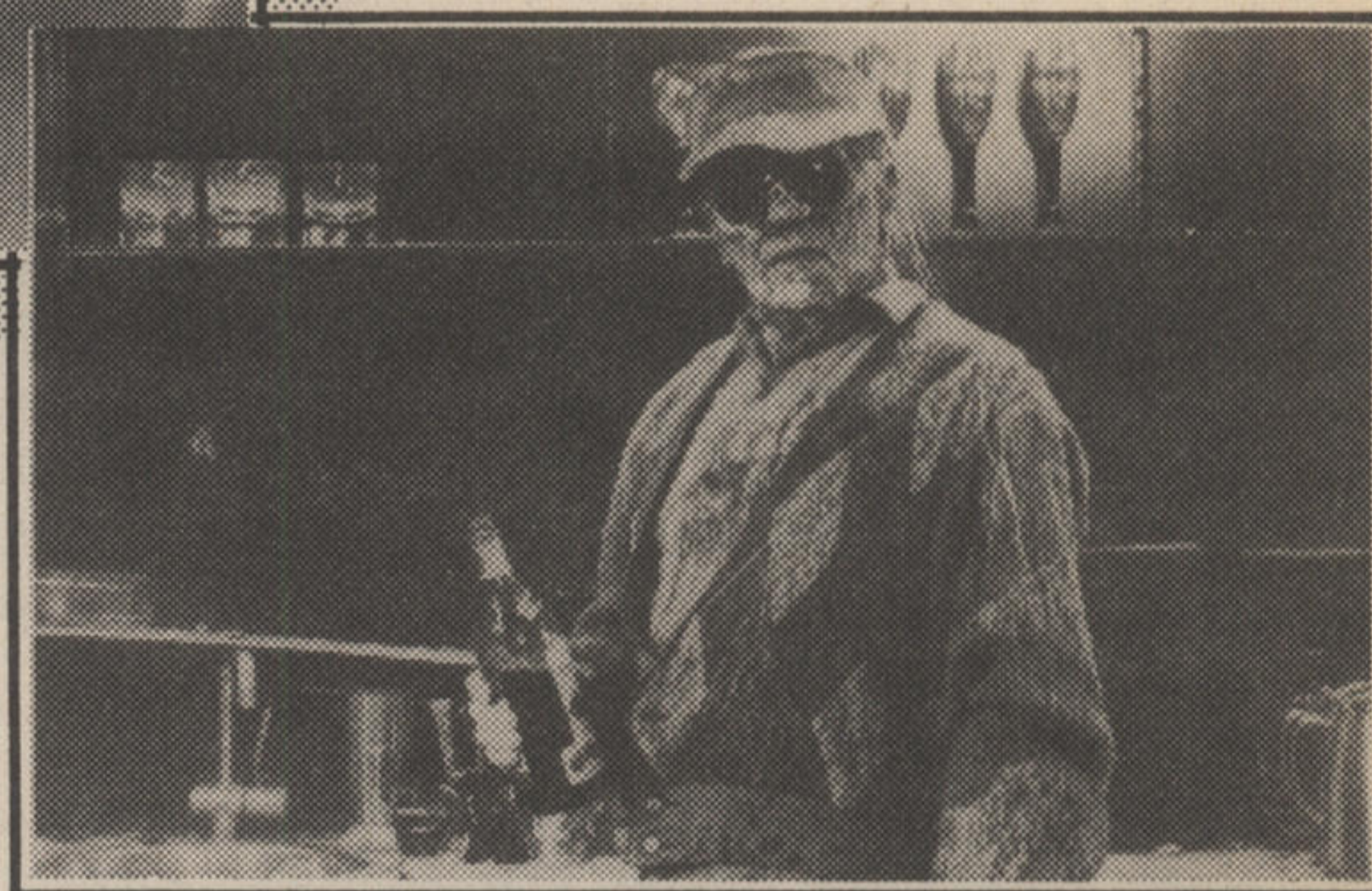
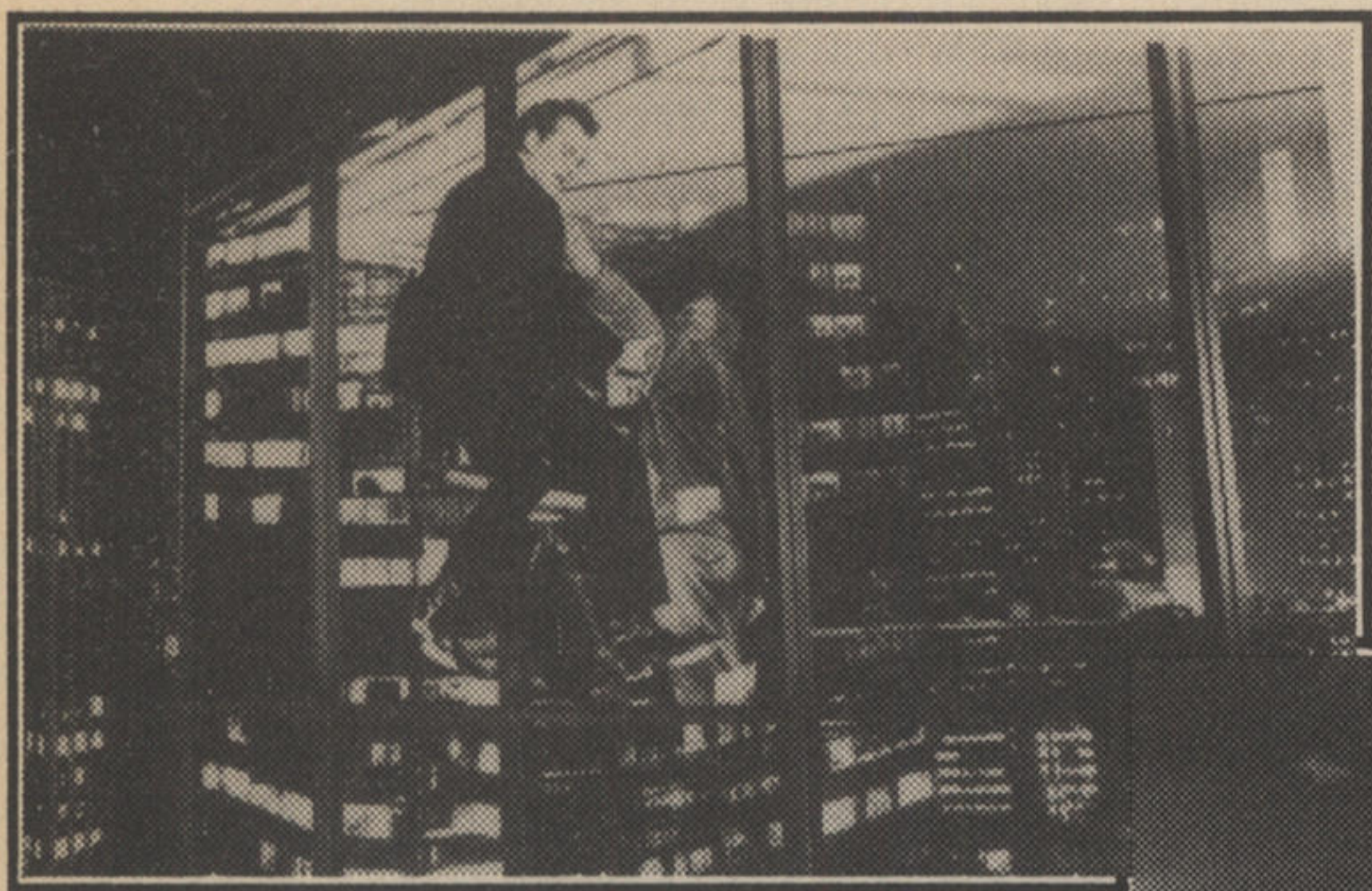
"I plan to write *no more sf whatsoever* after 1988," he emphatically states. "The sf field simply has not been good to me. Perhaps because I'm not a Libertarian cryptofascist."

When asked for some concluding thoughts on the state of fantasy fiction in general, he adds, "We need less categorization, less emphasis on formulaic 'safe' writing, a greater emphasis on character and quality in general in the sf field, more tolerance for outside viewpoints, less emphasis on so-called sympathetic characters which is a racist, classist criterion leaving with characters who're a bunch of Spielberg yuppies. Fuck that."

One thing's for certain, Shirley remains a writer who practices what he preaches. No matter whatever else is currently "hot" in the horror/fantasy/sf field, and even as Shirley goes on to explore other pastures himself, readers can at least be guaranteed thoughtful entertainments in the work that appears under his own byline.

The genre won't be losing a voice; rather, literature will be gaining one.

When The Lights Go Down



MICHAEL ARTHUR BETTS

CHILD'S PLAY	1988, Theater
SCROOGED	1988, Theater
WATCHERS	1989, Theater
DEEPSTAR SIX	1989, Theater

Just saw a movie on cable that I hadn't seen since I was in my late teens. *Don't Look Now* was one of the most impressive horror films I'd ever witnessed when it first came out in 1973. Starring Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie (who I was completely in love with). The taut psychic thriller had an artistic style unfortunately missing in many horror films. It really hit me after viewing the movie for the first time in many years just how much of today's horror cinema is lacking. For instance, although the movie is about a mad killer stalking the back alleys of Venice, Italy, there aren't any minor characters in the film who two seconds after you learn their names, are cut in half. Every character has a function, usually to help learn more about the main characters. In other words, there are no people who are merely props. This is important because it gives the movie a sense of direction. Another key ingredient to this movie that is so sparse in today's cinema, is the true sense of mystery. Although the end of the story is purposely spelled out, you really aren't sure what everything means until the very end. If you get a chance, try and catch it. There are other points I could make about this beautifully filmed picture but the modern screen beckons.

CHILD'S PLAY

On a personal level, I'm glad Tom Holland (the director of *Child's Play*) has come back to the horror genre. When I did an interview with

Tom, a couple of years back, after his directorial debut with *Fright Night*, he mentioned that he was going to leave the horror genre. At the time, I was sorry to hear that. I felt then, and still do, that he has a lot to offer the genre. Also, he did a big favor for me once that I'll always be grateful for. I won't get into that here except to say Tom has a lot of class. Now, with that said, I have to go on with the business of being an objective film critic.

Chicago detective, Mike Norris (Chris Sarandon, *Fright Night*) has cornered mad killer, Charles Lee Ray (Brad Dourif) in a toy store. The wounded and slightly crackers killer does a voodoo chant on a doll and claims he'll get even with the cop.

Guess what little Andy Barclay (Alex Vincent) wants for his birthday? A Guns and Roses tape? Nah, too young. Maybe a toy Uzi with laser scope, mmmmm? No, he wants a talking Good Guys doll, from the TV series with the same name. Mom thinks they are too expensive and tells Andy he can't have one. The moral to this movie could be: don't buy your kid what he wants for his birthday.

Andy finally gets his birthday wish when mom runs into a sleazy looking street peddler who is carrying one of the dolls. I guess you could call it a fire sale, since the doll was obviously hot.

Andy befriends the doll who calls himself Chuckie. Chuckie tells Andy that "they are friends to the end." This kind of brought me back to when I was a kid and received a Yogi Bear doll for Christmas. Whenever the Yogi Bear cartoon show was about to come on, I'd place the doll under the TV and watch the cartoon. One day, I forgot to get the doll under the set in time, but Yogi still came up on the tube. That didn't make sense to me. I looked under the set and there was nothing there, then I gazed up at the screen and saw Yogi. "Who's that impostor?" I yelled. Sometimes inanimate objects can seem more real

than the real thing. A movie like *Child's Play* has to delicately tiptoe that fine line between fantasy and reality. If it steps too far either way, it can destroy the whole concept.

At first Andy's relationship with the doll becomes more vivid than his relationship with the real world. I wish that's where the filmmakers would have taken the film. This was very effective in the 1945 British thriller *Dead of the Night* and to a lesser degree in Richard Attenborough's underrated *Magic*. Also, the voodoo doll in *Trilogy of Terror*.

Instead, we get a fairly interesting camp film that focuses on Chuckie as a wooden version of Freddy Krueger. However, up till Chuckie kills his first victim, Andy's babysitter, the film does work well.

Andy's mom, Karen Barclay (Catherine Hicks), leaves Andy with her friend Becky. After Becky puts Andy to bed she begins to hear things. The suspense builds and we see Chuckie streak past the hall entrance. Very effective. The bump in the night camera angles help build suspense. Then Aunt Becky gets a hammer to the head.

Enter Detective Mike Norris, no surprise there, and the film goes into cop trying to solve mysterious murder and Mom trying to convince cop it's the doll. Actually there is really nothing wrong with that. What's wrong is I never took Chuckie seriously enough after he started his rampage. I thought of him more as a demented Pinocchio with a knife.

One a camp level the film does have its moments, especially in a scene where Detective Norris is driving down the street and Chuckie is trying to kill him. However, I wanted more fright than chuckles out of Chuckie and just didn't get it. It's too bad because the acting, direction and camera work are all good.

When I left the theater, I looked underneath the screen. I didn't see a Chuckie doll there and said to myself, "Who the hell was that impostor."



SCROOGED

This movie is based on the classic ghost story "A Christmas Carol" by the great Charles Dickens. I've seen many versions of this story, some as a child frightened me, and others made me laugh. In almost all versions, up to *Scrooged*, the basic moral of Dickens' original story always stood out. If you're looking for a sincere upgrading of "A Christmas Carol" you won't find it in *Scrooged*. If you want a two hour Saturday Night Live skit scripted by two former SNL writers and starring the ex-SNL regular Bill Murray, then *Scrooged* just might be a satisfactory substitute.

The movie starts out with a hilarious take off on television. There is

an advertisement for a TV show called "The Night the Reindeer Died." Santa's workshop is being invaded by terrorists and Lee Majors comes to the rescue. Then there is an ad for the new television version of "A Christmas Carol" with Mary Lou Retton as Tiny Tim. This show is the baby of Frank Cross (Bill Murray) who is the young president of the IBC Television Network. Cross is an obnoxious, self-centered modern day Scrooge who cares about nothing but ratings and turning a buck.

The problems with Murray's character start almost from the beginning of the film. He's such an unbelievable smart-ass that you can't imagine for one minute that he's competent enough to run a major television network. In one scene, Cross crumples up a picture drawn by his secretary's son and he does it right in front of her while criticizing it. Why she doesn't nail him in the nuts right on the spot is beyond me. At the very least, she should walk and never come back. You have to believe that even in the miserable world that Bob Cratchet lived in, he wouldn't stick around while his won was being ridiculed. It's just this type of attitude in Murray's portrayal and the seemingly prideless individuals around him that make much of this movie hard to swallow.

The movie seems too content to be a parody and thus misses much of the subtleties so instrumental to the original story. The idea of the original Scrooge was not of an exaggerated character who never had a conscience but rather of a feeling human being who throughout the years drew within himself and eventually forgot what it meant to live. I rarely got that Murray's character. Now I realize this is supposed to be a comedy, and much of the satirical aspects of the movie do, indeed, work. Especially when Carol Kane shows up as the Ghost of Christmas Present and treats Murray's character the way he deserves to be treated. However, even Murray's redemption speech at the end left me a bit cold.

Nevertheless, there are enough good comedy bits to keep things moving, and the production values are impeccable. I'll give this one a very guarded recommendation as a comedy that pretty much bastardizes a classic tale.



WATCHERS

I refuse to spend much time on this one. It is based on a book by Dean R. Koontz which, I must confess, I haven't read. Had I read the book, I probably would have left the movie before it was over, just as a protest to what the filmmakers had done to Mr. Koontz's work.

On almost every level this movie is as atrocious a piece of filmmaking as I've seen since *Return to Horror High*.

There is an explosion at a biological research lab. A creature called an Oxcom (Outside Experimental Combat Mammal) escapes along with a dog that has been trained as a sort of homing device for the creature. The dog finds its way into the life of Travis Cornell (Corey Haim) who discovers the dog has almost human intelligence. Meanwhile, the Oxcom, which looks like something out a grade Z horror movie, is mutilating victims on its way to the dog. There are also some government agents looking for the two animals. One of the agents is taking his job so seriously he rips the eyeballs out of a local sheriff.

So what do you get in this movie? You get your basic maulings by a monster than reminds me of Big Foot on cocaine. You get your nominal characters who are set up to get creamed within seconds after their appearance on the screen. And then there is the great monster's eye view camera work that became famous in the Holiday Horror movies and has become so redundant that it makes one long for that old hack director Herschell Gordon Lewis.

The story idea is pretty interesting and Corey Haim can be a personable actor. However, the script, acting, and ludicrous direction make this such a stinker that I'd almost forgotten the whole mess before the credits rolled.





DEEPSTAR SIX

After bringing us *Friday The 13th* in 1980, it almost seems like Director Sean S. Cunningham has been apologizing. His first major apology was the enjoyable comedy horror movie *House*. *House* was about twenty million years of evolution compared to *Friday The 13th* and showed that Cunningham can make human films. With *Deepstar Six*, Cunningham has gone back to his old ways of ripping off other films like he ripped off *Halloween* back in '80. But this time he's kept the humanity he showed with *House* and given us a watered down version of *Alien*.

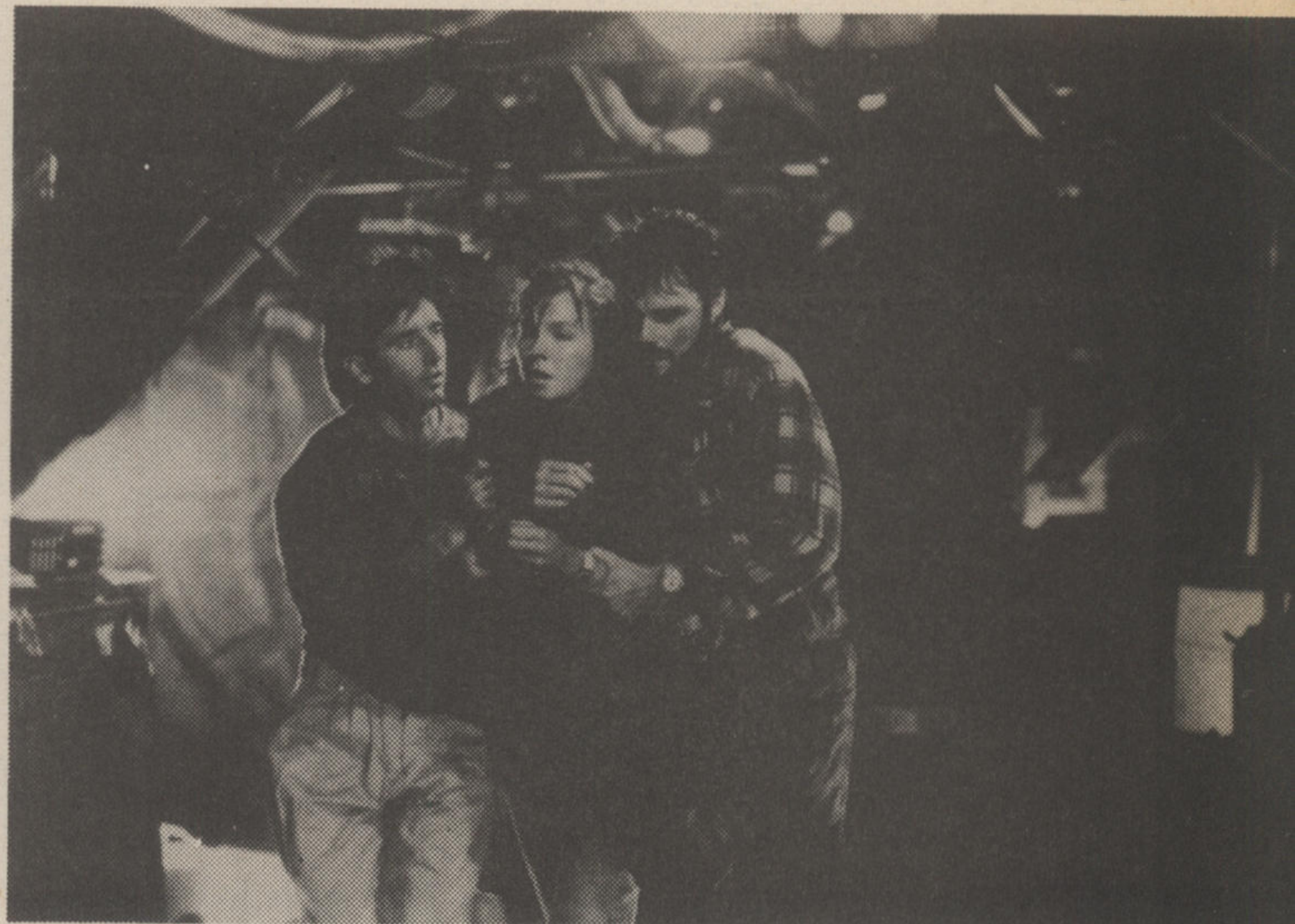
This was one of those ensemble cast stories where people are put in a claustrophobic situation then faced with the added inconvenience of rooming with a hideous monster.

At an underwater station, in the near future, a group of Naval personnel is preparing the ocean's floor for the installation of some nuclear missiles. Dr. Van Gelder (Marius Weyers) is under pressure to get the operation completed. The crew has already been under sea for a half-year; they're getting a tad wet between the ears. When a cavern is discovered underneath the ocean floor, Van Gelder decides to blow it up in order to smooth out the surface. Wrong move, tuna breath. The explosion unleashes a sea creature that's probably been there for a million years. Of course, havoc soon follows. At first, a small vessel with two crew members is lost and soon after that the main station becomes threatened.

Ah, but to add to the claustrophobic situation, one of the crew members, Tony Snyder (Miguel Ferrer, son of Jose), mistakenly sets off a nuclear blast that cripples the station and prevents the crew from escaping. Miguel plays the role of the team coward a bit too hysterically.

The best performances come from Taurean Blacque as the military leader of the outfit (unfortunately, he's snuffed way too early in the movie) and Nancy Everhard as Dr. Joyce Collins, a strong yet feeling person, who looks for strength from God to help conquer the lobster from hell. The creature is fairly effective and looks like someone you wouldn't want to take on a picnic ... that is unless it was the boiled main course.

Cunningham has done a fairly good job of giving one the feeling of being entrapped in a seemingly no-win situation. Most of the acting is adequate and the effects are pretty good. Cunningham has also taken a lot of time to add a sense of humanity, courage and faith, which are all commendable. This is, albeit, only a moderately entertaining movie and if you are tired of this kind of plot, I'd stay away from it. If you don't expect the quality of *Alien* or *Jaws*, you might want to jump in.



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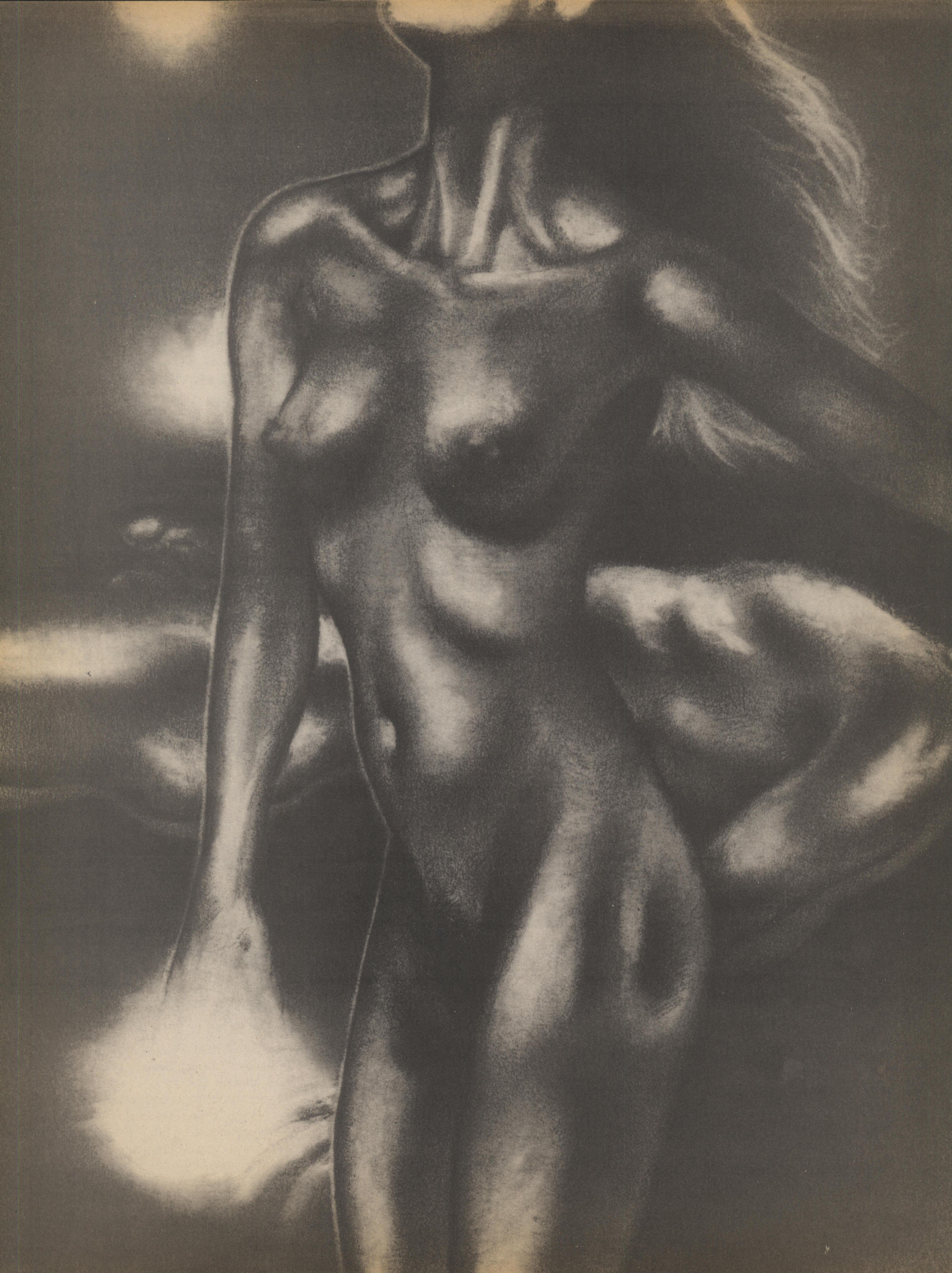
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SEEING THEM

DARRELL SCHWEITZER

I never knew Barry Atwood well. We moved in the same circles in college, but only because mutual friends led us to a casual acquaintance. We went to the same parties. We belonged to the same literary society.

And we both knew Laura Howard.

That was all. That was enough. Kismet, fate, inscrutable destiny. "There are no coincidences," Laura used to say. In the end, I believed her.

But the beginning was what we used to call a *flash from the past*. I had settled down to a quiet Sunday afternoon of marking test papers, when the phone rang. Quasimodo, my terrier, yelped and ran in circles around the telephone stand.

A *flash* --

"Phil? It's Barry."

For a moment, I didn't recognize the voice.

"Barry *who*?"

"Barry Goldwater, who do you think, old buddy? I'm running for president ... and your ... contribution could make all the damn difference--" He faked a laugh, but even over the phone I could tell it was a fake. His voice was hoarse, strained. He sounded as if he'd been crying.

"Barry Atwood," I said. "I haven't heard from you in -- what is it? Fifteen years, I think."

"Yeah. Look, Phil, I know I may be intruding, but if you have some time, I'd like to see you. It's *important*."

I glanced at the pile of ungraded test papers, but some instinct told me this was indeed important.

"Sure. Where are you?"

"Here. In Philadelphia. I can be over to your place in half an hour."

"Fine."

The year we graduated, Barry Atwood had moved to the West Coast. Los Angeles, undoubtedly. He'd wanted to get into films. I think he actually had worked on a few commercials. Now he was back. It had indeed been fifteen years.

There are no coincidences.

Quasimodo barked with customary fierceness when the doorbell rang, then scooted under his favorite stuffed chair.

I opened the door.

Barry looked tired. That was the overwhelming impression I got. Stooped slightly, his hair thinning in front instead of going

grey, but mostly *tired*, almost haggard. And he was thin. For most people, the difference between twenty-two and thirty-seven is at least twenty pounds, but he looked thinner than he had the last time I'd seen him. Not at all well, really.

"Phil?"

I noticed that he squinted.

"Come in, Barry."

He sat in the chair beneath which the dog had tactically withdrawn. Quasimodo kept still.

I fetched us a couple of beers. Barry sipped his occasionally. Then he started talking, nervously at first, and finally in a great torrent of words.

"It was really funny when it started," he said. "I mean, I laughed--"

He hesitated, as if he'd lost the train of thought.

I settled back, nursing my beer.

"What was funny?"

"Meeting Laura again after so long. This is getting to be a goddamn class reunion, Phil--"

"Laura *Howard*? Miss Occult USA 1970, teen witch, number one groupie of the ghost of Aleister Crowley, *that* Laura?"

He put down his beer, folded his hands in his lap, and said very quietly, "Don't joke about it, Phil. You went to her little sessions too."

"I mostly went to see her naked. Who could forget the sight of her crawling around by candlelight in her birthday suit, chalking circles on the basement floor at her mom's place. She had ... a great ass."

"She still does."

I leaned forward and slapped my fist into the palm of my hand. "Hey, hey -- Know what I mean? Nudge-nudge? Wink-wink?"

He didn't laugh at my borrowed witicism.

"There's so much to fill in." He sighed. "It's been *such* a long time? There are things you're do doubt wondering, Phil. I'm wondering too. What have *you* been doing all this time?"

"Living. I think I'm the only member of the Villanova Literary Society to actually go off and commit literature. I even get published occasionally. But mostly I teach ninth-grade in the public schools."

"Are you married, Phil?"

"Almost a couple of times, but no."

"Well I was. Her name was Anne Harris."

It was Laura Howard,
unquestionably.
The first thing she did
was grab my wrist
and say, "Wait. Wait.
Anachronism check.
You're wearing a Timex.
There were no
digital watches
in the
Summer of Love--"

You don't know her. After our divorce, she moved to New York. I'm in Philly so I can commute up every other weekend and see Jason, our son. He's five and the only good thing that came out of our marriage, which otherwise went very sour. Anne hates me."

"I'm ... sorry."

Suddenly I was very embarrassed, listening to this near stranger tell me such intimate things, and at the same time a little resentful that he had invited himself over to spill his guts on my living room rug, so to speak.

"Barry, aren't we off the subject?"

"No, we're not. It all has to do with Laura Howard. I met her just a block from here, a week ago yesterday, in Clark Park. I saw a poster about a rock concert, and I had this whim. I hadn't been to a real, live *rock concert* in a long, long time, and ... well, I actually put on a pair of genuine 1960s bellbottoms and a tastefully shrieking blue and red dashiki I hadn't worn in *decades*. But the concert was quite a disappointment."

"They always are. I've never been to a Clark Park event that wasn't--"

"*Tawdry*, Phil. That's what it was. A festival of some sort, but really an overblown flea market with some local group on a stage at the far end putting up a wall of noise. The whole thing was depressing. I realized how silly I'd been, dressing like an aging hippie when all the kids around me wore black leather, safety-pins, and mohawks and carried boom-boxes the size of suitcases -- as if the alleged music wasn't shattering eardrums quite efficiently enough.

"But I stayed long enough to flip through a record dealer's wares, boxes of albums on a table and on the ground underneath. It was underneath the table that I found myself face-to-face with a woman in her upper thirties. I didn't know who she was at first, but then she grinned hugely and said, 'Hey, man! Far out! We could be the Boobsey Twins!'"

"I tried to stand up, but hit my head on the underside of the table. All I could say was, 'Huh?'"

"When we got out from under the table, I could see what she meant. We were wearing identical dashikis.

"It was Laura Howard, unquestionably. The first thing she did was grab my wrist and say, 'Wait. Wait. Anachronism check. You're wearing a Timex. There were no digital watches in the Summer of Love--'"

"My God,' I said.

"My God,' she said. 'You haven't seen me since the Upper Paleolithic. Hey -- look what I found!'"

"She waved a record in front of me. It was by the Fugs. *Golden Filth*. She read from the back of the sleeve in her finest mock-oratorical manner: 'If you hesitate to hear about the cold fork of naked reality ...

then you'd better flip this record back into the rack and go dig up some old Monkees' albums--'

"Right on,' I said. 'Let's hear it for naked forks.'

"Barry, give me a hug--'"

"I did, and a kiss too, and pretty soon we both sort of *fell* down onto the curb, laughing hysterically. One or two of the teen-agers glanced our way. The band let fly with another peal of electronic thunder.

"Hey,' I said. 'People are *staring* ...'"

"They probably wonder what us crazily-garbed old farts are *on*. Or else they assume we're having heart attacks in stereo. I mean, *look* at us. You're, what? Thirty-seven? You're hair's thinning. Mine's got a goddamn racing stripe down the middle--'"

"Laura, it's been a long time--'"

"Let's get out of here,' she said. 'This is getting maudlin.'

"She paid for the record and dragged me along toward a streetcar.

"Were there any more treasures back there?'"

"Not unless you want old Monkees' albums. Come on.'

I interrupted. "Barry, you loved her once, didn't you?"

He trembled slightly, then caught onto the armrests, hard. Underneath, Quasimodo started to whine. Barry didn't seem to notice.

"Yeah. Once."

"But not now." I said that as a statement, not a question.

"No, not in years. But for a moment there, I almost fooled myself."

"Barry, level with me. It's great to see old school chums, but you don't suddenly come over here and--"

He stood up, as if to attention.

"I quite understand. I see. You're right, of course. Sorry to be of any bother. I'll just go now--"

I got up, caught him by the shoulder, and pushed him gently back into the chair.

"No, you don't have to go. But I do think you have to tell me the real story, the *whole* story. For friendship's sake, at least, I'll listen."

"Will you, for friendship's sake, *believe me?*"

That gave me a start. For the first time I was a little bit afraid.

"Has something happened? Involving Laura?"

He took a long draw on his beer, then said in a voice of the utmost sadness. "You could say that. Yes. No. Maybe. I'm not sure anymore, Phil."

"Just tell me everything," I said.

"When we were on the subway, I asked

her where we were going, and she told me she had a business here in town. Would I like to see? Well, it did seem *wonderful* to meet up with her again. It brought back so many memories.

"She took me to a part of the city I'd never even known existed before. Somewhere along the way, the subway burst out of the ground and became the elevated. It was sunset. I remember that distinctly. The sky was bright orange.

"She told me a little of her own adventures in the intervening years, but I did most of the talking, about Anne, about Jason. Maybe I told her too much.

"Well, look at it this way,' she said. 'If you're not married, you're free. Like in the old days.'

"It's fun to pretend,' I said, 'but you know perfectly well that we can't go back and be young again, make everything different--'"

"Then she looked at me sharply and said something I didn't understand, not then.

"What if we're not pretending?'"

"When our stop came, she led me down rusty stairs to a place where the El runs over Frankford Avenue like a roof and the stores are all blaring lights and iron bars. Every third one was boarded up. The street smelled like a subway tunnel, dirty and damp.

"You live here?'"

"Like I said, my business. Opportunity is where you find it.'

"A bit capitalistic for an over-the-hill flower child--'"

"She smiled ever so sweetly and said, 'Well fuck you too. Here we are.'

"She got out a set of keys and unlocked a door I hadn't even noticed as we had come upon it, squeezed in between two vacant storefronts. A wooden sign swung overhead, a faded picture of a bare-breasted mermaid in a top hat waving a magician's wand, and slightly newer lettering which said merely *This is THE PLACE*. A plastic CLOSED sign dangled behind the glass and bars.

"Inside, she fumbled for a light. The switch clicked, but no light came on.

"Shit--'"

"We groped our way along in the musky dark, past crates and piles of boards, paint chops rattled from the walls at my touch. Once something scurried before us.

"At the end of the corridor was another switch. This time the light worked, or at least one of its two uncovered bulbs came on, its harsh glare revealing a room filled with shelves of books and bottles and what looked like very peculiar pottery half hidden in the deep shadows. That was my first impression: a typical, back-street junk shop. But then I followed her gaze upward and saw huge, brightly-painted masks hanging from the walls.



"Isn't this wild?"

"Wild."

"Those are Mardi Gras masks. Some of them are very old. Once in a great while I sell one, but mostly they're my lares and penates."

"Larry who?"

"Guardian spirits. Never mind. Classical."

"I started browsing and I saw at once that Laura Howard was still very much on her occult kick, as we used to call it. The books were all on witchcraft and 'ancient mysteries,' that sort of thing, including the inevitable *Necronomicon*. Packs of tarot cards hung from hooks on a pegboard. There was even a baggie of something labeled 'Devil Dust.'

"I held it up to her. 'Devil Dust?' I said.

"For them's that needs it, Devil Dust."

"Amid the potions and herbs and black candles were a wide assortment of more conventional stage-magic paraphernalia: wands, hats, disguises, glasses with funny eyes, blindfolds, trick knives, and even a rubber chicken. Crystal balls gleamed in a locked case, each of them held in a pair of carved, wooden hands.

"You sell this stuff?"

"The old guy I bought the place from used to supply Ernie Kovacs with gimmicks. I deal to an exclusive clientele."

"On the wall at the end of an aisle was a huge poster that glowed in the semi-darkness: three flying disks and the legend *Seeing Them* by L. Allen Weinstein. There were more books, mostly about UFOs, but also Atlantis, Bigfoot, the Bermuda Triangle, and whole stack of the Weinstein volume. I held up a copy quizzically.

"I haven't changed," she said softly.

"You don't still get yourself all yucky driving nails through rat hearts, do you?"

"She didn't smile at that.

"You might as well ask me if I still suck my thumb. One *does* make progress over the years."

"She took me by the arm and led me through a bead curtain. Behind us, something rattled. Glass fell and broke.

"She jerked me around suddenly, back toward the shop room. '*Esmerelda!*' she hissed.

"The only reply was a creaking, like the sound of an old house settling, followed by silence.

"Your cat?"

"She didn't answer, but directed me back into the other room. I saw a lava lamp glowing in a corner, more posters of flying saucers on the walls, and a mattress on the floor. Beside the lamp was what looked like an altar, with a six-fingered wooden hand rising from it. Colored glass sparkled on the fingertips.

"Barry, I am sure it meant something that we met today."

"Destiny, my dear. It's written in the stars. Your sign is Scorpio. Mine is Right Turn Keep Moving--"

"She put her finger to my lips. 'Now don't be cynical about things you don't understand. It *meant* something. I *knew* to go to that place. I knew that I'd meet you -- or someone else who mattered -- there today.'

"It's a wonderful coincidence, that's all."

"There are no coincidences, Barry Atwood. Not even this is a coincidence.' She tugged her dashiki, then mine.

"She knelt down on the mattress and

pulled me down after her, then proceeded to demonstrate that not all her magic was of the ethereal, abstract kind ... and as we lay there afterwards, sweaty with love, it was easy to pretend -- to *forget* otherwise -- that no time at all had passed since those nights we used to spend secretly together in the *Lynx* magazine office at Villanova University.

"I remarked on this, and she said, 'It's only in your mind that any time has passed, any distance. That's what I've learned over the past decade and more. That's why I don't need rat hearts and chalk circles anymore. It's hard to explain, but once your spirit has become attuned to ... I supposed you'd call it cosmic energy, although there are different words the adepts use ... you can see the Masters on other worlds, where there is no war or disease or death. You don't have to grow old. That's what you want, isn't it?'

"Like Peter Pan,' I muttered, mostly to myself. I folded my hands behind my head and stared up at the ceiling. 'I won't grow up, I *won't*--'

"You're so damned narrow-minded. You think you know everything with your goddamn *science*, I'm trying to give you the greatest gift you can ever receive. I can move you back and forth through time, like a needle through cloth, out of the reach of age and death. Once your eyes are opened, once you understand, you will be able to do it too. Once you *see them*--"

Barry stopped talking, as if he'd run out of words. He closed his eyes. For a moment I almost thought he was asleep. Then he suddenly sat bolt upright and all but shouted at me.

"I did something really stupid, Phil. Really stupid."

"Hey, calm down. What did you do? Just tell me."

"I *laughed* at her."

"I knew I was being cruel, but I couldn't help myself. You know how it was back in college. We used to smirk about her being a witch and all. It was a big joke. You and me, Phil, we never took it seriously for an instant. And then, to hear her talk like that, so deadpan earnestly, it brought all the laughter back.

"She glared at me, furious. As if on cue, the whole place shook. For a moment, I thought it was an earthquake. A *lot* of merchandise fell in the next room. The lava lamp slipped in its base, sending jerky shadows over the walls and ceiling.

"That Esmerelda,' I said somewhat nervously, 'is going to put you out of business yet.'

"She crawled away from me, toward the lamp. Despite everything, the one thought that percolated into my brain was, *After all*

these years, she still has a great ass.

"I laughed again, but broke off in mid-chuckle when she flung my clothes into my face.

"I think you had better fucking go--"

"I sat up. 'I'm sorry,' I said. 'Really I am. I like you a lot, and I hope you'll always be my friend, but -- it's just too much to listen to you offering to take me on a flying saucer-ride to see the perfect spiritual masters of Mars--'

"The bead curtain rattled at the bottom, as if something small had just entered the room. But when I turned and looked, I saw nothing.

"I dressed quickly and rose to go. 'Look, I really am sorry. I apologize. Can I make it up to you? Take you out to dinner maybe?'

"She just sat there, staring into space, oblivious to my presence. When she began to speak, it was as if to the whole universe.

"This is a very special day.'

"I'm sorry I wrecked it for you. I've apologized. What more can I do?'

"She got to her feet and walked toward me, still naked. She reached out to touch my face. I raised my hand to push hers away, but hesitated. She closed my eyes with two outstretched fingers.

"When it is the proper time,' she said, 'you will see everything. You will open your eyes. Yours will not be a fleeting glimpse, a mere streak across the heavens. For you, there shall be no mysteries. Open your eyes. Come to understand that we are bound together now, you and I, by the magic of the flesh. Understand the special meaning of this day, of this encounter. It is a kind of graduation for me. I have worked so many years to reach this point. Open your eyes. For you it is but a beginning, a first step. Open your eyes. See them. Open your eyes.'

"I drew back from her and stood in the doorway, gazing at her nakedness, her undeniable beauty. Still my mind entertained undergraduate-wolf thoughts, even though it hurt to see her angry.

"And I told myself that on some level I still loved her. I couldn't explain the hurt any other way.

"There was one thing more: She looked distinctly younger in the half-light. It was something about the way her skin gleamed. And something else, too, which didn't come to me until I was away from there.

"Her hair was completely black. The white streak, the racing stripe as she'd called it, was definitely gone."

Barry paused again, as if he couldn't go on.

"Now wait a minute," I said after a while. "Parts of this are getting distinctly impossible. People don't really get younger now, do they?"

"I saw what I saw."

"It was the bad light. You said so yourself."

"Phil, I saw it."

"Okay," I said, sensing that it would be futile to pursue this point. "Tell me what happened next."

"What happened next was I went home. The Indian summer daytime weather had given out, and it was quite cold. I shivered all the way in that damned dashiki.

"Of course I couldn't sleep. I was rattled, to put it mildly. So I sat up listening to music. I tried to read. I tried to work on a script I'm doing. But I couldn't concentrate.

"Eventually I lay on my bed in the dark,



watching the hands move on the glowing face of my alarm clock. Regardless of what I tried to think about, I always came back to Laura, to what it had been like before with her, the sights and sounds and scents -- the faint perfume she used to wear -- and it was all so vivid I seemed to be reliving my youth. I was halfway moved to turn on the radio and see if I could pick up a 1970 newscast, but at the same time I was afraid that I might succeed.

"Eventually I dozed off and had a dream. I knew I was dreaming, and it seemed that inside my dream, I awoke. Someone was rapping gently at the front door, almost like an animal clawing to get in.

"I padded downstairs, barefoot, and opened the door.

"A huge, orange, laughing face floated

before me in the darkness. It was one of the Mardi Gras masks. It spoke to me in the voice of a my five-year-old boy.

"Daddy, I'm lost. Daddy, it's dark here.'

"Then I realized that a child was wearing the mask. It covered his whole body. Untied sneakers stuck out beneath the orange chin.

"Jason?'

"I snatched the mask away, but it wasn't Jason. It was Laura, her adult head on a little boy's body, distorted, gnarled, like a hideous dwarf. And her voice was cracked, grating.

"I am the way. I am the truth. I am the light of the other world. Come, follow me.'

"Then she laughed at me, a harsh, ugly laugh, and ran off my porch, down the steps, into the street. I ran after her in my bare feet,

for blocks. The city was empty, silent, dark. The padding of my footsteps was the only sound, impossibly magnified, like the thunderous beating of an enormous heart. Still the huge-headed dwarf ran, vanished between two parked cars, then appeared again in the middle of the street only to disappear once more around a turn in an alley.

"At last we reached an open place, bare ground, a vacant lot or maybe a park. The dwarf-child just stood there waiting for me to catch up.

"Suddenly the sky was filled with blinding light. I looked up, shielding my eyes, into a glowing, whirling, humming disk, and I heard Laura's voice.

"Like a needle through the cloth of time. Forever and ever.'

"The light dimmed and the saucer had clock-hands on it, turning slowly at first, then faster, backwards, then forwards, then backwards again--

"The alarm went off and I awoke in my bedroom, damp with sweat."

"That was quite some dream, Barry."

He sipped his beer, then gagged.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm okay. Now you're thinking I woke up and found my pajamas torn and my feet dirty from running in the street, but it wasn't like that."

"It wasn't." A statement, not a question.

"But the dream was more than just mind-static. It was what occultists, sorcerers, or

dreamed of Laura, scenes from our past, pleasant moments, but somehow they seemed forced to me, a kind of threat.

"'No,' I said in my dream. 'Get away from me--'

"Then the conductor was nudging me awake, a worried look on his face.

"'Hey, buddy, 'dis your stop?'

"I thanked him, embarrassed, and hurried from the train. I was looking forward to seeing Jason. I was *dreading* seeing Anne. Whenever we met, we always ended up screaming at one another. I hoped she had left Jason in custody of the maid and gone shopping or something.

"Her apartment was in the East Nineties, right off Central Park. I -- I --"

had much choice."

"Barry, listen to what you're saying. This is seriously crazy. Paranoid. It'll destroy you."

He pounded hard on the arms of the chair. "*Not that I had any fucking choice!*"

Just then Quasimodo the terrier squealed as if he'd been stepped on and darted out from under the chair and into my lap, whining. Barry let out a yelp too, almost a scream, and jumped up, nearly tipping the chair over. It was like the stereotypical woman's reaction to a mouse. At any other time, it might have seemed funny. But I didn't doubt that he had just mistaken my dog for Esmerelda the ... what? Familiar? Semi-housebroken poltergeist?

Then Barry was laughing, humorlessly, desperately.

"Jesus, Phil, this is crazy. I'm acting like such an asshole. You have every right to toss me out on my ear--"

"No, Barry. I'm not going to do that. Meet Quasimodo."

"Hi Quasimodo," Barry said, waving his hand feebly. "Nice to get to know ya."

"I went up to Anne's apartment and rang the bell. I knew where I was going of course. I couldn't have gotten *lost*. No, I had stood in this very hallway and rung this bell many times before.

"But there was no answer. I rang again, waited, rang. At last the door opened with a jolt, hooked on a chain. A sixtyish woman I had never seen before in my life stared out at me suspiciously.

"'Yes? What do you want?'

"I was momentarily too startled to say anything.

"'What do you want?'

"At least I managed to say, 'I've come to pick up Jason. I'm--'

"'Who?' She almost spat the word.

"Somewhat more in control, I asked, 'Does Anne Harris live here anymore?'

"'I don't know anyone by that name.'

"'But ... this is *her* apartment. Do you know where she's gone? Did you just move in here? The previous tenant--'

"The woman slammed the door in my face. I heard a bolt click. I raised my fist to knock, but staggered away and hit the opposite wall so hard I cracked the plaster. Then I realized I'd best be gone before someone called the police, so I hurried from the building.

"Outside, I sat on the garden wall and said over and over, '*The bitch. The goddamn bitch.*'

"I thought I was talking about Anne, who had moved away without telling me, taking Jason with her. I thought my anger and my hurt came from the realization that I'd never



whatever call a *sending*, a message, clear as a phone call, from Laura--"

"You can't really believe--"

Now I was beginning to think I should stop Barry's story right there. This was not healthy for him to bring it up with such conviction.

He clearly believed every word he said. I thought he was truly going insane, just then.

But there was no stopping him.

"That Sunday -- just a week ago -- was visiting day, when I could go up to New York and see my boy. That was why the alarm had been set. I was exhausted. I'd had almost no sleep. But I got up anyway. I never wanted to let Jason down.

"I fell asleep once on the train and

Once more Barry broke off. He put his hands over his face and sobbed.

I felt I had to say something, anything.

"Hey, East Nineties. You must have done very well for yourself--"

He pulled his hands away from his face and glared at me. Instantly I felt like a total jerk for having said that.

"*She* did very well by me, that bitch-and-a-half!"

"But there was ... there is your son."

"Yes, Jason. But, you know, Phil? I realize now that even Jason was bait. Anne used him as bait. And beyond that, *Laura* was pulling all the strings like a fucking *puppet-master* ... and I had to choose between *realities*, between *lives*, one with Jason in it, and Anne too, or else just Laura. Not that I

see my son again.

"If it had really been Anne, if I'd truly believed she had moved, I would have called information. I would have called my lawyer, or maybe even her lawyer.

"But I was actually talking about Laura.

"And I looked up in the sky and I *saw one*, a glowing disk, as clear a sign as any burning bush.

"I knew there was only one thing left for me. So I came back to Philadelphia on the next train. I didn't fall asleep this time. My mind turned endlessly in fantasies of revenge. By the time I reached Thirtieth Street Station my eyes were truly opened, and, just as Laura had predicted, I was *seeing them*--"

"Barry, what did you see? Think carefully."

"The saucers, Phil. Flying saucers, thousands of them at once, passing over the city like an incredible migration of suns. You didn't see anything unusual that day, Phil, nor did most people, but *I* did, because Laura had opened my eyes. She'd brought me that far, and my hatred and my fear provided the extra power I needed.

"I saw them, and I understood why the stupid Air Force with its Project Blue Book never turned up anything. They're not spaceships with little green men from Mars. They're spiritual *powers*, like angels, miraculous messengers, apparitions, but neither good nor evil. Most people never see them. A few catch a glimpse, just a glimpse, and they don't know what they've seen. But *I knew* that they're like the living cells in the bloodstream of the universe, all around us constantly, if only we can *see them*. That was what was happening. It was as if the painted backdrop of our reality were torn away, and I was seeing the bare stage behind."

"By the time I reached the Market-Frankford El," Barry continued, "I was alone, no longer quite in *your* world, Phil, or at least perceiving it *very* differently. The city was deserted, the streets as empty and silent as in my dream, the flying saucers gliding overhead like a burning cloud.

"The train came just for me. There was no one in the attendant's booth, so I climbed over the turnstile and boarded. And that train didn't stop until it came to the place with the rusty stairs, where the street smelled like a damp tunnel.

"I got off, went down the stairs, and the saucers flickered through the tracks above me like a rain of fire. My footsteps echoed.

"Something ran ahead of me, something small and dark, rattling behind trashcans. Once a window flew open and a blast of air from within sent curtains flapping. I heard things falling in there, breaking.

"The door to Laura's shop was unlocked. I had expected that. I groped my way along the cluttered corridor, paint chips raining down on me. The main room seemed to be swaying like the cabin of a ship in a storm, glass tinkling, books tumbling from shelves.

"The masks on the walls swayed and rattled. Then they began to speak. One of them had my ex-wife's voice, Anne's.

**"The room went dark.
I rubbed my eyes.
When I could
see again,
I went back
into the bedroom,
through
the bead curtain.
Laura was still
sitting there.
"It will be wonderful,"
she said.**

**"The two of us together.
We won't have to age.
We won't have to die."**

"Barry? Where are you? Goddamnit -- Barry!"

"And another scream. It was Jason.

"Daddy! Help me! I'm scared! *Daddy!*"

"I tore aside the bead curtain. Laura was sitting there, naked, on the edge of the mattress. She held a glowing disk in her hands. Then she released it and it floated in the air, expanding and whirling until it filled the room and its light was blinding. I staggered back into the shop room. The masks rattled.

"Daddy! Daddy!" Jason screamed from behind one mask, then another, and another, as if he were running along a corridor behind them, shouting out of each mouth in turn.

"The room went dark. I rubbed my eyes. When I could see again, I went back into the bedroom, through the bead curtain. Laura

was still sitting there.

"It will be wonderful," she said. "The two of us together. We won't have to age. We won't have to die."

"Why?" I said. "Why are you doing this?"

"I take what I want and I want you."

"Furiously, I yanked on the bead curtain, tearing the curtain rod loose. Beads rattled to the floor. "What about my son?"

"She smiled, and her smile was utterly malevolent. "Think of the good old days, Barry, my love. You didn't have a son then. The needle passes in and out, back and forth, forward and back. That is all."

"I was without words. "You -- you -- witch--"

"Now it was her turn to laugh at me, and her voice was horrible, like the dwarf in my dream.

"Do what thou wilt," she said. "That is the whole of the law. And I have done so."

The phone rang. Barry looked at it in absolute, abject terror.

"Excuse me," I said.

"No, Phil -- Please! Don't answer it!"

The story had gone on for hours. I stood in the semi-darkness, flicked on a lamp, and went for the phone.

"Phil!"

Just then an avalanche of pots and pans fell in the kitchen. The phone kept ringing.

"Quasimodo? Is that you?"

But my dog peeked fearfully out of a nearby closet, whined, and retreated back in again.

The phone still rang.

"Phil! For God's sake!"

"Something rattled across the floor upstairs, like the hooves of a goat.

"Phil!"

He lunged for me, but I picked up the receiver and he froze where he was.

There was no voice on the other end of the line at first, just utter silence. Then, very faintly, something stirred. I thought of the sound of a crab scratching against the side of a bucket.

Finally there was a voice I had not heard in fifteen years. But I knew it certainly enough. It was Laura Howard.

"I am the way. I am the door to the other world. I have seen the frozen suns of Orion, and sailed on fiery ships into the darkness beyond, where there is no more suffering, only joy--"

I replaced the receiver carefully. I felt sick then, terrified. I grasped desperately at any possibly rational explanation, and, not finding one, felt my own sanity fraying, about to snap.

"Phil," Barry said. "It was her." No question. Plain statement.

I nodded.

"I knew it would be."

"You knew?"

"Yes, because I killed her."

The lamp flickered, then went out. I could see out the window that the whole neighborhood had gone dark.

I regarded Barry Atwood with horror, and with awe.

And, sitting in the darkness, he told me the rest of the story.

"I hurled the glass part of the lava lamp at her. It shattered against her temple and she fell back onto the mattress. Then I grabbed the wooden hand-thing from the altar and beat her with it again and again, while the building shook and the floor heaved, and the darkness flashed into brilliant light and back into darkness. Even then, she wouldn't die. I had to strangle her.

"I felt like I was killing myself, but I had my hands around her throat for a long time.

"And, much later, I stumbled out into the silent, dark center room. I think some light came in through a skylight. I could see all the masks had fallen. Many were broken. None of them spoke.

"I found the key to the shop in a drawer. I locked the door behind me as I left.

"Outside, the train rattled on its track overhead. There were people on the sidewalks, cars moving in the streets, and no flying saucers."

"I killed her, Phil."

"But, *murder--*" I didn't know what to

say. Just then I felt that Barry Atwood was far saner than I.

"It's been a week," he said. "The police haven't come looking for me. There was nothing in the papers. I don't think it was quite ... murder."

"Is she really dead then?"

"In this world, in the body, she's dead all right. But I think it was all part of her plan. I think she *needed* me to somehow help her make the transition into ... another state. Now she wants me to join her there. I know this, Phil, just like I knew it was her on the phone.

"When I got home that night, there was a single saucer hovering outside my window. It was for me, again, invisible to everyone else, I'm certain. And it has been there every night since. It isn't angry. It tells me, in her voice, how happy we were once and how we can be happy like that again. Together."

With great effort, I asked, "Barry, do you want to go with her?"

"Part of me does, Phil, the same part that wants to be twenty-two forever. I'm not sure I can ... stay away much longer. You understand?"

"I think so, Barry."

"That's why I came to you, Phil. I thought you would understand. I looked in the phonebook, and you were the only one of my old friends I could find, the only one who knew Laura Howard. So I knew you would help me, even though we never actually knew each other very well. There are no coincidences, Phil. Somehow it has to be you. I want you to do something for me after I'm gone."

And for an instant everything snapped into a different focus, and I thought: *He's going to kill himself.*

But, no, by the crazy logic of his story, everything fit.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked quietly.

"Find my boy. Laura canceled Jason out somehow. She did something with time. Pulled a few stitches maybe. But he's out there somewhere. I know it. Help him find his way back, if you can."

"But *how?*"

Barry rose from his seat and closed my eyes with two extended fingers.

"When it is time, open your eyes."

"I'll try," I said.

"Thank you, Phil. Now, I think, Laura is waiting. Goodbye, Phil."

"Goodbye, Barry."

"You may need this."

He pressed a key into my hand, and he whispered an address.

I sat in the darkness and listened to him leave. He opened the door. The iron gate of the porch railing creaked. Then he was gone.

I opened my eyes, and after a minutes there was light flickering in through the open doorway and through the Venetian blinds, as if the whole city were on fire.

I went to the doorway and looked out.

Barry was standing in the middle of the street.

And there in the darkness, as silent as falling snow, the flying saucers began to land.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. c
2. a
3. b
4. b
5. d
6. a
7. a
8. b - c
9. d
10. b
11. c
12. A - c
B - b
C - a

13. b

14. b

15. c

16. a

17. b

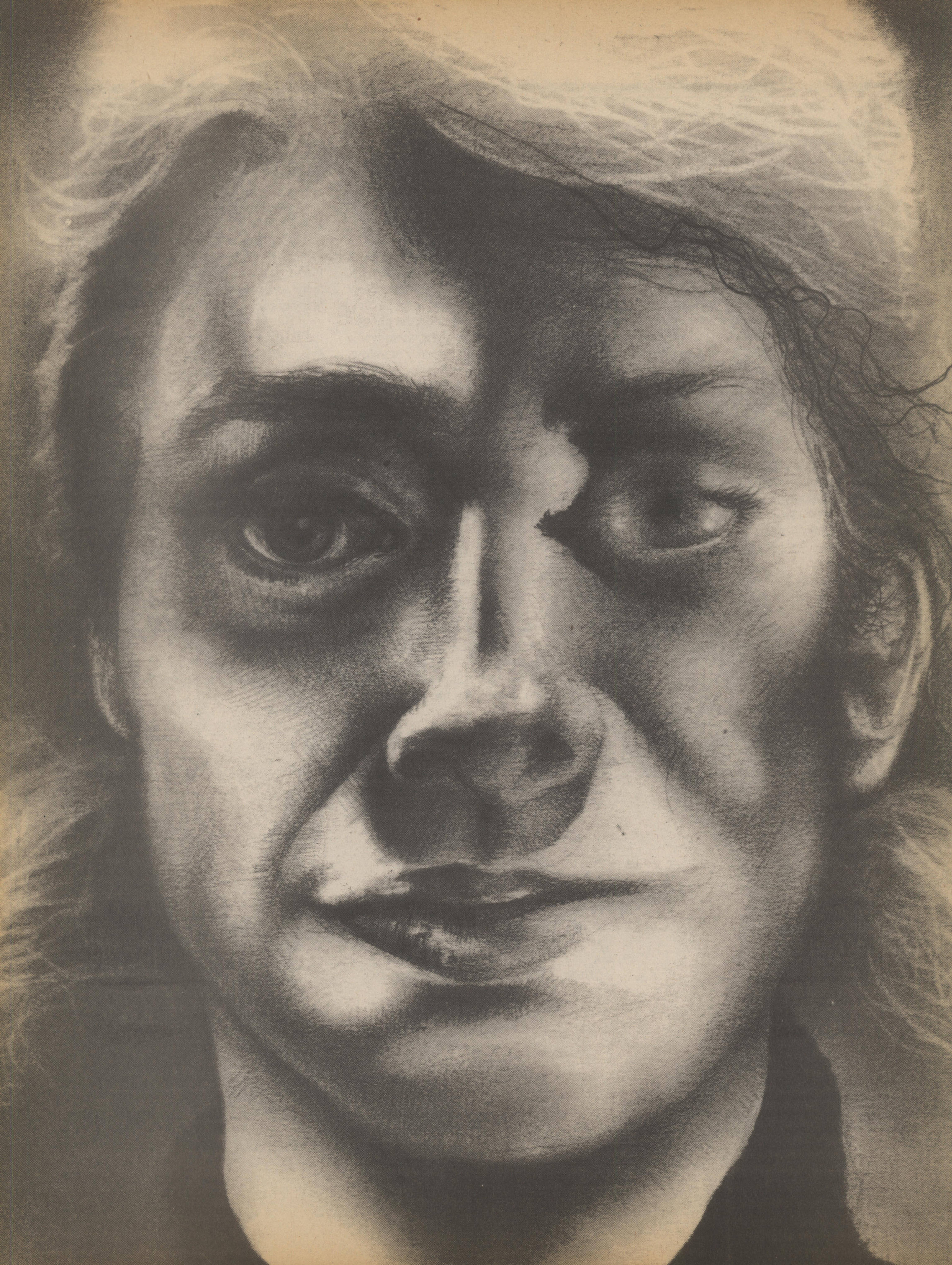
18. d

19. c

20. b

Bonus: "See you next Wednesday."





According to Ruth, only the most highly original art, the most creative, could be pure art.
And being creative, it had to be, by definition, female.
Because there was no more highly creative act than giving birth -- giving life, for God's sake --
an act exclusively female.

PERFECT ART

G. WAYNE MILLER

Prick.

That's what Cliff was. Gina had never called him that before, but now, alcohol bathing her brain, it fit.

And it felt good -- really good -- whispering that word into the dying suds of this, her sixth or seventh beer. Because that's what Clifton T. James was: a prick, motivated only by what was between his legs. Men ... when you got down to it, they were all alike, weren't they? Pricks. Self-centered, greedy pricks. And you, young lady? Yesterday's news, the second some new bimbo shook her tail in the bastard's face.

Which is what Cliff had done. Taken up with someone new right before Thanksgiving break. A tall, black-haired film major whose daddy reportedly had made a killing in real estate. The last time Gina and Cliff talked, a desperate call she'd placed two nights ago, he mentioned how he'd asked the slut to move in with him. Gina could picture them now, high on that great weed Cliff always had, screwing like rabbits in heat. The thought sickened her.

Prick.

"Another Beck's," she told the bartender.

As the evening wore on, the bar would fill with rock musicians and poets and students, like Gina, from Rhode Island School of Design. But now, at 5:45 p.m., it still had its daytime colors. A lunch and after-work watering hole for lawyers and bankers and businessmen. There they were, in their ties and suits, hunched over their martinis, maybe a dozen altogether. The one closest to her was staring. Undressing her with his eyes, rubbing his tongue along his teeth. Men were always coming onto her like that. Even when Cliff had been with her, you would catch them doing it. Cliff used to say it was her face. What else could it be? She'd always thought her shoulders were a bit too broad, and she'd never been pleased with her small breasts. But her face was striking. She knew that much. That's what everyone had told her since she'd been a little girl: that she had the perfect face. High cheek bones, like a model's. Large blue eyes. Blemish-free skin. Deep red lips. Even drunk, like tonight, that face was radiant but soft, like an impressionist

painting.

My little impressionist painting.

That was Cliff's phrase. He'd coined it on their second date, a week after they met at the beginning of first semester. He was tall, handsome in a Rocky Mountain sort of way, at 27 the youngest full professor in RISD history. His field was European film and it was there, the first day of his celebrated Bergman seminar, that they'd met. Gina, a junior, was majoring in filmmaking. Cliff was just back from sabbatical in Stockholm. The first time they made love, he seduced her with California chardonnay and first-person accounts of the great Bergman himself.

"Hello."

The voice was a woman's, sultry but polished, hinting of breeding. Gina expected a middle-aged lady wearing a mink, her fingers heavy with rings. But when she turned, she saw someone in sweat pants, high-top sneakers and sweater, her only jewelry a pearl necklace. She looked about 25. Tall, maybe five-nine. With the homeliest face Gina had ever seen. The kind of face you felt sorry anyone had the misfortune to have.

"Mind if I join you?"

I've seen her before, Gina thought. *Seen that face.*

It was at the RISD museum, where Gina worked part-time. Yes, Gina remembered her quite well now. She'd come in on several occasions the last few weeks. Spent most of her time in the early American galleries, where Gina worked, admiring the museum's substantial American realism collection.

"The way that man was staring, I thought you'd appreciate company," the woman said. "Do you mind?"

"No," Gina said, and she meant it. Judging by the tongue action, it was only a matter of time before the accountant troll, undoubtedly married, would have been putting the moves on her.

"I'm Ruth," the woman said, sitting.

"I'm Gina."

"And you're feeling down 'cause your lover's dumped you."

Gina's eyes widened. "How'd you know?"

"Oh, I can tell," Ruth said, smiling. "It's a woman-to-woman thing, being able to pick up on something like that."

Gina liked the sound of that, the automatic sorority it implied. "Cliff's a--"

"Prick," Ruth finished. "I think that's a very accurate description of many men. Sometimes, I believe, that's how they think. With their cocks, which they believe to be the most marvelous little organs in the world. Ha!"

Suddenly, Gina thought she was going to cry. For two weeks, it had been like this: from the heights of pure anger crashing down into the darkest depression. She sniffled and composed herself.

"So, ah, what do you do?" she said to her new companion.

"I'm an artist."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Me, too. Well, sort of. I'm an art student. At RISD. I'm into filmmaking."

"How interesting."

"What kind of art are you into?"

"Perfect art," Ruth said.

"I guess that's what we all aspire to," Gina said, laughing.

"The difference is I intend to achieve it. I'm already very, very close."

[2.]

In the brief period she would have to reflect on it, Gina would try to convince herself that it was only the invitation to see Ruth's paintings that propelled her out of the bar and into the woman's car. She would not admit to herself that sitting there, increasingly shit-faced, she had felt the first jolt of the sexual voltage that jumped from this stranger like electricity out of some powerful generator. She would not admit that she was attracted to her as she had been to no woman, and few men.

They drove through downtown Providence, heading toward the waterfront, discussing art. Ruth had a hypothesis. She'd spent years refining it, she said, and was only now painstakingly proving it. According to Ruth, only the most highly original art, the

most creative, could be pure art. And being creative, it had to be, by definition, female. Because there was no more highly creative act than giving birth -- giving *life*, for God's sake -- an act exclusively female. Nothing a man could do could even come close. The mother force, Ruth said, flowed through all the best art. True artists imparted that force to their works -- *impregnated* them with it, as it were. The result was perfect art. Art that lived and breathed with the mother force. Art not merely imitating life, but *becoming* life. Heavy-duty, Ruth agreed, but demonstrably true.

But why, Gina saw through her drunkenness to ask, were so many of the world's great painters, sculptors, filmmakers male? Simple, Ruth said. It was a matter of oppression of women, much as what Cliff had done to Gina was oppression. Couldn't she see?

Yes, Gina said -- couched in those terms, she supposed she could.

And if circumstances had been different, alarms would have been going off in her head. But circumstances weren't different. The love of her life was gone. Her grades had plummeted. Christmas was in two weeks. Gina had never been lower. Or this drunk.

[3.]

Ruth's studio was in an old warehouse near the wharf. Once a beehive of activity, Providence's slow decline as a port had left the waterfront a ghost town; at this hour, 9 p.m., even the ghosts were sleeping. Gina had heard that the area was being reclaimed by artists attracted to large spaces and low rents, but tonight, there was no sign anything but rats lived here. Ruth parked and they went in through a loading dock. A freight elevator brought them to the top floor, the fifth. They walked down a shadowy corridor to Ruth's studio. Ruth slid the doors open and they went in.

It was a massive place, too massive for Gina to take in all at once. She stood in the doorway, letting her eyes drift. The furnishings were sparse, only a couch and an armchair and a table or two. The floor was bare, oil-stained. Overhead, the ceiling beams were exposed; from one of them was suspended a block and tackle, a relic from the building's earlier life. The cathedral-length windows were covered with dark drapes. But it was the walls that were most striking. They were hung with an incredible array of oils, water colors, pastels, charcoals. Most were of people, principally women, although a landscape was interspersed here and there, along with a couple of abstract pieces. It was a stunning collection, the work of someone overloaded with talent.

Perfect art.

The words rang through Gina's head, only now they didn't sound so hollow. Gina didn't know if Ruth had made a name for herself yet, but what she was seeing was impressive. This was talent, the kind of raw, driving talent that could take Ruth to the top.

"All yours?" Gina asked weakly.

"All mine," Ruth said, her voice lacking any trace of pride.

"They're very good. They're ... *brilliant*."

"They're trash," Ruth said scornfully. "Crude attempts."

"I think they're brilliant," Gina repeated, less confidently.

"That's because your thinking is too traditional. Restricted and restrained. I don't blame you; mine was once, too. Would you like some cocaine? You do cocaine, don't

an unpleasant shiver.

"The collection. Come."

Gina did not argue.

Ruth led her to the door, turned the knob, and they went inside. It was a warm room, bright, a tenth the size of the outer studio. The walls were covered with white drapes, the floor with white shag carpeting, and there were no windows, a fact that did not strike Gina as strange until later. At one end, there was a satin-sheeted bed; at the other, an arrangement of ten or so canvasses, each mounted on an easel, each hidden under red velvet cloth, each bathed in soft ceiling lights. Another easel supported an empty canvas. Except for the bed, the room could pass for one of those chic galleries in Boston or New York. Gina wondered momentarily if she had ever done a show in here. It would have been funky. Would have suited Ruth. Fit her like



you?"

"Yes," Gina managed.

"Then here," Ruth said, drawing two lines with a razor on a china plate. "Be my guest."

They got high. They sat on the couch doing lines, too many to count before long, and Ruth prattled on about perfect art, and Gina listened, trying with only marginal success to assimilate what was being said. And when everything had become a blur -- a pleasant, weightless sort of blur in which Cliff no longer had substance -- Ruth got off the couch and extended her hand.

"Come," she said.

Where? The word formed on Gina's lips, but no sound came out.

"There," Ruth said, gesturing toward a small door.

"What?" Gina managed. The touch of Ruth's hand made her shiver, but it was not

a glove.

"I work only in here now," Ruth explained.

"Comfortable," Gina said.

"Yes. There was a time when I could work under any conditions. Now I find comfort is absolutely necessary for concentration."

"For perfect art," Gina offered.

"For perfect art. Would you like to see my latest pieces?"

Gina nodded.

"They make what's out there look like scribbling."

"I can't believe that."

"But it's true."

One by one, she unveiled her works. There was a rendering of a woman's hands, the nails painted a soft pink. A woman's neck, adorned with a simple pearl necklace, like Ruth's. A set of legs. Forearms. El-

bows. A single shoulder. Breasts. Buttocks. Feet. A stomach, the tiny blond hairs barely visible.

"You're not embarrassed, are you?" Ruth said when she had uncovered all but one of her works.

"No," Gina said. And the truth was she was not embarrassed, only vaguely uneasy. And not because of the subject matter. Not with the paintings *per se*. There was something else ... something in the news a year, a year and a half ago. Something involving the police, wasn't it?

She tried, but the memory couldn't be coaxed.

"Something is bothering you," Ruth interrupted.

"No ... it's just ... it's just I can't believe how good they are. *Brilliant*. They're not photographs, are they?"



"No. If you look closely, you'll see brush marks."

Bending, Gina scrutinized the painting of the woman's legs. They were perfect legs, thin and toned at calf level, weightier but without a trace of cellulite or varicose veins. A sixteen-year-old's legs. The only imperfection -- if it could be called that -- was a pinpoint-sized mole on the inside of the left thigh. Ruth was right. If you looked closely, you could see brush marks. Whatever else Ruth was, she thought, she was a disciple of realism.

"Perfect," Gina said.

"Thank you."

"Is it the same person?"

"Not exactly," she smiled. "Nature has not blessed a single individual with such symmetry and grace -- yet. But as artists, that should be our aim, should it not?"

Perfection?"

"Yes."

"Now you must see my latest. I finished it only last week."

Ruth slipped the cloth off her last painting. It was a female pubic region, an isosceles triangle of black hair against china-white skin.

"What do you think?" Ruth said breathlessly, and Gina felt it again, arousal.

"I ... I think I ought to go now," Gina said.

"No you don't."

And she didn't, not really.

[4.]

It wasn't only the alcohol, or the cocaine, or the loneliness. There was something else that propelled Gina to share Ruth's bed.

There was Gina.

Since puberty, she'd wondered how it would be to have sex with another woman. Not an obsession, no -- she was strongly heterosexual, and nearly all her fantasies concerned men. But there had been times seeing a woman, especially one unclothed, when she had ... well, *wondered*. Wasn't it Masters and Johnson who said such fantasies were normal? And wasn't it true, as Ruth implied, that the female body was intrinsically more carnal than the male's? Wasn't it all somehow tied in with its reproductive role, one far more complex than a man's, which began and ended with ejaculation?

She remembered high school gym, seeing other girls naked, how amazed she had been by the diversity of the female form. No two designs precisely alike. *Like snowflakes*, she thought. She remembered thinking some

grand cosmic scheme must be responsible. That God, in His infinite wisdom, had a reason for such diversity. She remembered accidentally brushing her friend Lori Anders when they'd been alone in the shower once, how there'd been an awkward moment of silence in which Gina's whole body tingled and her nipples were suddenly erect. How Lori's body seemed to react that way, too. How there'd been a charge in the air, and she'd had an almost irresistible urge to caress Lori, if only for an instant.

"Don't," she ordered Ruth when Ruth touched her cheek.

But Ruth knew. Ruth felt it, the way Lori Anders had. The way Gina herself felt it, building, building.

"You're so beautiful," Ruth whispered, the way Cliff once used to whisper.

"No ..."

Closer, Ruth's breath sweet, inebrious.

"Your face especially."

A *perfect face*, Cliff used to say. An out-of-focus image of him took shape in her mind, then was gone.

"Not a blemish anywhere."

"Please ..." Her resistance was an impotent thing now. Ruth moved her hand to Gina's neck, drawing them together.

"A perfect face."

"Mmmmm ..."

"I must paint it."

"... mmmm ..."

"I must make it mine."

And then, no more words from either, only a dizzying avalanche of passion that carried them to the bed. When Ruth had stripped, she looked at Gina, unembarrassed, as if seeking her approval. The sight of Ruth's nakedness only fueled what was raging inside Gina. It was an incredible body, with skin the color and smoothness of fine porcelain. No fat, not an imperfection anywhere, except an almost undetectable mole on her left thigh. Gina's eyes wandered, stopping as they made their way along Ruth's body. The dark triangle between her legs. Her stomach, flat, firm. Her breasts, shaped according to some ideal geometric formula. Her neck, slender, strong, adorned with a string of pearls. Only the face, so homely, so plain, seemed inharmonious.

But the body -- the body was stunning. Gina had the crazy idea she'd seen if before.

But where?

Lori Anders.

No.

The museum.

No.

Ruth's paintings.

Yes, that's what it was. Gina could see them at the other end of the room, still bathed in ceiling light.

So that's it, Gina thought before losing

herself. Now it made sense.

Self-portraits.

And then she was drowned in Ruth's smothering love.

[5.]

When she awoke, she was in Ruth's bed.

Bound hand and foot.

Gagged. Unable to scream.

She struggled, her breath short and panicked, the pressure in her temples pumping pain through her skull. She tried lifting her arms, her legs. It was no use.

Be calm, she tried to convince herself, and after repeating it several times, she almost was.

At least you're no longer drunk.

It was then, trying to pull herself together trying to come up with something that might see her through this -- that she noticed the room was different. She hadn't been moved -- no, the bed was the same, the paintings were arranged in their places -- but something had changed. The wall drapes had been pulled back to reveal copper plating, ceiling to floor. There were no windows.

"Ruth?" she tried to say. But of course there was no sound, only movement of the sheet used to gag her.

Maybe Ruth was lying in the larger studio, bound and gagged, too. Perhaps she'd gone out, and while she was gone, someone had come in, found Gina, tied her and cleaned the place out.

Except nothing was missing.

And Gina didn't believe any of that.

Whatever was going on, Ruth had to be behind it. Probably in the other room, getting ready to ...

I never should have come here, Gina thought, tears forming.

But it was too late for thoughts like that.

She remembered a newspaper story about a millionaire's daughter who had been

abducted and buried in a makeshift grave for three days with only a jug of water and a cardboard tube for breathing. She survived, she told her rescuers, only by clinging to the faith that somehow she'd be saved.

Gina tried to frame it that way.

I'll be saved.

Someone will report me missing and they'll come looking.

But who?

For the first time since last night -- if in fact it was last night, and not days or weeks or only an hour ago -- she thought of Cliff. He wouldn't be reporting her missing, and neither would anyone else, not until Christmas break, at least. No one knew where she was. No one cared.

It was in the middle of that new despair that Ruth came into the room. She was wearing a white robe and her head was hidden under a white hood. Gina knew it was her only when she spoke.

"The mother force was very strong last night," Ruth said. "It is stronger today."

Her voice was cold, distant. Gina had the inconceivably frightening notion that there was nothing under the hood. Not that impossible plain face of hers, only ... only ...

only what?

Emptiness, like a blank canvas?

Gina tasted bile.

"The copper contains it. Focuses it -- magnifies it -- perfect for painting. It was one of the ancient's secrets, copper. The Mesopotamians knew this Medieval alchemists. A secret, alas, lost in the passage of time. Until me."

Gina strained at the rope.

"I wish you would relax," Ruth urged.

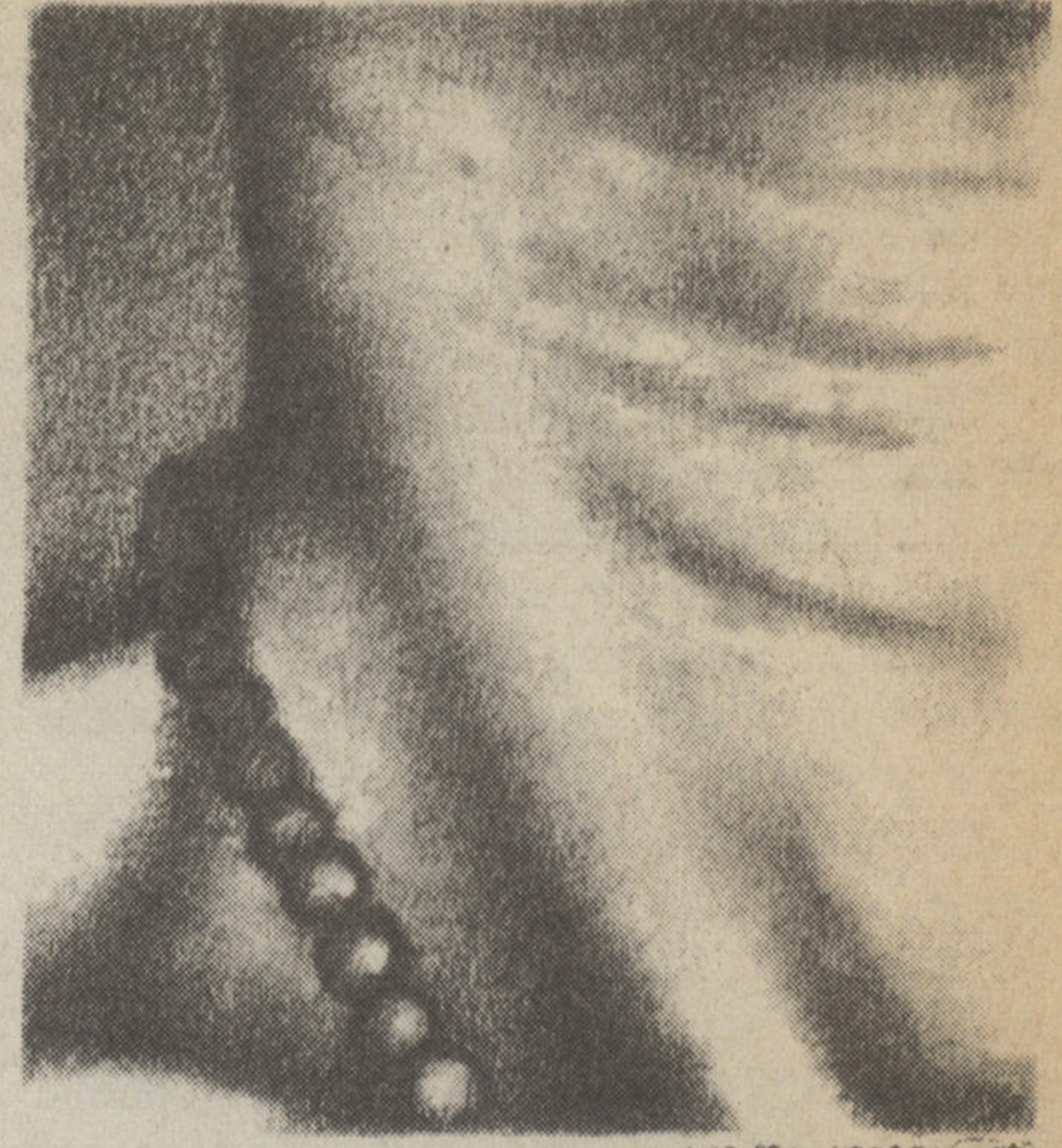
"The face must never, ever be depicted as angry or scared."

I must paint it, she'd said before kissing Gina. *I must make it mine.*

"I searched so long for you, for the final piece," Ruth said, arranging her easel at the foot of the bed. "Over a year. But I do not complain. Perfect art is patient."

That's when it hit Gina, hearing the word "piece." That's when last night's echo of a memory sprang to life. That's when she was catapulted to a new level of fright.

It was a TV newscast she'd seen more than a year ago, long before Cliff had dumped her and life had shifted into surrealism. The Providence police chief had been on the screen, talking about having no new leads in the serial killer case, begging the public for help in tracking the maniac down. Gina remembered the most gruesome detail of the case: how each of the bodies had been found horribly mutilated. Each missing parts. *Different* parts in every case, the newscaster had quoted exclusive sources as saying. Feet. Legs. Hands. In one incredibly bizarre case,



only the neck. Gina remembered how the victims had all been women, how the authorities theorized that the killer must have been charismatic in the most horrible tradition of the mass murderer, how he -- *he* -- probably had lured each of his victims with sweet talk and finesse.

Put them all together, one detective had been quoted as saying in a newspaper that had been soundly criticized for publishing it, *and you'd almost have a whole person. Everything but a face.*

And another memory, this one fresher, of someone remarking that it had been over a year since the killer had struck. The someone expressing the hope that, cross fingers and knock on wood, he had tired of his gruesome game, or moved along, or died. That, like Jack the Ripper, he'd passed into history.

Out of nowhere, an image formed on the fright screen of Gina's mind: an image of the Venus de Milo which she'd pondered for hours visiting the Louvre on her summer in Paris. Such classic beauty, the statue's face and torso, juxtaposed by the mutilation of time and mishandling, which had robbed Venus of her arms.

"Perfect art is jealous," Ruth was saying. "Possessive, like a lover."

Ruth turned the easel so that Gina could see it: an outline of Gina's face, done in pencil.

"Roughing it out," Ruth explained.

Gina's bladder let go.

Ruth took her scalpel and ran it around Gina's neck along the line where she intended to decapitate her. "The mother force," she said, bearing down with an inhuman strength. "The source of all life and creativity. The source of perfect art."



The Black List

P. W. SINCLAIR

1988

FIFTEEN OF THE BEST

1988 was an interesting year in horror. Not the best of times, but hardly the worst, either. It was the first year in recent memory that didn't feature any new titles by Stephen King. It was also the first year in recent memory that saw the publication of a new Peter Straub novel. It was a year in which anthologies of previously-unpublished stories continued to thrive, perhaps finally opening some of those long-closed minds along Publishers' Row. It marked the second full year for the TOR Horror Line. It saw increased horror publishing activity from other major houses -- NAL, Pocket Books, Avon, St. Martin's -- none of them truly a "line," but a positive step forward nonetheless. In 1988, we saw more variety. We saw an opening of the imaginative gates, otherwise known as the "Finally There's Room for a Little Bit of Everything in this Field" syndrome. For proof, consider "splatterpunk." It started the year as the undisputed Future of Horror, squeezing out just about everything else. It ended the year as just another sub-genre, with questionable sales figures and even more questionable staying power.

Interesting.

Before we go on, a brief note on the titles presented here. You'll notice that I called this list Fifteen of the Best, not *The Fifteen Best*. It could be that I don't quite have the guts to pull together a definitive list, but I prefer to think of it as open-mindedness. If literature of any kind is to grow and prosper into the twenty-first century, we need more decisions made by readers themselves and fewer by the self-proclaimed prophets of the critical set. So let's leave it at this: You'll find some books here that are worth your attention. If

you are (or even if you simply *call* yourself) a dedicated horror fan, these are some of the titles you can't ignore. The fact that I loved every one of them is immaterial. It's what *you* think that matters.



THE INFLUENCE

Ramsey Campbell
(Macmillan, 0-02-521160-9, \$14.95)

Arguably Campbell's best novel to date, this one throws a giant pie in the face of all who say Campbell's problem is that he's too obscure, or that he can't write in a gripping, commercially-marketable style. Without sacrificing the eerie nuances and disturbing surrealism that are Campbell's trademarks, this book really moves. It's a chilling ghost story about a death, an inheritance, and horror

reaching from beyond the grave.

THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY

Ellen Datlow and Terry Windling, Editors
(St. Martin's Press, 0-312-01851-7 hard-cover, 0-312-01852-5 trade paperback)

A welcome newcomer and a great companion volume to Karl Edward Wagner's annual *Year's Best Horror* from DAW, this is a massive volume of the best from 1987. Datlow and Windling split the editorial chores, the former handling the horror field, the latter dealing with more traditional forms of fantasy. More than thirty-five stories, including horror tales from Harlan Ellison, William F. Nolan, Michael McDowell, Kathryn Ptacek, T.M. Wright, Lisa Tuttle, and a lot more. Datlow's long essay (a delightful summation of 1987 in horror) is more than worth the price of admission all by itself.

ANGRY CANDY

Harlan Ellison
(Houghton Mifflin, 0-395-48307-7, \$18.95)

Seventeen of Ellison's best, most recent short stories. For those of us who know, that's all that needs to be said. I could take a few paragraphs here to explain the unusual title, but that would ruin the very grim pleasure of reading Ellison's introduction to the volume.

FOR FEAR OF THE NIGHT

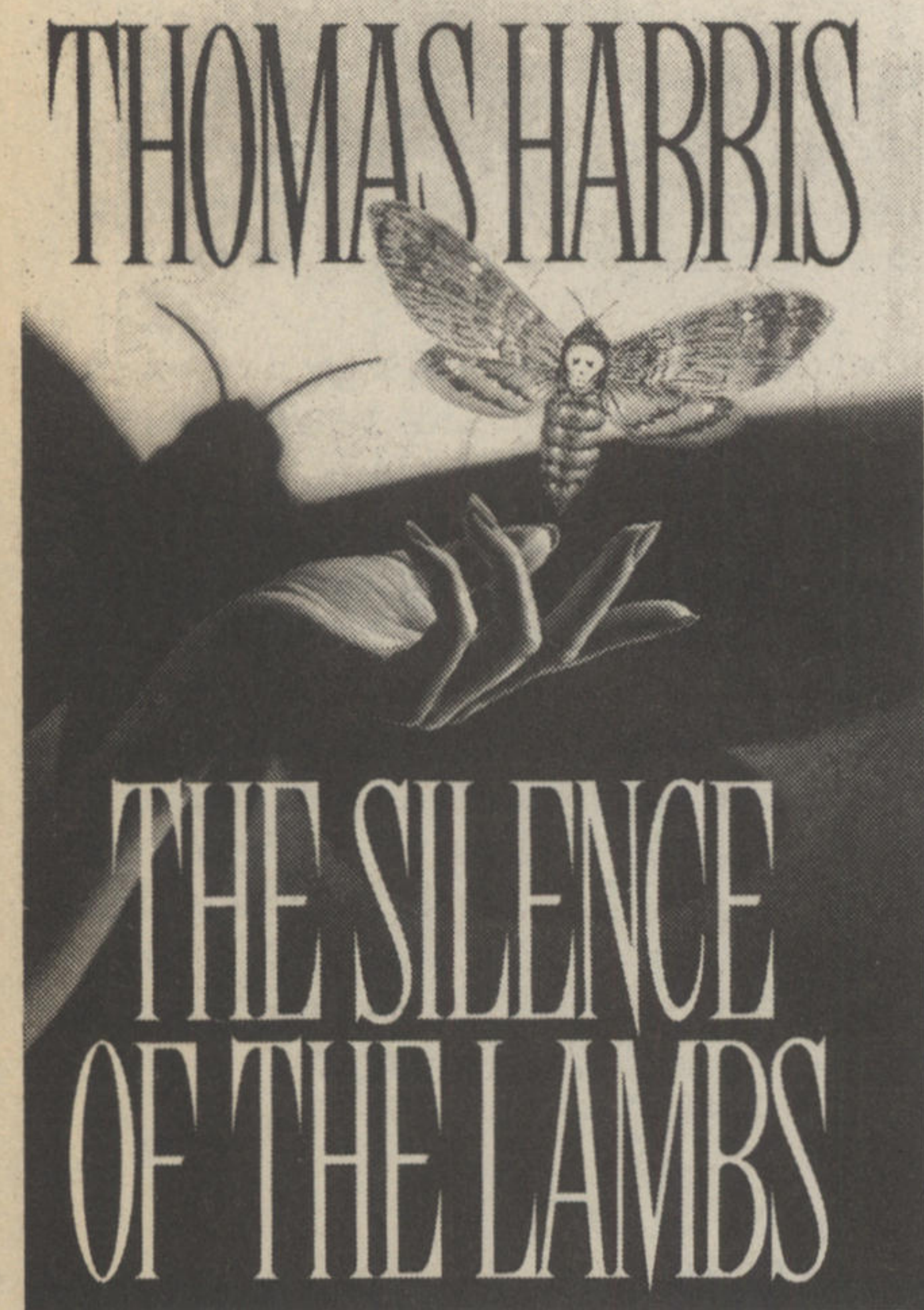
Charles L. Grant
(TOR, 0-312-93046-1, \$17.95)

A burned-out amusement pier in a small resort town. A voice on an answering machine. A ghostly vision. A troubled photographer. Strange deaths. The House of Night. Quiet. Dark. Creepy. Chilling. Effective.

STINGER

Robert R. McCammon
(Pocket Books, 0-671-62412-1, \$4.95)

Reviews of this book have called it a B-movie kind of horror novel -- enough so that I refuse to add my own voice to the chorus. I don't care if it *is* about an alien invasion of a small, isolated town. I don't care if it *does* move with the giddy speed of an out-of-control roller coaster. I don't care if you *do* finish it feeling a little bit guilty because you know it was just pure entertainment, not very deep, but you enjoyed the hell out of it anyway. I don't care about any of that. I'm not going to call it a B-movie kind of horror novel. I'll just call it worthwhile.



THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

Thomas Harris
(St. Martin's Press, 0-312-02282-4, \$18.95)

If you liked Harris' previous efforts, *Black Sunday* and (of particular interest to horror fans) *Red Dragon*, this novel will be sure to top your own personal list of '88's best. It's a taut suspense novel about a bizarre serial killer, a horror novel that's not a horror novel -- but that is surely the most *horrific* book you'll read for a long time. Harris recently signed a gargantuan contract with (I believe, though don't quote me on this) Doubleday. He's big now. He's going to be positively *huge* in a few years. If you don't already read him, start now and avoid the rush.

BLOOD AND WATER AND OTHER TALES

Patrick McGrath
(Poseidon Press, 0-671-64405-X, \$15.95)

The cover blurb for this short story collection calls McGrath "a Poe for the '80s." Publicist's enthusiasm aside, that may well be true. The thirteen stories in this book are unusual, scary, surrealistic, and about as wide-ranging as it's possible to be. The mainstream critics love McGrath, but that's no reason for horror lovers to turn away. Go into this collection with an open mind and be prepared to laugh, shiver, shake your head wonderingly -- and then turn back to page one to read the whole thing again.

SILVER SCREAM

David J. Schow, Editor
(TOR, 0-812-52555-8, \$3.95)

Here's another reason for short story fans, short story writers, and potential anthologists to rejoice. This book also appeared in hardcover from the folks at Dark Harvest, but whichever format you choose, you'll have a good time. It's a collection of what I'd call "visually-oriented" horror -- stories about the movies, movie theaters, television, Hollywood, and so on. Bloch, Barker, Campbell, Wagner, McCammon, and a lot more, are featured. It also includes a quirky introduction from Tobe Hooper and an even quirkier afterword by editor Schow.

LOWLAND RIDER

Chet Williamson
(TOR, 0-812-52722-4, \$3.95)

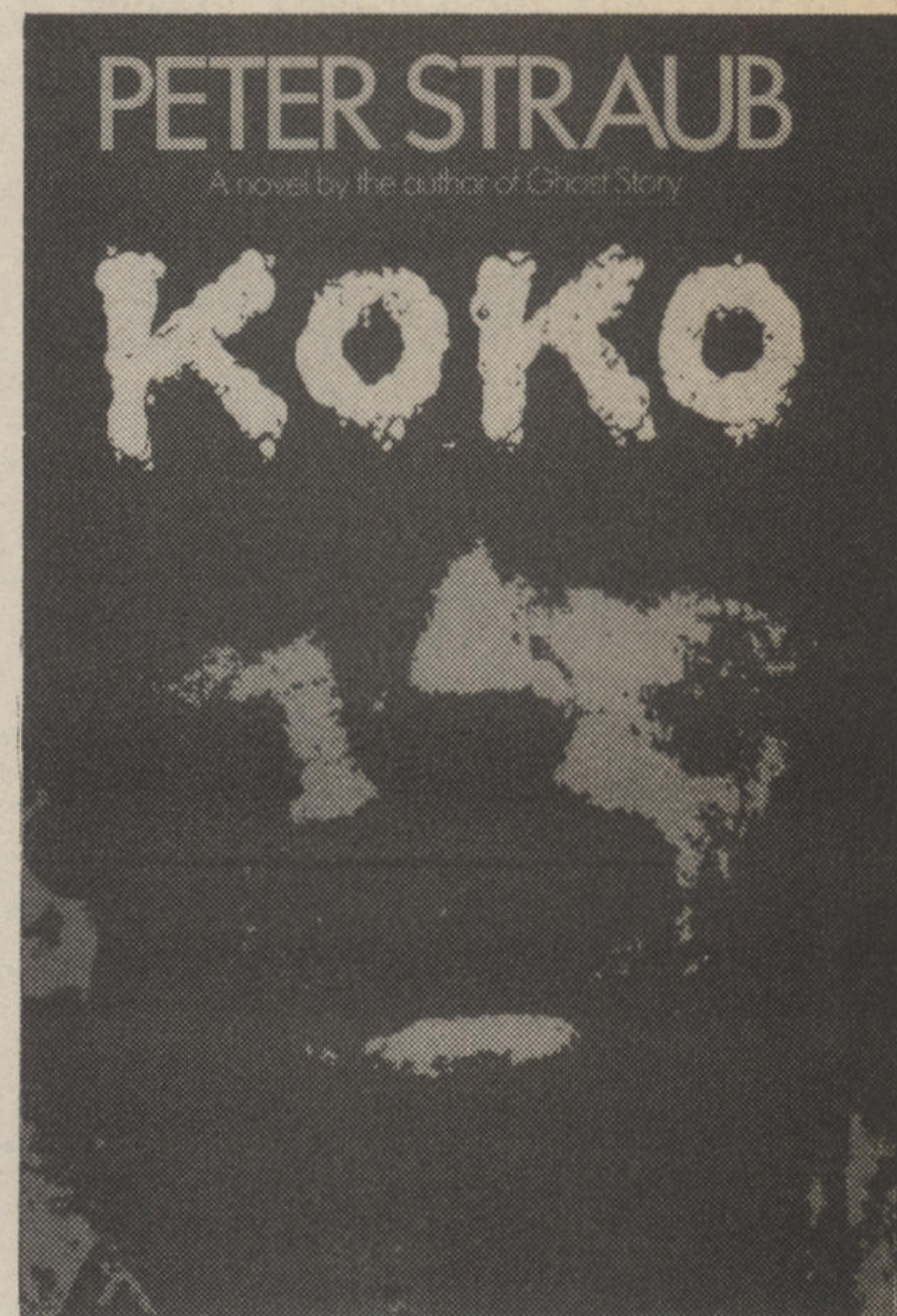
Year-end wrap-ups such as this are not going to be able to call Williamson an up and coming talent much longer. In fact, the publication of this novel just about makes it impossible to do so now. The follow-up to *Soulstorm* and *Ash Wednesday* is proof positive that the man is here to stay, and that he intends to make a big mark. It begins innocuously enough, as a novel in the *Death Wish* school. But from there it gets darker and darker, scarier and scarier. You may not want to ride the subway after reading this one -- assuming, of course, that you ever did.

BLACK WIND

F. Paul Wilson
(TOR, 0-312-93064-X, \$18.95)

Another one of those not-quite-horror novels that appeared last year. This one *does* have

occult elements, but they take a back seat to the story of the years leading up to World War II in Japan and American, and, of course, the war itself. Dr. Wilson has topped all his previous efforts with this one, outdoing even *The Keep*.



KOKO

Peter Straub
(Dutton, 0-525-24660-6, \$19.95)

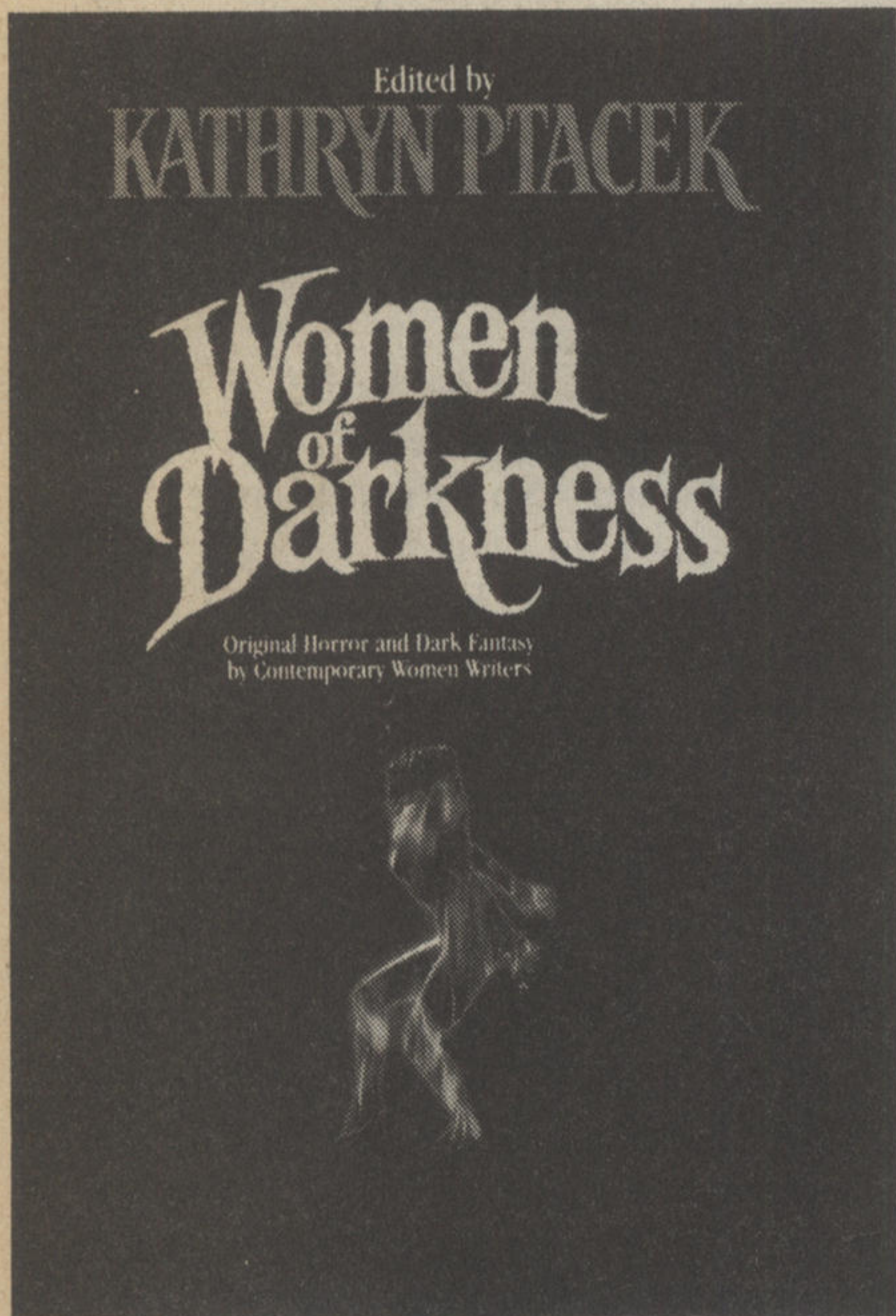
If you put hot coals to my feet and forced me to proclaim my own choice for the best novel of 1988, this would be it. No, it's not a horror novel. But it's of much more than passing interest to genre fans, who here have the opportunity to see what Straub made of his experience in the horror field and how he twisted the conventions of horror into fascinating mainstream shapes. This suspense novel about Vietnam and the men who fought there -- then and now -- seems to me to be the perfect example of the many ways in which reality sits cheek-by-jowl with fantasy, both in literature and in so-called "real life." Parts of it disturbed me more than any other novel published last year.

JOHN THE BALLADEER

Manly Wade Wellman
(Baen Books, 0-671-65418-7, \$3.50)

Is there a horror fan anywhere out there who doesn't know about John? Is there a horror fan who didn't revel in the publication of this omnibus volume? If there is, he'd better not

admit it. He might get carried off in the night by some strange inhabitants of the North Carolina hill country. Seriously, this collection of tales by the late, great Wellman (with a foreword by David Drake and an introduction by Karl Edward Wagner) is about the closest thing to "must" reading published in '88. If you didn't know about John before, there's no excuse not to now.



WOMEN OF DARKNESS

Kathryn Ptacek, Editor
(TOR, 0-312-93096-8, \$17.95)

Presented to prove my introductory point that anthologies thrived in '88, and also to disprove the oft-repeated statement that there aren't any good female horror writers. The twenty tales here are by writers both known and new (Kit Reed, Lisa Tuttle, Elizabeth Massie, Tanith Lee, and Melanie Tem, to name just a few). Most of them will please you, and just about all of them will put our genre sexists to shame.

T.M. Wright
(TOR, 0-312-93055-0, \$16.95)

With this novel, Terry Wright cements his reputation as one of the best ghost story writers around. The tale of an island (of course; check out the title), a deep lake, and a troubled shoreline resort, it's unsettling rather than downright scary -- proof, we can hope, that horror doesn't have to be full of Technicolor gaudiness to find the right nerves and tapdance on them.

PRIME EVIL

Douglas E. Winter, Editor
(New American Library, 0-453-00572-1, \$18.95)

Of all the anthologies published in '88, this one got the most attention and sold the best. That's due largely to the new Stephen King story it contains, but there are also twelve other tales here (by Barker, Grant, Etchison, Morrell, Straub, Tessier, and others), and most of them are better than King's. If you can't find the hardcover, don't worry. It's going to be *everywhere* in paperback.

TEN HONORABLE MENTIONS

The House Of Caine

Ken Eulo
(TOR, 0-812-51773-3, \$4.95)

Roofworld

Christopher Fowler
(Ballantine, 0-345-35701-9, \$7.95)

Valley Of Lights

Stephen Gallagher
(TOR, 0-812-51832-2, \$3.95)

Crucifax

Ray Garton
(Pocket Books, 0-671-62629-9, \$3.95 Also published in hardcover, as **Crucifax Autumn**, by Dark Harvest)

Oasis

Brian Hodge
(TOR, 0-812-51900-0, \$3.95)

Bloodlinks

Lee Killough
(TOR, 0-812-52064-5, \$3.95)

The Troupe

Gordon Linzner
(Pocket Books, 0-671-66354-2, \$3.50)

Adversary

Daniel Rhodes
(St. Martin's Press, 0-312-02148-8, \$18.95)

Shadowshow

Brad Strickland
(New American Library, 0-451-40109-3, \$3.95)

The Devil's Auction

Robert Weinberg
(The Weird Tales Library, Owlswick Press, 0-913896-25-X, \$18.95)

UNABLE TO CLASSIFY

THE CORMORANT

Stephen Gregory
(St. Martin's Press, 0-312-01753-7, \$13.95)

I want to end with a note of mystery, fitting for a wrap-up of the horror field. This First American Edition of a 1986, award-winning British novel, appears to have been released in 1988. By that I mean, it first came to my attention in '88. It was reviewed elsewhere in '88. But the bibliographic information available in the book itself fails to list the year of American publication, mentioning only the 1986 copyright. It doesn't matter. Whether we're talking '86, '88, or even -- let's split the difference -- '87, this is a novel worth checking out. It's the brief, dark story of a bizarre sea bird left to the narrator as part of an inheritance. From there, events spiral downward into darkness with chilling speed. Find it if you can. This is one bird that's going to fly through your memory for a long time.

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NIGHTMARES

HORROR HAPPENINGS: NEWS, EVENTS, LATE RELEASES

HELLRAISER II

Hellbound: Hellraiser II, which was released in December, had to give up some of its more grotesque scenes in order to receive an R-rating from the Motion Picture Association of America. Twice rated X, the film was found to be a little too relentless and intense, says Bob Cheren of New World. The re-edited scenes included a decapitation of a monster, a bloody resurrection sequence, and a scene in which the resurrected female character feeds on human flesh in order to restore her own.

CABAL ON THE SCREEN

Clive Barker and David Cronenberg have teamed-up to adapt Barker's *Cabal* to film. The movie will be called *Night Breed*. Barker will direct, and interestingly enough, Cronenberg will play evil psychiatrist, Dr. Decker. "Barker told me that his casting inspiration was the result of seeing me interviewed on the BBC," Cronenberg says. "He said I should do the role the way I do interviews -- in a clinical, matter-of-fact style." Filming for Morgan Creek Productions is taking place in Calgary and at London's Pinewood Studios.

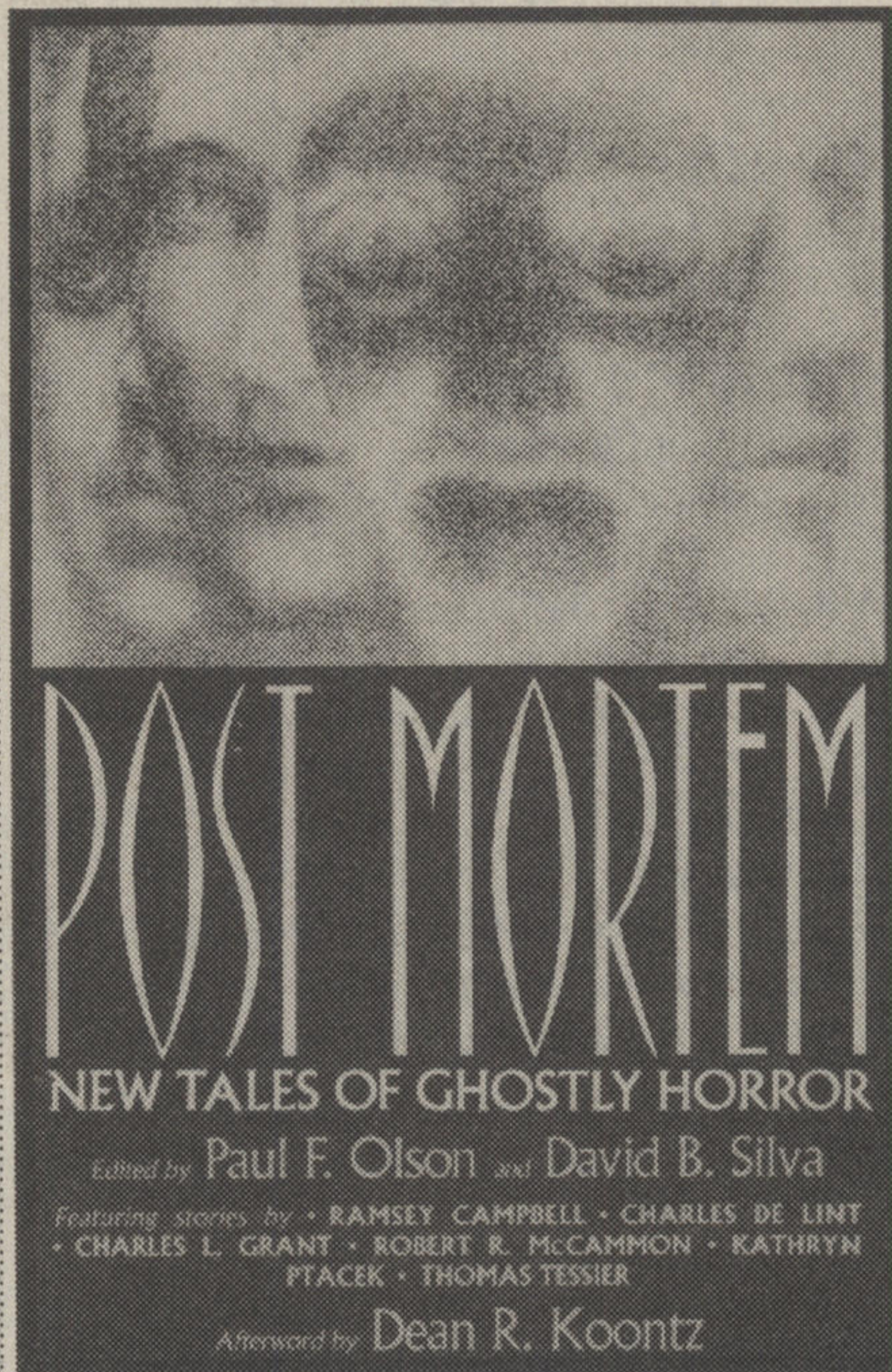
ILLUSTRATORS OF THE FUTURE

L. Ron Hubbard's Illustrators of The Future Contest (ILOF) has been launched. Its purpose is to find and nurture novice SF artists interested in exploring the possibilities of careers in illustration. ILOF has been created as a partner to Hubbard's Writer's of The Future short story contest, and will function in much the same manner. Deadlines will be quarterly. As the three quarterly co-winners are announced they will begin work illustrating Writer's of The Future stories. This *apprenticeship* is in addition to the \$500.00 award that each winner will receive. The annual grand prize is \$4,000.00. Full details on the contest may be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: L. Ron Hubbard's Illustrators of The Future Contest, 2210 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 343, Santa Monica, CA 90403.

YEWNEEK SENTIMENTS

Looking for just the right card for that horror-lover in the family? Well, Yewneek Sentiments may have just the card for you.

Celebrating all occasions (even weddings, anniversaries and Christmas) each card comes with a horror slant and sells for \$1.50. Delivery will be made within two weeks after receipt of your order. Cards can be ordered by naming the occasion desired and sending \$1.50 a piece to: Yewneek Sentiments, P.O. Box 23222H, Euclid, OH 44123. Satisfaction guaranteed.



POST MORTEM

Just out from St. Martin's comes this collection of contemporary ghost stories co-edited by Paul F. Olson and David B. Silva. The ghost story has a long tradition in the field of horror and this landmark anthology brings the tradition up to date. With an afterword by Dean R. Koontz, the book includes seventeen original ghost stories by today's masters: Ramsey Campbell, Robert R. McCammon, Charles L. Grant, Thomas Tessier, William F. Nolan, and others. Hardcover. \$16.95.

1988 WORLD FANTASY AWARDS

Life Achievement: Everett F. Bleiler
Novel: *Replay*, Ken Grimwood
Novella: "Buffalo Girls Won't You Come Out Tonight," Ursula K. Le Guin
Short Story: "Friend's Best Man,"

Jonathan Carroll

Collection: *The Jaguar Hunter*, Lucius Shepard

Anthology: *The Architecture of Fear*, David G. Hartwell, editor

Anthology: *The Dark Descent*, David G. Hartwell, editor

Artist: J.K. Potter

Special Award - Professional: David G. Hartwell

Special Award - Non-Professional: *American Fantasy*

Robert and Nancy Garcia

Special Award - Non-Professional: *The Horror Show*

David B. Silva

DEAN R. KOONTZ

Berkley has recently contracted with Koontz for the reprint rights for six books: *The Servants of Twilight*, *The Eyes of Darkness*, *The House of Thunder*, and *The Key To Midnight* (all originally published under the pen name of Leigh Nichols), plus *The Voice of the Night* (originally published under the name of Brian Coffey) and *Demon Seed*. The six book package will reportedly bring Koontz an advance of \$1.8 million and was largely the result of not only the success of his last several bestsellers, but of the successful reprint of *Mask*.

MARVEL COMICS

According to *Locus*, Marvel (the top comic book publisher in the United States) has been purchased by the Andrews Group. Marvel's collection of some 2,000 characters includes Spiderman, Captain America, the X-Men, and The Punisher. The sale was for a reported \$82.5 million.

ANNE RICE

Anne Rice recently told *New York* magazine that she will be creating the characters and overseeing the scripts for a new Fox network television series called "Hello Darkness." The series revolves around an Irish policeman who lives with a sexy and wicked female ghost. "The tension will come in when the cop tries to persuade the ghost to use her powers for good instead of evil," Rice said. She is also working on a movie based on her three vampire books--*Interview With A Vampire*,

The Vampire Lestat, and *The Queen of the Damned*.

DALLAS FANTASY FAIR

Bull Dog Productions will present their first Dallas Fantasy Fair of the year from April 7 through April 9th at the Marriott Park Central in Dallas. Guests will include Peter Bagge, Richard Pini, Michael Resnick, Julius Schwartz, Matt Wagner, and Doug Wildey. Tickets are \$20.00 at the door. For more information, contact Bull Dog Productions, P.O. Box 820488, Dallas, TX 75382.

AFTER SUNDOWN

Looking for a terrific new writer? You might try reading Randall Boyll's first novel, *After Sundown*. Two families decide to get away from it all in a quiet, isolated cabin, high in the Wasath Mountains. Trapped by a raging snowstorm, they encounter a nightmare far more horrifying than death or grief. Published under Berkley's Charter line. \$3.95.

TWILIGHT ZONE MAGAZINE

You won't hear about it by reading the magazine, but according to one of Montcalm's advertising assistants, the *Twilight Zone Magazine* will be "temporarily suspending publication" after its June issue. No word on how long the suspension will run or how *Twilight Zone* plans on dealing with subscribers.

WOLF'S HOUR

Just out from Pocket Books is Robert R. McCammon's newest novel. In *Wolf's Hour*, McCammon has taken the age-old legend of the werewolf and broken the mold, shattering equally aged misconceptions generated by pulp novels and horror movies. Unlike the traditional stereotype, the werewolf in this novel is no ordinary beast or asylum lunatic. His name is Michael Gallatin, and he is a man of the world, a lover, and a master spy. Don't miss this one, McCammon never fails to take his readers on a delightfully adventurous journey. \$4.95. Paperback.

TUBE TERROR

Horror appears to have finally come to the television medium. How long it'll last no one knows. But before they disappear, you should make an effort to check out some of the newest entrees on this season's menu. At this point, the tastiest of the bunch seems to be *Nightmare on Elm Street: Freddy's Nightmares*, a series of shows which are at their best when Freddy simply hosts instead of making an actual appearance. On the

softer side comes *Friday the 13th: The Series*, bearing little resemblance to the seven hit movies which have plagued theaters throughout the eighties. On the more bizarre side, you'll find *Monsters*, which for the most part comes across uneven and a little "cute." Interesting, though, is the return of *Twilight Zone* this season. Unlike its predecessor (the CBS resurrection of the original series), this one captures all the delight and magic that Rod Serling used to bring to the tube every week. Make an effort to catch it, you won't be disappointed. Other shows which you might want to at least catch once include: *Tales From The Darkside*, *Beauty And The Beast*, *The Hitchhiker*, and *Ray Bradbury Theater*.

SAY WHAT?

Here's something that you might like to take advantage of while you can, because this little offer expires on June 1st. From now until June 1st, however, all you have to do to receive all eleven back issues that are currently available (see the inside back cover if you aren't sure which ones we're talking about here) is send a check for \$35.00 (that's a savings of \$8.00 off the original cover price for these special back issues) and a card referring to this little announcement in the Nightmares Column to: *The Horror Show*, 14848 Misty Springs Lane, Oak Run, CA 96069. Make sure you include your name and address.

DRAGON CON

October 6-8, 1989 at the Omni International Hotel and Convention Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Guests include: Wes Craven, Anne McCaffrey, Michael Whelan, Andrew Greenberg, Larry Elmore, and others. Pre-registration (through September 15th) is only \$30. Fantasy Role-Playing, Strategic, Miniature and Computer Gaming in over 100 feature tournaments, and much more. For additional information send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Dragon Con '89, Boc 47696, Atlanta, Georgia 30362.

MINI-FOLIO

Those of you who are fans of the illustrations of John Borkowski will enjoy his 16-page Mini-Folio of original art. You can get your copy by sending \$1.00 plus one first class stamp to: John Borkowski, 21 Bladwin Street, West Haven, CT 06516.

CARRION COMFORT

Dark Harvest Books has just released the follow-up to Dan Simmon's 1986 World Fantasy Award winning novel, *Song of Kali*. Running 636 pages long, *Carrion*

Comfort revolves around three elderly friends (mind vampires) with the extraordinary psychic ability to use others while feeding off the generated emotions. Trade hardback, \$21.95. TOR Books will be publishing this novel in two books, so this is your only opportunity to get it all in one package. Dark Harvest continues to publish the most interesting books of the field. Upcoming, they'll be putting out the hardback version of Robert R. McCammon's *Swan Song*, plus Dean R. Koontz's *The Eyes of Darkness*, and *The Asimov Chronicles*, which is a massive collection spanning the 50 year career of Isaac Asimov. For more information, write Dark Harvest, P.O. Box 941, Arlington Heights, IL 60006.

1989 WORLD FANTASY AWARDS JUDGES

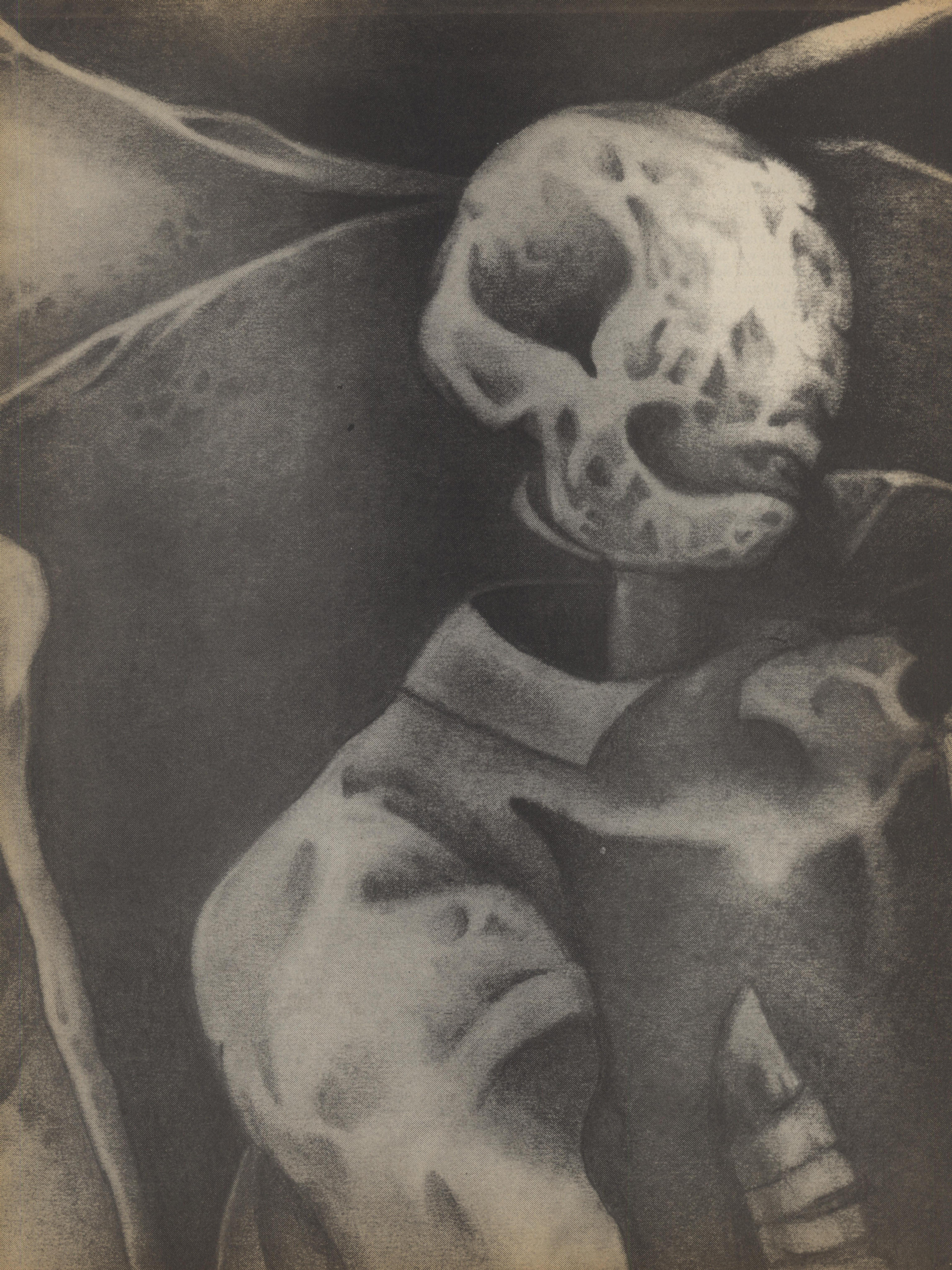
This year's World Fantasy Award judges have been announced as Ed Bryant (P.O. Box 18162, Denver, CO 80218), Susan Allison (c/o Berkley Publishing Corporation, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016), Lisa Goldstein (1471 Excelsior Ave., Oakland, CA 94602), Peter D. Pautz (P.O. Box 4326, West Columbia, SC 29169), and Jon White (98 Riverside Dr. #10-G, New York, NY 10024). Eligibility for an award requires that a work be published in 1988 by a living author or editor. Categories are: Best Novel, Best Novella, Best Short Fiction, Best Anthology, Best Collection, Best Artist, Special Award - Professional, Special Award - Non-Professional, and Life Achievement. Materials should be sent directly to the judges and marked as World Fantasy Award Materials.

THOMAS HARRIS

After two strong novels (*Red Dragon* and its sequel *The Silence of the Lambs*), Thomas Harris will be moving to the Dell line for his next two novels. Dell is reportedly paying a whopping \$5,750,000 for North American rights to the two books.

WES CRAVEN

Wes Craven, director of the first *Nightmare on Elm Street* movie has a four-picture deal with Alive Films, and is in the process of shooting *No More Mr. Nice Guy*, in which he's created a new serial killer in the vein of Freddy Krueger. His next film for Alive will be titled *The People Under the Stairs*. Keep your eyes open for both.



The membrane splits and a viscous, opaque substance the color of olive flesh begins to spread over the rock, upwelling like a clogged sink.

THE PUPPET ZOO

JEFFREY OSIER

It's only when the sky begins to darken up above the ever-narrowing streets that he begins to examine the crumpled ticket in his hand and realizes that it is handwritten, no more than a cluttered, twisted exercise in calligraphy, smeared by the sweat in his curled, fidgeting palm. He looks around the deserted street and then at the map on the reverse side of the invitation, but it is faded and indecipherable.

He puts the ticket in his shirt pocket and wipes the ink and sweat in his palms down the thigh of his pants. Up ahead there is a two-headed lamppost, bent as though from a collision with a car. He walks quickly to the corner, touches the sweating, corroding metal post and turns, knowing without knowing why that this is where the next turn is, knowing which way to turn and already seeing, far ahead of him, the next corner at which he will turn and what it will look like in precise detail once he arrives there.

He looks back at the intersection one more time and wonders what bent the lamppost. It's been so long since he's seen a car pass by that he's unsure if he's seen any at all tonight. Only one lane of traffic could possibly move up the one street, and the one on which he now stands could barely allow even that. The accumulation of filth is ancient and prodigious, and the paths cut through it are too narrow and ephemeral to accommodate anything wider than a single horse.

No car will or has ever crossed this intersection.

He walks on, then, kicking at the rubble, examining the walls of the buildings that surround him, their ominous features dulled by a monolithic darkness, leaning inward as they rise three and four stories above the street. They are packed so tightly together that this entire quarter of the city gives the appearance of a single, sprawling hive of a building, through which some gigantic animal has gnawed away a series of winding, narrow streets.

As he examines the buildings in the lamplight, his discomfort over the unfamiliar styling of their doors and windows is mollified by the certainty that, though eccentric in construction, these buildings are dead and

unmoving.

But yet, so is everything else. Shouldn't there be rats eating all this spoilage at his feet? Shouldn't there be some sounds--voices, the opening or shutting of doors or windows--from within at least some of these buildings? His only companions are the stars, too numerous, too bright along the thin strip of visible sky, too silent as they appear and disappear along the roof edges.

It is several more turns before he sees any people. A woman, plump in her long white gown, with a thick black mane that glimmers and streaks in the starlight, passes him by. Soon they both pass a tiny old black man, limping and stumbling through the rubble.

Others appear in this street so narrow that no more than three can walk abreast, where there are no more lampposts, only a white beacon up ahead that turns everyone in front of him into a soft-edged silhouette, and every face in back of him into a white, cringing mask.

They pass out of the avenue through an opening no wider than a doorway and out into a square bathed in white light. More people, emerging single file from other avenues, fill the square, the lines merging as they move towards the iron gate. The crowd is suddenly alive with voices. A woman stumbles into him and he has to grab both her shoulders to keep her from collapsing onto the pavement. She looks at him, smiles weakly and then gasps in alarm.

"I think I've lost my ticket."

She is young, her face pretty but withering, as though she were suffering from a lingering illness and stressed by a sudden panic. She searches her pockets, her purse, looking at him and no one else.

He pulls his ticket out in a fist and opens it. It is smudged and crumpled beyond recognition.

"Do you think they'll make me pay at the gate?"

He hands her his ticket. It disintegrates during the exchange, dripping onto the cobblestones. His hand touches hers, and the hands clasp each other, trying to subdue the other's trembling.

The gates are wide and unguarded, of course. People crowd their way through, out

of the white light and into the tree-lined darkness within. The smell hits them as soon as they enter.

"Ugh," she groans, turning to him and burying her head in his shirt. "I haven't been to a zoo in so long, I forgot how bad they can smell."

He just gives the scalp under her thin blond hair an affectionate rub, and then they move on. Once inside the zoo, the crowd narrows onto the sidewalks. He walks on the outer edge and sometimes steps off the concrete onto the wet grass. Branches reach out of the darkness and slash across his face. He pushes her in towards the center of the crowd, but it is a maneuver that almost everyone on the fringes is making and the crowd gets more unruly as it grows compressed--slowing down, as people stumble, pushing and slapping at those surrounding them. And yet, even as the panic spreads, a stressed silence falls over them all.

They circulate over the sidewalks, bouncing and tumbling in apparent chaos. But when the sidewalks branch into thinner, more numerous tributaries, they split and follow a prescribed path without hesitation or confusion.

He squeezes the girl's hand, but as he looks through the darkness cannot see her, only her arm outstretched into the jostling crowds that threaten with every lunge and stumble to break their grasp. Finally, as they have thinned down onto a narrow walkway he is able to pull her closer. Their eyes meet briefly, desperate and afraid. Their handclasp breaks when the crowd slows to a stop and they embrace, their lips to each other's ears, words half-forming but refusing to be released. So they mumble and stutter until he kisses her, pretending therefore that nothing needs to be said, that all is clear and natural and they are here *because*.

There is a shriek of feedback and a clattering of static overhead and a voice over an intercom fills the night sky. But the voice, loud and exuberant as it is, is incomprehensible, a mumble broken by hisses and pops.

And the light goes on. Before them is a short iron fence and beyond that a patch of grass and shrubbery and beyond that, a deep pit and beyond that, a miniature wasteland of

rock and mud. At the far end, a mere thirty yards away, is a wall of jagged rock, creating a sharp and disturbing gray edge against the black, starless sky.

The intercom buzzes into silence and the sounds of the crowd are reduced to a staggered chorus of hacking, convulsive breaths, as all eyes are drawn to a small hole in the rocks, a hole that was not there a moment ago but which seems to blink slowly open as they watch, until it is almost a yard wide. A hiss emerges from that hole and, then, a glimmer of light, as a shimmering membrane pushes through the opening, rising into a swelling sphere. The membrane splits and a viscous, opaque substance the color of olive flesh begins to spread over the rock, upwelling like a clogged sink. The fluid conforms to the shape of the rock as it spreads and then slaps up against the rock wall. Slowly, tendrils rise up the vertical wrinkles of the rock, thickening as they go, a webbed membrane appearing between each tendril, until there is a solid wave consuming that vertical face--until the entire grounds, from rock wall to the deep pit in front of the audience, is covered with the glistening, hardening sea of flesh. It continues to rise but then slows and stops as the wrinkles and creases begin appearing and disappearing along the surface, twitching and yawning to life.

Suggestions of faces and limbs and genitals and the rich complexities of internal organs ripple across the surface of that shivering, twisting mass, each visible for only a moment as the thing settles itself, warming up for the performance.

He turns to her, but her face is blank--except for her widened eyes, blindwhite as they reflect the reflections of the spotlights that hit the thing in the enclosure. Her skin beads with sweat and she looks somehow older, heavier. He looks at his own hands for signs of aging. There are none, but he is suddenly struck with a sensation of a vast passage of time, as though the journey here from

the lights, from the bustling city streets, down the ever narrowing corridors of crooked wall and into the crowded nocturnal zoo, has stretched across his entire lifetime.

When he looks up again the thing is still, its knots and striations thick and secure. Suddenly, from deep within the vertical wall of flesh, there is a hysterical screaming, more horrifying because it is so muffled and constricted. Along a thick, protruding length of that wall, a knot begins to shake and twist. The screams grow louder as the knot changes shape. Six thin vertical slits appear simultaneously along the knot and then breathe wide, revealing a deep black pit with five narrow bars running down the opening. The screaming is an unrestrained agony now, as within that pit and behind those bars the creature emitting the screams rises into the light.

It is a misshapen, monstrous image of a young man--a boy, molded tentatively from this spread of flesh. It twists behind the bars, screaming for help, looking in turn at everyone in the crowd with eyes that are blind, bulging knobs. Its hands grip and shake the bars even as they lose form and identity in the flesh of the knotted bars.

The ground trembles. The plain of flesh explodes, spraying blood into the crowd as a tentacle rises from the rupture up into the spotlights. When it curls down and the head stop the tentacle passes close over the crows, the fissure around the base of the tentacle heals. The huge face, that of a vile, ancient woman, with a few scattered teeth made from quivering strands of flesh, laughs at them and then, as it turns towards the caged boy, sprouts long, twisted arms with a dozen thin, crooked fingers at the tip of each.

They stare at each other now, these two puppets, one with eyes of knobbed, bulging meat, the other with eyes that are no more than black, gaping pits. The boy falls silent, watching as the crone moves in closer and those twenty fingers lengthen and sharpen into needles. The boy disappears back into the pit, but an arm shoots in afterward, splattering the bars. They can hear the deep echoes of his screams down there. When he is finally pulled out he is impaled on the end of a single needled finger. The crone laughs and pokes at him as she pulls him out of the pit--though his trunk is a tentacle, like hers, anchored into the flesh, as she is, and cannot be pulled out entirely. The agony she inflicts on him, his screams for help, the slow deliberation of it all, seems to go on for ages as each needled finger sinks through him in turn.

There are some in the crowd who cry, others who stagger away, trying to escape the spotlight, others who laugh and cheer. He finds himself in sympathy with them all, but he cannot turn away and he cannot utter a

sound.

She opens her mouth wide and inserts the still screaming boy into it. She swallows him and follows the tentacled trunk to the rounded edge of the pit, which frames her head precisely. She remains there, motionless except for muscular quivers and contractions along the length of her trunk. When she pulls away there is no more boy. She looms out over the crowd, cackling at them, her black empty eyes following them, her trunk arching and undulating in a nauseating dance of victory.

Waves of faces and events quake across the fleshscape. Every one of them would see to be of imminent importance except that each is but a brief glimmer, a twitch, significant only as part of an overall pattern, the waves stirred up by her dance.

But it is a silent dance and the crowd, not as large as it once was, is a silent crowd. So when the soft, girlish whimpers begin to rise from the hole in the flesh wall, they all hear it. The old crone rears her gigantic head back and stares at the pit, her clusters of needle fingers twitching and clicking.

The whimpers turn to a steady crying and another figure appears at the rim of the pit, the freshly molded caricature of a pretty young girl. He looks at her face--the eyes, from this distance, seem to be real eyes, eyes that he recognizes in an instant. He turns, looking for the girl whose hand he'd held walking into the zoo, but she is no longer there, having backed off from the spectacle and moved on to other exhibits, beneath other spotlights in the dark, wooded distances of the zoo.

The serpent witch is rising tall and leaning in towards the crying girl, who languishes along the pit's edge, hugging it with her cheek and arms, mourning the loss of her brother/lover, oblivious to the witch-mother looming over her ...

But the moment the needle-fingers strike, she is gone, her crying still audible in the pit. As the witch rears back for another lunge, the crying rises in pitch and is broken into staccato fragments. The rim of the pit shudders and widens, and it is only at the moment of her strike that he realizes that the voice is no longer crying, but laughing. The witch's head and arms disappear into the pit, which widens to accommodate them and then, abruptly, clamps tight around the serpentine trunk. The laughter is drowned out by screams and then by the sizzling of the flesh along the trunk, which is sparking and blistering, and being pulled in through the ravenous mouth, which, in a matter of moments, consumes the entire floor of flesh, and the wall of flesh, and then finally itself, leaving only a small black cavity in the wall of rock. The suddenness of this disappearance hits the

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JEFFREY OSIER is an educational filmmaker by profession. His fiction and artwork have been featured in *Deathrealm*. He will have stories appearing in upcoming issues of *2AM* and *Grue*.

crowd like a shock wave. The night is filled with screams and shouts and thrashing limbs.

He turns and runs. Some try to block his way or hold him back, others run just as he does, but they are all in darkness--except for the entrenched, compacted crowds together under other spotlights as other stories are remolded within the enclosed theaters of flesh.

He sees only glimpses of these exhibits: gigantic faces droning soliloquies to waves of smaller, more transient faces, creatures rooted into the fleshgrounds, their serpentine bodies wrapped or crashing in a bizarre combat or embrace. He doesn't linger to watch any of this. He runs and stumbles and searches until he finds the gates (the same gates? no matter), empty and unguarded.

He runs down the narrow avenues, but it's hard to see now. The two-headed street-lamps are sputtering--some are out entirely. Others run down these avenues, each one alone, and willing to kill whatever lingers in their solitary paths. So he pushes on past them, charges over their fat and flabby shapes sprawled across the narrow streets, searching for wider streets, for brighter lights, for a world in which cars prowl the night and people move freely, their dreams sealed into their skulls, where they can only escape in dreams or stories which will never pierce another's skull as anything more than words--words with meanings, words with impacts, but with only an imitation of substance.

The streets are like spiraling, descending corridors. People beckon to him from windows but he refuses to listen, refuse to be taken in, groping after that abstraction of a world he clings to inside his skull, a world of chiseled stone planes and timid units of obedient flesh.

In the darkness he trips and falls. Sharp heat races in a diagonal up his forehead, and when he sits up, he feels blood there, a long, jagged cut. He fingers the flesh of his forehead and finds that if he presses hard enough, deliberately enough, he will be able to seal that cut.

But the pain lingers, and the blood burns his eyes. As he stands, he hears a voice.

"You're hurt, boy. Come in and rest. I'll help you find your way out in the morning."

He looks up at a shabby little silhouette in the doorway. Suddenly he is too tired, too heavy to continue any longer. He says something to him, unable to understand what comes out of his own mouth. But he understands that he has accepted the man's offer and he stumbles forward, his head in a spin. He staggers into a small room, lit by a single kerosene lamp, as the man slams the door behind him.

He turns around but the man is gone. No matter. Leaning against the walls and furni-

ture, he moves through the flickering brown half-light of the room, alerted by the familiarity of all this. Why should this room seem so familiar, why do voices and faces and the circumstances behind them seem to superimpose themselves over the room?

Along the wall is a long narrow table. There is no body there now but he can remember her lying there, two days' decomposition in water still not enough to disfigure or even diminish her frail beauty. He can remember standing in this very spot, and all the thoughts reeling through his mind, drowning out those voices that droned on and on behind him.

But these are not his memories, his thoughts ...

The heat in the room is unbearable. He tries to find the door he just stepped through, but somehow, it is obscured by the darkness, by the crowding of furniture ...

**But his skin itches,
crawls with heat,
and the breeze
from the basement
is pulling at him
with its cooling ...
its healing.
He has to escape
the room, the heat,
the drowned girl
and all those voices ...**

He pulls aside a curtain and sees a long, narrow corridor, and at the far end of it, a door. He opens the door and is hits by a surge of cool, sweet air. It is a stairway leading down into total darkness, and that isn't what he wants. Is it? It's light, it is the familiar, that he seeks now.

But his skin itches, crawls with heat, and the breeze from the basement is pulling at him with its cooling ... its healing. He has to escape the room, the heat, the drowned girl and all those voices ...

And there is no other door, anywhere.

His descent is tentative, the unlit steps uneven and wobbling. He clutches the railing with both hands, but as he moves, he finds that he has trouble pulling the sticky surface of his palms from the rail.

There is a crunching of wood and the entire stairway breaks away beneath him. He splatters flat into the concrete at the bottom, shapeless, naked, with splinters of wood drifting over his surface.

He killed her. Do they all know he killed her? It is such a long story, would they understand if he were ever to tell them? And what of the other body?

And which of the characters is he? He feels himself to be the murderer, but there is so little of him, and so much of the drowned girl, her memory, the sensation of drowning, and of the other man, and what it felt to have the knife slip in between his ribs ...

He seems to be descending into a maelstrom of conflicting experiences and memories that seem to synchronize only along a certain plane, and along that plane there lies a series of clear, motivated events that, once delineated, seem to plunge deep into a pit of nearly identical events that sink with little variation through time and space.

He tries to move across the floor, but as he does, progressing along the cold concrete, he still feels himself splattered back at the point of impact. He spreads to fill the floor, fueled by the memory of an ancient tragedy templated into his soul.

He tries to open his mouth, to scream, yes ... but more, to confess, to explain, to prostrate himself and horrify others ...

He feels a hundred mouths opening and closing along his surface, but they are no more than puppets, toys. The mouth he seeks never existed, or belonged to someone else, someone blank, without a past, without a story.

Above him he hears the grumbling of the crowds, and a voice, crackling over an intercom. He tries to rise to his feet, but he has no feet. He is merely flexing the impulses that create and uncreate the puppet figures that ripple through this pool of flesh. What rises towards the ceiling, towards the opening that appears above him, is but a small part of him. He touches the membrane, pushes up against it, trying to break on through to the empty plain, blind but not deaf, mute but not immobile. He knows that if he can pierce the membrane there is a crowd, willing or unwilling, on which he can unleash his confession, wave upon wave of his brutish animal memory. He knows that among all those crowded beyond his enclosure, there will be someone who will share his guilt, and more than one willing to spread it ...

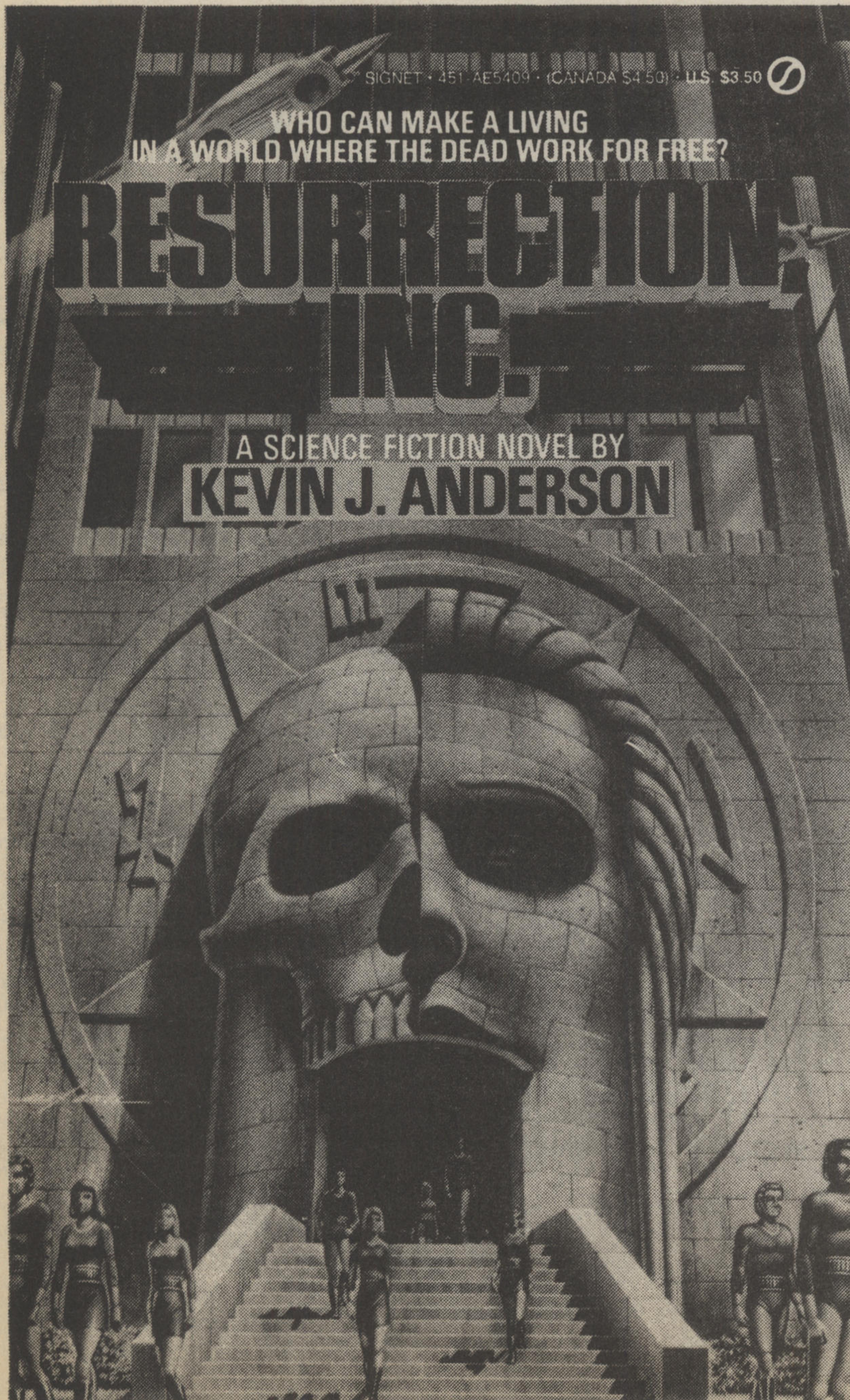
There is a sweet sound of the tearing membrane and he surges, filling the cellar and pushing his mirroring, echoing mass up onto the barren, rocklined stage.



IT IS THE FUTURE. AND THE DEAD WALK THE STREETS

Resurrection, Inc. found a profitable way to do it. A microprocessor brain, synthetic heart and blood—presto, anyone with the price could buy a Servant with no mind of its own, no memories of its past life, and trained to obey any command. But for every Servant created, a living worker was out of a job. Some people took to rioting in the streets, their rampages ruthlessly ended by armored and heavily armed Enforcers, eager for the kill. Some joined the ever-growing cult of neo-Satanism, seeking heaven in the depths of Hell.

Only one tried to save the world. His name was Danal, he was dead—murdered in a neo-Satanist sacrifice—but as a Servant he began to remember. Danal learned who had killed him. . .and what **Resurrection, Inc.** had in mind for the human race. . .



"*Resurrection, Inc.* is the best science fiction novel I've read since Greg Bear's *Blood Music*. Anderson's foreshadowing is impeccable. The structure and style is almost pure Heinlein. And the suspense is even more tense than the blockbuster climax that ends *The Terminator*."

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"*Resurrection, Inc.* is a race-horse romp through a future nobody wants, and the jockey, Kevin J. Anderson, reminded me alternately of Philip K. Dick, Jack Williamson, Rex Miller, and Stephen King. But it's all fresh and original, and the vitality of *Resurrection, Inc.* makes it a macabre pleasure to read."

—J.N. Williamson

"In every field of endeavor, good craftsmanship is to be recognized, appreciated, and held out as the standard for others in the field. Kevin J. Anderson's *Resurrection, Inc.* is just such an accomplishment and merits our enthusiastic and wholehearted recommendation!"

—The Midwest Book Review

"[*Resurrection, Inc.*] is Anderson's first novel, and it's a good start by a promising writer. It will appeal to both Horror readers and Science Fiction readers (even SF readers who don't like Horror) because it successfully melds both genres. This is a book worth your time."

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THE EDWARD D. WOODS, JR. MEMORIAL QUIZ

[OR] YOU, TOO CAN DIRECT A MOVIE

A. R. MORLAN

While *Plan Nine From Outer Space's* hapless director is not remembered for being one of the horror genre's great directors, Edward D. Woods Jr. did have a unique, yet universal dream -- to make his kind of movie, his way. And although his efforts aren't reviled as great art, they do have something in common with the films of the directors listed in the quiz below -- a director had a vision, and he used the meager means at his disposal to create that vision. Some of the horror directors in the following quiz worked with bigger budgets, or were able to utilize the talents of better-known stars, but they all shared Woods' dream and goal -- to entertain, and just maybe horrify. (As always, over one third right is the goal.)

Jacques Tourneur (1904-1977) and Val Lewton (1904-1951) were a director/producer team who created the most atmospheric, beautiful "B" horror/suspense films of the 1940s. Working on shoe-lace budgets so low they often had to use excessive shadows to hide incomplete sets, these men nonetheless were able to create film classics which stand up to this day as superior film making--

1. While the 1982 remake of the 1942 *Cat People* did explore the inherent sexual tension of the heroine's plight, it was in no way superior (or in many instances equal) to the original film, a fact which might have had something to do with the director's limited experience with the horror genre. Who did direct the remake of this Lewton/Tourneur effort?
a. Paul Morrissey b. Paul Newman c. Paul Schrader d. Paul Bartel
2. In *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural*, John Calhoun notes that Francis Dee's narration of the 1943 *I Walked With A Zombie* may well have been inspired by the heroine's narration in which Hitchcock classic?
a. *Rebecca* b. *Under Capricorn* c. *Notorious* d. *Spellbound*
3. The last film made by Tourneur/Lewton was 1943's *The Leopard Man*; in that movie, how did the real-life leopard initially suspected of several killings escape?
a. It killed its trainer and ran off c. Its cage is broken in a traffic accident
b. A Spanish dancer (Margo) scares it during her nightclub act d. Children let it out on a dare

The next two directors, John Carpenter and Brian De Palma, were born the same year *The Leopard Man* was released; both men have developed unique film "voices" -- De Palma both sexual and humorous, Carpenter relentlessly tense, with incredible suspense -- and both have made some of the genre's most vivid, troubling, memorable horror/science fiction films in the past two decades--

4. Many of De Palma's films have starred or co-starred his former wife Nancy Allen, except for --
a. *Carrie* b. *The Fury* c. *Blow Out* d. *Dressed To Kill*
5. Carpenter's first blockbuster, *Halloween*, was shot on an impossibly small budget of:
a. five bucks b. \$1,000,000 c. \$25,000 d. \$300,000
6. In De Palma's 1973 classic *Sisters*, former Siamese twin Danielle (Margot Kidder) wins a most deadly gift on a game show called "Peeping Toms" -- what is it?
a. a set of fine cutlery b. a gun c. a can of Mace d. a matched set of sewing shears
7. To date, only one actor has been nominated for a Best Actor Oscar for starring in a John Carpenter film; which movie got the nod from the Motion Picture Academy?
a. *Starman* b. *Escape From New York* c. *The Thing* d. *Big Trouble In Little China*
8. Charles Durning played supporting roles -- one a good guy, one a villain -- in which De Palma films?
a. *Body Double* b. *Sisters* c. *The Fury* d. *Carrie*
9. One of the wonkiest, funniest lines in years was uttered in a Carpenter film -- "I have come to chew bubble gum and kick ass ... and I'm all out of bubble gum" -- which actor in which film said those words?
a. Kurt Russell, *Escape From New York* c. Keith Gordon, *Christine*
b. Donald Pleasance, *The Prince of Darkness* d. Roddy Piper, *They Live*

David Cronenberg (1943 --) has a habit of never moralizing in his usually *outré*, totally engrossing films, even as he takes subtle (and some not so subtle) potshots at modern medicine, government, and the freewheeling lifestyles of the '70s and '80s--

10. In *They Came From Within* ('75), just exactly *what* came from within?
 a. "children of rage" c. videocassettes popping out of stomachs
 b. disgusting parasites which transmitted the urge to kill and have orgy-like sex d. the power to blow up heads
11. Aside from being weird-looking, members of *The Brood* ('79) lacked something ...
 a. eyes b. bones c. navels d. lungs
12. Match the clinic/organization with the Cronenberg film in which it appears (3 points):
 A. The Keloid Clinic a. *The Brood*
 B. Continental Security Company (Cons Sec) b. *Scanners*
 C. Somafree Institute of Psychoplasmics c. *Rabid*

George Romero (1939 --) not only entered college at the age of sixteen, he was also a grip on a Hitchcock's *North By Northwest*. Gruesome, thoughtful and daring, Romero has greatly changed the horror genre--

13. In 1977's vampire film *Martin*, Romero steps before the camera as --
 a. an undead vampire b. a priest c. the vampire's father d. a wino
14. Which one of the "Dead" films prompted Lucio Fulci to make a "sequel" called *Zombi 2*?
 a. *Day of The Dead* c. *Night of The Living Dead*
 b. *Dawn of The Dead* d. *Return of The Living Dead*
15. Who is the make-up artist/actor who is closely associated with Romero and his films?
 a. Rick Baker b. Rob Bottkin c. Tom Savini d. John Chambers

Other notable directors have had a hand in shaping the modern horror film (Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven, Joe Dante, and others), including a few who only one horror film, or only a few out of a career devoted to other genres -- yet those efforts have had considerable impact on the field--

16. Peter Bogdanovich both wrote (along with Polly Blatt) and directed the 1968 gem *Targets*, which was notable for many things -- Boris Karloff's graceful last hurrah, an Oriental woman in a major role, and a chilling background look at a mass murderer (Tim O'Kelly) -- including the fact that it was his first major directorial effort. Perhaps the most horrifying line comes near the end, when killer Bobby Thompson (Kelly) says to the officers who arrest him:
 a. "I hardly ever missed, did I?" c. "Th-that's all, f-folks!"
 b. "Bang, bang." d. "This is a stick-up!"
17. In Steven Spielberg's 1971 made-for-tv film *Duel*, why does the unseen trucker go after Dave Mann (Dennis Weaver)?
 a. Mann rear-ended him c. Mann whipped him the bird
 b. Mann overtook the rig on the highway d. Mann was going slow in the fast lane
18. Like Hitchcock and Romero before him, when Oliver Stone directed *The Hand*, he took played a bit role on camera, as a --
 a. policeman b. hustler c. cartoonist d. wino
19. John Landis, who, aside from his long-form video *Thriller*, is primarily known for his comedy now, changed the face of horror with his sassy, funny, scary and ultimately heartbreaking *An American Werewolf In London* (1981). The score of this film contained songs with "moon" in the title, some of which are listed below. Which song *doesn't* appear on the soundtrack?
 a. "Blue Moon" b. "Bad Moon Rising" c. "New Moon on Monday" d. "Moondance"
20. One of the greatest directorial efforts in modern cinema was, sadly, truly a singular effort, for after *Night of the Hunter* (1954), actor Charles Laughton would never again step behind the camera. Why didn't this talented man direct another film?
 a. he died after making this one c. his contract didn't permit it
 b. the film did poorly at the box office and was misunderstood for years. d. he gave up film for writing

Bonus Question: Many directors have personal quirks they love to explore on film. Hitchcock made his personal appearances, Spielberg plays games with film titles, etc. John Landis's quirk is a pet phrase, which has appeared on posters, on billboards, and movie marquees (as well as being occasionally uttered) in most of his films -- what is this four word catch phrase?

Answers on page 47



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