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NEW BLOOD

MAGAZINE

No. 7
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and Other
Depravities**



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C O N T E S T R U L E S

1. No entry fee is required, and all rights in the story remain the property of the author. All types of science fiction and fantasy are welcome; every entry is judged on its own merits only.

2. All entries must be original works of science fiction or fantasy in English. Plagiarism will result in disqualification. Submitted works may not have been previously published in professional media.

3. Eligible entries must be works of prose, either short stories (under 10,000 words) or novelets (under 17,000 words) in length. We regret we cannot consider poetry, or works intended for children.

4. The Contest is open only to those who have not had professionally published a novel or short novel, or more than three short stories, or more than one novelet.

5. Entries must be typewritten and double spaced with numbered pages (computer-printer output O.K.). Each entry must have a cover page with the title of the work, the author's name, address, and telephone number, and an approximate word-count. The manuscript itself should be titled and numbered on every page, but the author's name should be deleted to facilitate fair judging.

6. Manuscripts will be returned after judging. Entries must include a self-addressed return envelope. U.S. return envelopes must be stamped; others may enclose international postal reply coupons.

7. There shall be three cash prizes in each quarter: 1st Prize of \$1000, 2nd Prize of \$750, and 3rd Prize of \$500, in U.S. dollars or the recipient's locally equivalent amount. In addition, there shall be a further cash prize of \$4000 to the Grand Prize winner, who will be

selected from among the 1st Prize winners for the period of October 1, 1988 through September 30, 1989. All winners will also receive trophies or certificates.

8. The Contest will continue through September 30, 1989, on the following quarterly basis:

October 1 - December 31, 1988

January 1 - March 31, 1989

April 1 - June 30, 1989

July 1 - September 30, 1989

Information regarding subsequent contests may be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope to the above address.

To be eligible for the quarterly judging, an entry must be postmarked no later than Midnight on the last day of the Quarter.

9. Each entrant may submit only one manuscript per Quarter. Winners in a quarterly judging are ineligible to make further entries in the Contest.

10. All entrants, including winners, retain all rights to their stories.

11. Entries will be judged by a panel of professional authors. Each quarterly judging and the Grand Prize judging may have a different panel. The decisions of the judges are entirely their own, and are final.

12. Entrants in each Quarter will be individually notified of the results by mail, together with the names of those sitting on the panel of judges.

This contest is void where prohibited by law.

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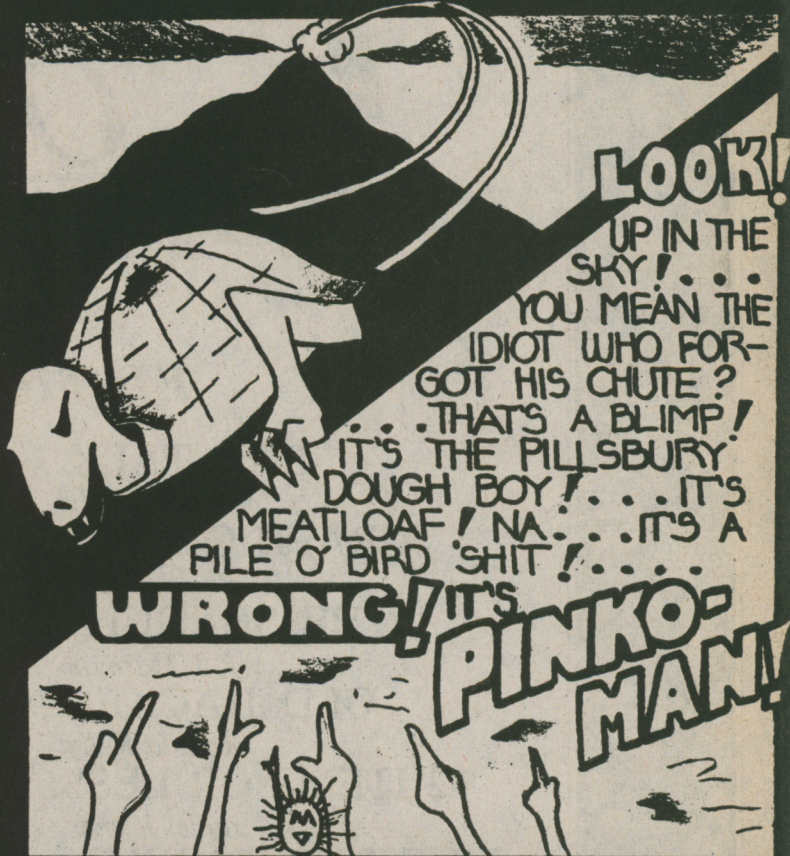
THE ADVENTURES OF JOE DOLT

COMMUNIST SUPER-HERO

JOHN LOCHNER
© 10-2-89



FASTER THAN A ONE LEGGED TORTOISE.
... MORE POWERFUL THAN A SLUG.
... UNABLE TO LEAP ANYTHING...



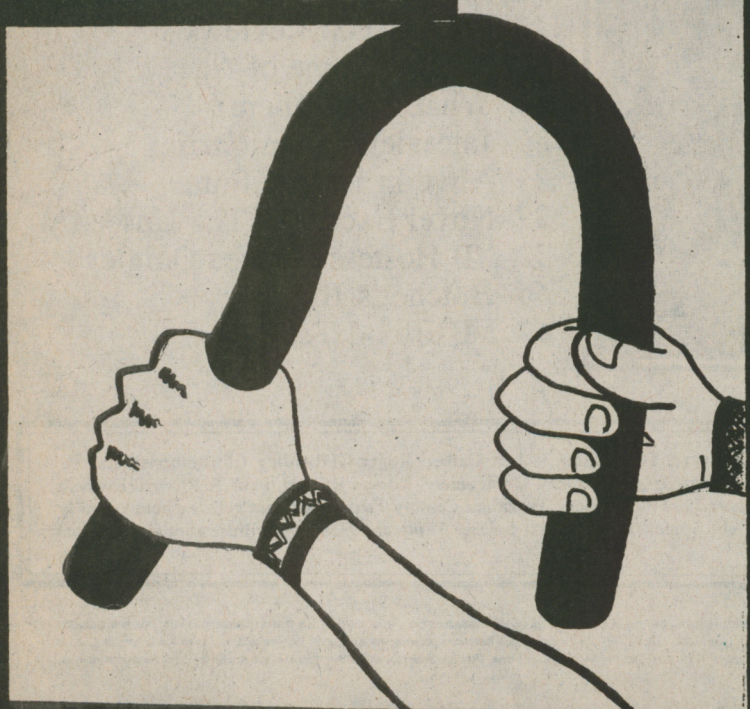
LOOK!

UP IN THE SKY!
... YOU MEAN THE IDIOT WHO FORGOT HIS CHUTE?
... THAT'S A BLIMP!
... IT'S THE PILLSBURY DOUGH BOY!
... IT'S MEATLOAF!
... NA... IT'S A FILE O' BIRD SHIT!

WRONG! IT'S PINKO-MAN!

YES IT'S PINKOMAN, STRANGE VISITOR FROM ANOTHER PLANET WITH POWERS AND ABILITIES FAR BEYOND THOSE OF MORTAL CARTOON CHARACTERS... PINKOMAN, WHO CAN FLUSH MIGHTY URINALS, BEND SOLDIER WITH HIS BARE HANDS...

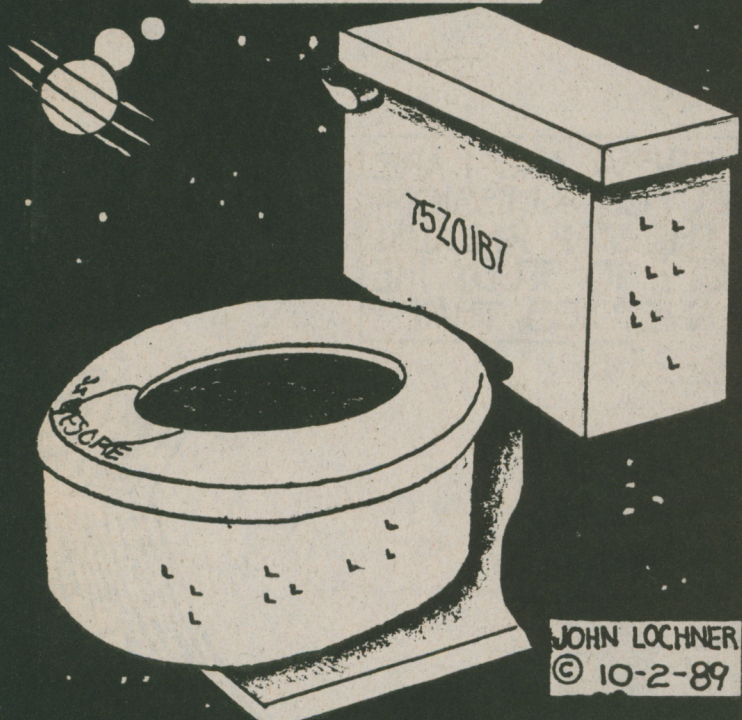
AND WHO, DISGUISED AS JOE DOLT, MILD-MANNERED DISHWASHER FOR A LARGE METROPOLITAN NURSING HOME, FIGHTS A NEVER ENDING BATTLE FOR FALSEHOODS, INJUSTICE, AND THE COMMUNIST WAY...



NAPALM ME

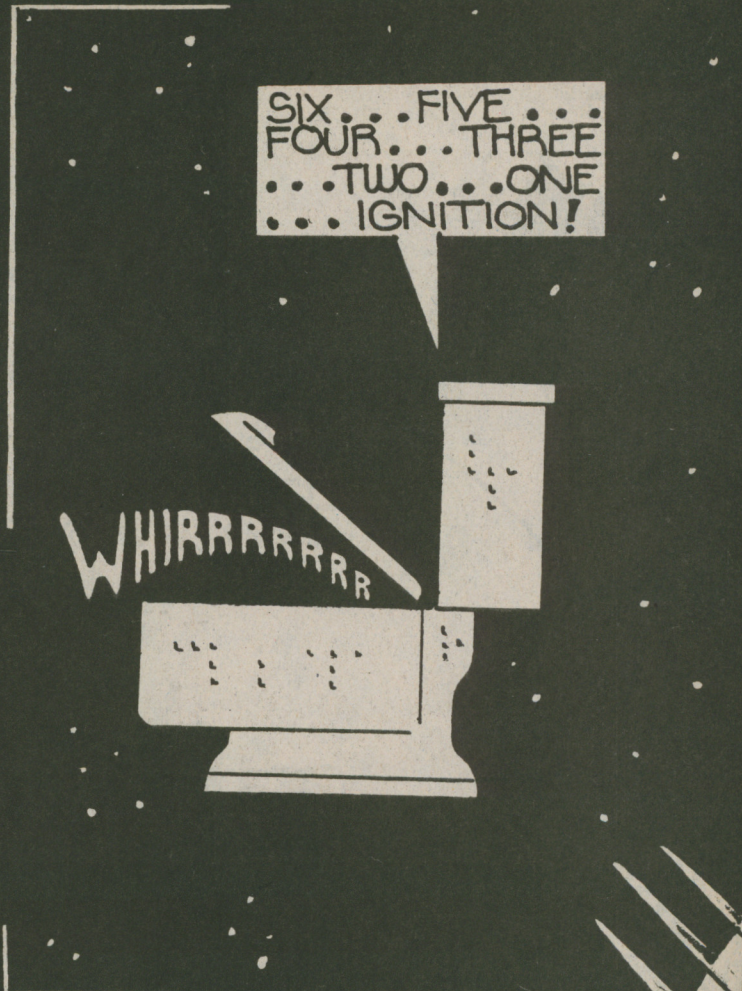
CHAPTER 1

THE MISSION



JOHN LOCHNER
© 10-2-89

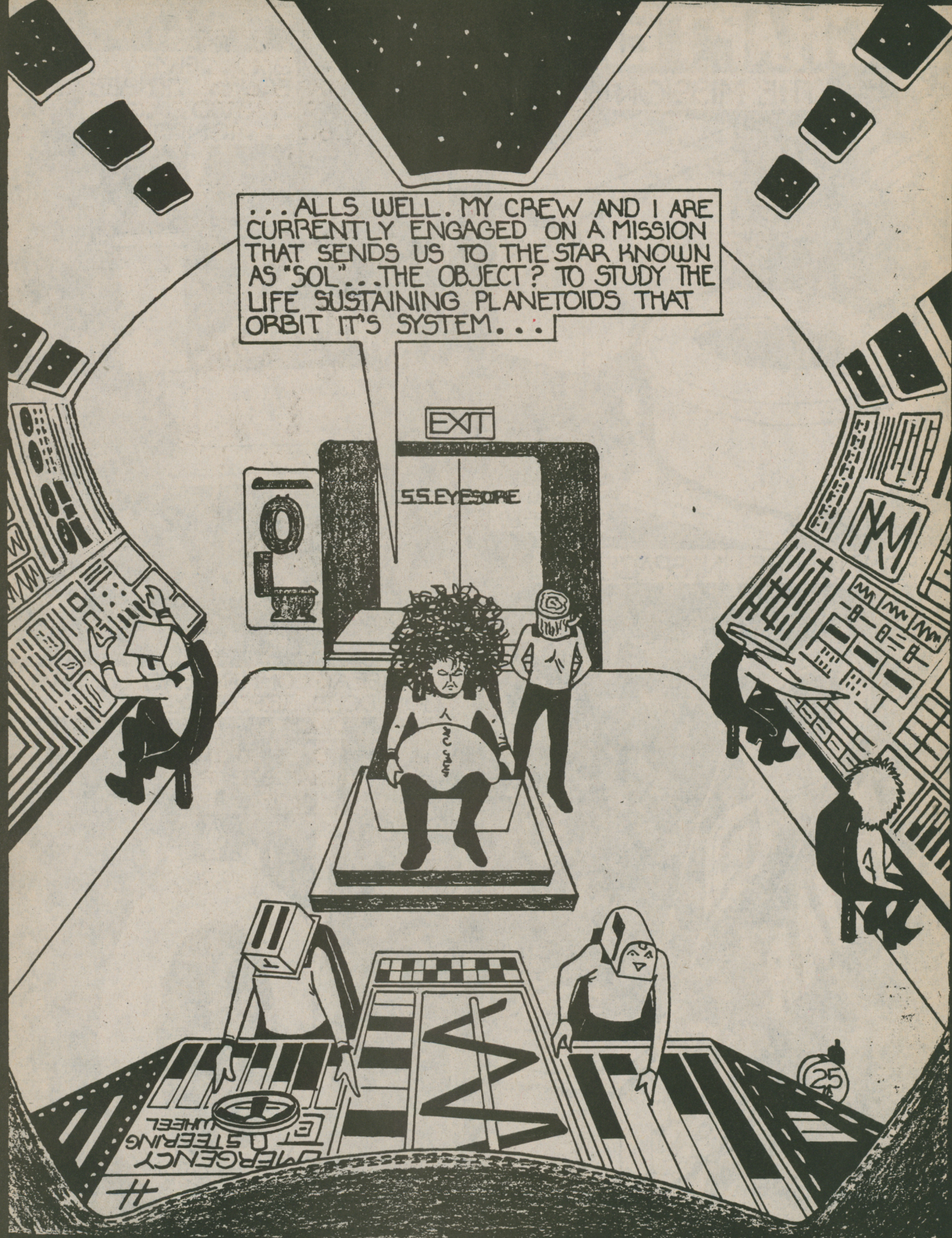
SOMEWHERE IN SPACE....



STARSEAT COMMANDER'S JOURNAL,
JOE DOLT REPORTING



...ALLS WELL. MY CREW AND I ARE CURRENTLY ENGAGED ON A MISSION THAT SENDS US TO THE STAR KNOWN AS "SOL"...THE OBJECT? TO STUDY THE LIFE SUSTAINING PLANETOIDS THAT ORBIT IT'S SYSTEM...



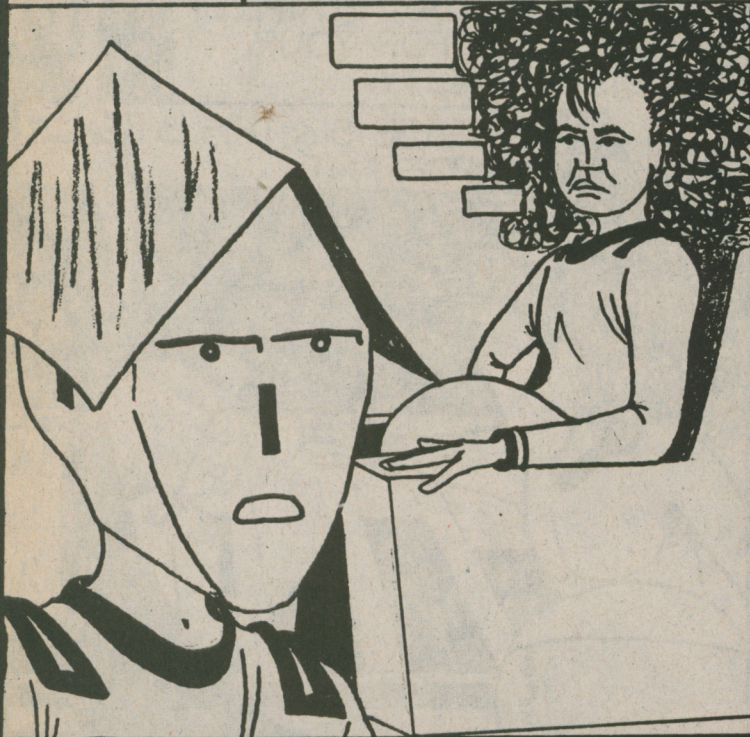
EXIT

S.S. EYESORE

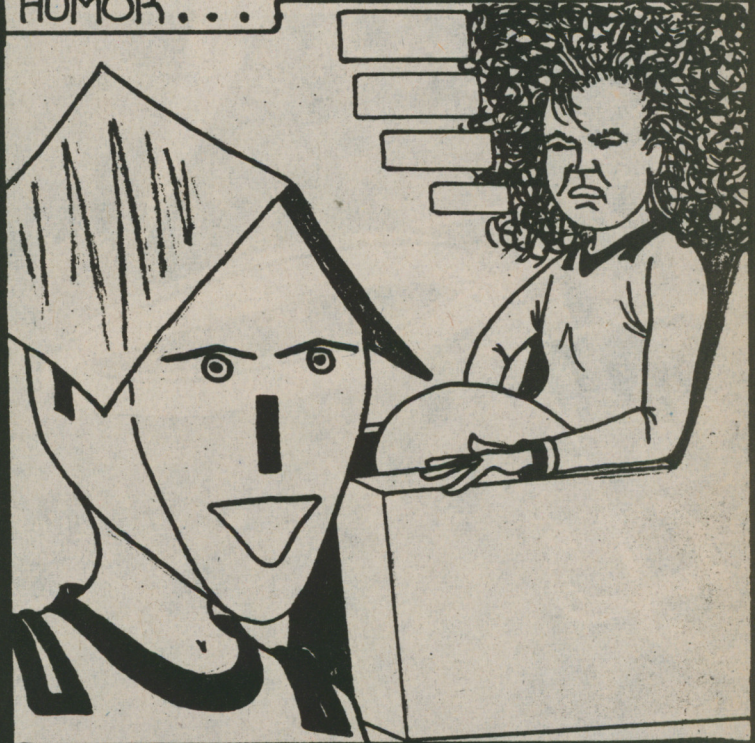
EMERGENCY
ET STEERING
WHEEL

25

... HOWEVER, AMONGST THE MEMBERS OF MY CREW THERE IS ONE OFFICER THAT I POSSESS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF DISTRUST FOR... THIS IS MY SECOND IN COMMAND, MR. EMERALD...



... HE'S A ROBOT FROM THE PLANET "KORAX", AND BEING THE PRANKSTERS OF OUR STAR SECTOR, THE KORAXIANS HAVE A NASTY HABIT O' PROGRAMING THEIR ROBOTS WITH A SENSE O' HUMOR...



TIME PASSES, WHEN SUDDENLY....

LURCH!



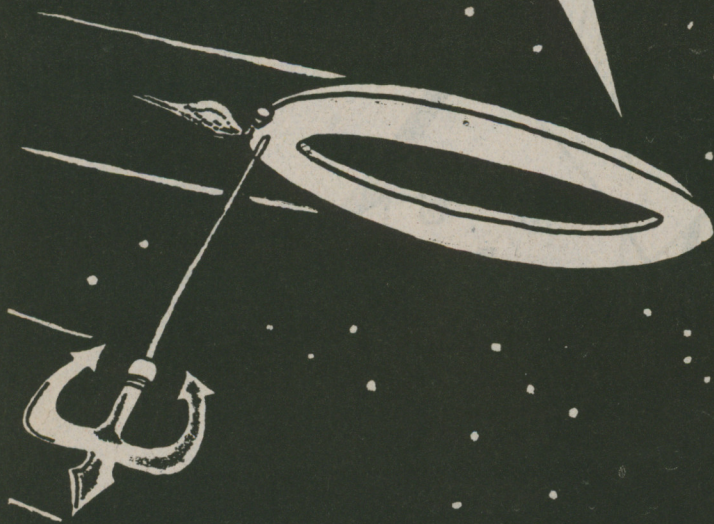
AW C'MON! HOW COULD YOU GUYS MISS FIRE A GRANNY SHIFT?

SORRY COMMANDER, IT SEEMS THAT OUR THROW-OUT BEARING IS WORN OUT. THE CLUTCH SLIPS, HENCEFORTH WE ARE STUCK IN LOW GEAR.

YOU SHOULD HAVE CHECKED THAT BEFORE WE LEFT HOME.



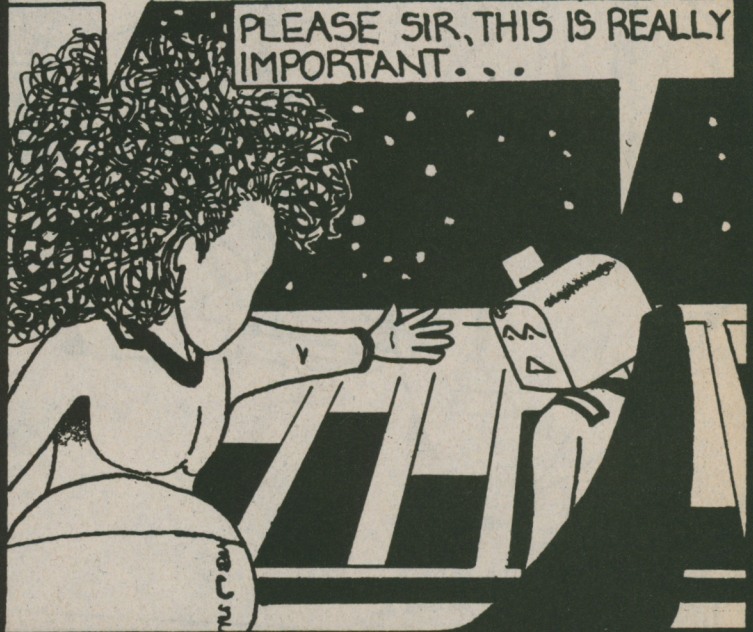
NEXT THING YA' KNOW YOU'LL BE TELLIN' ME YA' HAVENT REELED IN THE ANCHOR!



...THEN...

COMMANDER, WOULD YOU STEP OVER HERE? WE HAVE ANOTHER PROBLEM.

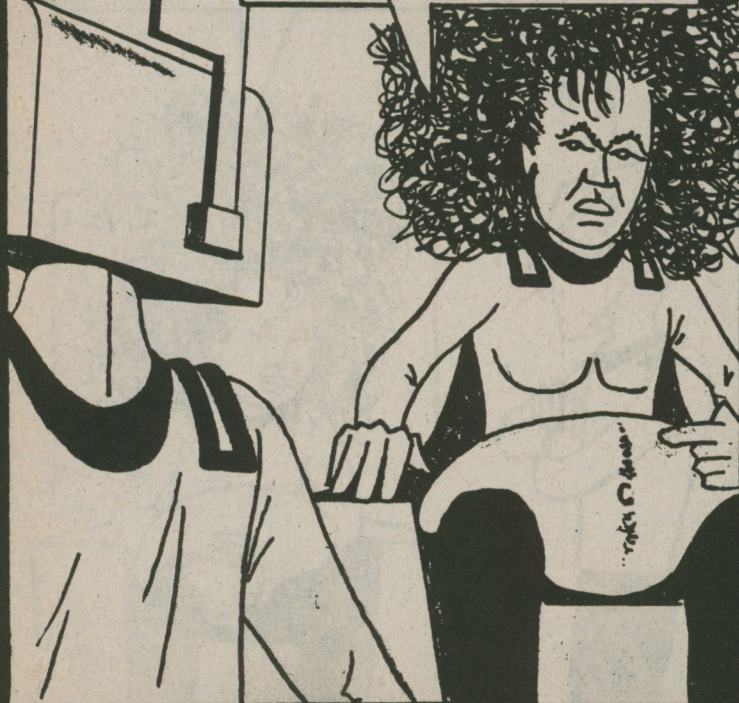
PLEASE MR. OUT, NOT NOW. CANT YA' SEE THAT I'M OFF ON ANOTHER FANTASY TRIP... I HAVEN'T TIME FOR YOUR CHILDISH REALITY.



PLEASE SIR, THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT...

... I CAN'T MAKE ANYTHING OF ALL THESE LIGHTS AND GADGETS... I'M SORRY SIR, BUT I'M LOST.

IS MY ENTIRE CREW INCOMPETENT, DAMNIT? ... JUST FOLLOW THE STARS, LIEUTENANT.



THIS ISN'T A GAME OF CONNECT THE DOTS, COMMANDER.

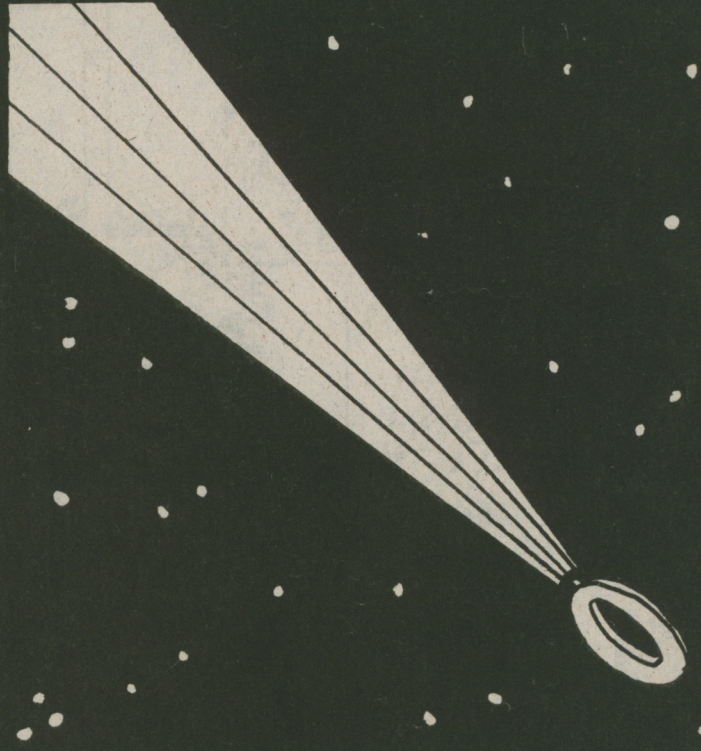
HEY LOOK! THERE GO ONE O' THOSE "ZAGONITE" SHIPS. FOLLOW THEM. THEY GOT BETTER MAPS.



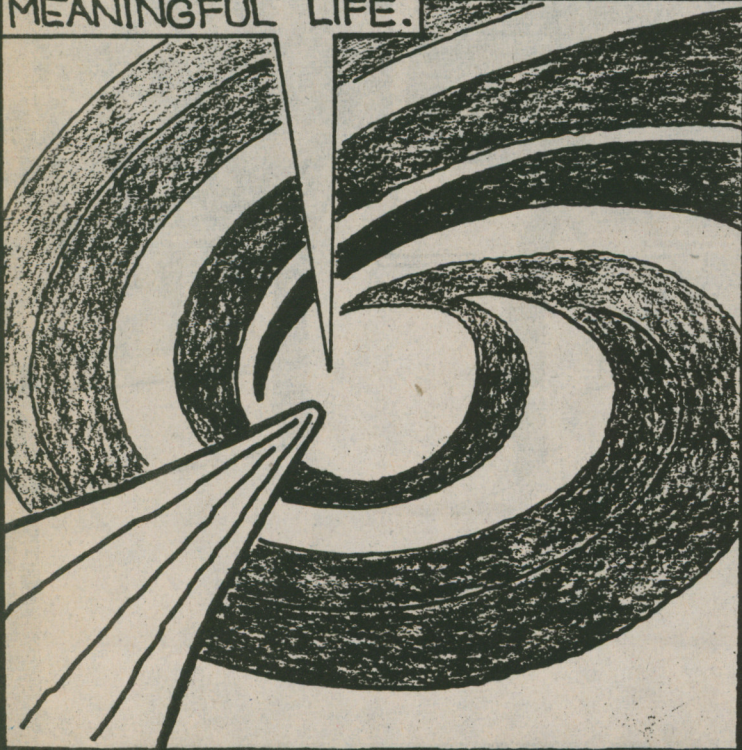
NOW WHAT ZIT WAS I POPPIN' BEFORE I WAS SO RUDELY INTERRUPTED?



AFTER FINALLY ATTAINING ULTRA-HYPER-SUPER-TRANSSONIC-OAR-DRIVE, THE "EYESORE" QUICKLY REACHES IT'S DESTINATION...

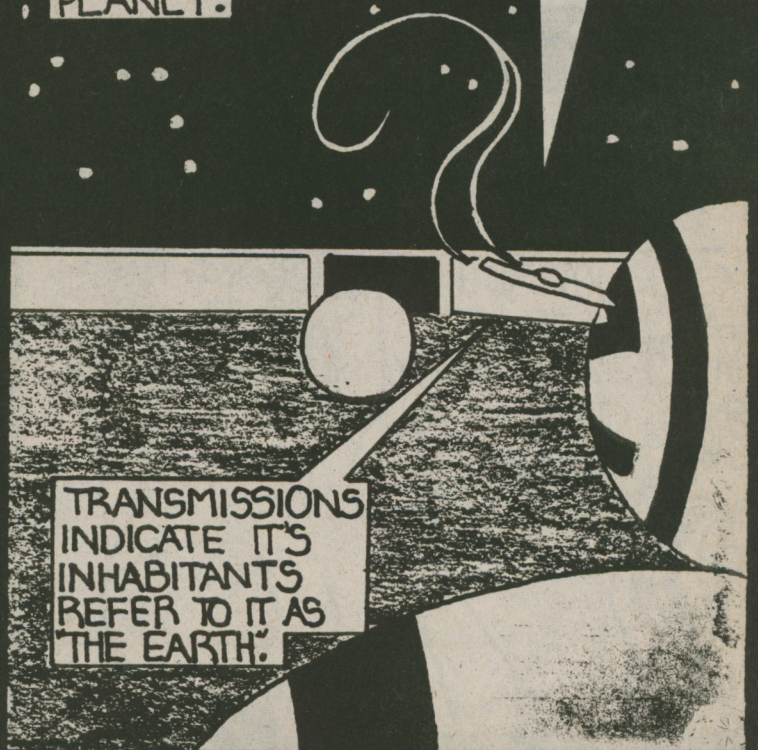


COMMANDER'S JOURNAL, ADDITIONAL... WE HAVE REACHED THE STAR "SOL"... A QUICK ANALYSIS HAS SHOWN THAT THE THIRD PLANET IS THE ONLY ONE IN THE SYSTEM WHICH SEEMS TO RETAIN ANY HALF-ASSED INTERESTING OR MEANINGFUL LIFE.



... AND THE EYESORE OBTAINS AN ORBIT ABOUT THE PLANET.

MAN THAT IS ONE DIRTY LOOKIN' PLANET.



TRANSMISSIONS INDICATE IT'S INHABITANTS REFER TO IT AS "THE EARTH".

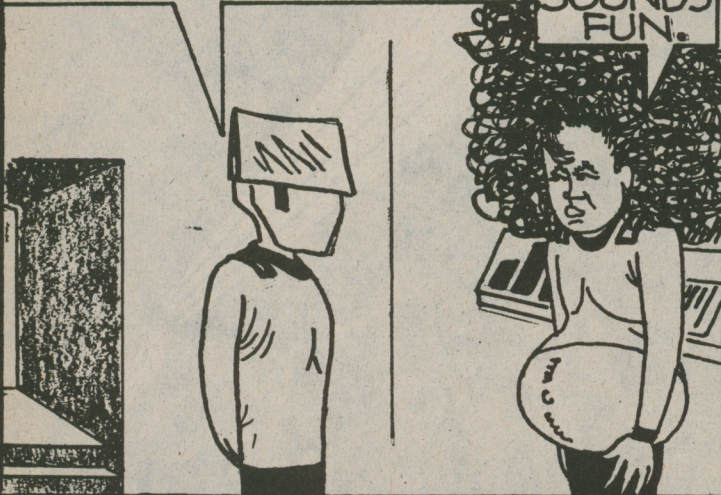
WELL THEN, GIVE ME THE LOW-DOWN ON THE BALL O' DUST.

CLASS F ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL SCALE...

THATS THE LOWEST RANKING.

YES, ALSO EVIDENCE OF IMMENSE POLLUTION... CARBO-FLORIDES, CARBON MONOXIDE, RADIATION. IN ADDITION, MASSIVE DECAY AND ERROSION OF ALL NATURAL RESOURCES...

SOUNDS FUN.



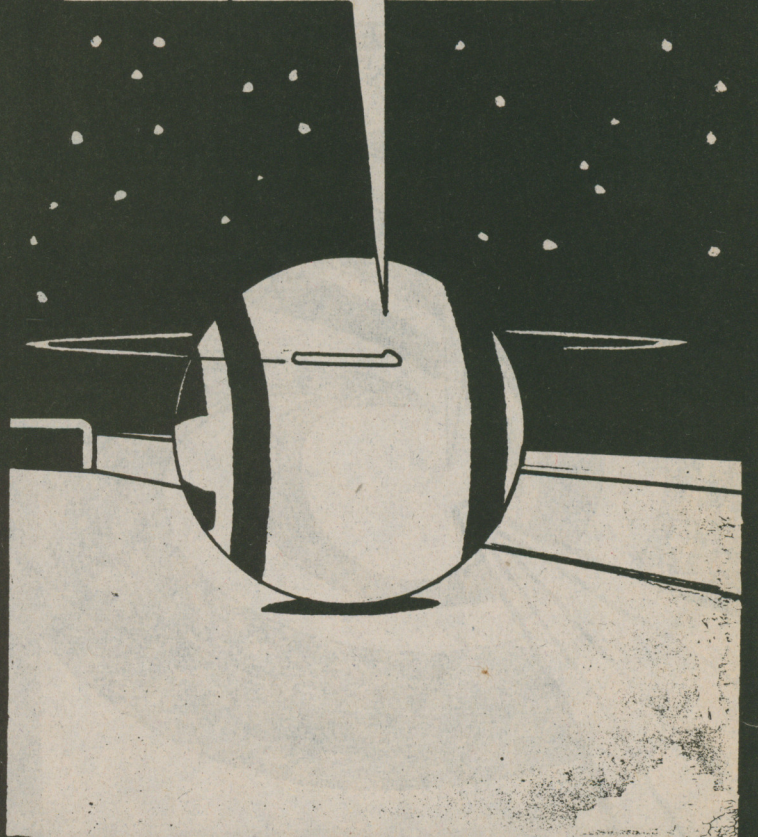
...THEIR SUN'S ENERGY OUT-PUT IS DEFINATLY IN DECLINE. IN EFFECT THIS IS A DYING PLANET...INHABITANTS ARE CARBON LIFE FORMS. HUMANOID. APPARENTLY SUFFERING FROM SAVAGE, PARANOID BEHAVIOR AND CATATONIC THINKING... SHALL WE SEND DOWN A RESEARCH TEAM?

NEGATIVE. THIS PLANETOID DOESNT WARRANT THE RISK OF AN EXPEDITION. WE'LL CONDUCT STANDARD OBSERVATION PROCEDURES FOR THE NEXT EIGHT CROUTONS, THEN PROCEED TO OUR NEXT APPOINTMENT.



...NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'LL BE IN THE SEAT'S LIBRARY. YOU CAN REACH ME THERE IF I'M NEEDED... YOU HAVE COMMAND OF THE BRIDGE MR. EMERALD.

ALLRIGHT! WHO KYPED ME COPY O' "DICK, JANE, AND SALLY"?

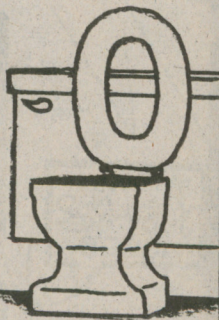


NOW IF YOU'LL EX BE IN THE SEAT M YOU CAN REACH M I'M NEEDED. YOU H DMAND OF THE R. EMERALD

... IN THE LIBRARY ...

HEY! LOOK AT THIS! SOMEONES RIPPIN' OFF THE SHOW BY RAKIN' IN UNREPORTED MERCHANDISE ROYALTIES.

TURBO POOPER

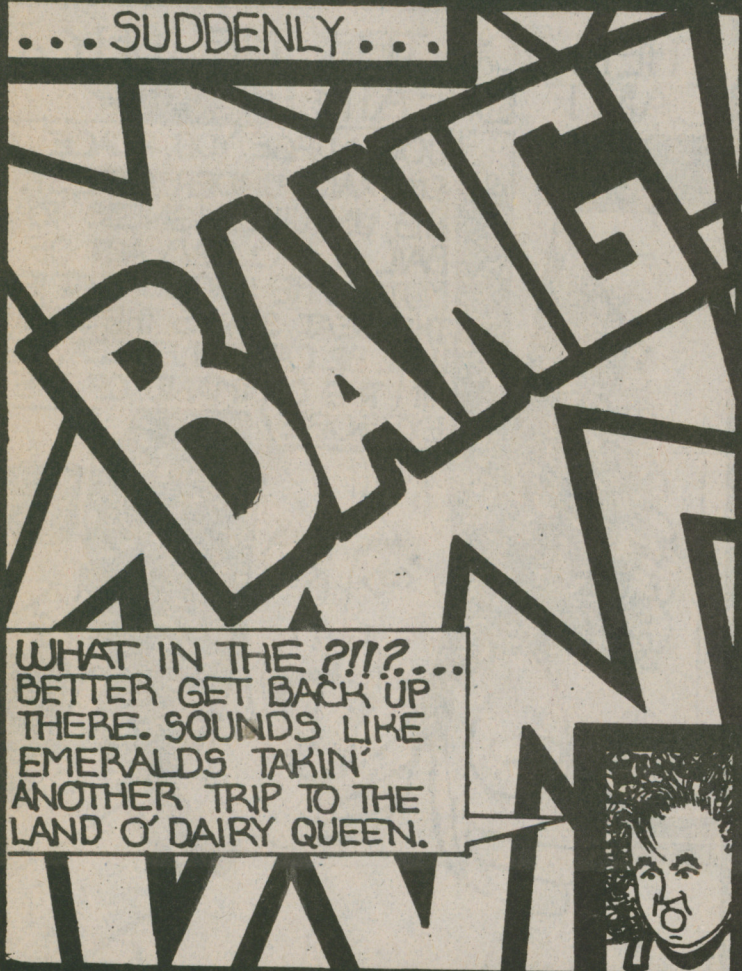


THE CHICK WHO DESIGNED THIS THING OBVIOUSLY WASN'T THINKING O' COMFORT.

OOPS! CEREBRAL MELT DOWN



... SUDDENLY ...



WHAT IN THE ?!!?... BETTER GET BACK UP THERE. SOUNDS LIKE EMERALDS TAKIN' ANOTHER TRIP TO THE LAND O' DAIRY QUEEN.

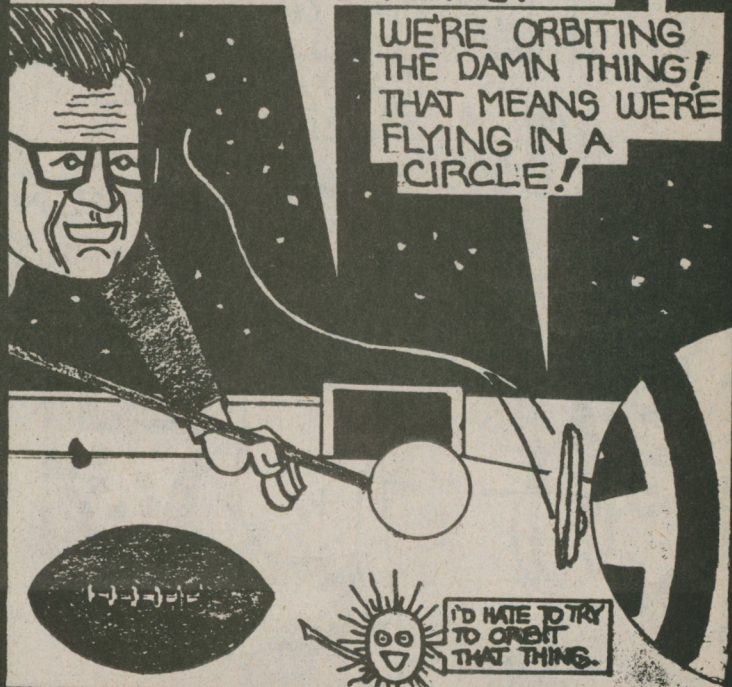


... DOLT ARRIVES ON THE BRIDGE.

WHATS GOIN' ON HERE, EMERALD ?

UNKNOWN. NAVIGATION REPORTS THE HELM SLUGGISH. WE'RE HAVING TROUBLE KEEPING THE SEAT IN A STRAIGHT LINE.

WE'RE ORBITING THE DAMN THING! THAT MEANS WE'RE FLYING IN A CIRCLE!



I'D HATE TO TRY TO ORBIT THAT THING.

ABRUPTLY THE ATTENTION OF THE CREW IS DRAWN TO THE VIEW SCREEN...

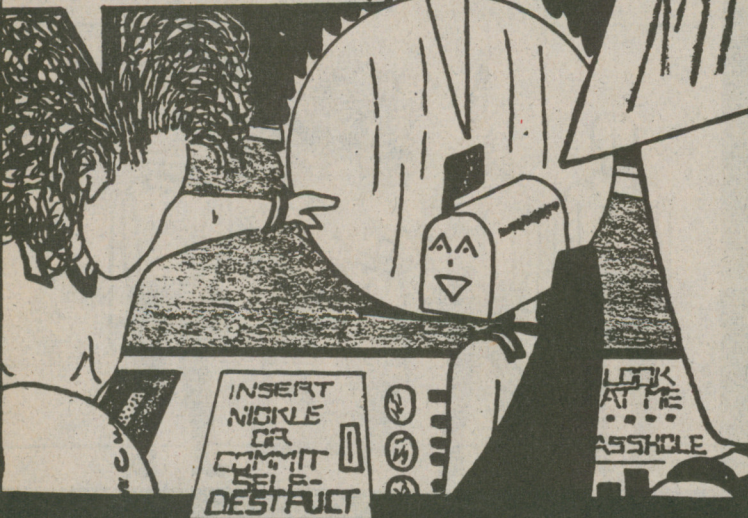
OH LOOK, EMERALD!...LOOK! LOOK! LOOK!

ENEMY CUE-BALL APPROACHING AT MULTI-ULTRA-HYPER-SUPER-TRAN-SONIC-OAR DRIVE.

HOW COULD YA' JUST LET A THING THAT BIG POP UP ON THE SCREEN, MR. OUT?

BUT NOBODY DIES IN CARTOON LAND, SIR.

WE AIN'T CARTOONS!



CRACK!

WHO? WHO? WHO?... WHO COULD BE BEHIND THIS ALL?



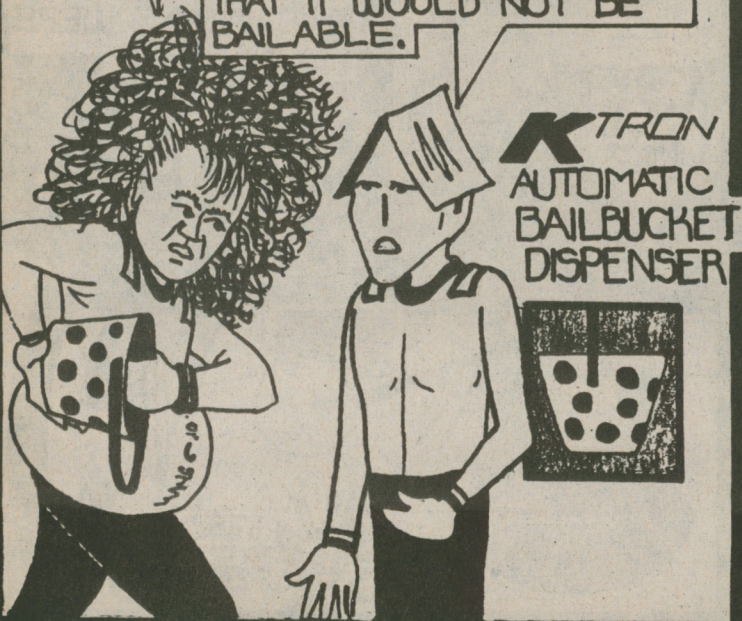
IT'S JOHN, JEAN, AND JUDY RE-VISITED.

WOULD YOU PUT THAT BOOK AWAY.

OH NO! A HOLE! QUICK EMERALD, GRAB A BUCKETT AND START BAILIN! WE GUNNA SINK!

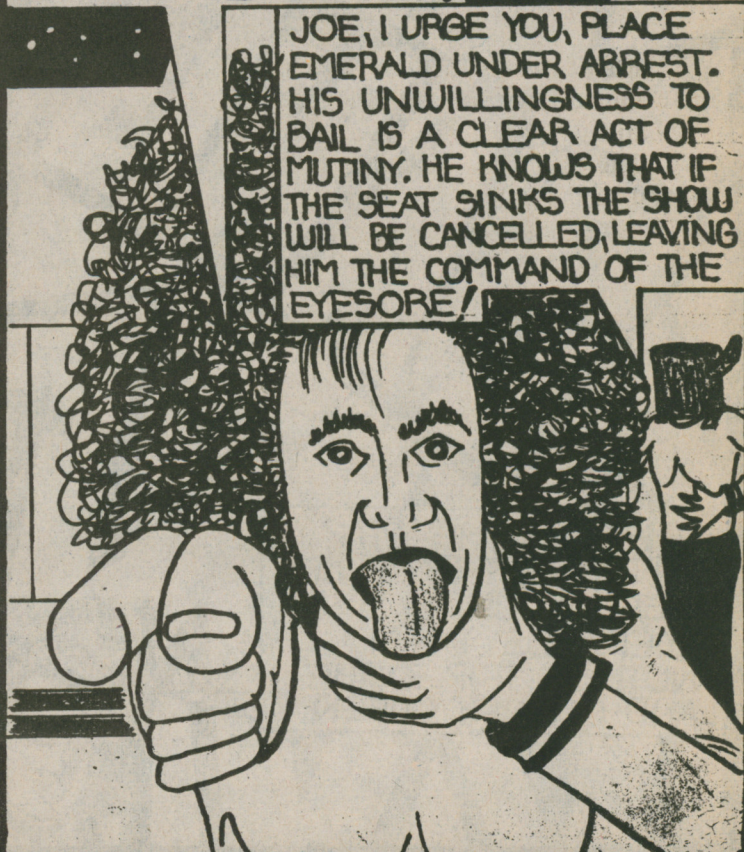
NOT POSSIBLE. WATER IN IT'S LIQUID FORM CAN NOT EXIST IN SPACE... ONLY IN THE FORM OF ICE DOES IT EXIST AT ALL, WHICH MEANS THAT IT WOULD NOT BE BAILABLE.

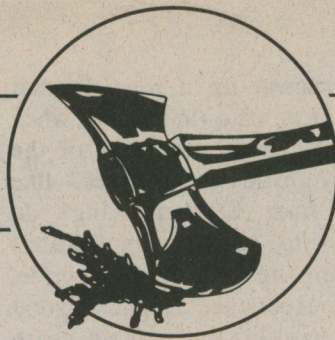
KTRON
AUTOMATIC
BAILBUCKET
DISPENSER



THEN YOU TELL ME WHY I CAN'T BREATH!

JOE, I URGE YOU, PLACE EMERALD UNDER ARREST. HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO BAIL IS A CLEAR ACT OF MUTINY. HE KNOWS THAT IF THE SEAT SINKS THE SHOW WILL BE CANCELLED, LEAVING HIM THE COMMAND OF THE EYESORE!





Tapping The Vein: Book One
Eclipse Books
\$6.95 U.S.

The horror comic, which, until recently, was thought to be extinct, has returned with a vengeance. On stands that were once bare of anything horror related, you can now find titles like DC's excellent *Hellblazer* and *Sandman*, Spiderbaby's controversial-but-always-first-rate *Taboo*, and Marvel's pathetically bad *Nightmare on Elm Street* (which is now dead, bless the powers that be). This is only a small sampling of what's out there; piles of other horror comics, in these times of spandex-clad superheros and angst-ridden mutants, are coming on as freshly as a breath of fetid, grave-chilled air.

Eclipse Books has opted to get in on the horror boom by corraling Clive Barker into graphically adapting the stories from his *Books of Blood* series (using the term "graphic" with Clive can be redundant, but in this case, we're talking graphic as in comics, of course). Barker himself, along with the assistance of Dennis Etchison, is acting as Executive Editor on the series, cleverly entitled *Tapping The Vein*, making sure, I'm assuming, that things stay faithful to the bloody-but-lyrical status quo set by Barker's stories.

Tapping The Vein: Book One is everything that you could ask for in a horror comic: it's scary—and bloody—and beautifully written and illustrated. The adaptor's love for the source material shows through clearly in almost every panel. The fine lines and painstakingly detailed layouts of P. Craig Russell (who is, in this humble reviewer's opinion, one of the best graphic artists ever) mesh perfectly with the story "Human Remains," a tale of a male prostitute who gains an inhuman admirer, while Scott Hampton's somber and atmospheric painting style in "Pig Blood Blues" really grabs you and



drags you into the story of some reform school boys and the pig they worship. One scene in particular, in which a burning pig is running through a night-shrouded forest, is bound to stick with you for a long time after you put the book down. And lastly but certainly not least, is John Bolton's cover: literally eye-popping.

This is the kind of comic that your mother wouldn't want you to read, thank God, which, in itself is a damn good reason to pick it up. *Tapping The Vein: Book Two* is now available and features the stories "In the Hills, the Cities," and "Skins of the Fathers."

—Mike Baker

TABOO #2
Spiderbaby Grafix & Pbls.
\$11.00 U.S.

The cover of *TABOO #2* alone is enough to give Tipper Gore a violent case of the vapors. Picture an aquatic, mad Madonna with . . . *things* suckling at her breasts. Yeah!

As with the first issue, the stories go for the throat. "The Pyjama Girl's Big Night Out," by Eddie Campbell, is as topical as today's headlines, and as unsettling. Based on a true incident of murder and of the ensuing bureaucratic bumbling that allows no dignity in death, it goes far beyond any news report or article you're likely to see or read.

David Marshall's "Encore" is a tale rooted in the time-honored EC Comics tradition of the dead returning to seek revenge upon the living. Nice and nasty, but the ending doesn't quite reach the level to which it aspired.

"Mad Eyes," a collaborative effort between Ben Dilworth and Andrew Elliot, works if you go into it with the idea that the narrator is a loon (on second reading, I thought of the opening of Poe's "Tell Tale Heart"—"Mad . . . you think me mad?"—and the story congealed. Which is not to say that the two stories are similar, it just would have helped the reader if he had an inkling of the main character's mindset at the beginning).

Rick Grimes' trio of stories, "Sick Animal," "Hell's Toupee," and "Numbleschitz," are all quite disturbing. Mr. Grimes has a, shall we say, "unique" art style, with characters bearing only the slightest resemblance to anything human, and busy, rough-sketch panels.

"Saying Grace," by Stephen Bissette, brings back Cardinal Syn, the cannibalistic canon from the cover of *TABOO #1*. This story has a nightmarish, faerie tale quality to it; extremely

distasteful (sorry; couldn't resist).

Other standouts include a mini-portfolio of S. Clay Wilson's art, including a full-page drawing depicting a demon crouched between a woman's legs and snorting from her pussy with a straw; Michael Zulli's "Mercy," which concerns a lapsed Catholic and his guilt fetish (suffice is to say that if Miss Tip recovers from her earlier swoon, this story'll send her into a coma. Somebody got her address?); the beginning of the Alan Moore/Eddie Campbell series, "From Hell - a melodrama in sixteen parts;" and several sketches by Clive Barker, most notably "The Droolies," (study for an unrealized children's book project).

About the only clinkers in the group are "Life With the Vampire," and "The Human Crux," a pair of tales by Cara Sherman Tereno that depict the origin of a vampire and how he's coping in today's world of AIDS and other sexual diseases. Doesn't anybody realize that the virus attacks only *living* organisms; the undead need not apply, thanks.

Anyway, both issues of TABOO are available from Spiderbaby Grafix & Publications, P.O.Box 442, Wilmington, VT 05363. Check or m.o. made payable to the head Droolie—er, Spiderbaby Grafix & Publications.

—Kenneth D. Whitfield

Beautiful Stories for Ugly Children
Piranha Press
\$2 U.S.

Beautiful Stories for Ugly Children is not your typical comic book, either in format or content. Volume One consists of thirty pages of wonderful pencil sketches—by Dan Sweetman; three-dimensional, detailed and haunting—accompanied by chunks of strong text—by Dave Loupre. No panel by panel layout, and no word balloons (in case you're wondering, Loupre and Sweetman are responsible for the wonderfully warped "Wasteland" strip that runs in *Fangoria*).

The single story in this issue, "A Cotton Candy Autopsy," is as tough to describe as its title suggests. Picture

five circus clowns on a roadtrip that soon gets out of hand (if, like me, when you think of clowns, you think of the scary, nasty little fucker-types, like Pennywise, from Stephen King's *It*, you'll begin to see the implications here). During the course of the joyride, the clowns experience laughter, good times, love, hardship and trouble, death and madness.

On one page, you're looking through the windshield of a car being driven by a clown with a bottle of beer in one hand, and a dressed-up show-dog in his lap. Next to him is another clown swilling beer. Two clowns in the back seat are partying with a lady named Addy. Loupre's text says it all:

"It was me, Bingo, Foo Foo, and Joey Punchinello from the street. Foo Foo stole the keys to the Dart while Bingo grabbed Addy the Freaklady and some of our best pups. I got the booze out of the ringmaster's trailer when he was watching the big-top burn. Joey just lay low. Everyone knew he was always wiser to things than he was saying, like when the midget got drowned in the horse trough last winter.

"Not a damned thing about the

fire on the radio, so we blasted tunes and shot west doin' 95, teasing the dogs and taking turns in the back seat with Addy. In the back seat, she was a ny-

body's freak.

Pure poetry. And the artwork is fantastic. Later, the group stop at a mini-mart to stock up on beer. Foo Foo wanders into a strip joint next door to check out the girls (are you getting the mental picture of this? a clown named Foo Foo in a sleazy strip-joint?), but the grungy clientele takes exception to his kind:

"... I'm telling you, if the clown has a natural enemy, it's bikers."

Funny, tragic, insane, sick, "Cotton Candy Autopsy" is easily one of the most innovative comics of the year. And that's just the first issue. Advanced publicity for the second promises "a story of the typical suburban family . . ." a typical suburban family that just happen to be named the Deadjohnsons."

Beautiful Stories for Ugly Children is published monthly by Piranha Press, an imprint of DC Comics, and is available at most comic shops.

Before I go, let me state plainly that the above comics—especially TABOO—are definitely *not* for children. They contain scenes of graphic violence and sexual intercourse.

—Kenneth D. Whitfield



Graphic Horror: The Comics Come of Age

Why the comics grew up...and why you'll be glad they did

London. Ariel view of smoking ruins, twisted steel girders and raging fires. A holocaust, the carnage is apocalyptic. Bodies are strewn everywhere, horribly dismembered. Some have been skinned, their flesh hung on clotheslines like so much laundry, while others hang impaled on street signs, antennas, steel beams, and other assorted sharp objects. Heads are rolling, quite literally.

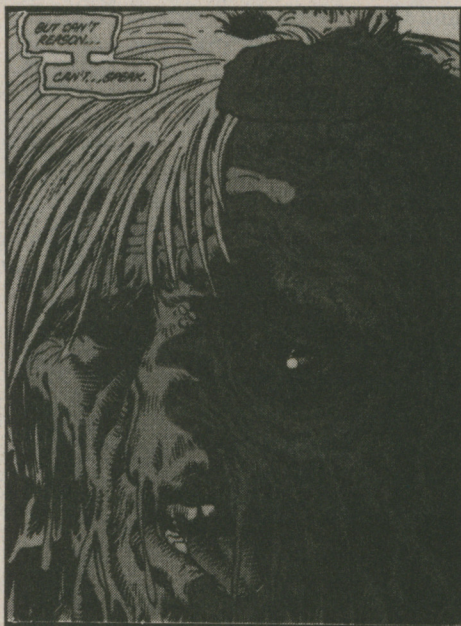
A lone figure stands amid the chaos, wearing a business suit and clutching a woman's decapitated head. Around him, the heads of men, women and children lay scattered like marbles.

Kid Miracleman is throwing a tantrum.

The date is June 16th, 1916. The god Morpheus, King of Dreams, has been imprisoned by a Magus, an Aleister Crowley type. Switch to 1986. After patiently waiting seven decades, Morpheus escapes. In his absence, the world has gone without dreams for 70 years, and things have become decidedly strange. In an effort to regain his kingdom, Morpheus must regain the three tools of his Realm, the talismans of his power. A pouch containing the sands of dreams, a helmet crown, and a ruby that focuses dream energy. He begins by cursing the son of his captor with eternal waking. He then travels through the Dreamrealm to his Kingdom, now in ruins. Later, with the help of a human named John Constantine, Morpheus regains his sand pouch from a dying woman, her once supple body now covered with festering sores, her rampaging dreams a source of the ultimate destruction to anyone who enters her sphere of influence.

Morpheus then travels to Hell itself to do battle with the demon that possesses his helmet. In a psychic free-for-all, witnessed by Hell's minions, Morpheus bests the demon.

The search for his ruby leads him



to a diner, wherein a madman named Doctor Destiny uses the talisman to commit murder, rape, dismemberment, and necrophilia on the diner's patrons. But such is the power of insane dreams.

Morpheus, Master of Dreams. Brother to Destiny, Despair, Death and others.

This is the Sandman.

A grotesque aberration of man and plant. A being of great power, a God of the Green, a being created from the nucleus of a dying man's soul. A woman named Abby, once in love with the man, now in love with the monster, she carries the monster's child. And finally, a man named Arcane, a ruthless scientist experimenting with bodies in necromancer-fashion.

This is the Swamp Thing.

An Englishman named John Constantine, who smokes too much, drinks too much, has problems with women. A normal guy, except the black arts of Magik always have a way of seeking him out. He has descended into hell on a

staircase composed of naked, writhing bodies; he has led a demon to the Gates of Heaven, where the demon was promptly eviscerated by an angel. Constantine, as he lights up a cigarette: "Don't know why everyone thinks angels are so bloody cherubic. Buggers scare the hell out of me."

This is John Constantine, Hellblazer.

Welcome to the funny pages.

As you may have noticed, comic books have changed. What we're seeing now is a medium, long dismissed as child's play, that's experiencing growing pains. What was once the home of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, Archie and his pals, etc., today's comic neighborhood is a bit more seedy, what with the arrivals of Morpheus, Swamp Thing, and the Hellblazer.

Even the comic anthologies are resurfacing, though they haven't fared as well as the above-mentioned series. *Death Rattle*, from Kitchen Sink Press, was a wonderful throwback to the EC comics: short, three to eight page stories depicting graphic disembowelment and other juicy acts of violence; the bad guys got what was coming to them, usually—unless the good guys got it first. But it only lasted eighteen issues (sounds like a lot, but not when you're doing a monthly).

Another *departe* is *Wasteland*, from DC. To my knowledge, this is the only horror anthology attempted by one of the two biggies in years. And this was one weird book. Some of the stories were straightforward horror, others were tongue-in-cheek jibes at the powers-that-be, and some left you wondering, What the fuck was that? But how could you not like something that told stories of Donald Trump as a mere pawn of Satan; or of a horror writer named Steven Queen that had a little worm in his head.



making him write his stories?

Actually, Stephen Bissette's *TA-BOO* is one horror anthology comic that's kicking ass and taking names. Bissette is an accomplished artist (he worked on *Swamp Thing*, and many others) who undertook this venture with one aim: let the creators create. No page restrictions; no censorship; take an idea and run with it. Surprisingly, the results have been consistently chilling and nauseating, although Bissette has had trouble with obscenity laws (the second issue was refused by his former printer, but is now available), and some foreign markets won't even allow it between their borders.

You know this has gotta be good stuff!

The cover for the first issue (done by Bissette himself) depicts a wicked looking vicar seated at a dinner table, knife and fork in ready hands. A silver platter sits before him. His meal?

Roasted babies.

Kids, man; I'm not fuckin' kidding.

Better yet, there's an intro by Clive Barker, along with a couple of his sketches, plus stories about the consequences of torturing kittens, a game show for people who want to commit suicide, murderous tapeworms, toxic shock syndrome...

To borrow a line from a DC ad:
You outgrew comics.

Now they've caught up with you.

GUILTY PARTIES

Miracleman was written by Alan Moore, the Stephen King of comics, and drawn by John Totleben. Moore took a sort of silly, fifties-era superhero, gave him and his supporting cast (the *Miracleman Family*) believable origins, and turned the whole world upside down.

(For those unfamiliar with *Mira-*

cleman, he's really a superhero named Marvelman, but Marvel Comics frowned on the use of that name. Remember Shazam? Pretty much the same guy—kinda.)

Moore and Totleben's tenure on *Miracleman* ran for sixteen issues, sixteen issues of beautiful artwork and poetic prose that will leave you stunned and shocked. As an added treat, some issues contain backup stories of the original *Marvelman* and *Marvelman Family*, made all the more charming in their hokiness when you consider the origin Moore gave them. Charming, yet unsettling.

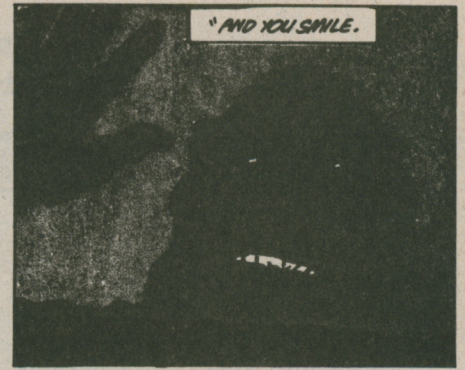
Miracleman will continue with writer Neil Gaiman and artist Mark Buckingham, the original creators. Very capable hands; they should continue with the high quality Moore and Totleben established.

Available from your local comics dealer, or from Eclipse Comics, P.O. Box 1099, Forestville, CA 95436. \$2 per issue; issue #1 is \$5. All issues available (all the Moore issues are being collected together in a series of graphic novels, with each book containing four issues; now available).

Sandman is written by Neil Gaiman, illustrated by Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III.

I can't praise this title enough. As of issue eight, the creative team is still shocking and delighting the reader. Subtle, yet possessing the power of a steamroller. Hopefully, they can keep it going.

(For video-oriented readers, Morpheus, the Sandman, makes Freddy Krueger



look about as nasty as Eddie Munster.)

Published monthly by DC Comics, \$1.50/issue (Issue #8 is a good entry level issue. It contains a synopsis of what's gone before as well as a dynamite new story).

Swamp Thing has had a long and illustrated career. Somewhere around issue #20, Alan Moore once again took over the helm of a floundering, simplistic character and really shook things up (in a story entitled "Anatomy Lesson" Moore gave Swampy an origin that dovetails nicely with the old mythos and makes for a near-believable fantasy. "Anatomy Lesson" has been collected as a graphic novel. B. Dalton's and WaldenBooks carry it. Also, look for *Roots of the Swamp Thing*, an excellent affordable entry book.

As for artists, Swampy's had many standouts, including Stephen Bissette, John Totleben, Tom Mandrake, Alfredo Alcala, and Tom Yeates, and creators Len Wein and Berni Wrightson (Wrightson illustrated Stephen's King's *Cycle of the Werewolf* and *Creepshow* books).



Moore left things in the hands of Rick Veitch, who handled the transition admirably, and who put Swampy through some major changes of his own invention. Wonderful changes that eventually resulted in his departure after DC execs killed a particular story in which Swamp Thing was to meet "the Nazarene" in the Garden of Gethsemane. After initially approving the issue, DC got cold feet, claiming it was too offensive (strange logic, considering another DC title featured a vampire that drank the blood of Christ at the Crucifixion).

The fate of *Swamp Thing* is in the hands of another creative team now, unannounced as I write this, so who knows what future titles will bring. But issues twenty through, say, ninety, are highly recommended.

Published by DC Comics. \$1.25/issue.

Hellblazer is written by Jamie Delano; art is by Mark Buckingham and Alfredo Alcalá, with occasional guest artists.



Published by DC Comics. \$1.50/issue.

All 18 issues of *Death Rattle* are still available from Kitchen Sink Press, No. 2 Swamp Rd., Princeton, WI 54968, or you might find it in the back issue bin at your local comic dealer. The first six issues are in color. You'll find many familiar names here—Bissette, Veitch, Corben. Issue #7 is an Ed Gein special. If you like HBO's *Tales from the Crypt*, you'll be on familiar blood-drenched ground here. \$2/issue.

Look for *Wasteland* in the back issue bins.

TABOO is available from Spiderb-aby Graphix, P.O.Box 442, Wilmington, VT 05363. Stephen Bissette and Nancy O'Conner, publishers (and you should go to your local comics dealer and demand they carry this title). Price is \$11, but worth every penny, considering each issue is over 100 pages in length.

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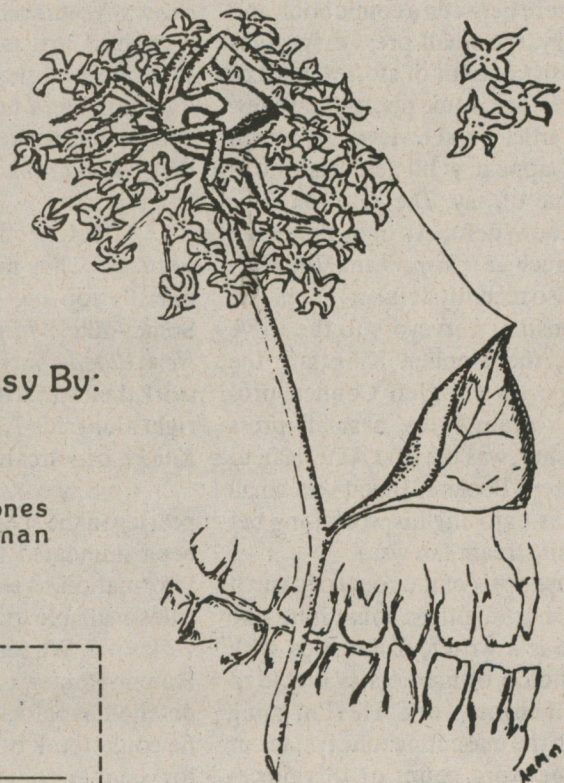
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What's Out There?

An Overview of the Small Press/Alternative 'zines

By Roman Ranieri

Lapping greedily at the blood spilled in the aforementioned comics are the small press magazines—*Cemetery Dance*, *After Hours*, *AFRAID*, *Weird Tales*. Falling somewhere between a comic book and an anthology, the small press magazines usually consist of a lot of stories, a lot of story illustrations, some poetry, and a few non-fiction articles and reviews. Although they might appear a bit less ambitious than an issue of, say, *The Twilight Zone Magazine* (now defunct) or a *Fangoria*, magazines such as *Whispers* and *The Horror Show* (also recently defunct) are in fact the only constant purveyors to the Clive Barker fan, the Stephen King fan, the Skipp & Spector fan (Jeff Conner, proprietor of *Scream Press*, a small press book publisher, was the first American to publish Barker's *Books of Blood*—the small press fan was enjoying his work long before the mainstream fan was).

A synopsis of the roots of a small press publisher might go something like this: he/she is a writer, dissatisfied with the current crop of markets available to which to sell his/her work. He (I'm going to work with the masculine tone just to cut down on the word count of this piece) takes his tax refund check, gets a few of his writer buddies to give him some stories, hacks them into his computer, typesets

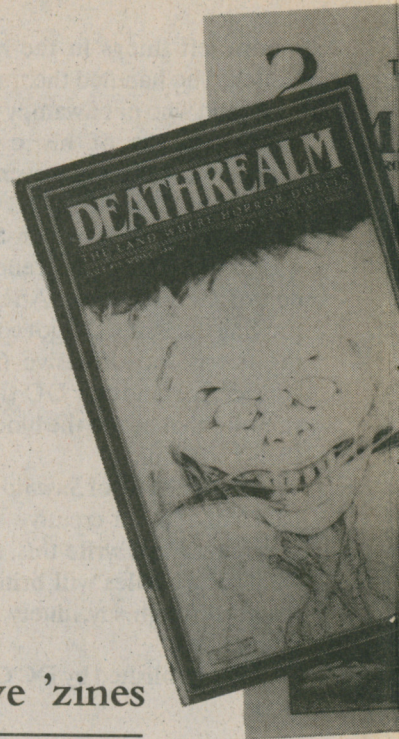
them, then takes the whole thing to a printer. He sells a couple of hundred copies by listing his magazine—his magazine; has a real nice sound to it—in *Scavenger's Newsletter*, a monthly newsletter for writers, artists, poets and fans. He gets some more stories from some of the newsletter's readers; he meets Skipp & Spector at a fantasy convention and they tell him they could probably send him something in a few months.

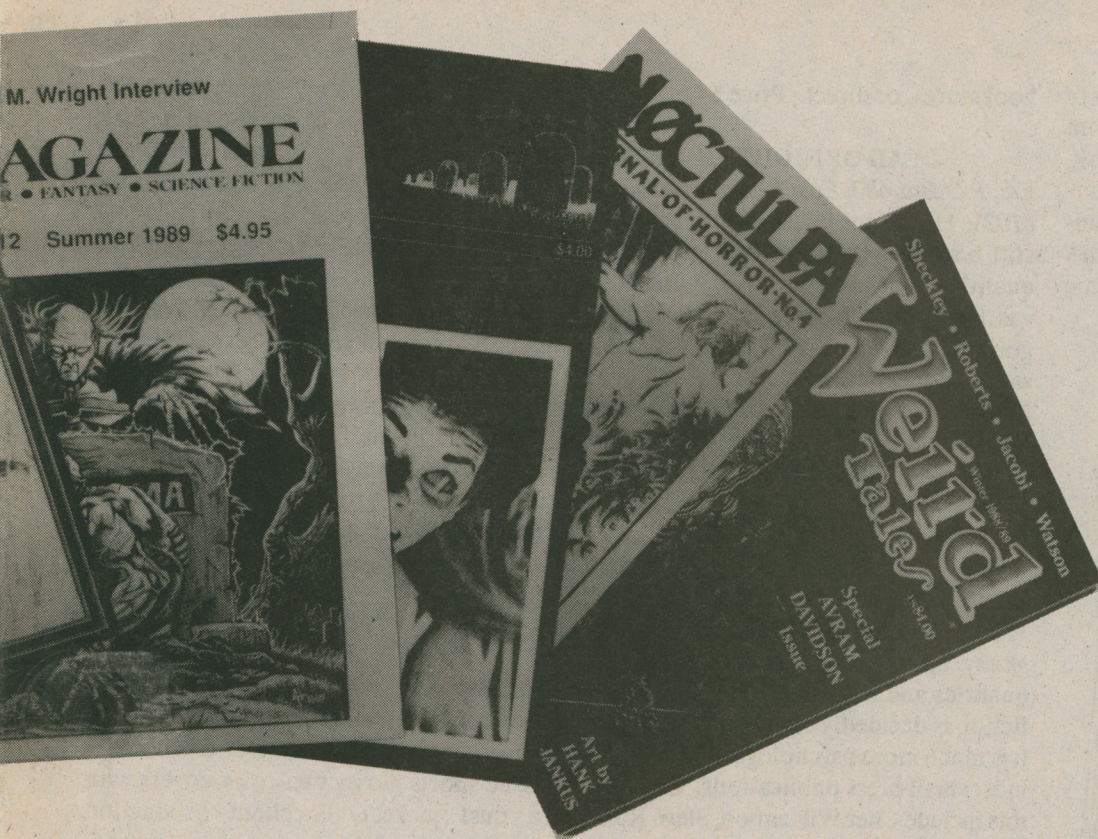
It goes on from there. Some aren't so lucky. They publish a few issues, find out it's too big of a job, or too little. Some—like *Whispers*, *Horror Show*, and *New Blood*—survive and, inch by inch, work their way to the newsstands to a spot right alongside *TZ*, or *Fango*, or *The Dark Knight*, or—dream of dreams—*Hustler*.

Since *New Blood* first began appearing in the specialty/comic shops, we've been inundated with requests for more information on as many of the small press titles available today. Okay—you're wish, ya' know? We forced contributing editor Roman Ranieri to sit down and compile a detailed list of as many small press titles he could think of; he queried the editors for sample copies, read through all of them, and reviewed them. So sit back and let'm show you the menu.

CEMETERY DANCE—*Richard T. Chizmar, Ed., P.O. Box 858, Edgewood, MD 21040*. Easily the best of the bunch, both in appearance and content, *CD* features two-color covers and excellent production qualities throughout. A nice blend of splatter and mainstream horror and dark fantasy. Latest issue is a Richard Christian Matheson special, including a new story by Matheson, plus articles and fiction by David J. Schow, Ray Garton, and William Relling Jr. Published quarterly with a print run of 2,500 copies. Available in some bookstores, from dealers such as Weinberg Books, The Overlook Connection, Nicholas J. Certo, and Mark Ziesing (addresses appear at the end of this article), or directly from the editor/publisher. Single issue price \$4. One year subscription, \$15.

DEATHREALM—*Mark Rainey, Editor, 3223-F Regents Park, Greensboro, NC 27405*. A handsome digest with glossy black-and-white covers, this popular title offers excellent production qualities throughout. The fiction (only 4 stories in the latest issue, though) and artwork are first-class, with a heavy Cthulhu influence. Recent contributors include Joe R. Lansdale, J.N. Williamson, and new talent Jeffrey Osier. Also offers reviews of





the latest books and small press titles. Published 3-4 times per year, with a print run of 1,200 copies; available from some bookstores, or order directly from the editor/publisher. Single issue price \$3.50. One year subscription, \$13.

THE TOME—*David N. Wilson, Rd., 454 Munden Ave., Norfolk, VA 23505.* The second issue of this fine-looking digest has just been published. The production qualities have improved slightly over the debut issue but, all in all, it's a thick (although the pages are numberless) quality effort. Some of the tales are pretty twisted, but there doesn't seem to be any particular slant. The next issue is a special "Editor's Anthology," featuring new fiction by J.N. Williamson (*MASQUES*), Mark Rainey (*Deathrealm*), W. Paul Ganley (*Weirdbook*), Chris B. Lacher (*New Blood*), and many more (write now for information). Published "whenever we can get around to it," state the editors, it usually appears bi-annually with a print run of 300. Available from Weinberg Books, or directly from the editor. Price \$4.00.

2AM—*Gretta M. Anderson, Ed., P.O.Box 6754, Rockford, IL 61125-1754.* Full-sized, with stiff black-and-white covers. Excellent production values through-

out (since Gretta started using a laser printer). First-class fiction covering the full spectrum of dark fantasy, from pure horror, to sword and sorcery. Published quarterly with a print run of 1,000 copies, 2AM is available in some bookstores, most dealers, or direct. Price \$4.95. One year subscription, \$15.

AFTER HOURS—*William Raley, Ed., 21541 Oakbrook, Mission Viejo, CA 92692-3044.* Impressive full-sized publication, with stiff b/w covers. Very good production qualities throughout. First-class art. The only magazine that publishes fiction that "comes out only after dark," *AH* features mainly fiction, with Tanith Lee, Harlan Ellison, Robert Dunbar, Steve Rasnic Tem, J.N. Williamson. Published quarterly with a print run of 750 copies. Available in some bookstores, most dealers, or direct. Price \$4.

GAS—*Jeannette M. Hopper, Ed., P.O.Box 397, Marina, CA 93933.* Now digest-sized, this is the official publication for the Gross American's Society. Good production qualities, although the pages in the latest issue are not trimmed properly. A balanced blend of fiction, poetry, articles, and essays. Very unique. Published quarterly with a print run of 250

copies. Available only from the editor. Price \$2.50.

HAUNTS—*Joseph K. Cherkes, Ed., P.O.Box 3342, Providence, RI 02906.* Trade paperback with glossy two-color covers. Excellent production qualities throughout. First-class artwork. Geared toward the traditional horror fan and featuring mainly fiction with some poetry. Published quarterly with a print run of 1,000. Available in some bookstores, or direct. Price, \$3.50.

SPACE & TIME—*Gordon Linzner, Ed., 138 W. 70th St., #4B, NY, NY, 10023-4432.* Handsome digest with stiff b/w covers. Excellent production qualities; first-class art. Also publishes the full spectrum of the genres, plus some unclassifiable pieces that have earned this magazine a well-deserved reputation as one of the best small press publications around. Mainly fiction with some poetry, contributors include G. Wayne Miller, Bentley Little, Charles de Lint, Bruce Boston. Price \$5, but write first since there is some speculation that it has suspended publication.

SERENDIPITY—*Joseph Dickerson, Ed., 4295 Silver Lake Rd., Pinson, AL 35126-3307.* A digest with a varied look

(#2 had glossy, color covers, but #3 was b/w). Production qualities also vary, from excellent to average. First-class artwork, though. Featuring a blend of fiction, articles and poetry mostly by unknown authors. Published 4-6 times per year with a print run of 2,000. Available in some bookstores, or direct. Price \$2.

GRUE MAGAZINE

Number 10 Fall 1989 \$4.50



THE BLOOD REVIEW—*Ruben Sosa Villegas, Ed., P.O.Box 4394, Denver, CO 80204-9998.* The first of two non-fiction publications featured here, *The Blood Review* is a rich, full-sized periodical with b/w covers. Excellent production qualities. First-class art. Although it does feature a few stories and poems, the main thrust is on essays and reviews of the horror genre. Regular contributors include Edward Bryant, Steve Rasnic Tem, Matthew J. Costello. Published quarterly with a print run of 500, it's available directly from the publisher. Price is a hefty \$7, but it's pretty thick.

JABBERWOCKY—*Jeff VanderMeer & Duane Bray, Eds., 7701 SW 7th Pl., Gainesville, FL 32607.* Beautiful digest with two-color covers. Excellent production values; first-class art. Weird, unique fiction, poetry and articles from mostly lesser-knowns. Published biannually with a print run of 500. Available in some

bookstores, or direct. Price \$4.

DEAD OF NIGHT—*L. Lin Stein, Ed., P.O.Box 682, East Longmeadow, MA 01028.* Handsome full-sized magazine with stiff b/w covers. Very good production qualities; first-class art. Emphasis is on vampires, though there is a surprisingly good mix of work, a tribute to Lin's talent as editor. Featuring J.N. Williamson, John Maclay, Yvonne Navarro, Edward Lodi, *DoN* is published quarterly with a print run of 300. Available directly from the editor. Price \$3.

NOCTULPA—*George Hatch, Ed., P.O.Box 5175, Long Island City, NY 11105.* A trade-paperback anthology with glossy, b/w covers. Excellent production qualities and first-class art. None of the fiction is decidedly bloody or violent, but it is much more psychologically grim than most small press publications. Contributors include Chet Williamson, Steve Rasnic Tem, David B. Silva, and many more. An annual with a print run of 1,000 copies. Order direct from the publisher. Price \$8.95, but worth it.

WEIRD TALES—*George Scithers, Darrell Schweitzer, John Betancourt, Eds., P.O.Box 13418, Philadelphia, PA 19101-3418.* Stunning trade-paperback-sized magazine (this is not small press, depending on whom you ask) with glossy, full-color covers. Excellent production values; first-class art. Although mostly geared for the fantasy/sword-and-sorcery fan, the contributor's are never disappointing; Gene Wolfe, Ramsey Campbell, F. Paul Wilson, T.E.D. Klein, Brian Lumley. Published quarterly with a print run of 10,000 copies, *WT* is very easily located in bookstores, from dealers, or direct. Price \$4.

THIN ICE—*Kathleen Jurgens, Ed., 379 Lincoln Ave., Council Bluffs, IA 51503.* Thick, handsome digest with b/w covers. Excellent production qualities; first-class art. No particular slant, though recent issues of the magazine have featured interviews with Skipp & Spector, William Relling Jr., plus fiction by Bentley Little and Ronald Kelly, so splatterpunks will be happy with *TI*. Published tri-annually with a print run of 250. No subscriptions currently available, but single copy price is \$4.50.

GRUE—*Peggy Nadramia, Ed., P.O.Box 370, Times Square Station, NY, NY 10108-0370.* Thick digest with glossy, b/w white covers, *Grue* is also one of the top-notch small press horror publications currently available. Excellent production values and first-class artwork. Peggy doesn't shy away from much—write for details about her recent "Sexual Horror" issue—and her contributor list is impressive: Thomas Ligotti (*PRIME EVIL*), Joseph Payne Brennan, Ramsey Campbell, Janet Fox. Published tri-annually with a print run of 3,000 copies (estimated). Available in some bookstores, from dealers, or direct. Price \$4.50.

WEIRDBOOK—*W. Paul Ganley, Ed., P.O.Box 149, Buffalo, NY 14226-0149.* Beautiful, full-sized magazine with b/w covers (recent 20th anniversary double-issue sports glossy two-color covers with a dust jacket). Excellent production qualities; first-class art, with an emphasis on dark fantasy/high fantasy. Contributors include Brian Lumley, Joseph Payne Brennan, Al Sarrantonio, Jessica Amanda Salmonson. Published semi-annually with a print run of 2,000. Available in some bookstores, from dealers, or direct. Price \$6 (\$10 for the double-is-

ISSN # 0271-2512



Peni R. Griffin
Jeffrey Ford
Scott Virts

sue).

P O S S I B L E IMPOSSIBILITIES— *Linda Nelson, Ed., 7735 Osceola St., Westminster, CO 80030.* Handsome full-sized, with two-color front cover. Good production qualities, but the pages are not properly trimmed; first-class art. Science fiction/fantasy slant, publishes mostly unknowns. Published quarterly with an unknown press run. Available directly from the editor. Price \$3.

PULPHOUSE— *Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Ed., P.O.Box 1227, Eugene, OR 97440.* Stunning hardcover magazine (more like a book, though) with foil-stamped lettering on the covers, this is attractive enough to be displayed with your first-editions. Excellent production qualities, but no artwork. Publishes "dangerous fiction" by a few lesser-knowns, plus such luminaries as Harlan Ellison, Algis Budrys, Damon Knight, Michael Bishop. Published quarterly, **PULPHOUSE** does two horror issues per year, one science fiction, one fantasy. Available from dealers or direct. Price is steep—\$20 for regular issues, \$60 for leather-bound—but each issue is a definite collector's item.



TERROR TIME AGAIN—*Donald L. Miller, Ed., 1591 Taylor St., #4, St. Paul, MN 55104.* Digest with stiff b/w covers. Excellent production qualities; first-class art. Features a blend of fiction and poetry mostly by unknowns. Published annually with a print run of 200, **TTA** is available directly from the editor. Price \$5.

DOPPELGANGER—*Jamie Meyers, Ed., 50-B Union Ave., Little Falls, NJ 07424.* Impressive digest with stiff b/w covers. Excellent production qualities; first-class art. Features a blend of fiction, poetry and articles with some well-known contributors. Published 2-3 times per year with a print run of 300. Available in some bookstores, or direct. Price \$3.

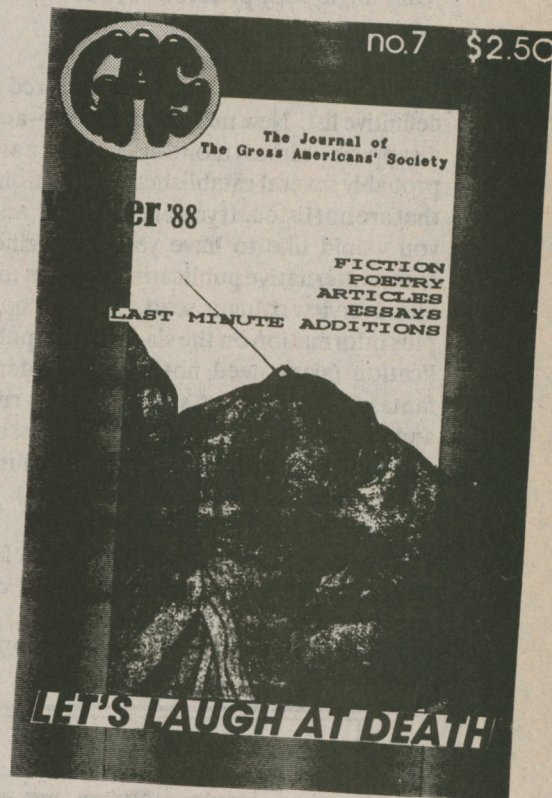
NIGHT SLIVERS—*Patricia Kocis, Ed., P.O.Box 291, Palos Park, IL 60464.* Digest with stiff b/w covers. Excellent production qualities; first-class art. Stories are short-shorts (usually under 1,500 words), mostly by unknowns. Published biannually with an unknown print run. Available direct. Price \$4.

SCREAM—*Russell Boone, Katie Boone, Eds., P.O.Box 10363, Raleigh, NC 27605.* Full-sized with stiff full-color covers. Excellent production qualities; first-class art. Heavy comics appeal, very professional tone. Published tri-annually with a print run of 1,500. Available in some bookstores, or direct. Price \$3.50.

TWISTED—*Christine Hoard, Ed., 22071 Pineview Dr., Antioch, IL 60002.* Thick (latest issue is 152 pages) full-sized with stiff b/w covers. Good production qualities (the page numbers are handwritten); first-class art. Slant is definitely toward the weird, gross and grotesque, **TWISTED** is the granddaddy of splatterpunk periodicals. Published 1-2 times per year with a print run of 350. Available from some dealers and direct. Price \$6 (and worth it).

INIQUITIES—*Buddy Martinez, Jesus Gonzalez (manuscripts), Bill Furtado, Eds., 167 N. Sierra Bonita Ave., Pasadena, CA 91106.* Set to debut this summer, **INIQUITIES** promises to be a biggie. Full-sized, with full-color covers, slick pages, plus some color inside. Excellent production qualities and artwork. The editors don't adhere to any particular slant—they

enjoy "quiet" horror as well as splatterpunk. Contributors include Peter Straub, Ramsey Campbell, Skipp & Spector, David J. Schow, and more. Quarterly schedule, with a print run of 10,000 copies. Available from dealers, some bookstores, or direct. Single issues are \$4.95; one-year subscription, \$19.95.



FRIGHT DEPOT—*Ronald C. Morgan II, Ed., 15519 Domart Ave., Norwalk, CA 90650.* Digest with b/w covers. Good production qualities throughout; good artwork. Featuring a balance of fiction and poetry by mostly unknowns. Published 2-3 times per year with an estimated print run of 100. Available direct. Price \$4.50.

AFRAID, The Newsletter for the Horror Professional—*Tom Elliott, Ed., 2170 S. Harbor Blvd., #270, Anaheim, CA 92802.* Full-sized newsletter. Excellent production qualities; no artwork, but uses numerous cartoons. Although **AFRAID** is basically a trade journal for the horror writer, fans of the regular columnists will enjoy it as well. Columnists include Gary Brandner (best-selling author of *The Howling* and *Doomstalker*), Terry Black (screenwriter for *Dead Heat* and *Tales from the Crypt*), John McCarty (*Splatter Movies*), Mort Castle (*Fear, The Illustrated Book of*

Horrors). No fiction, no poetry, but interviews one major personality "in the Business" each month, including Richard Laymon and Kirby McCauley (Stephen King's former agent). Published monthly (yes, 12 times per year!) with a print run of 1,500. Available in some bookstores, some dealers or direct. Price \$20 for one year (single copy price, \$2.95, but prefers subscriptions).

This should not be considered a definitive list. New magazines appear—and disappear—almost monthly, and there are probably several established publications that are not listed. If you are an editor, and you would like to have your magazine/comic/alternative publication listed in the next overview column, send a sample copy, plus information on the slant of your publication (slant need not be horror/dark fantasy), contributors, schedule, print run and availability. Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope for our reply. Deadline is December 1, 1990.

For complete listings, send \$2.50 for *SCAVENGER'S SCRAPBOOK*, Janet Fox, Ed. (checks payable to Janet Fox), 519 Ellinwood, Osage City, KS 66523-1329.

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(818) 986-6963

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c/o Dale Gibbons
9414 Magnolia Ave.
Riverside, CA 92503

Little Bookshop of Horrors
c/o Doug & Cheri Lewis
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(303) 425-1975

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with this
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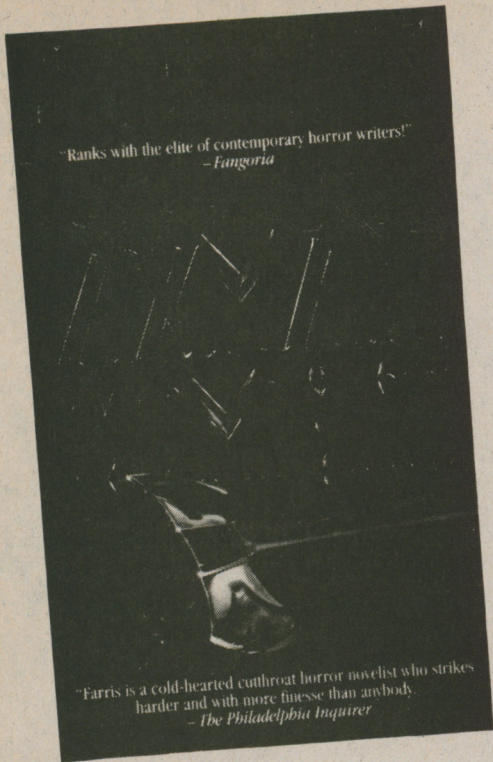


Although widely recognized as one of the major talents in the horror and dark suspense field, John Farris still remains something of a mystery man. Since 1956, his 27 books have sold 20 million copies worldwide, although he has granted few interviews over the years to promote that work. He is perhaps best known for his novel, *The Fury* (1976), which was made into a successful motion picture the following year by director Brian De Palma. Some of its success no doubt was due to the fact that Farris adapted his own novel to the screen. Lesser known to the general public is that Farris also wrote the original screenplay for—and directed—an earlier independent feature, *Dear Dead Deliah* in 1972. (Yet another novel, *When Michael Calls* became a motion picture for television in 1969. Farris, however, had no direct involvement with that project.)

If it seems that this best-selling novelist has more than a passing interest in filmmaking, you're right. With the exception of two of his books, Farris has written screenplays for—or has options on—*Sharp Practice*, *Shatter*, *The Uninvited*, *Nightfall*, and *Son of the Endless Night*. Incredibly, all of his horror novels and thrillers remain in print. Farris is recognized in America as being an important influence on a generation of writers. Stephen King said of him, "In the years of my late adolescence and early adulthood, I did more than just admire his work—I adopted his career as both a goal to be reached and an example to be emulated." Peter Straub has singled Farris out as "One of the giants of contemporary horror."

Born in Missouri, the soft-spoken author/poet/screenwriter/director currently makes his home in Georgia. When I spoke to him, he was simultaneously involved in more projects than most writers would dare to tackle in a lifetime.

NB: You've been writing successful horror and suspense novels since the 1960's. Have you ever lost interest in exploring the dark



side of the human condition?

Farris: I'm very interested in what turns on the spigot for the dark side that is in all of us, and starts it flowing. A lot of people go through life without ever experiencing that in themselves; yet others get into situations which cause radical changes in personality. There's apparently an endless supply of situations—as reported in the media. I would be hard-pressed to write anything that would equal the stuff which shows up on television these days. Or to imagine it, really.

I don't know whether it's due to the miracle of modern communication or if there's simply more aberrations cropping up, but some of the things that go on . . .

Not too far from where I live, a guy abducted a six-year-old girl from her bedroom at two-thirty in the morning, took her into the woods, and raped her. The parents hadn't locked the back door. Fortunately, she's going to live. The rapist was visiting in the neighborhood, and had a history of small crimes, but what he did to this little girl was a big move up for him. Where does this sort of middling evil come from, and why? There are few total psychotics in the world, those who should be committed for what they are capable of doing or what they have done, such as Ted Bundy or the Hillside Strangler. Although such people are rarities, this side of human nature is what fascinates me.

NB: If not horror, what sort of writing do you think you'd be involved with?

Farris: I would probably be a comedy writer.

NB: You're not serious.

Farris: There's a humorous side to the horrible, too. But horror is difficult to do, and so is humor. Few writers do well in either genre. I'm not an expert on other people's horror, because frankly I don't read a lot of it. There are new people who interest me, like Dan Simmons and Chet Williamson, but most of what I read is one-note grim, if you know what I mean. I can't speak for other horror writers, and I don't know if I'm morbid by nature. I don't think so. I *am* deeply cynical. I'm always appalled by human nature yet fascinated by the contradictions, the perversity of people. Most of us are perverse. You just need to sit back and be amused by it all.

NB: So either we laugh at the real-life horrors going on around us or go a little crazy ourselves. Are you ever concerned with such a fate for yourself, dealing with such grim topics day after day?

Farris: If I was going to go crazy, I would have done it by now. But it can get depressing. My last novel, *The Axman Cometh*, which is about an ax murderer, obviously has some depressing aspects. At one point in the book I couldn't proceed. I knew what was coming, I had planned it, it was central to the book—but when I came to it, I just didn't want to do it! I liked the people I needed to get rid of. I had spent a lot of time with those characters, and for the first time since I started writing, I simply could not do something that I had to do. I got to feeling very morbid about this, and I was not fun to be around. Like an actor getting deeply into a role; you can imagine Laurence Olivier playing Richard III and how much fun he must have been around the house after the show.

NB: Most of your younger fans are probably not aware that you began your career with mystery and mainstream novels. Yet you've made your greatest reputation with dark suspense and the fantastic. Why stay in this genre when obviously you're capable of publishing any kind of novel you please?

Farris: To return to the term "dark suspense," the abnormal psyche is an endless source of material, of interesting stories. I dislike writing the same book over and over again. I prize humor in writing, con-

centrated plots, rich characters, good versus evil; I like a happy ending. I like stories which I can use as a vehicle to show off; I mean that in a good sense, to show off what I can do. And I can do a hell of a lot. This type of fiction gives me the opportunity to take chances. Although I have a lot of readers out there, I don't get much in the way of critical attention.

NB: That last point could be argued, but does it bother you that you don't receive much notice from the critics?

Farris: No. At this point I have an indulgent publisher, feel that I'm pretty close to the height of my abilities, and can do anything I damn well please [laughs]. As long as I can get away with it, and nobody's told me yet that I can't. All of this is ideal for creative output. I write for a living, and I have to deliver a book a year to make ends meet. Beyond that I'm free to explore whatever I damn well please. But to answer your previous question, I suppose I could write a "family saga" or something else—if I didn't die of boredom first!—but it would be pretty much like other family sagas. It wouldn't be as good as Dickens—who is? It would probably be better than Danielle Steel—who isn't? But I really don't have the interest in doing anything else.

NB: Which three of your own novels would you recommend to someone sampling your work for the first time?

Farris: *Sharp Practice* and *Shatter* for sure. Those are variations on suspense. The third one's kind of tough . . . I guess I would recommend they go into something lengthier and more intense, which would be *Son of the Endless Night*. But it's difficult to choose between that one and *All Heads Turn When The Hunt Goes By*.

NB: Since you're one of the few authors to regularly adapt his own novels for the movies—as well as to adapt the novels of others—why haven't we seen more films which say "screenplay by John Farris"?

Farris: Good question. The Writers Guild registers somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000 movie scripts a year for full-length features. Of those, maybe 150 to 200 are filmed. There are many writers out there in Hollywood who make handsome livings—I'm talking about earning \$100,000 to \$250,000 per screenplay, who perhaps have one screenplay produced every three

or four years. The only books of mine I haven't adapted are *Minotaur*, *Catacombs* and *Wildwood*; they would be very costly to film. Only *The Fury* and *Dear, Dead Deliah* have made it so far. That's it.

NB: *Son of the Endless Night* is generally considered one of your finest, and most frightening, works. How close is it to being brought to the screen?

Farris: It's been turned down by every studio in Hollywood. They do not want to make a movie about demonic possession. They say it's not a "hot" subject right now.

NB: It would seem to me to be the project to go after, since Hollywood is always seeking to make something as wildly successful in that vein as *The Exorcist*.

Farris: I think so. You think so. But they don't [laughs].

NB: Even so, you're about to go into production with two independent features, which you'll both write and direct?

Farris: Yes. *Nightfall* is based on a book I did a couple of years ago, and we're scheduled to start filming in Florida at the end of May. We're now raising money for *Shatter*, which I wrote several years ago, as well. The *Nightfall* budget will be about three and a half million, *Shatter* will come in for seven million. It's a question now of how I'm going to balance my life, because there are four films that I would like to do. The others would be *Sharp Practice*, which would be filmed partially in England and the rest in Canada. The last one is a little up in the air right now, but I think I would like to do *The Uninvited*. I have a good screenplay for that.

NB: It's probably many a writer's secret dream to make a movie version of their own novel. But how do you expect to get these films off the ground without studio backing?

Farris: The trick of doing films as independent productions, with private financing is to keep the budget reasonable. It's not that difficult if you understand the material well, and plan thoroughly. For motion pictures in the "thriller" category—unless you get lucky like Paramount did with *Fatal Attraction*—you're potential grosses are limited at the box office. Most horror or suspense may bring in between twenty to twenty-five million dollars, counting ancillary rights. Which

is a nice gross, but not exceptional. If you carefully consider the material and cast the picture accordingly, you project should be successful on a four to seven million dollar budget. Everybody will make money on my films, and I will have the pleasure of doing a picture the way I want.

NB: But in terms of time and energy, do you think you can afford to direct all of these projects, or just one or two of them?

Farris: I'll be in charge of all of them, and I would probably direct at least two. They would be *Nightfall* and *Sharp Practice*. It takes about a year out of your life if you're directing a feature, and because I'm writing, directing, and overseeing the projects, it's a full year for each from preproduction to the answer print.

NB: Then, regrettably, it'll be awhile before we see any more of your novels.

Farris: No, even that's not full-time work. I'll still do a book a year. I spend about three hours a day writing; my concentration is such that I can produce a book in about three or four months.

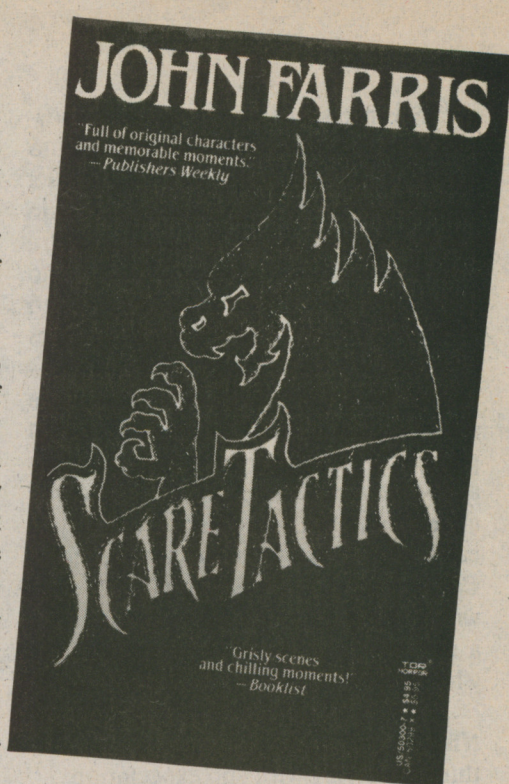
NB: So you're not intending to sacrifice one career for another?

Farris: I need to do both. If I were just making films—well, I need to do the writing. That's basic with me. Yet nothing but writing drives me crazy—and three hours a day is not enough to keep me occupied. So this a nice mix, if I can do it.

NB: Since you've done both, is there any major difference in writing suspense for the screen, as opposed to writing suspense for the printed page?

Farris: You have to fulfill the audience's expectations—and very quickly—or you're dead. It all depends on how you fulfill them, and that goes back to talent and technique. The crafting of any movie is really tough. Screen comedy is probably the most difficult form of film-making, with suspense a close second. To be brief, I want to do my own films because I know how to do them better than anyone else. Movies done by a committee are dreadful. I made the decision years ago I wouldn't option any novels of mine that I really cared about.

NB: Do you consciously think of the possibility of a movie version as you're writing the novel?



Farris: I don't have films in mind when I sit down to write a book. If I did, I would never have written *Catacombs* or *Wildwood*, for God's sake [laughs]. My editor told me he thought *The Axman Cometh* would make a great film. I believe I have a good instinct for what will work as a film, and what won't work. If I were writing books just to be filmed, I would be writing *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* and so forth. I could do that—but I don't think I could stay awake long enough to finish one. It's a film school way of getting into the movie business. But it's not a way that interests me. I'd rather do things the hard way.

NB: What advice do you have for someone who is considering following in your path as a professional writer?

Farris: Writing is a job. It is plain hard work. Anyone who's gone to college and written term papers knows what I mean. Just think of doing it every day, five days a week. Or three days one week and four another—whatever schedule suits you. Just as long as you do have a schedule, and even if you have a job on the side—which most people must have when they're beginning to write seriously.

I run every morning before I go to work. I hate running [laughs]. But I do it because it's beneficial, and I know other good things are going to come because of it. When you start out cold, saying to yourself "I can't do this today," the first couple of laps are murder. Then you get yourself into a groove, and find that the experience

becomes pretty mechanical, if not enjoyable. It's that way when you sit down to write something as long and difficult as a novel. Doesn't matter whether you can do it better in the morning or better at night, you have to establish a regular time to write. It may be a paragraph or a page, who knows? But if you stay with it the pages pile up, and you'll write a book. I know that as much as I don't like to sit down some mornings and look at that word processor, still the pages will happen. (I'm all for word processors; writing is a damn chore no matter what, and anything you can find to make it easier, latch on to it. Can you imagine how it was when they wrote with a quill pen?) You should have a routine and no expectations. Just see what happens.

NB: Can you give an example of something occurring with "no expectations?"

Farris: *The Axman Cometh* began as a story. I thought of the premise the day before I started to write. Originally it was two short stories which came together in my mind as one, and which I planned for the expanded paperback version of *Scare Tactics*. I conceived the story on the 14th of August, sat down to write it on the 15th, and on the 24th of October, it was done as a full-length novel. I didn't know when I sat down this would happen. I always had a notion of where I meant to go with the idea, but I didn't know who most of the characters were until I was writing. My expectation was only that I wanted to find out what happened next.

NB: Since you've had the experience of writing horror for more than twenty years, have you yet to find any boundaries which you feel shouldn't be crossed?

Farris: It's all in how you approach the material. In *Son of the Endless Night* I had a sex scene between a twelve-year-old girl and the protagonist, which could be interpreted as pretty gamey. But one of the keys to the scene is that she's *not human*, which some critics seem to overlook. Also, at that point in the novel I needed to get about as far down into the depths of degradation and evil as it is possible to go. In the thousands of horror stories that have been published, how many scenes truly make the reader's skin crawl?

We've had an abundance of things crawling out from under beds and popping out of closets. Even though my novel

dealt with supernatural themes, I had to be very careful and choosy about graphically illustrating the point I wanted to make. No way to try to handle the scene "tastefully." So I didn't. It was about as pornographic as you can find in fiction. I haven't had too much feedback on it; a couple of fellow authors thought I really had gone too far. They're right. I think I really extended the boundaries about as far as anyone's going to in this century.

NB: Beyond the obvious talent that it takes for someone to be a writer, is it even more specialized to attempt horror?

Farris: It's hard to write *anything*. So it's just amazing to me how many people are doing horror nowadays.

NB: You've already stated you read very little horror. But what do you really think of most of the new crop of writers?

Farris: I'm sure there are many writers out there whose ideas are better than their execution. Maybe they'll get there eventually. Almost all publishers have horror writers on their lists. They're sending me galleys to read hoping for quotes. But not to hurt anyone's feelings, few of these writers have skills that interest me.

NB: You're certainly aware of the so-called "splatterpunk" movement, in which one of the main reasons for the story's existence is precisely that: to see how far the boundaries of sex and violence can be pushed in the genre.

Farris: There are writers out there—I know of a few and I've read a few—who pile on the gore. But it's not particularly creative, and a lot of talent is required to make it work. I do believe I have a knack for describing the horrible without belaboring the point.

NB: Yes, but you're not a shrinking violet at describing explicit scenes of violence. In the story "Horrorshow" from your *Scare Tactics* collection, the scene in which the girl is attacked is incredibly brutal.

Farris: Go back and read it again and find all the brutal paragraphs. I think there's a total of *one*. The rest is anticipation of that specific paragraph. It's not as if I spent eight pages having the killer jump up and down on her head. That's precisely the point I'm trying to make. When you lead a reader up to that moment, you've got to give him something—you just can't cut to

the corpse lying back at the morgue. Doesn't work anymore. It's a scene which has to be shown somewhat graphically, but there's a degree beyond which you don't have to describe it any further. I think I reach that middle ground. I'm not particularly fond of long scenes of bloodshed; how many ways can you really do it, anyway?

When I get into violence—something that's really terrible—I want it to be memorable. Because I can bring considerable power to bear on just such a situation, I do. I want the reader shaken and helpless not to continue reading. I don't pull any punches, but I don't look for opportunities just to gross people out.

NB: Yes, but this "splatterpunk" movement seems to be increasingly popular.

Farris: Popular with whom? You might as well ask why are the *Friday the 13th* films so popular.

NB: I don't follow.

Farris: Well, they're big with nine and ten-year-old kids. Who don't take it seriously—and I'm not sure that's good. My point is there are people who will see this kind of film or read that kind of book, because that's what they enjoy at the time. I sincerely hope they'll mature and go on to other things.

NB: Before you turned to horror and dark suspense, you had a successful career as a writer while most of us were still daydreaming about it. Just how young were you when you published your first novel?

Farris: Eighteen. I sold my first book the summer I was out of high school. It was published under a pen-name about a year later. I had three novels published in 1956. I was involved in playwriting in New York for a time, and I've done a hell of a lot of screenwriting. But I try to produce at least a novel a year.

NB: Of course, now that you're a recognized "brand-name" author, you're able to start slowing down?

Farris: Sure. Right now I'm doing the final revisions on the screenplay for *Nightfall*, I'm budgeting another picture, I just finished *Fiends*, I'm one-third of the way through a novel called *One of Your Children*, and next week I'll start the title story for the expanded paperback version of *Scare Tactics*. So basically that's what I'll be doing between now and late Spring.

Installment #1:
"The Call of
Cronenberg"
(Sing A Song of Midian;
A Pocketful of Grue)

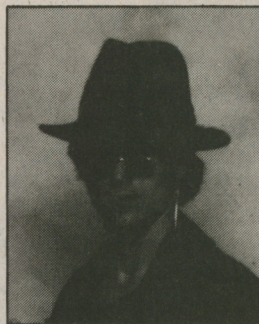
Sometimes, writing and researching film is like having a fullblown New Year's hangover that nothing short of trephination will cure; after reading about the cancellation of the *Watchmen* project by Twentieth Century Fox (certain pucky individuals have noted that the deal probably fell through because Fox wanted the role of Doctor Manhattan filled by Michael Keaton), the acceptance of the director's chair for *ALIEN III* by Rennie Harlin (the renaissance man behind *Nightmare On Elm Street IV* and *Born American*), and the producers of *Batman* offering Jack Nicholson \$25 million for a three-minute spot in *Guano II* (for those not in the know, "guano" is Batshit), one wants to take a large ax to these collective heads and see if some creation of H.R. Giger crawls out of the brainpan, having eaten everything inside. Certainly, the situation in film today, with the deaths of Atlantic, Vestron, New World, and all the other little companies which supplied us previously with the most exotic and outre in science fiction, fantasy, and horror, is enough to make Rex Reed reach for the cyanide, should we be so lucky.

The biggest problem with the lack of enjoyable film nowadays lies with the corporate mentality which underlies the System In Hollywood, the mentality—or lack thereof—that says, "We don't care if it's good, we just want it to gross 500 million dollars!" With the studios looking down their collective noses at original ideas and herding *en masse* toward the newest sequel to a major hit, hoping that the sequel will pull in as much as the original, they're forgetting that, more often than not, the original idea was sufficiently imaginative in its own right to make any chance of a sequel gaining the same amount of glory rather piss-poor. Horror cinema seems to be taking a horrendous beating under this mindset, as the greed pours in dumptruckloads: when one simply computes that the original *Nightmare on Elm Street* or *Dawn of the Dead* cost a ridiculously small amount of money to produce, yet were still able pull in a respectable sum in video rentals, cable runs, and midnight

ALIVE

I N D A L L A S

by
Paul T. Riddell

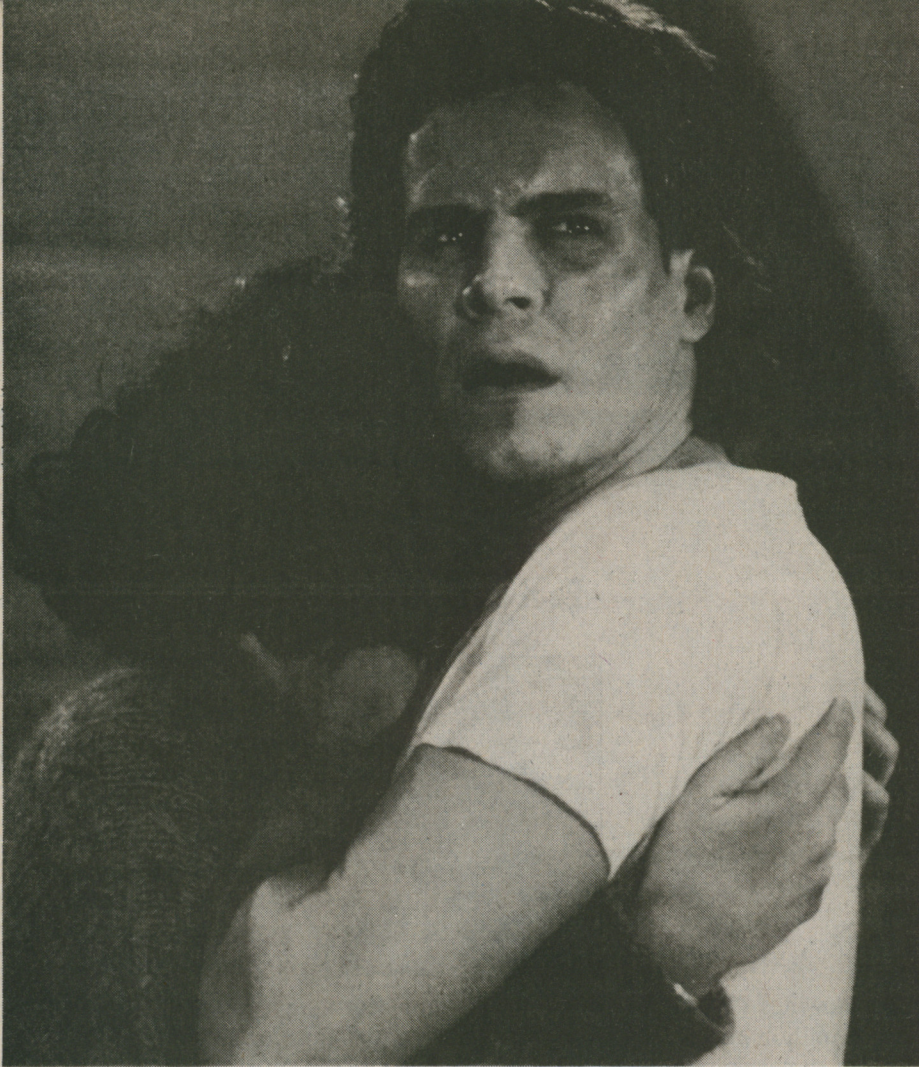


movie showings (for the record, *Dawn* cost \$1.5 million but grossed \$52 million in its first three years), then a push for a sequel—laced with a lot of teenage tit, goofy jokes, and blood by the lakeful—is inevitable.

Which is why *Nightbreed* (Twen-

tieth Century Fox) makes such an enjoyable view: pure originality, to an extent found rarely in the cannibalistic field known as cinema. No barebreasted nymphets, no chainsaw wielding psychos, no jokes leveled toward a common denominator so low that *Star Trek V* is too highbrow. At





the same time, no quick scares, but then, isn't it nice to have a slow dose of utter horror overtake one like nitrous oxide at the dentist's?

To put it simply, *Nightbreed* is a film that takes nearly every cliché in the field and turns them all into a jackstraw tumble, making damn certain that each viewer remains in the dark until the next shock. We take the first cliché, the loner (in this case, Boone, played by Craig Sheffer), who has dreams of monsters in a place called Midian. Instead of finding that his dreams are reflections of monstrosities he committed in the real world, as psychiatrist David Cronenberg claims, he finds that he is perfectly innocent of the several brutal murders of which he's accused. Further, Boone discovers that the sweet, harmless doctor has a psychotic streak a light-year wide. The doctor has tried to implicate Boone in the killings to allow his "hobby" to continue.

Fleeing from Calgary, Boone finds Midian, an old miners' cemetery in northern Canada. The legends surrounding the place are true: Midian is where the mon-

sters go. Vial as they may appear, the creatures merely want to live undisturbed by "Naturals". However, when Decker tracks Boone to Midian, the peace doesn't last long, as he discovers the strangeness of the necropolis and brings back the forces of normality to wipe out the last of the *Nightbreed*.



Of course, with today's film market, such a film is a liability. No name stars, no top-40 soundtrack, no merchandising hooks. "How are we expected to finance something like this?" the studio execs will scream. Thankfully, aside from its dangerous visions, it has one major attraction: its director and screenwriter, Clive Barker, the man who brought the wildly disparate branches of literary horror into one cohesive whole, combining both the gripping yet bloodless terror of a Robert Bloch and the "splatterpunk" of Skipp & Spector. Barker gave the literary field a good kick in the ass a few years back, keeping the genre from degenerating into neo-Gothic romance; he does the same for celluloid.

By way of slight digression, when the preview trailers for *Hellraiser* appeared nearly three years ago, I remember screaming at the hype attendant with that famous quote by Stephen King (and if you don't remember it, take a look at any older edition of *The Books of Blood* and you'll see it in print barely smaller than the author's name and the book title), "Yeah, so King likes him. So what? If getting good press from Stephen King means so much, why the hell isn't Harlan Ellison directing? Lord knows, King mentioned him often enough in *Danse Macabre*. Or why don't they offer directorship to Dennis Etchison?" (Of course, this was back in my tender youth, before I saw *Maximum Overdrive* and realized that some writers have absolutely no business on the other side of the camera, and that ideas that seem perfectly tense on paper come out of the projector on the far side of

ludicrous. I'm sure that the scripts for *Lifeforce* or *Nightflyers* seemed to have potential, too.)

Well, if *Helraiser* didn't sufficiently explain the logic behind letting Barker direct, then *Nightbreed* does. To be succinct, Barker has an eye for the macabre equalled only by such artists as Bosch and Giger, and his creatures come out as real, not just something cobbled together to make the marks think they got their money's worth. From the reptilian Peloquin (Oliver Parker), to the porcupine Shuna Sassi (Christine McCorkindale), to those morbid pranksters Leroy Gomm and Lude (Tony Bluto and Vincent Keene, respectively), these creatures come off as *people*, not merely monsters. As an added pleasure, they don't follow the old "Gentle Ben" bullshit which seems to pervade the field from the old days when Toho decided to make Godzilla into a hero, which, presently, may or may not affect the movie's chances at the box office. These people, while having a compassion for each other unsurpassed by any of the Naturals encountered, are still alien, with rituals and activities incomprehensible by any of us "normal folks", and in these days of Reagan-inspired intolerance, what average audience is willing to spend the time trying to understanding the *Nightbreed*, much less empathize with them?

I'm sorry if this review seems to have more holes in it than rotten cheese-cloth, but a detailed dissertation would require a complete plot synopsis, and I'm not that cruel. Suffice is to say that *Nightbreed* appeals best to those who love the esoteric and monstrous, and anyone who loathed the children's book *Where the Wild Things Are* won't get a thing out of it (mostly because *Nightbreed* is really an adult version of that wonderful tale). Sure, it's a bit confusing to those unfamiliar with the seminal Barker story *Cabal* (from the collection of the same name), but that's mostly due to the MPAA ratings board mutilation and the inherent demands of an industry that frowns upon three-hour films. See it anyway, if only to see David Cronenberg as one of the best psychos since the original Norman Bates. Catch it immediately (you'll probably have to wait for the video if you didn't see it in the movies), and when your family asks why you spent your money on that instead of *Back to the Future III*, tell 'em old "Uncle Zonker told me to."



In other matters, some of you have just as much fascination for what goes on during the production of a movie as you do for the final product, and in some cases, the tales of budgeting woes or changes in scripts make a more interesting read than what actually appeared upon the screen. Very rarely, however, are the bugs and flaws documented with the best designs. *The Book of Alien*, by Paul Scanlon and Michael Gross was probably the last example (most books of this ilk tend to present an aura of perfection, that the film sprung full-blown from the director's head like Athena from Zeus), but easily the best example is the H.R. Giger diary *Giger's ALIEN*, recently reprinted by Morpheus International for the pittance of \$39.95.

For those unlucky enough to miss its release, *Giger's ALIEN* is Hans Rudi's diary of the entire *ALIEN* project, from his initial design sketches to his acceptance of the 1979 Best Visual Effects Oscar (back when that particular award wasn't given as solace to either Lucas or Spielberg as a sop for not winning Best Picture). Between those points, the book chronicles Giger's work on designing not only the title creature, but the derelict ship, the alien planetoid, and the famous "space jockey," as well as many details not seen in the final film, due to either financial constraints or editing concerns. In addition, it includes lots of photographs of the construction and filming of the props realized from Giger's sketches and paintings, plus his commentary on the filming itself (not

only the nice things one sees in press kits, but the nasty things he saved for the diary alone).

"Well," you may ask, "what good is that? I mean, I understand wanting a neat book like this to leave out on the coffee table and scare the shit out of my parents when they come over, but what good is having all the commentary?"

Well, I say, patting you on the head in a patronizing way, it makes quite a bit of difference. Film is a collective art, a fusion of skills from director and producer to special effects sculptor and cameraman. The old "auteur" theory, which promotes the idea that the director is the Artist, the man who single-handedly puts the pieces into a watchable whole, is a crock of purest bulldada. On a more personal level, it proves two things: film preproduction and design is a very piecemeal business, with a lot of ideas dropped upon the wayside due to impracticality or unfeasibility (I once read a letter in *Starlog* from some fanboy who tried to explain that the "biomechanoid" look of the *ALIEN* derelict and the alien nest in *ALIENS* was the product of some sort of alien fungus which lives in a symbiotic relationship with the aliens, and that somehow it developed intelligence and formed the "space jockey" to warn passing spaceships away. I didn't have the heart to tell the twit that he was reading meaning into a goddamn *science-fiction* film in order to stem his questioning, the way creationists will twist and manufacture information which seems



to prove their theory that the earth is only 10,000 years old and not 4.5 billion. But then, I'll save the ink expended on the subject of "fanboy mania" for a later date.); and it confirms my conviction that if not for director Ridley Scott and Giger, *ALIEN* would have been yet another cheapshot attempt at a science fiction-horror movie. Besides, the pictures are great viewing for the suitably twisted at heart.

(If unavailable in your area, write to Morpheus International, P.O. Box 7246, Beverly Hills, California 90212).

Any threats, inquiries, or entreaties concerning this column may be sent to P.O. Box 811852, Dallas, Texas 75381-1000.

Addendum: One of the problems with the darling little genre which NB engrosses itself with is that it's getting harder and harder to define the term "horror film." Contrary to the reasoning of most studios these days (who are fond of saying, "It's not a horror film; it's a suspense/action/neomystical/supernatural/fill-in-the-blank..."), to which the word "horror" is synonymous with "liability," what with the *Friday the 13th/Nightmare on Elm Street* sequels dropping like flies at the boxoffice, a true horror film incorporates so many different types of terror that a pigeonholer finds him/herself inundated.

How, for instance, does someone compare the electric sublimity of *ALIEN* to the vomit-meter overload of *Evil Dead*? Both terrify in their own little ways, but pigeonholers wanting to dissect the reasoning behind their classification and distill the common denominator of both are best off trying to make a silk purse from Jesse Helms' ear.

In that event, although they received scant attention from other magazines devoted to horror (O'Quinn Productions, this note's for you), I nominate *Lord of the Flies* and *The Handmaid's Tale* as worthy members of the contemporary mythology.

For those three that haven't read the William Golding novel, let me recap: a group of boys, the survivors of a plane crash at sea, find themselves on a deserted island without supervision. They slowly slide into barbarism and anarchy, since the previous demands of authority and conformity crumble under the new "tribe" mentality.

The main victims of the battle for control between Ralph (Balthazar Getty) and Jack (Chris Furrh), are Piggy and Simon (Danuel Pipoly and Badgett Dale). Both are the first to die when the barbarians take over. Simon's demise is particularly nasty: when he tries to investigate the Monster which Jack invents to assert his authority, his hurried return to camp only brings upon his confrontation with the spearpoints of Jack's gang.

More space on this film would subvert its goal. Its visual cleanliness and sparing use of melodrama make it an unfit piece for simple dissection, as any detailed picking would cause it to unravel. Suffice to say, see it ASAP, and it will stay in the mind when *Batman* becomes a fogged memory.

Similarly, *The Handmaid's Tale* isn't really horror per se, but it's guaranteed to kick those who believe "it couldn't happen here" squarely in the tuchis (the it of which I speak is comprised of the religious theocracy determining what is good for everybody else, and if the specter of Pat Robertson becoming president in 1988 wasn't enough to make you soil your trousers, then this film, based on the Margaret Atwood novel, will require you to use Extra-Strength Clorox to bleach out the shit stains).

At the beginning of the film, we see an America in the mould of Jerry

Falwell's wet dreams. Religious fanatics have staged a coup and taken control of the country, renaming it Gilead and forcing the inhabitants to accept their rule. Anyone not in the WASP form (blacks, Hispanics, Orientals, and I suppose Catholics and Jews), gets shipped to labor camps. Since pollution has rendered a vast majority of Gilead's women sterile, the few remaining fertile women become "Handmaids," destined to produce children for the ruling elite (interestingly, just as Nazis took Jewish children who appeared Aryan and incorporated them into German society, this regime allows fertile lesbians, a group normally executed for "gender betrayal," survive, so long as they tolerate being Handmaids). The film revolves around Kate, a handmaid assigned to the military leader of Gilead (Robert Duvall) and his wife Serena (Faye Dunaway).

If the movie were played for laughs, then its plot would read like a particularly vicious Monty Python segment: the sequence where the initiate Handmaids hear about the horrors of the past (abortion, contraception, planned parenthood, *ad nauseam*) plays like an unfunny takeoff of the "Every Sperm is Sacred" song in Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*; the set designs evoke the slightly surreal feel of any number of skits. In fact, the film *Handmaid's Tale* shares kinship with *Brazil*: Kate's world is shaped by fanaticism, and although Sam Lowry's was sculpted by bureaucrats, both are true hells.

(In an interesting broadside at current religious leaders, a later segment of the film presents a place called "Jezebel's," a club for the elite, where every vice denied the masses, from liquor to deviant sex, is available for the taking. At the risk of seeming extremely partisan, it's all too plausible, as I always wondered if TV evangelists railed on and on about perversion and sin because they didn't want the jamaoks to mess up their particular pool. One can easily picture a Donald Wildmontype at a place like this, sucking the ink from a Tits n' Slits centerfold, while one of his brethren tries to fellate the corpse of Joseph McCarthy. Makes ya wonder...).

In an age where the Powers That Be in science fiction claim to have their atrophied fingers on the pulse of the future, but continue to shove *Star Trek* novels into our hands as evidence, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a bitter but necessary kick in the face.

Joe
Citro

Exclusive!
An
excerpt
from
this
popular
author's
latest
bestseller!

(Warner Books; Release date, March 1990; 275 Pages;
Price \$4.50; ISBN, 0-446-35839-8)

"The Unseen is a tale of misunderstandings and imperceptiveness, and the real-life horrors they can lead to. It poses what are—at least to me—some interesting ethical questions amid its horror elements. It's basically the story of Jarvis Lavigne, a teenager determined to uncover the mystery behind his father's suicide; something Lunker Lavigne saw in the gore—something so upsetting, so contradictory to what's real—caused him to kill himself, and Jarvis wants to know what it was. With his friend Stacy, and an ancient black man named Cooly Hawks, they venture into the gore, into the vast endless woodlands. Cooly does not survive: while trying to protect the boys from an attack by wild dogs, he's snatched up and carried off by a terrifying creature unknown even to legend. In this section, Harley Spooner, one of Cooly Hawks' old friends, comes face-to-face with Hell itself . . ."

—Joseph Citro

He lay naked and sweaty under the flannel sheet. His pale, twig-thin body tense, full of pain. There would be no possibility of sleep this night; he was too upset.

Now, his anger long past, he felt a kind of emptiness. His wife, ten years in the grave, weighed heavily on his mind. He missed her. Night after night he conjured the image of her face beaming at him from the next pillow. It was not the face of the wasted old woman who had smiled weakly, even as the cancer tore the pounds away from her once stocky frame. No, at night he saw the young farm girl he'd married, heard again the stammered vows promising she'd stay with him until death. She had been as good as her words; she always was.

Always, but just that once . . .

She had died here at home, in this very bed, after weeks

and weeks of suffering. The skin of her back, sallow folds of wrinkled flesh, spotted with red and running sores. At the end she couldn't move enough to take the pressure off them.

"I'll be all right, Harl," she promised. It was said not with her voice, but with a barely visible quiver of her translucent lips. Her lungs, nearly too damaged to breathe, could no longer drive out words that were loud enough for a man to hear.

Yet Harley knew what she'd said. And he'd believed her.

"I'll be all right." She'd said it over and over. But she'd lied. She went somewhere, leaving her tiny withered corpse in their marriage bed.

Harley had held that lie against her for a long while. He forgave her only when he realized how much he missed her. Wilma had been a good old girl. He was sixty-eight when she left him, too old to consider taking another wife.

Instead, the place took up his time. There was always something here to occupy his mind, to keep it out of the devil's hands. His first project had been to brace up the porch roof, the very job Wilma had been nagging him to do for the last two summers of her life. He did it for her.

Then there was the replastering of the walls in the parlor. Someday, he figured, he'd hang new paper in there as well. A good bright color would lighten up the room, make it a nice cheery place when friends came to visit.

Friends.

The old grandfather clock in the downstairs hall ticked loudly. It seemed to get louder as it aged, like an old man growing deafer, hollering to hear his own voice. That clock had run for three generations, with never a repair, never a problem. Harley had disconnected the chimes because they'd often wake him up at night. He needed what sleep he could get. As he grew older, the sleep he got was as fragile as new ice on a pond. Funny, he thought, won't be long 'fore I get all the sleep I want, and then some.

Friends.

That Cooly Hawks had been a good old son. Harley would miss the nut-brown face appearing at his kitchen window at 6:30 almost every day of the week.

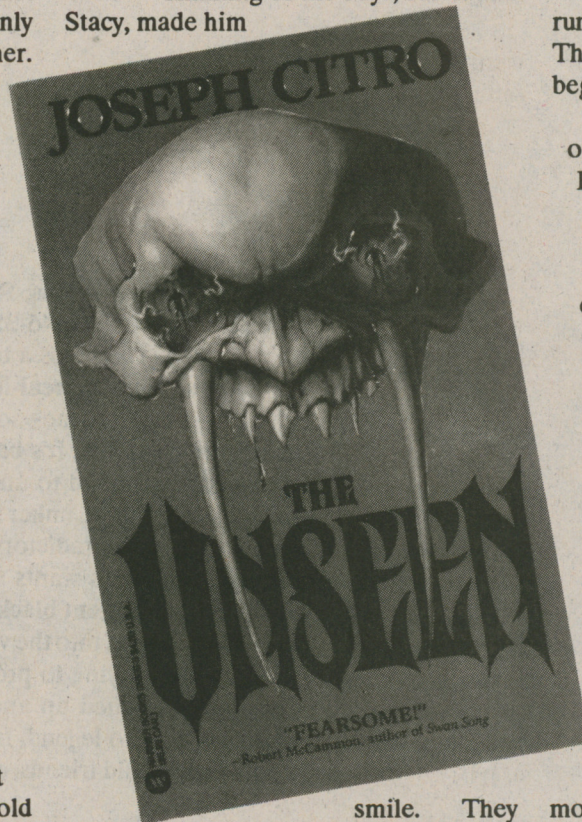
He'd miss their morning coffee together. *Why'd he want to go dragging them boys up into the gore for, anyways? He shoulda known better. Wasn't what happened to Lunker Lavigne enough?*

A man of Cooly's years should have known what—at least for Harley—was a simple truth: Sometimes it's okay to go into the woods, sometimes it ain't.

Harley rolled on to his side, trying to relieve the gas pain that stabbed at his insides just above his stomach. The sharpness faded, but a nagging pressure remained. He pulled his hairless, pasty-white legs up almost to his chest.

Friends.

Thinking of the boys, Jarvis and Stacy, made him



smile. They were pretty good boys, all right. Then his smile collapsed into a stern, paternal frown. He just hoped those boys would know better than to go poking around up there a second time. Maybe tomorrow he'd better round them up and give them a talking to. The winny-go was nothing to mess with, not even for a grown man as woods-smarts as Cooly'd been.

Two little fellas like that, why they'd be nothing more than dessert for the hungry creature.

The thought of dessert evoked a loathsome image of Cooly being devoured, his front-side split open like the carcass of

a deer. Standing over him, slavering hungrily, a red-eyed horror tore the stringy flesh from his old, brittle bones.

Harley imagined what must have occurred, what the little boys must have seen:

Screeching, the forest-black monster swoops down from the treetops, eyes stretched wide, bleeding from the tremendous velocity. It runs on burned-scarred limbs, deformed by its unending race through the wilderness. Jagged spikes of bone protrude from the stumpy ends of its legs where, over the years, the flesh has wormed away. Its fang-filled face, only human by suggestion, splits open into a savage lipless grin.

Roaring, it grabs the black man, runs with him—screaming—into the woods. Then, with Cooly limp and powerless, it begins to feed . . .

"Jumpin' Jonah, I gotta cut this out," said Harley to the empty bedroom. He flopped on to his back again, tight muscles tugging angrily within his chest.

Eyes wide open, he surveyed the room. The August moon turned the drawn window shade into an opaque rectangle the size of a door. Its bottom rose into the room with even the tiniest rustling of a breeze, then fell back, flapping back into place with an irritating click.

Outside the window, the porch roof groaned and creaked.

Across the room, he could see his collection of photographs, like dark little tombstones, on top of his chest of drawers. Although he couldn't make out the details, Harley knew those pictures as well as he knew his own face in the bathroom mirror: there were his father and

mother, seated in wooden lawn chairs, a half-circle of sons and daughters, Harley's brothers and sisters, standing behind; beside that one was Harley and Wilma on their wedding day, her gapped-tooth grin, shy, but with just a dash of the devil's mischief in it. And there was a picture of the old dog, Sampson, who had once saved Harley's life by turning a charging bull, losing its own in the effort.

Friends.

Harley decided to count the ticks of the grandfather clock in an effort to get to sleep.

One, two . . .

The tapping window shade occa-

sionally intruded (snap, snap . . .), but Harley tried not to let it bother him.

. . . *eighteen, nineteen* . . .

While he counted, his imagination, as undisciplined as a new puppy, tried to pull him back into the gore, back to the battle between Cooly and the winny-go.

Harley fought the pull of his imagination.

. . . *thirty-three, thirty-four* . . .

A breeze puckered the window shade again, scraped its thin, plastic edge along the wooden frame. Its weighted bottom clattered against the sill.

"That's 'bout enough a *that*," Harley blurted. Throwing his spindly legs out of bed, he padded across the pegged pine floor to the window.

For a moment, he thought the dark silhouette on the window shade was his own shadow.

He grasped the shade, released it, letting it snap up and flutter its tension away at the top.

Frozen, Harley stared out the window. A massive, hulking form loomed before him, framed in the dirty glass.

Harley stood face to face with a creature so alien, so grotesque, that all the details of its appearance failed to register at once. The only thing the old man

sensed was his own primitive dread, a fear that pushed him backwards one, two stumbling steps, his eyes never leaving the eyes that watched him.

"Harley," the ghastly whisper seemed to fill the bedroom.

Harley stared, dumbstruck, his own heartbeat thundering in his ears.

"Harley, come with me . . . "

Harley backed up another step.

"C—Cooly? Is that—"

But no! This thing couldn't be Cooly, it was too massive, too hideous.

Before Harley could take a fourth reflexive step backward, the thing was on him. With an agile bend and leap, it vaulted through the open window and grabbed Harley by the hair.

It pulled the old man's face forward, so close that Harley could smell its fetid breath.

"Harley . . . " it whispered again. Then, with a downward flex of the thing's elbow, Harley dropped to his knees. Strands of thin white hair ripped painfully from their follicles.

Harley screamed. It felt as if the thing had pounded him in the chest, slammed him with a fist like a sledge hammer.

His mind flashed to the revolver in the drawer beside the bed. He'd put it

there during that rash of break-ins during the sixties. Could Wilma have moved it? Was it loaded? Could twenty-year-old bullets still be good?

It must be there. It had to be.

Unbearable pain in his chest. Had the ungodly thing stabbed him with something? He tried to wriggle away from the powerful paw that clenched his hair. Struggling, he felt more hairs tearing free.

He realized that his only chance for freedom was to let the thing rip away his scalp. Bracing himself for another jolt of pain, he yanked his head to the right. Still the thing held on. Harley felt the bones of his knees grinding against the pine flooring, folds of loose skin pinched and split in the cracks between the boards. He could smell the foul odor that now filled the room; it was sweet, like the smell of decaying leaves; at the same time it was fetid, like carrion.

If this was the winny-go, then he'd fight, although he knew it was pointless. But Harley was a man; he refused to go easily.

His chest hammered; cold sweat flowed from his open pores. The profusion of glassy beads made his skin as slick as grease . . .

Ah! The thing's hand slipped off Harley's neck!

He made three faltering steps toward the bedside table, his chest pounding like an anvil on a chopping block. As he reached for the drawer, powerful hands seized him by the shoulders.

Arms like rods forced the little man's face to the floor boards. His nose flattened against the dark pine. He could feel the sickening grind of cartilage, the sharp shattering of bone. He didn't wonder what the thing was doing to him—he knew. He just wondered why it was doing it in this way.

When he remembered what the boys had said about the wild dogs, he understood: the thing was going to stomp him. Before the blow occurred, Harley Spooner imagined the big foot descending with tremendous force toward the back of his neck . . .

When the impact came, it was as if his ribs snapped closed like a fist, crushing his lungs and heart like eggshells in their bony grip. The name of the Lord stuck in his throat. It came out neither as a prayer or a curse.





OH, LINNEA!

Interview by Pat Jankiewicz

The noonday sun beats down on the courtyard of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Glendale, where filming has begun on the black comedy, *Say Bye Bye*. As soundmen, extras, producers, and publicists scurry about like mice in a maze, actress Linnea Quigley stands off to the side with her friend, makeup artist Cindy Warren, silently watching the proceedings.

Quigley is a charming blonde who resembles a young Goldie Hawn. Looking at her, one would never guess that the easygoing, friendly actress has died more film-deaths than Jason, Freddy Krueger and Godzilla combined—in the 34 films she's made in the last 12 years, she's died a whopping 13 times! The Meryl Streep of low-budget horror films, she's played punkers, zombies, demons, and psychos. She's best known to genre enthusiasts, though, as Trash, the thrill-seeking party-girl in Dan O'Bannon's cult classic *Return of the Living Dead*, a role that helped her to inherit her current position as horror's only Scream Queen.

On the set, Quigley's the most affable actress one could ever hope to meet; hip and funny, with no trace of an "attitude." She's more like a perky cheerleader than a starlet. Particularly endearing is the way she exclaims "Oh yeah!" when excited about something, or uses sound effects to make a point words can't convey. As the interview begins, she can't find a chair, so she grabs a warm spot on the sidewalk, inviting me to do the same.

NB: You're dropping "Quigley" from your name; how come?

Linnea: From now on, it's just going to be "Linnea." I'll use "Quigley" sometimes, but only when I'm producing. It's easier to say "Linnea" than "Linnea Quigley."

NB: Your producing now?

Linnea: Uh-huh. I produced a film called *Murder Weapon*, and another one called *Beverly Hills Corpse*, with director David Decoutea, as well as *The Linnea Quigley Horror Work-Out*. I like small, low-budget productions 'cause everybody's like a family, and has a lot more input. I'd like to produce more low-budget films to keep the people I like to work with together. That's what makes it fun.

NB: Is producing easier than acting?

Linnea: [Laughs] No, definitely not! You have to deal with everything—every problem and work them out. You get pretty unnerved. As an actress, I don't have to be responsible for permits, parking, deal memos—that's a big responsibility! It's like having a party at your house every night and having to clean it up afterwards.

NB: What else have you been up to lately?

Linnea: *The Linnea Quigley Horror Work-Out*, which is available on video now. It was written by Ken Hall, who wrote a couple of movies called *Ghost Writer* and *Dr. Alien*. I'm in it with Cynthia Garris, whose husband, Mick Garris, is a director/writer (*Critters 2*). Cynthia did all the choreography on it. It also has a girl named Victoria Nesbit and a lot of cool zombies. I teach the zombies how to get in shape, because the zombies don't take care of themselves. Even though they're dead, they still need to exercise.

After that I did *Sex Bomb*, then went through eight states in five days promoting *Vice Academy*. I also went to England. I liked it, had a great time there.

NB: What do your parents think of your movies?

Linnea: My parents like my movies now. They came on the set of this one and had fun. My parents are proud now. Before, they didn't know what I was doing. Before, I was embarrassed. Now I like working in them. I've been in a lot of fun movies.

NB: You're dad didn't have a heart attack watching *Night of the Demons*?

Linnea: He hasn't seen *Night of the Demons*. They don't like demon movies too much. They like my comedies, like *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers*, but demon ones? They'd rather not see their daughter possessed! [Laughs]

NB: Every parent's nightmare, I suppose.

Linnea: My parents also haven't seen *Return of the Living Dead*. Like I said, they don't really like things like demons and the living dead, they like things where I don't have my brains eaten. My mom doesn't like that at all, they're like "Eeeyaaah!" I

just say, "You don't want to see that one, you want to see this one." They accept that. I want to do whatever comes my way that I like. I don't want to do any more slasher films—they're kind of boring and not any good. I'd like to do things like *Aliens* or comedies. I'd like to do a lot more comedies.

NB: When do you think you'll go mainstream?

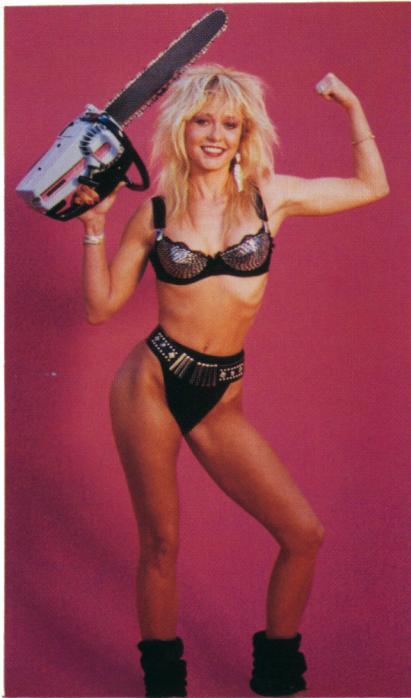
Linnea: Within the next 12 hours! No, I really don't know—when it happens, it happens.

NB: Was it difficult doing *Return of the Living Dead* in the nude?

Linnea: Oh yeah! It was cold! It wasn't hard in terms of "Which leg warmer do I wear today?" [Laughs] Plus, all that makeup, it seemed like I wasn't nude. It took'm forever to paint me. It was like "Let's see how much stress and torture we can put Linnea through!" I got tonsillitis because shooting was all nights, no days. Freezing all the time, you weren't ever



See what happens when you peek down nice girls' blouses?



warm, 12 hours a night, freezing for two weeks, you're bound to get something.

NB: Any weird or wonderful stories you have about *Return* director Dan O'Bannon?

Linnea: Oh yeah! He wanted everything so precise, like the skulls on my shorts had to be exact. He wanted me to shave my eyebrows, but I said no because people were saying they might not grow back, and he kept going, "Well, they grow back," and everybody else said they might not, so I didn't do that. But I got along fine with him. Dan's brilliant—crazy, but brilliant.

NB: What's your least favorite film experience?

Linnea: I guess *Silent Night, Deadly Night*, which was about a psychotic Santa Claus, because it seemed so stupid. I kept thinking, *I can't believe I'm doing this*. It wasn't scary, just dumb.

NB: You were in one that I saw at the drive-in a while back—

Linnea: Oh no! I'll bet I know! Was it a film where I had an evil child?

NB: Yeah! *Don't Go Near the Park!*

Linnea: Yeah, that was a bad experience because nobody knew what they were doing on that one. In the film, I had a kid that was evil and the kid goes around terrorizing people. I was supposed to age from 18 to 40, so they put cotton and stipple on my face, like "Oh, I really look old." [Laughs] Really dumb. That was before I knew anything. I didn't ask about budgets, I just thought (in a dazed starlet voice) Wow, I'm gonna be in a movie, oh wow! I was stupid! [Laughs]

NB: Were you ever an extra?

Linnea: Oh yeah, definitely! I was an extra in *Death Race 2000*. I played "A Cordazone in the Back (in the bleachers). I was like [that dazed starlet voice again] "Oh wow, they gave me a free lunch and I was, like, *an extra!* I was a national toothpaste girl for two years; ya know, where you go "Oh, you're breath—it smells so fresh!" [Giggles] It was funny, on commercials, everybody'd get really weird, the directors and stuff. So critical. My first film was *Fairy Tales*..

NB: What do you think was your best performance in a film?



Linnea: A lot of people think *Return of the Living Dead*. I guess my choice would be *Savage Streets*, maybe 'cause I got to play something different—Linda Blair's deaf-mute sister.

NB: Who've you worked with that's really impressed you?

Linnea: Robert Englund. I loved James Karen (*Return of the Living Dead*), he was so happy and optimistic all the time. Don Calfa's great; he played the mortician in *Return of the Living Dead*. I liked Gunnar Hansen, Leatherface from the original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*—we worked together on *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers*.

NB: Any filmmakers you'd like to work with?

Linnea: Yea. Woody Allen! I'd like to be with him in a horror movie, have him star and me produce. He'd go around killing people and go "I feel guilty, I—I'm guilty." I like black comedies, like Woody Allen as Freddy Krueger—*A Nightmare on Allen Street* [laughs].

NB: You had a pretty interesting cameo in *Nightmare on Elm Street 4*, right?

Linnea: Oh yeah! My boyfriend was doing the special effects, so he said, "You're good at this stuff, you do it!" So I was a soul in Freddy's chest. It was fun; they

gave me a great screen credit—I saw it and thought *Oh God!* (Laughs)

NB: Do you ever do any of your own stunts?

Linnea: I do a lot. I like doing stunts as long as it's not being set on fire. But fights! Fight scenes are fun to do! One time, in *Sorority Babes in the Slime Bowl-A-Rama* the girl I was fighting with was drunk, so she hit me—hard. If you have somebody you're fighting with—in a fight scene—and they're fine, it's great, but she was drunk every night and we had a big fight scene. She just pushed me completely wrong into a shower—onto the steel part. My arm swelled up really big, so I wasn't too happy about that.

NB: Should've socked her back.

Linnea: I figure if she's driving around drunk like that, she'll get hers soon enough.

NB: Have you written any scripts?

Linnea: Yeah. I want to start doing my own stuff now. I have a couple of animal rights scripts, one big budget, one low budget. The low budget one gets the point across that you shouldn't experiment on animals, but it's done so that everyone can see it; there's nudity in it and all kinds of things.

NB: You're an animal rights advocate?



Linnea: Oh yeah! I just met with Dan Matthews from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). I'm probably gonna be one of their spokespeople. They have Elvira, Belinda Carlisle and Jane Wiedlin involved, so I'm going to help just to get publicity for them, getting *Entertainment Tonight* involved, and magazines like *Premiere*, whatever I can do to help the cause.

NB: What got you involved in all that?

Linnea: I've always loved animals and then six years ago I saw a film about the horrible things they do to animals in the labs, the army, the fur industry, the cosmetic companies. Until then, I had no idea what they did. So I do whatever I can because this isn't right, and they don't let the public know what's going on.

NB: What kind of pets do you have?

Linnea: I have three dogs and no cats, because my dogs don't like cats and cats don't like my dogs. I have a slipperkey

named Count Dracula, a Benji-type mutt named Spats, and a Maltese mix named Mondo. I've had up to 60 pets at once. Once time I bought a hamster and didn't know it was pregnant, so POP! Babies, like the next day! I separated them into cages, and wound up with a whole lot more babies!

NB: To switch from your genetic experiments, do you like being a scream queen?

Linnea: Yeah, it's cool. I always liked screaming as a kid, and telling ghost stories. I loved *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *House of Wax*, ooo! [Simulated chattering teeth] *House of Wax* with Vincent Price was scary; too scary for me!

NB: Do you ever feel close to any of your characters?

Linnea: Maybe *Treasure of the Moon Goddess*. She's a rock singer who has to go to a foreign country—her manager leads her on but she manages to stay out of trouble. I'm kinda like that. I've got good karma,

or something. She kept getting into these situations, but everything turned out fine. It took forever to make, though.

NB: What character do you play in *Say Bye-Bye*?

Linnea: I play a wild, kooky makeup girl. I like bein' kooky. I really like doing comedies; it fits me more. Comedies are fun to work on, 'cause they're light. It's not like doing *Ironweed*, where you're [face scrunches up] aargh!

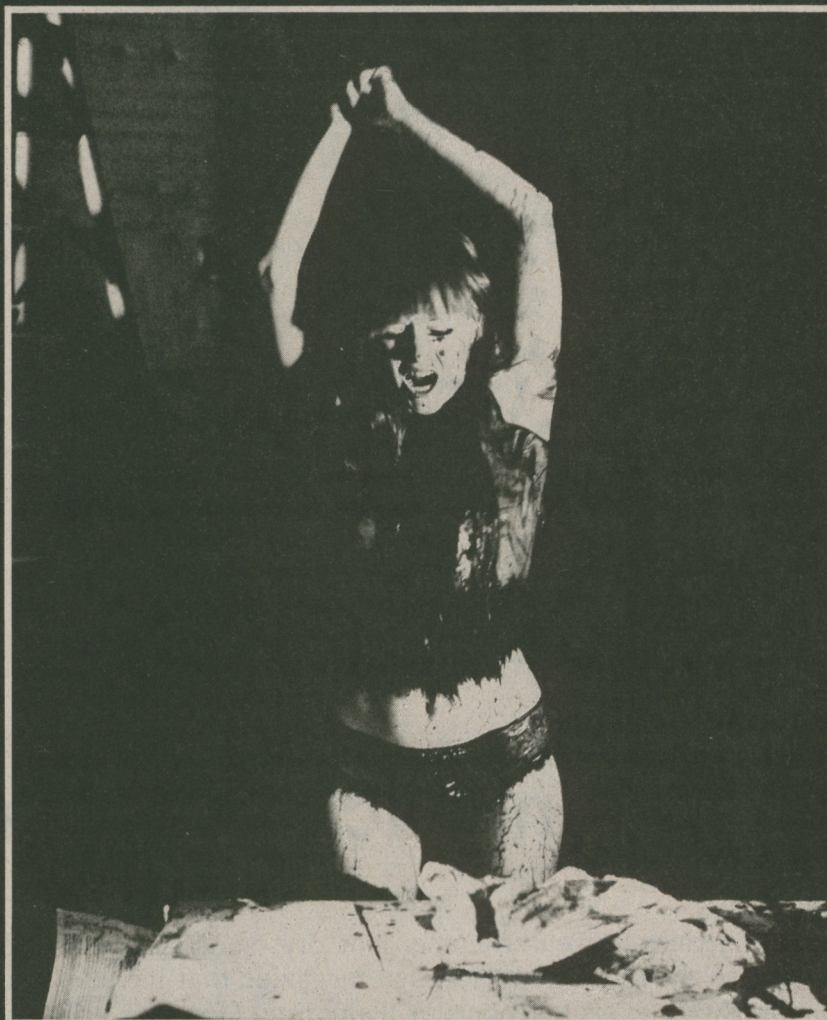
NB: Anything you don't like doing in films?

Linnea: Oh yeah! I don't like dying at the end! [In a Snow White falsetto] I would like to save everyone, as everyone cries [laughs].

NB: So what's coming up for you?

Linnea: I'm going to Ohio in a couple of weeks, for *Fallen Angel*. *The Linnea Quigley Horror Work-Out* is out on video now. And I'm landscaping my house [laughs]. My dogs don't like it, not one bit!

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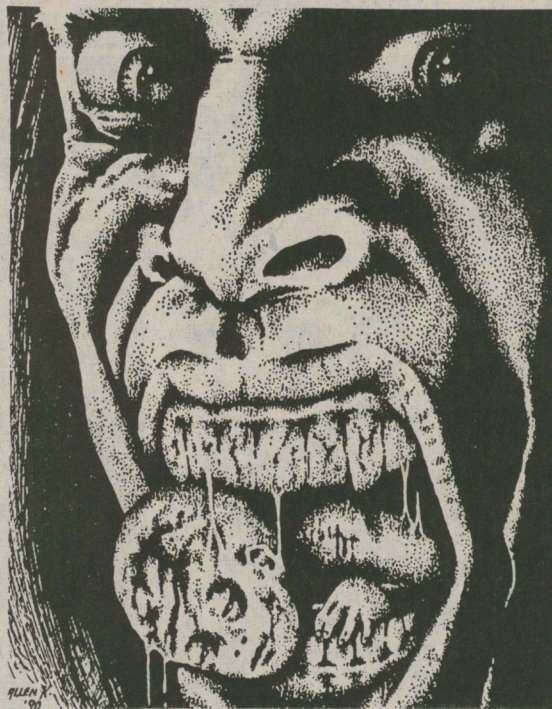
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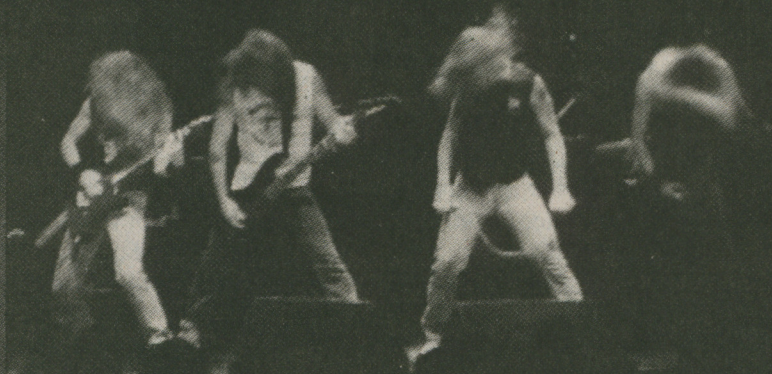
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COMBAT



Hey, what's happening?

Not much, eh?

No, no, we haven't met. But I'm here to brighten your day. I got a story you aren't going to believe... No, no, I'm not looking for money, and I'm not drunk. This is my first beer. I just seen you come in, and I was sitting over there by my lonesome, and I says to myself, self, there's a guy that could use some company.

Sure you can. Everyone needs some company. And you look like a guy that likes to hear a first class story, and that's just the kind of story I got; first class.

Naw, this isn't going to take too long. I'll keep it short.

You see, I'm a spy.

No, no, no. Not that kind of spy. No double-ought stuff. I'm not working for the CIA or the KGB. I work for

Mudzpickt.

Yeah, I know, you never heard of it. Few have.

Just us Martians.

Oh yeah, that's right. I said Martians. I'm from Mars.

No, I tell you, I'm not drunk.

Well, it doesn't matter what the scientists or the space probes say; I'm from Mars.

You see, we Martians have been monitoring this planet of yours for years, and now with you guys landing up there, saying there's no life and all, we figure things are getting too close for comfort, so we've decided to beat you to it and come down here. I'm what you might call part of the advance landing force. A spy, so to speak. You see, we Martians aren't visible to your satellite cameras. Has to do with

light waves, and an ability we have to make ourselves blend with the landscape. Chameleon-like, you might say. And we'd just scare you anyway if you saw us. We'd look pretty strange to you Earthlings.

Oh this. This isn't the real me. Just a body I made up out of protoplasmic energy.

The way I talk? Oh, I know your culture well. I've studied it for years. I've even got a job.

Huh?

Oh. Well, I'm telling you all this for one simple reason. We Martians can adapt to almost everything on this world—even all this oxygen. But the food, that's a problem. We find alcohol agrees pretty well with us, but the food makes us sick. Sort of like you going down to Mexico and eating something off a street vendor's



Joe R. Lansdale bar talk

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cart and getting ill... Only it's a lot worse for us.

Blood is the ticket.
Yeah, human blood.

Find that funny, huh? Vampires from Mars? Yeah, does sound like a cheap science fiction flick, doesn't it?

You see—ho, hold it. Almost fell off your stool there. No, I don't think the beer here is that strong. There, just put your head on the bar. Yeah, weak, I understand. I know why you're feeling that way. It's this little tube that comes out of my side, through the slit in my clothing. I stuck it in you when I sat down here. Doesn't hurt. Has a special coating on it, a natural anesthesia, you might say. That's why you didn't notice. Actually, if you could see me without this human shell, you'd find I'm covered with the things.

Sort of like a big jellyfish, only cuter.

Just rest.

No use trying to call out. Nothing will work now. The muscles in your throat just won't have enough strength to make your voice work. They're paralyzed. The fluid that keeps the tube from hurting you also deadens the nerves and muscles in your body, while allowing me to draw your blood.

There's some folks looking over here right now, but they aren't thinking a thing about it. They can't see the tube from this angle; just me smiling, and you looking like a passed-out drunk. They think it's kind of funny, actually. They've seen drunks before.

Yeah, that's it. Just relax. Go with the flow, as you people say. Can't really do anything else but that anyway.

Won't be a drop of blood left in you in a few seconds anyway. I'll have it all and I'll feel great. Only food here that really agrees with us. That and a spot of alcohol now and then.

But I've told you all that. There, I'm finished. I feel like a million dollars.

Don't know if you can still hear me or not, but I'm taking the tube out now. Thanks for the nourishment. Nothing personal. And don't worry about the beer you ordered. I'll pay for it on the way out. It's the least I can do.

Joe R. Lansdale is the award-winning author of the novels *Cold in July* and *The Drive-In*. His short stories have appeared in such diverse magazines as *Espionage* and *The Twilight Zone*. "Bar talk" (cont. on page 64)



The kid—who couldn't have been more than ten years old—was lean, mean, and fast. Accent on the fast part. Leo swore that the kid must've been some form of hybrid city life, a mutant cross between human and jaguar, particularly adept at quick getaways. Leo saw a chain-link fence stretching across the width of the alley up ahead, and he figured if the kid could climb half as well as he ran, this two-block chase had been a colossal waste of time, energy, and especially lungpower.

His chest was beginning to napalm out with thick, dull fire when the boy slipped on something. Wet garbage, most likely. Too dark to see for sure, but no matter. The kid went suddenly sliding on one foot like an out-of-control ice skater, the probable-garbage streaking behind him

in a greasy-looking skid mark. His other leg flailed as uselessly as his arms, and in the light bleeding in from the unbroken streetlamps, Leo could see the kid's toes bursting from the end of the extended sneaker. Finally the kid pinwheeled into the fence as if he meant to shear through, and only rattled it for his troubles. He tottered backward, stunned. By then Leo had him by the shoulders.

"Lemme go, motherfucker," the jaguar-child said. His clenched teeth were a downturned crescent against the black of his skin. The two-block wind tunnel treatment hadn't done much to alleviate the smell of gasoline from his clothes.

"What the hell were you trying to pull back there?" Leo asked, his lungs occupied with other things more impor-

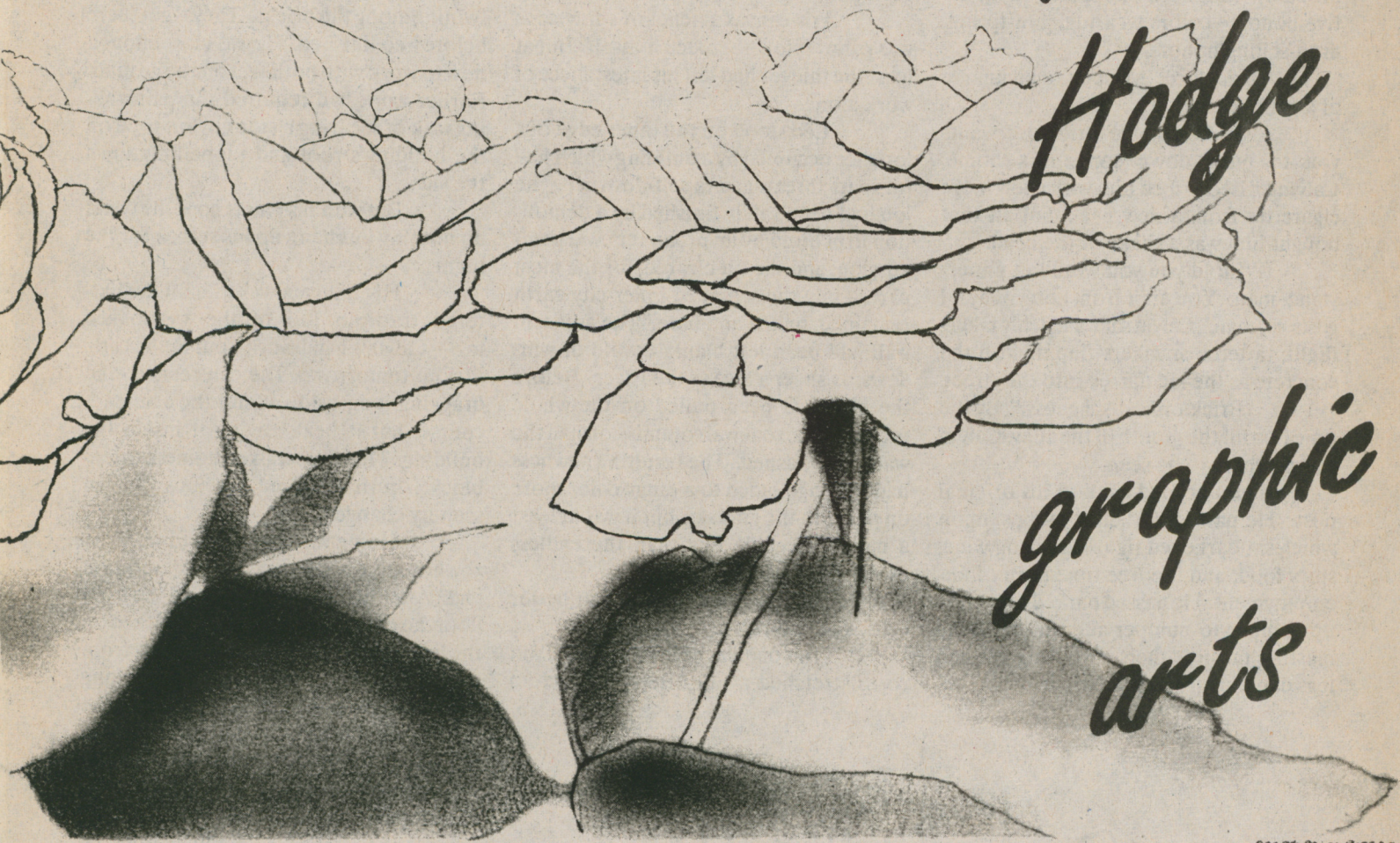
tant than speaking comfortably. "Why the hell you wanna burn down a building in your own neighborhood?" Leo tightened his grip as the kid began to squirm, trying for a crotch-kick that Leo barely dodged.

The kid cursed. Repeated his demand to be released. Called him every dirty white man's name Leo had ever heard. Even came up with a few more Leo hadn't known about. And just when he was about to say *Screw it* and turn the kid loose, the moon broke through the overhanging charcoal stack of clouds and illuminated a dribble of green paint tracing the inside of Leo's forearm.

"Hey," the kid said, "you the painter, ain't ya?" He stopped squirming for the first time since rebounding off the

Brian
Hodge

graphic
arts



fence.

Leo gulped air, dousing the fire-pit in his chest to a dull glow. "Yeah. That's me." Leo relaxed his grip slightly.

The pale crescent showed in the kid's face again, this time turned upward a bit. "I like your pictures. They pretty cool."

"Thanks." More relaxed. "What's your name?"

"Calvin."

"Okay. Listen, Calvin. If I let you go, you promise not to run away? All I wanna do is talk a minute, that's all."

Calvin's luminous eyes rolled. After a second or two, he nodded.

Yeah, right, and the second I let him go he sets a new record for the hundred. But he couldn't hold the kid captive in-

definitely. He released Calvin's hard little shoulders, and to his surprise, the kid stayed put. They turned together, began to walk toward the street.

"You want something to eat?" Leo asked. "There's a deli still open down the street."

"Got a cigarette?"

Leo gave him the pack. As the kid lit up, a rat scurried along in the shadows ahead. Scurried? Let's try waddled. This neighborhood was bountiful to them, and every day was Thanksgiving. A tin can was held in its twitching muzzle. It disappeared into the darkness, its progress marked only by the clinking can. Urban cowbell.

"You working on a new picture somewhere?" Calvin asked.

"Uh huh. I was working on a couple of roses on the building you were trying to burn down."

Calvin dragged, his thin chest puffing out, and then he chuckled softly. Said nothing.

"So how come you're out torching buildings in your own neighborhood?" That's nuts, Leo wanted to add, but didn't. These row-houses could act like dominoes in a fire. Set one off, they could all go.

Calvin chuckled again. "You wouldn't unnerstand, man. You ain't from here."

Amen, kid. But don't hold it against me. "Try me anyway," Leo said.

"I done it for somebody," Calvin said after a long, contemplative moment. "Who?"

An even longer pause. Then, "Bricklord."

Bricklord... the name was vaguely familiar. A gang, maybe. Since his age was obviously shy of double digits, Calvin probably wasn't old enough to claim active honors—colors-wearing, gun-toting, drug-selling honors.

Bricklord. Maybe the nickname of a gang-leader.

"So how come Bricklord wants you to burn down someone's home, Calvin?" Leo bribed him with a few more cigarettes from a new pack, but all that bought him was a shake of the head.

"I told you you wouldn't unnerstand, man. You ain't from here, okay? I gotta go, man," Calvin said, suddenly taking flight, tattered sneakers flapping on the concrete as the kid darted into the street.

"Bricklord calls, I guess." By the time Leo hit the mouth of the alley, Calvin was nowhere to be seen.

Leo headed back to his original post. He passed darkened stoops, upon which sat darkened figures sharing wine, spicy food, and the free time born of unemployment. He passed parked cars lined up bumper-to-bumper at curbside, some blasting music, others sprouting relaxed legs dangling from open windows, others

as permanent as planters in suburbia. Although the neighborhood wasn't ranked among the city's safest, and white faces were definitely in the minority, Leo made it back unscathed to the spot where he'd been painting.

His canvas satchel of spray cans was gone. Idiot, he chided himself. But at least the thieves had left his latest piece of work alone.

Leo stood on the inner edge of a lot once occupied by a building which had for years threatened to self-destruct. The job had been safely finished by a demolition firm hired by an urban renewal commission, and the lot cleared, for the most part. Only the scorched inner-city earth remained, naked and bare. The adjacent wall had been left blank, devoid of windows, as sheer a face as the Eiger. Before the plug had been pulled on the whole program, the renewal commission had the wall whitewashed. The resulting newness had long ago faded to a dingy color more on par with the gray sky, but it was at least a more agreeable hue than the endless expanses of grimed-over brick.

And it made for a much better canvas for Leo's art.

This one was nearly finished. Twin roses stretched a full fifteen feet across

the wall, not including the stems. Shades of red and pink blended and merged and swirled together, creating a startlingly detailed depiction of petals yawning in full bloom. Two thorny stems curved gracefully toward the ground, winding and intertwining along the bricks. They'd get there before Leo finished. He was close enough now to work with both feet on the ground. Earlier work had required the painstaking task of securing a stout nylon rope on the building's roof and rappelling down the side.

But with his paints gone, he could do nothing but hang up his smock for the night.

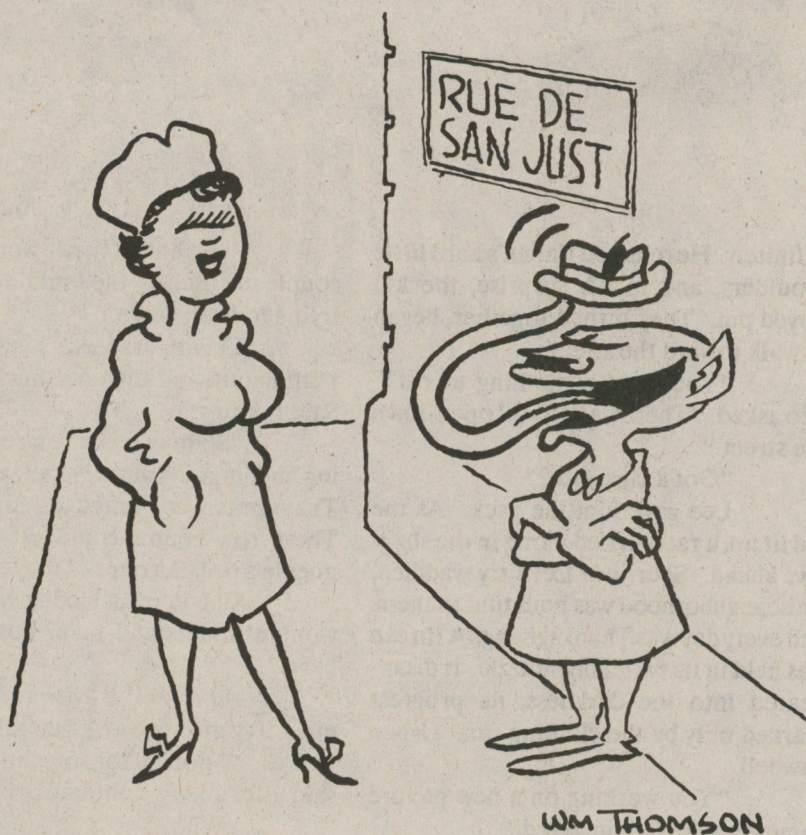
His final act was to haul the battered trashcan full of the gas-soaked rags—Calvin's handiwork—out to the curb. Pickup tomorrow. The can reeked, and dragging it curbside wasn't the safest recourse, but it beat leaving it inside the building. Then Leo walked home, a three-block trip that offered precious little in scenery changes.

Home was a narrow, three-story rowhouse, a brick cracker box stood on end. After Leo quadruple-locked the front door, he paced into the kitchen, flicked on the light, and grabbed a can of Miller from the refrigerator. Following the creaking staircase upstairs, he kicked back on the unmade double bed. Looking at the empty left side. Despite his ample size, the bed still seemed too big. It had for the past month, sharing the house only with the schools of silverfish channeling along the baseboards and a troupe of roaches tap-dancing their way into hiding at the first mention of light. He'd thought the bed wouldn't seem so vast as the weeks went by, but so far no such luck. The entire room felt as hollow as an echo.

As hollow as the sound of his breathing within the four walls, as the beer took the edge off the night and sent him spiralling down into relaxation, then sleep.

As hollow as the building that burned four blocks away.

Leo had been holding down a drafting table and an Associate Art Director's position with Hanson, Murphy & Lawford Advertising, from which he pulled a cool \$49 thou per annum, plus percs. Not too shabby. Advertising was a strange breed in the career world, a peculiar hybrid of business and creativity that al-



lowed for a bit more individual expression than did your average white collar corporate cubbyhole. It mattered not that Leo was a shaggy-headed hulk of a man who looked as if he should be battling the Sheriff of Nottingham; what mattered was that Leo delivered the goods, a fair portion of said goods consisting of artwork designed to hype the latest high-tech barbarian toys of Lord Avatar to all the little would-be twenty-first-century Conans. Power swords and guns, shields and beasts and helmets, action figures sold separately. The manufacturer was happy. H, M & L was very happy, as was wife Natalie. And while money may not buy peace of mind, it at least affords one plenty of comfortable places to rest one's head, and so Leo managed to live with himself.

But once he had achieved his pinnacle, he no longer wanted it. Simple as that. The flames of fast-track career burnout were raging. So, after six months of painful internal deliberation, Leo resigned his post and talked Natalie into selling the split-level in the suburbs.

He wasn't sure why he wanted to move to the inner city. Maybe a deep-seated desire to immerse himself into an area with a genuine past and personality, something the mass-erected outlying clone dwellings had neatly managed to avoid. Whatever the reason, it felt as strong as a biological need. And at first, Natalie was game.

Maybe because the inner city was not without hope, not without better days ahead. The eighties had become the decade of restoration; the powers that be were finally getting it right, deciding to work with what was already there, leaving the buildings' personalities intact as they rehabbed them where they stood.

An area right downtown, a racial stewpot of blacks, Hispanics, and whites, was scheduled for a double-barrelled blast of benefits, a one-two punch of federally funded renewal and private sector gentrification. Leo jumped on the bandwagon and bought a rowhouse in which he and Natalie could live and out of which he could operate his own freelance commercial art studio.

But then the plug was pulled on the whole life-support system. And the private sector—businessmen with plans to relocate office and retail space in rehabbed art deco buildings—didn't find the area nearly as

attractive as before. There's no bread, let them eat cake. Chalk up one more casualty to federal budget cuts.

It wasn't much longer before Natalie pulled the plug, as well.

Leo decided to tough it out for awhile. If nobody else was interested in making the area look brighter, maybe he could. With brick walls for canvas, and spray cans for brushes, it certainly wasn't much, but it was at least an effort.

It would become a losing battle only when he let his eyes stray too far from the little oases of beauty he managed to create.

Or when he was confronted by the low, low laughter that rolled quietly through the streets in the dead of night.

Leo had replaced his missing paints by the next night and went back to work on the stems. This time, Calvin visited of his own free will, without gas-soaked rags. But he wasn't alone.

"I tole you I met the painter," Calvin was saying as he approached. "Thass him, there. I tole you."

Leo turned toward his audience.

The guy that Calvin had brought along was older, maybe twenty, with unsmiling eyes of flint. His skin was a coffee-with-cream color, and wet-looking curls of hair circled his face and chin. His hands were stuffed tightly into the pockets of red leather pants, with taut muscles sculpted behind a black fishnet shirt. His black boots anchored him to the asphalt.

"That's good work, man," the new arrival said quietly. "You ain't bad, that's for damn sure."

"I tole you he's good," Calvin whispered. His eyes drank in the huge pair of roses trellised up the wall.

Leo's breath, which had momentarily hitched, came easier now. He wasn't sure of the new guy's intentions, but he seemed civil enough.

The two of them walked closer, the stranger still coolly appraising Leo's work like a prospective buyer in a gallery. Calvin asked Leo if he had any more cigarettes. He took one for himself, then handed a few to Calvin.

"How come you do this, man?" asked the stranger. His eyes met Leo's for the first time.



"My zipper's stuck . . ."

Leo shrugged his bulky shoulders, a can of green paint still in his hand. "I just want to. Makes me feel good. Better."

The stranger gave a flippant shrug of his own. He grinned faintly at some joke only he could hear. Gently shook his head. "You a fool."

Leo's heart sunk. Torpedoed right at the waterline.

"Who are you, anyway?" Leo asked. "You the one they call Bricklord?"

"Who, *me*?" The stranger's eyes widened, and then he burst into a rich peal of laughter. Up until now, Leo would've guessed the stranger incapable of having a sense of humor. "Sheeit, that's a good one. Bricklord. Shit." His mirth dwindled away to a few sputtering chuckles, and Leo felt about as tall as one of his spray cans. "If it matters, my name's Willy. I ain't Bricklord, man. You'd know that if you's from here. But you ain't."

That singular accusation again, which rang all too true. He was here by choice, they were here by circumstance. Such a difference, a gulf that no bridge could span.

"You think you doing us a favor, putting this shit on the walls? The rain-bows and clouds and stars and flowers and shit? Think you doing us a favor for all us niggers and spics and poor white trash?" Willy didn't speak so much out of anger as he did perceived fact. When Leo didn't answer, he went on. "Well, you *ain't*. You can paint up a garbage can real pretty, and you still got a garbage can. You didn'

change nothin'. I don't know where you're from, but that ain't the way it works here."

Calvin had been looking at his feet while this went on, a sad twist in the corner of his mouth. The kid disagreed, apparently, but knew his place wasn't to contradict. Not here, not now.

"What if it's not for you in the first place?" Leo finally asked. "What if it's just for me?"

Willy shook his head again, as if he'd been pounding his skull against the wall instead of looking at it. "Jus' give it up, painter. You beat by somethin' you don't even unnerstand. You's beat before you even started."

It was a hell of an exit line, and Leo stood and watched as Willy tossed a friendly arm around Calvin's shoulders and steered him away. Calvin managed to get in one quick glance at the wall, at the sweat and paint that brightened it, at Leo's eyes. And then they were gone.

Along with whatever impetus Leo had to keep working. So he packed up and called it an early night.

Leo finished a few nights later. It took him about half an hour, blending lighter and darker shades of green and a touch of black until the second rose stem swept down to the base of the building. Without a single run, without so much as one stray dribble. Nothing felt quite like the completion of another piece of work, another brainchild conceived and born and raised to maturity, left to stand on its own... whole and fully realized. Nope, no

other feeling quite like that in the world.

Leo returned his spray cans to his new nylon bag, then backed up to take in a more complete view of the twin roses. Beautiful. He could hardly wait until daylight so they could see it, really see. So they *all* could see.

Except...

They were all seeing *now*. From the streets. From the sidewalk. From just a few feet away, he noticed as he turned around. Talk about losing yourself in your work; he hadn't even heard them approach. Standing motionless, staring. Young and ancient, black and white and Hispanic. Junkies. Mothers. Winos. Whores. A cop. Children. Dealers. The lost and the searching, half-lit by streetlights too few to cut through much darkness on *this* edge of town.

Leo gave them a queasy, gentle smile, feeling sick within because no one seemed to truly appreciate it. Feeling sicker still when the faces didn't change.

Silence, except for the distant omni-mix of traffic and sirens, televisions blaring out open windows competing with crying babies.

Someone in the street hit the play button on a ghetto-blaster, speakers blasting a rap song, a robotic four/four rhythm that prompted many of them—those who could—to dance. They let themselves go with total abandon, circling themselves around a teenage girl who swayed, then knelt beside a squirming cloth bag in the street.

Leo didn't like this at all. He saw no joy in the display, nothing of a celebration. It was darker, somehow more elemental. Obligatory.

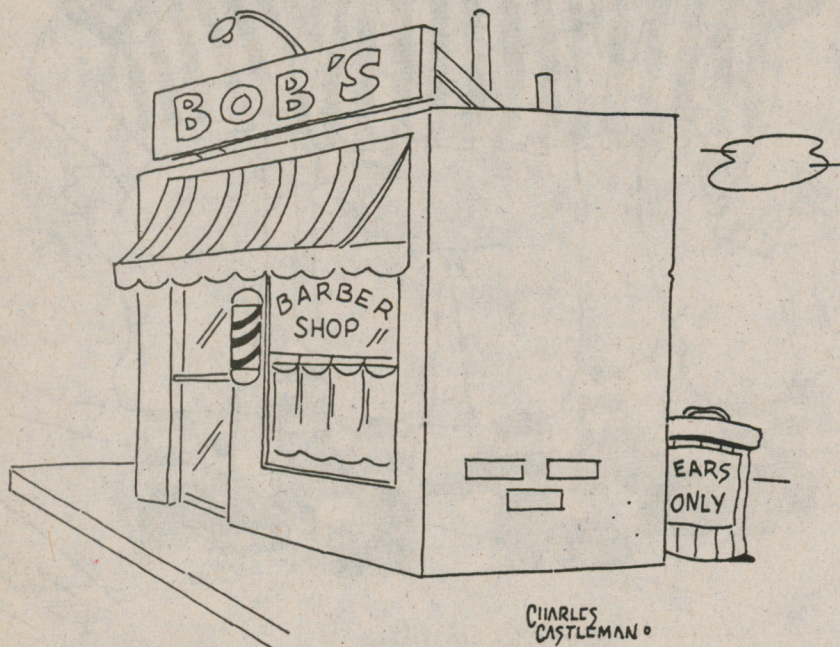
From the comfort of the shadows, Willy came forward to greet him. He looked much the same as he had the other night, except for his red pants, which he'd traded in for pale yellow. The sad shake of his head remained the same.

"Warned you once, man," he said. "I tole you you's messing with shit you don' unnerstand."

"I can't understand what nobody'll tell me about," was the only defense Leo could muster.

"Sometimes you gotta take things on faith. I know you mean well, but man, you past the point of no return now."

Leo looked past him to the nightmare conga line out in the street. The dancers were still caught up in a frenzy.



The girl in the circle moved her kneeling body with a serpentine fluidity, wild hair tossing to and fro about her shoulders, head thrown back in an act of perfect supplication. She reached into the bag beside her, drawing out the source of its erratic movement—one of those oh-so-plump rats so prevalent in the area. It wriggled like a worm on a hook, fat pink tail lashing at her wrist and forearm like a tiny whip.

"There's a way things run 'round here," Willy said. "We may not like it, but we unnerstand it, and so we know how to live with it. And get by. Bricklord wants a building burnt out? We give it to him. He wants to see some of our food rot in the street? We give that to him too. He don't never ask for no life so long's we keep him happy with all the other shit. Sacrifices, man. That's what it's all about. Keeping the place the way he likes it."

And just who the hell is this Bricklord guy that's got these people so beaten down?

"And then you come along with your spray cans," Willy said.

Out in the street, the girl pulled a short dagger from out of the folds of her dress. Within the circle of dancers, she slashed open the rat's neck, then bucked beneath its nearly severed head, catching the sudden drizzle of dark blood on her breasts, her throat, her forehead, her tongue...

Everyone suddenly fell motionless, waiting.

"Me, I think you do fine work," Willy said, "but my opinion don' mean much. But Bricklord, man, you done pissed him off good."

At first, Leo thought it was an earthquake. But it was too centralized. A low, subsonic rumble emanated from within the building across the street, shock waves vibrating the street and asphalt underfoot. The noise swelled like the approach of a subway train.

As the maelstrom of sound reached its zenith, every window in the opposite building blew outward, a rain of glass encircling the foundation. Bricks fell, red dust puffing up as they crumbled on the ground. The entire structure seemed to sag, like a balloon deflated of a bit more life. And as Leo watched, the side of the building broke out in creeping webs of mold that filled in the cracks between the bricks...

Then the shape began to bleed through the wall.

It was immense. A hulking, amorphous, three-dimensional blackness taking form from the structure's interior like fog pouring through a screen. Its head reached midway between the third and fourth floors, featureless except for twin globes of eyes like harvest moons. It reeked of rot, despair. Its lower face split to reveal a cruelly smiling mouth rimmed with rusted metal teeth, and its methane breath stank of the sewers.

Bricklord.

"Probably don' mean much to say I'm sorry, painter," Willy said.

Even if Leo could've geared his feet into motion, it wouldn't have done much good. Bricklord crossed over to where he stood with three thunderous steps, and as Leo stared aghast, trying numbly, vainly, to fathom the enormity of the apparition, it reached for him, closed its hand around him. For something that had materialized through a brick wall, it had gelled into something awfully solid.

He was lifted up, up, legs flailing and arms straining against the fist that enclosed him, and Bricklord aimed him at his own creation. Leo's head was but a yard from the roses, the only things in his field of vision, and instinctively Leo knew with an overwhelming sorrow that they were to be the last things he would ever see.

Pressure.

The hand tightened around his middle, a visegrip, tighter, and Bricklord's forefinger began to grind down upon his

shaggy head. Much as Leo's own finger had sought out the nozzles of all his spray cans. His ribs caved in with a wet, splintering crack.

As Leo's mouth and nostrils and eye sockets erupted into a red unidirectional spray, Bricklord held him before the wall. And with bold, sure strokes, began to create.

Another gray day.

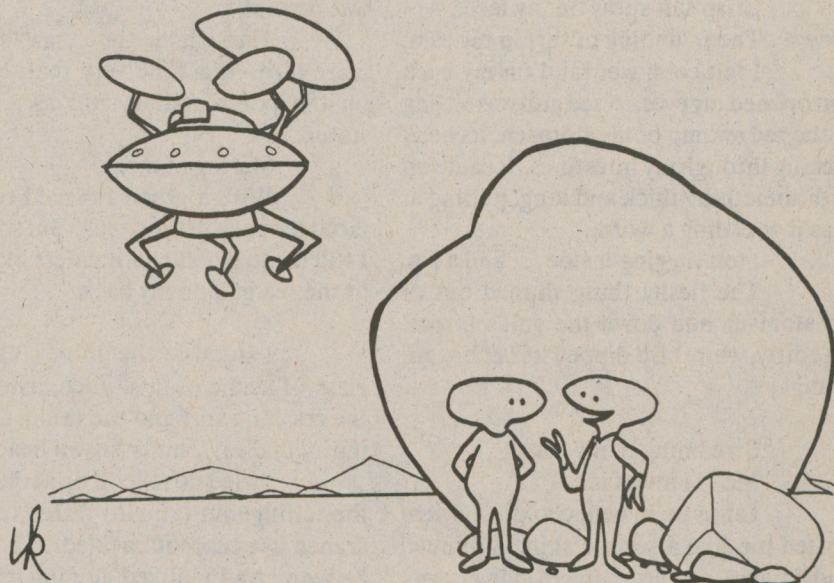
A day like all the rest; infinity behind, infinity ahead. Out in the street, Calvin, a little boy of eight-going-on-nine-going-on-thirty-seven, sat curbside. He carefully studied his feet. Olympic runner's feet, he thought. *I could beat'm all.* He wondered who you talked to about signing up for the Olympics. Hoping that someday, maybe, he'd get his chance to prove himself. Just a chance to show them what he was made of.

The spray can he'd found in the gutter reminded him of the relay batons the guys in the Olympics used. He was a far better runner than artist, but what he had sprayed on the whitewashed wall a few feet from where the painter had died was easy to discern: a tombstone shape in between the bottom of the flower stems.

The wall had turned into a group effort. Calvin's crude tombstone, the painter's extraordinary flowers...

And the other thing—added late last night—which, after it dried, was shaded with various rusts and reddish-browns. An oval shape, with splayed legs...

A gigantic cockroach, eating the roses.



"This time I'll do the ET shit and you activate the magnetic ovens."

K.J. Harmon

the seagull

Crisp salt spray on my face.
The pounding of surf in my ears.
I felt cold, wet sand on my back
and opened my eyes. A sea gull was sitting
in the red swamp of my stomach, its beak
picking through my intestines. It came up
with something thick and long, pulling at
it as if wrestling a worm.

I felt tugging inside . . . and a rip.
The fleshy thing slipped out of
my stomach and down the gull's throat.
The dirty, white bird dipped its beak again
to dig . . .

Screaming in my ears.
Me . . . it was me.
I shot up in bed, choking. Sweat
coated me like a second skin. I blinked
and images of the cottage living room
flashed in my eyes. The morning sunlight

was painful.
Through the glare I saw the night-
mare bird—this time very real—perched
on the porch railing, still as a marble
statue.

Staring at me.
With a groan I turned over and
faced the back of the couch. But somehow
I still could feel the fathomless black eyes
of the sea gull on my back.

I stood at the door, clutching a
glass of acidic orange juice, listening to
the crashing surf and the raindrops pelting
an endless, empty brown beach.

I tried not to look up at the gull on
the railing, but the bird flitted its wings,
craned its neck, and cackled. It begged to
be seen. And I looked, hoping it was just
an illusion.

No . . . it was real. It was staring
at me again with mocking eyes. It was
waiting me out.

It hadn't waited out Janice or
Paulie. It had taken them with a cry that
shattered the winds, swooping from the
skies yesterday like a winged banshee. Its
jubilant scream sliced through the air as I
shouted fearfully, full of rage.

Then the bird circled in the sky, a
king reigning over its domain. But when I
ran to my wife and son the bird dropped
from the clouds to drive me back inside
the cottage. I could do nothing but cower
and leave my family as fresh meat for a hel-
lion's palate.

I had realized then the bird was
taunting me.

We arrived on the beach only
yesterday. Clouds had been threatening



rain and an ocean-blown wind had put an unpleasant chill in the air. Waves chewed the beach with frothing, white teeth.

It was an omen.

It was misty and cold all afternoon. Paulie and Janice decided to build a sand castle. The thing fell out of the sky like a white missile.

Even now I can hear Janice's scream . . .

" . . . Paulie, watch out!"

He turned his shoulder and looked up into the sky. But before he could flinch, the razor-sharp talons of the bird had slid inside his skull, grasping his eyes.

All I could do was sit there, my hand frozen to the armrests of the folding chair. Janice screamed. I followed the flight of the bird as it soared away, twisting, spinning. Diving.

I wanted to yell, to warn her. But I couldn't.

Janice knew what was happening. She covered her eyes with her hands, but the gull expected that. The thing landed on her face, clutching her fingers in its talons. Even from the porch I could see the bird fighting to pry free her hands. Then her face was exposed. She looked at me. Oh god. She didn't have time to scream before the bird snatched her eyes and flew away.

I found my legs then. With a lurch, I leaped out of the chair, raced down the creaky porch stairs, and headed across the sand. I crouched by Janice and stared into the black sockets in her head.

I heard a screech.

I turned.

A flash of white, a hammer blow

on the side of the head. I fell to the sand, clutching my left ear. Stickiness on my palm. I raised myself to a sitting position.

Another flash.

I tried to duck, but its claws found the top of my head. Pieces of flesh and hair were torn from my scalp. I struggled to my knees . . . and crawled through the sand like a child hunting for seashells. I crawled away from the bodies of my wife and son because that's what the damn bird wanted. It could have killed me then, but it didn't want to.

At least . . . not yet.

Blood dripped down the sides of my face, down the back of my neck. I tasted copper. When I reached the porch stairs, I struggled to my feet and stumbled up onto the porch. I heard the bird coming and ducked my head toward the house.

Let it kill me. Let it rip my eyes out and dig at my brains. I couldn't live without my wife and son!

But nothing. I turned and there it was clutching the porch railing, staring at me pitilessly. I could imagine Janice's and Paulie's eyes swimming undigested in the gull's stomach.

The bird raised its wings as if it were flexing its muscles and watched me step over to the sliding glass door. I pulled it open and fell inside. The bird did nothing. When I slid the door closed, it screeched.

As if it were laughing.

I let it laugh at me until the sounds were just echoes. I turned to the window and the bird was gone. I could see Janice's and Paulie's bodies. I could see the water picking at them just like the gull had.

Even from the window, I could see the bird's talons reaching into Janice's empty sockets. White pieces on its claws.

"No!" I shouted.

I slid the door open and stepped

onto the porch, fear, anger and revulsion boiling into one churning mass inside my stomach. "Goddamn you!"

It flew at me. It didn't even soar into the sky, pick up speed, ride the air currents. It just shot at me, like a bullet from a gun. I fell to the porch, but didn't feel anything tear into my skin. The bird must have pulled up. I turned on my back and saw it hovering above the porch.

It spat a gout of blood in the air. I could do nothing as it splattered my forehead. Was it Janice's blood on my forehead, regurgitated from the thing's stomach?

I crawled back to the cottage, crying, beaten. I didn't look back through the window; I knew the bird had flown over to the bodies to feed.

My orange juice, now half gone, rolled in my stomach as I watched the gull fly through the raindrops, dancing with the finger-tendrils of ocean fog.

Picking at my stomach.

No, that was the dream.

This was the edge of the world,

all right. A bleak, empty landscape of sand and ocean that nobody—not even God—wanted. It belonged to the gull, to whatever demon was swimming in its blood and laughing inside its brain.

We should have stayed in Kingstown, got a motel room, visited the beach when the weather was good. But it's too late now, isn't it? I'm in a cage and my keeper is a thing of the skies.

The bird dropped to the porch then, claws clutching the railing. It fluttered its wings as it bent its beak forward, leaving something on the warped wood.

Eyes, sitting there like a child's marbles . . .

The thing craned its neck, leaned down, and slid one eyeball into its beak. I saw the bump as it slipped down the gull's throat. Then it reached for another . . .

The bird fluttered its wings, flopped its head about, then was still. Staring. I blinked. The thing's head was becoming fuzzy, as if the ocean mist had swallowed the cottage. I rubbed my eyes, but the bird's head was totally obscured.

And in the fog, another face was forming . . .

No . . . please.

Janice.

Her mouth was slashed open in a grimace of torment, eyes aflame with fright and pain. Eyes were the windows of the soul. The thing took their eyes . . . and their souls.

The image faded. Fog again, forming back into the head of the sea gull. It turned, craned its neck again, and leaned down to the railing.

"No," I whispered. "No, please."

It swallowed the first eye, but held the second at the edge of its beak so I could watch as it slid back into the darkness.

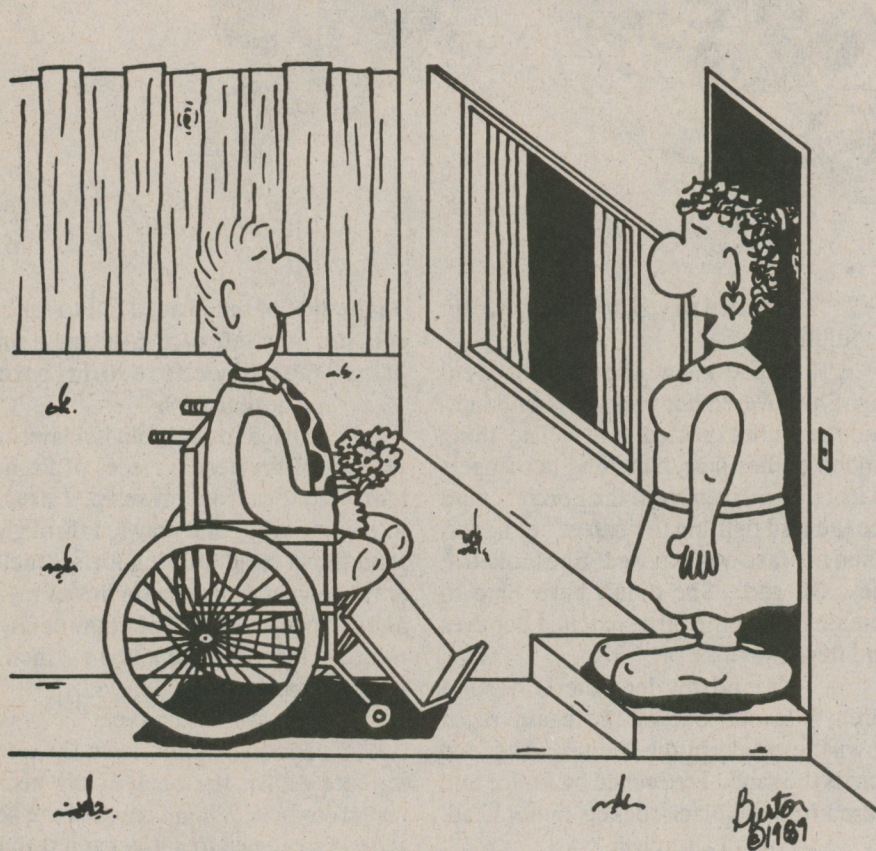
"P—Paulie?" Stinging tears were falling down my cheeks.

Paulie screamed. No . . . it was the gull, the goddamned sea gull. No . . . it was Paulie.

"Paulie!" I shouted.

The gull cackled.

I grabbed the door handle and slung it open, slamming it in the runner, and stepped out onto the porch. I



"I was expecting someone . . . taller . . ."

sprang, swinging my hand, swatting the bird on its side. It was jerked from its perch, but picked up its wings and soared into the air. I ran down the steps, into the sand, and looked up into the sky as the gull swooped, spun, prepared to dive.

The game was over.

A high-pitched, angry scream exploded ferociously from its mouth. As the bird plummeted, I knew without even looking that its talons were flexing, reaching.

I did the only thing I could do at that point. I dropped to the sand and scrambled into the darkness beneath the porch. The bird slammed into the wooden grating, screeching, and I was afraid it would slip under the porch, furious, talons slashing me to ribbons. I moved away from the opening, sliding backwards on my ass, fingers clawing in the cold sand, picking at rocks and small pieces of ancient wood.

And something . . . soft.

I turned my head slowly, momentarily forgetting the bird as it scratched its way through the wood. I looked down through the shadows to my hand, palm sitting on the mushy forehead of a dead man, fingers poking through black holes where the eyes should have been.

I couldn't move. But when I saw the revolver clutched in the man's hand—decomposing flesh had caked the handle and barrel—I was able to slip my hands on it.

The bird screeched and clawed behind me. Wood splintered. Pale light from a cloudy world leaked into the darkness. I grabbed the gun and tugged, but the man's hand was frozen. I jerked again, pounding my fist onto the man's fingers. Bones snapped. Slimy flesh slipped between my fingers.

The bird ripped out another piece of wood.

It came free, almost, after another pull. One finger remained locked around the trigger.

A scream, a furious flutter of wings. The gull poked its head through the hole, squeezing through, fighting to reach me.

I raised my hand and brought it down hard on the brittle finger, snapping the bone easily. I pulled the gun free, twisted, pointed.

The bird was halfway through,

jagged pieces of wood cutting into its sides.

I pulled the trigger.

Nothing.

The bird wriggled through.

I pulled the trigger again—then again.

The shadows erupted in a muzzle flash. The report *ba-boomed* in the confines, crushing my eardrums. The world shifted into slow motion. The gull, pieces of flesh and feathers spinning in the air, fell to the soft sand. Dust swirled in the diffused light streaming through the torn grating.

And in the dust . . . faces.

Cloudy, tortured faces showed themselves in the light, a procession shifting through the dust, into the light, then off to a place that should have accepted them long ago: a man, eyeless, his mouth slashed open in pain; a little girl, her lips twisting with silent screams; an old man, defiance chiseled into the wrinkles of his skin, teeth mashed against the pain from unseen talons; then Paulie; and Janice. Shifting away, disappearing, becoming dust particles again, dust set-

tling onto the torn, bleeding corpse of the sea gull.

Then a scream of absolute fury cut through the close air, squeezing my head in a vise. But I didn't close my eyes . . . because another face appeared in the swirling dust.

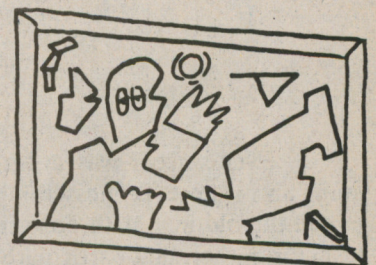
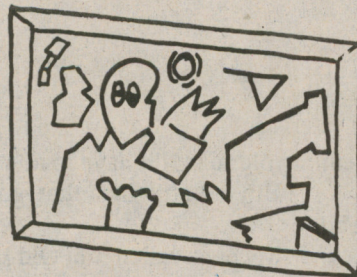
A dark face.

A face that blocked out the light.

A face that disappeared with another agonized scream that seemed to spew through bloody lips, lips pulled back over gleaming white incisors. The gull was left like the demon had left all those other people, an empty husk.

With my hand I searched blindly behind me, grabbing the man's shattered fingers. I crawled over to the body of the sea gull, grabbing its beak and baring one of its eyes. Would this do any good? I didn't know. I stabbed the jagged bone into the creature's head.

A long time after, freed from the stifling chamber, I started digging graves for my family . . . and for the corpse who saved my life.



Handwritten signature.

Ronald Kelly

old hacker

Ever since I was a barefooted young'un in these Tennessee hills, I regarded the old man with downright disgust. Or, rather, that particularly nauseating habit of his.

His name was Jess Hedgecomb and he lived out in the West Piney Woods near Hortonburg. Folks said he was something of a hermit; just a lanky old geezer who lived all by his lonesome in a two-room shack by Silver Creek and roamed the forest in search of wild ginseng and furs to make his meager living. He was harmless enough, I reckon. He had a sad way about him, but he was friendly enough in conversation and was known to flip a shiny nickel to any kid who happened to be standing at the candy counter when he sauntered into Dawes Market for his weekly groceries. Yeah, he was a harmless, well

meaning old man, I'll have to admit.

But he still had that godawful habit.

My papa called him Old Hacker, more out of amusement than anything else. See, whenever the old gent was standing around shooting the bull with the regulars on the porch of the general store, he would get this funny look on his face just before he was gonna clear his throat. The racket he made was kind of funny and kind of scary at the same time, especially for a young'un like me. Then, with a turn of his head, Old Hacker would send a great, gray-green glob of junk into the dirt road—or into a spittoon, if one was handy.

Just like I said, it was a damned nasty habit, one I wrinkled my nose at every time I laid witness to it. However, as I grew older, I began to notice something

that gradually changed my revulsion into a strange fascination.

It began during the summer of my seventeenth year. I was working for Mr. Dawes part-time; sweeping up the store, stocking shelves, and pumping gas out front whenever a customer pulled up. One sweltering July afternoon, I was helping load cement sacks into the back of Sam McNally's pickup when I suddenly heard that ugly sound. Old Hacker let loose with a glob of mucus that landed no more than a yard from the truck's left rear tire. I shook my head in disgust, glanced down at the ugly mess, and nearly fell clean off the store porch.

That streamer of green spittle was a-twisting and a-wiggling in the clay dust like it was a danged mudpuppy! I looked over at Sam, wanting to call his attention



to it, but thought better of it. When I glanced back down, the thing was gone. Not dried up by the scalding summer sun, though—I mean it was plumb, lickety-split gone . . .

It happened again a couple of weeks later. I was pumping unleaded into some out-of-towner's big Buick. Old Hacker was sitting on the porch, playing barrel-top checkers with Mr. Dawes. I just stood there, watching the old man, waiting for him to cough up a hefty lung. Directly, he did just that, sending a glob to the side, so that it hit the whitewashed porch post. Half in horror, half in awe, I watched as it inched its way up the post like some slimy green worm. When it reached the rain gutter, it stretched out and barely caught hold. I held my breath, sure that it was gonna drop to the ground

with a splat. But, finally, it found its footing and disappeared over the slope of the corrugated tin roof.

Almost afraid to, I looked back to the checker game. Much to Dawes' surprise, Old Hacker skipped the remaining three of his reds, winning the game. Then the oldtimer turned and stared straight at me, flashing me a knowing wink. It spooked me so badly that I pumped two gallons over the amount the stranger wanted and had to pay for the mistake out of my own pocket.

That weekend I hiked out to the West Piney. I had my .22 rifle and my hound dog, Bones, with me. But taking potshots at bluejays wasn't my only intention for walking the woods that day. I had half a mind to drop by Jess Hedgecomb's place. So I did.

Old Hacker was reared back in a caneback rocker, his feet propped up on the porch railing, his nose buried in a dog-eared copy of the Farmers Almanac.

"Mornin'," I called out. I had a nervous feeling in my belly, the kind you get while waiting in the dentist's office, listenin' to his drill.

"Mornin' to you," acknowledged the old man. "You're Harry Dean's eldest boy, ain't ya?"

"Yes, sir," I nodded.

He stuck the almanac in the side pocket of his overalls and removed his bifocals. "Well, come on and pull up a chair, young man." He grinned, looking his eighty years and then some. "I don't get a whole lot of company way out here in the sticks."

"Yes, sir," I replied politely. Isat

down in a rocker identical to the one Mr. Hedgecomb occupied.

We sat there in silence for a good long time. Then Old Hacker looked over at me, his eyes sparkling. "Just dropped by for a neighborly visit, that right, son?"

I reached down to scratch behind Bones' droopy ears. "That's right."

"Naw, I don't think so," he chuckled. "I seen you watching me over at Dawes Market. I figure it was more curiosity than good manners that brought you out here this fine morn." Then he leaned forward in his chair and started that noisy hacking cough that I had grown to loath so much. When he finally spat into the dry dust of the front yard, we both sat there and watched. Bones bared his teeth and growled as the gray-green glob slowly made a bee-line down the pathway, toward the thicket.

"They always travel west," Old Hacker said, as if discussing the migration of birds. "No matter where I am in the county, whenever I cough up one of the little devils, they always head west—straight for the piney woods."

I held onto Bones' collar and watched the high grass part as the living lunger disappeared into deep forest. "Why

is that?" I asked.

"Oh, I know why," Jess Hedgecomb told me. "But maybe you shouldn't want to. Maybe you shouldn't want to know anything about me or my . . . affliction."

Looking straight into that old man's haggard eyes, I said "Yes, I do." I knew that I really didn't, that I would probably be better off if I took my leave that instant and never returned. But it was kind of like standing in line for the freak show at the county fair. You have the creepy feeling that what you're about to see will be horrible, but you still want to see it all the same.

The strange tale that Jess Hedgecomb told me that day was much worse than any freak show I could ever hope to attend, real or imagined.

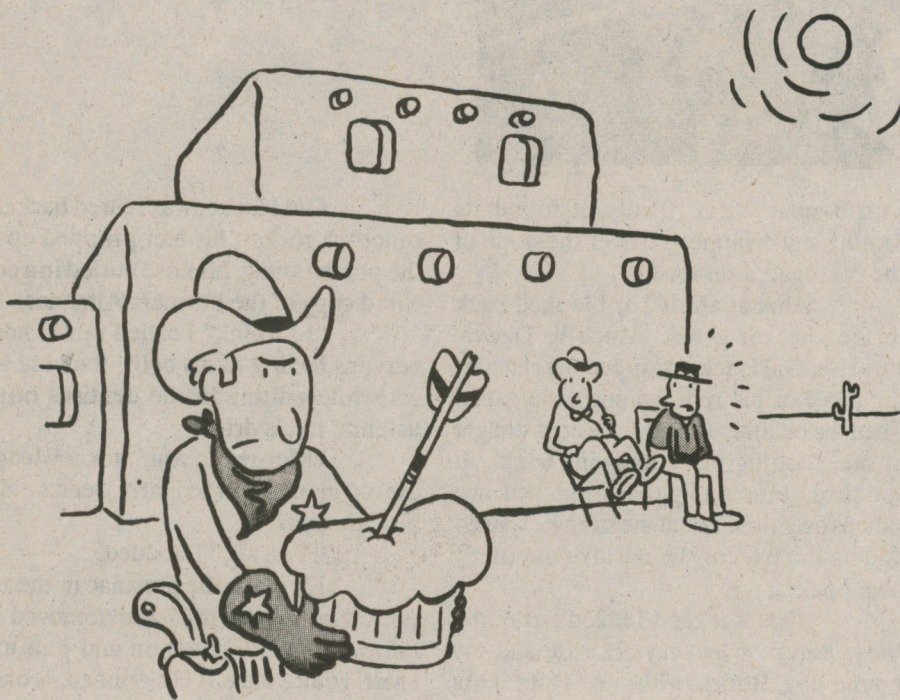
"I was born the son of a tobacco farmer," he began innocently enough. "So were my boyhood buddies, Lester Wills and Charlie Gooch. We worked the fields with our fathers. We planted, harvested, and hung the leaves in the barn for curing. But we were absolutely forbidden to partake of the stuff. "I catch you smoking before you come of age and I'll tan your hide right good," my papa would warn me. Of course, none of us listened. We'd do

what most kids our age did; smoke corn silk or sneak old butts outta the ashtrays down at the train depot.

"I'd say we were about twelve years old that summer we found our own little goldmine out in the dark hollows of West Piney Woods. We were walking home from skinny-dipping in Silver Creek, when we came upon a heavy patch of wild tobacco growing pretty as you please. What a stroke of luck, we thought. Now we could harvest our own little crop without anyone knowing about it. Lester and Charlie smuggled boards and tin from home and we built us a small curing barn about the size of a doghouse. We stripped the leaves off the stalk, hung them up in that little shed, and smoke them with charcoal I filched from my papa's barn. We'd only cure them leaves for a couple of days before we couldn't stand it no longer. Sometimes the leaves would still be half green when we rolled them up into cigars and set the match to them.

"Well, towards the month of September, we were down by that patch of wild tobacco. We were shooting the breeze and cutting up, when Lester tore apart one of those leaves, like kids will do on a whim of the moment. And, Lordy Mercy, there was something *alive* in it! The juice that dripped outta the veins of that shredded leaf just twitched and squirmed like crazy. Lester threw the leaf down and we watched that tobacco sap crawl like tiny snakes through the thicket . . . straight for that wild tobacco patch. Me and the boys, we hightailed it outta that section of West Piney and never went back. But the damage was done. We'd already smoked a summer's worth of that horrid stuff into our lungs."

Mr. Hedgecomb paused, a pained expression on his ancient face, then continued. "I've been to many a doctor in my time, trying to find one who could rid me of this confounded stuff I carry around inside. They all look at me like I'm batty and tell me maybe I should see a psychiatrist. But I ain't crazy. I know the damned things are inside of me. When I lay in my bed at night, I can feel the little buggers stirring around, boiling in my lungs, trying to find a way out. They never find it on their own. I have to cough up the slimy bastards little by little, but there never seems to be an end to it. I truly believe that I'll be cursed with this awful infestation until my dying day. Then maybe we'll both



" . . . right in the sheriff's asparagus soufflé. Them injuns are really askin' for it this time."

be able to find the release we've been searching for all these years."

Me and that old man sat there in stone cold silence for a long time afterwards; I was wondering if his tale was true, at the same time knowing that it was; Old Hacker looked like he was having second thoughts, like maybe he shouldn't have bared his soul like he had. "I reckon you'll be wanting to get the hell outta here now," Hedgecomb uttered bitterly. "Well, I can't say I blame you. It ain't none of your concern anyhow."

I looked over at Jess Hedgecomb and, in those rheumy old eyes of his, I saw a loneliness so dark and empty that it made my heart ache. I knew then the true reason why Jess, Lester, and Charlie had been lifelong bachelors. It wasn't because they were queer for each other, like some folks in town thought. No, they never married for fear that a single kiss might have infected their spouses with that awful thing living inside their bodies. For nearly seventy years they had endured the horror and had endured it alone.

I just settled back in that rocking chair and propped my feet up on the railing. "Naw, I reckon I'll sit a spell longer," I told him.

Old Hacker smiled. Not that sad, little half-grin that I had seen all my life, but an honest-to-goodness, heartfelt smile.

We grew to be close friends during the months that followed. Every day after school, I would do the old man's chores for him, then spend the evening playing checkers and talking. My parents thought it was a fine thing, a young fella like me taking interest in a lonely old man like that. I do believe those last eight months of Jess Hedgecomb's life were the happiest, simply because he had someone there in that drafty cabin to pass the time with.

But the happy days didn't last for long and, by wintertime, both Old Hacker's health and his outlook on life hit rockbottom.

I must admit, there were times during his long bout with pneumonia when I felt like leaving that place for good. But I didn't. There were times when his congestion and coughing spells became so frequent that the brass spittoon beside his bed nearly overflowed

with living phlegm; times when writhing, green lungers crawled the bedroom floor until finally finding escape through the cracks in the boards. But I didn't lose my nerve. I stayed. I sat right there in the chair beside his bed, doing whatever I could for him. I just didn't have the heart to abandon him . . . not at a time like that.

It was a snowy day in early February when I found the old man dead. I walked into his dark room, a cold dread heavy in the pit of my gut. The pneumonia had taken its toll, drowning him in his own bodily fluids. His skin was icy to the touch. I was just about to pull the blanket up over his head, when his chest hitched violently. Stepping back, I watched in horror as his chest rose and fell, his throat emitting a wet wheezing sound. The old man was dead, yet he was breathing. I could hear the mucus within his lungs churning and sloshing of its own accord.

Then his ribs began to snap . . . one by one.

I fled from that dark house but lingered on the front porch, torn between going and staying. From within the house I could hear a terrible racket; the ugly sound of splintering bone and ripping flesh. I stood on that porch for what seemed an eternity, my hands

clutching the frozen railing, my attention focused on the tranquil snowscape of the West Piney Woods. Then I was aware of a shuffling, liquid sound behind me . . . the sound of ragged breathing from the open doorway. I made a mistake, I tried to convince myself. *The old man's not really dead.*

I turned around and screamed.

On the bare boards of the ramshackle front porch, trailing a gory trail of fresh blood and slime, was Jess Hedgecomb's lungs. They heaved and deflated like a pair of gruesome bellows, pulling themselves across the porch with a life of their own. Then they paused; my screaming had drawn their attention.

The gory windpipe, weaving like the head of serpent, turned my way and regarded me blindly, the hollow of the gullet staring like a deep, eyeless socket. I pulled my eyes away, hearing the wet *clump-clump-clump* of the thing making its way down the porch steps.

When I finally did gather the nerve to look, it was gone, leaving an ugly trail of crimson slime across the virgin snow. I could hear it thrashing through the dead tangle of thicket, huffing and puffing, could see plumes of frosty breath rise as it headed into the wooded

(cont. on page 64)



Shanks

"Listen, son, your mother and I think it's just great that you want to be a gynecologist when you grow up, but for now tell anybody who asks that you want to be a fireman."

James Kisner



“What a mess!”

Dorothy mouthed the words without really saying them or even relating them to anything in particular. Then she parked the Honda in the supermarket lot and stepped out into the bright early morning sunshine.

The supermarket would be crowded later in the day, jammed with hordes of ugly people buying ugly food to perpetuate their ugly bodies. Dorothy shuddered, then took several deep breaths to calm herself. At least she wouldn't have to watch those people. She'd be long gone before those hordes arrived.

There was nothing worse in the whole, blue-eyed world than to be stuck behind two or three frumpy-dumpy housewives with shopping carts full of the

American harvest: the poisonous loaves of white bread; the vapid snack cakes; the shiny, plastic candies spun full of air and sugar and rodent feces; the ragged slabs of meat obscenely oozing blood with little white pads tucked under them that looked like soiled sanitary pads when you peeled them off; the sealed packets of lunch meats and wieners made of ground-up yuck and innards; the cholesterol pustules in butter and milk and cheese; the cooked and re-cooked frozen and refrozen vegetables processed into nutritional oblivion; the weird microwave dinners; the bland TV dinners; the cereals that looked like overprocessed puffs of dried barf; the pudding pops and Popsicles; the New and Improved, high-fiber, low-calorie, no-taste offal—and while the whole distressing banquet of

nothingness reposed like so many neatly packaged parcels of gastrointestinal malaise, grubby kids would hang on the sides of the carts and pick their noses and make faces at her while their mothers counted coupons, sorted out food stamps, wrote checks or peeled out the twenty dollar bills.

The prospect of seeing one of those monster women was daunting beyond belief, but it didn't have to be, Dorothy realized, brightening as she as she entered the supermarket, and breaking her stride only briefly to allow the electronic door to open all the way. Even if, by quirk of fate or droll irony, any of those women and their rug-rat, dirtball kids were out this early, she wouldn't have to bother with them. She had less than twelve items to buy; she could use the



12 items or less

Illustrations by Judy Rosenblatt

Express Lane—the special concession supermarkets made for the sane people who were repelled by the lumps of cellulite-engorged flesh commonly called the masses.

Avoiding the masses was very necessary, of course, because what the masses had might be catching, and Dorothy didn't want a dose of it, whatever it might be.

She smiled and selected a shopping cart, one that didn't seem to have been overly used, with wheels that rolled true without wobbling. She started down the main aisle, moving purposefully towards the arena where produce was displayed.

She stopped abruptly, a frown crossing her face as she recalled something she had avoided remembering for

hours.

It wasn't really a thought that etched the frown on her face; it was merely a fleeting image, a frail, desperate thing nagging at the edge of her awareness.

Best not to think about *that*, she cautioned herself and paused to hunt through her purse for her shopping list.

She was a tall woman, five-nine in her bare feet. Her hair was light brown and hung to her shoulders; her eyes were dark gray-blue and generally moist with one concern or another. Her figure was attractively slim, her breasts perhaps a cup size too small, but that minor discrepancy in her overall poised perfection was hardly noticeable. Lately though, her breasts had begun to sag a wee bit and that

distressed her.

She was thirty-five.

What a dirt-ball age to be, she always thought. Still young, yet not really young, and no one would ever mistake you for an innocent. Especially when people found out you had three children and an athletic-looking husband who must certainly exercise some degree of prowess in the connubial bed.

It seemed there were always those lewd jokes about being married, about bearing children. She disliked them. Because the jokes weren't really about sex and children, they were about loss of innocence. Traumatic loss, that. Overwhelming loss. No more cute little girl with pigtails and a heart of lavender. No more pert young thing. No more unthreatening caresses. Every touch car-

ried an underlying message of unbridled lust.

Goddamn everything, she thought and gave up trying to find her list. She must have left it at home. Maybe if she just cruised up and down the aisles, she'd remember what she came for.

To get out, an internal voice reminded her. *That's all. Nonsense*, she countered. *I have things to buy. Things I need, like disinfectant and scrub brushes and...*

The supermarket was a vast structure with long aisles and tons of food on display. She remembered the first week it had opened and how intimidating the place was. Not inviting or cozy as grocery stores used to be. No, this was a huge pavilion, not a comforting

place to be at all. It was a place in which one could get lost, where one could hide out.

What a mess! her internal voice said, intruding on her thoughts again. *What an awful mess!*

"Shush," she said aloud.

Perhaps she needed citrus. She stopped at a huge mountain of grapefruits and chose a large fruit. She weighed it in her hand briefly then squeezed it to see if it was...

The squealing kids and demanding...

... fresh. It burst in her hands and a soft explosion of wet, squirming worms...

... husband wanting to play hide-the-salami after you've worked your ass off all day chasing his kids, cleaning his messes

and...

... erupted on her hands.

She dropped the fruit on the floor and screeched.

... and don't even think about that, Dorothy.

Her stomach a churning vortex of disgust, she brushed the worms from her hands. She kept looking at them, turning them over again and again, until she was satisfied all the worms were gone. Leaving her cart behind, she turned and ran to the end of the produce aisle, spinning on one heel as she rounded the corner.

"Where is the goddamn manager?" she said loudly, gazing down the aisle. Strange. There seemed to be no one around. Anywhere. She faced in another direction and stared at the meat case.

The display of various meats seemed much larger than she remembered it. It looked like things did when she accidentally put her husband's glasses on instead of her own. Not only was it large, it also seemed to bulge out of a different dimension, like a distorted wall. She approached it timidly, temporarily forgetting about the worms in the grapefruit.

Standing at the edge of the meat case, she realized that the meat wasn't red; it was gray and green and it stank. But the worst of it, as Dorothy examined it more closely, was that the meat was moving, animated by an infestation of maggots—hoards of the disgusting things were writhing in the sparkling greenish strands of the decayed carnal fiber.

The moving blanket of infested meat seemed to stretch endlessly on either side of her. She jerked back from the meat case, screaming with all her wind, but her reaction was meaningless at best; the maggots jumped out at her, splattering her crisp white blouse and designer jeans with squirming flecks of white.

Dorothy rubbed and rubbed at the maggots, but her efforts were futile. She turned to run down the nearest aisle—a long corridor of canned goods. She yelled for help, still trying desperately to scrape the squirming maggots from her skin. Then she darted down another aisle. And another.

There was no one anywhere in the store.

No! she shrieked inside her mind.



"You're new at this, aren't you?"

I didn't, I didn't...

Then suddenly she came upon another person. She wasn't alone in the awful place after all. He was standing at the end of a row of canned vegetables and fruits, swabbing the floor with a mop. His back was to her, and though she yelled at him, he didn't turn. The air reeked of disinfectant.

Disinfectant, she found herself thinking rather stupidly, considering the urgency of the moment. *I must get some of that. Lots of it.*

She raced toward him, then stopped, gasping for breath. She grabbed him by the shoulders and forced him to turn around and face her.

He didn't have a face.

And one of his arms crumbled under her grip as the worms undermined the fragile non-living thing that gaped at her now, not with a face but with only a skull, totally bereft of human flesh and features.

No.

Dorothy let go of his arm, barely noticing the chunks of gray grue clinging to her fingers, and reversed herself, running back down the aisle as the canned vegetables and fruits puffed...

No, I didn't, I didn't, don't, let me out of here, I didn't mean, I need, I didn't...

... and exploded, pelting her with soft plops of vile-smelling wormy garbage, stringing up in her hair, filling her ears and nostrils, clinging to her flesh and...

... did I?

... the worms dug in.

She stretched out her arms as she slid around the corner. Then she noticed the mold growing on her own fingers. And the awful cast of her skin, and the rippling effect the worms made as they crawled under it, and she dropped to her knees, clutching her hands to her ears, trying to blot out the sound, the awful din of cans bursting, rotten fruit ripping apart, putrid meat shooting through the air, and the worst sound of all, the gnawing noise within her own head and body.

Everywhere she looked there was flowing slime and grue. Cadaverous clerks stood watching her with skull faces, as bits of their bodies dropped down to merge with the flow.

Dorothy sobbed.

But there wasn't any pain, not actually. There was no real pain in dying, and she surrendered to the mass finally, allowing her body to slump down into the squirming slime. And it closed over her almost immediately, covering everything but her head.

Her eyes stared up at the ceiling, not even blinking when the first steel beam fell through and the walls crumbled and the roof caved in, and the entire supermarket tumbled down, settling into a massive pile of junk and trash and garbage and decaying matter all aswarm with little white moving things enjoying the greatest feast of their short lives.

Sticking out of the mountainous pile of refuse was a thin, cadaverous arm,

clutching in its hand a single piece of moldy and decayed fruit. Worms oozed out of the center of the fruit and out of the flesh of the hand.

And in a corner of the skull of the thing that had been Dorothy, there clung a few cells of gray matter in which some last thoughts flickered, thoughts that persisted while the rest of the thing was consumed.

Yes...

... I did it.

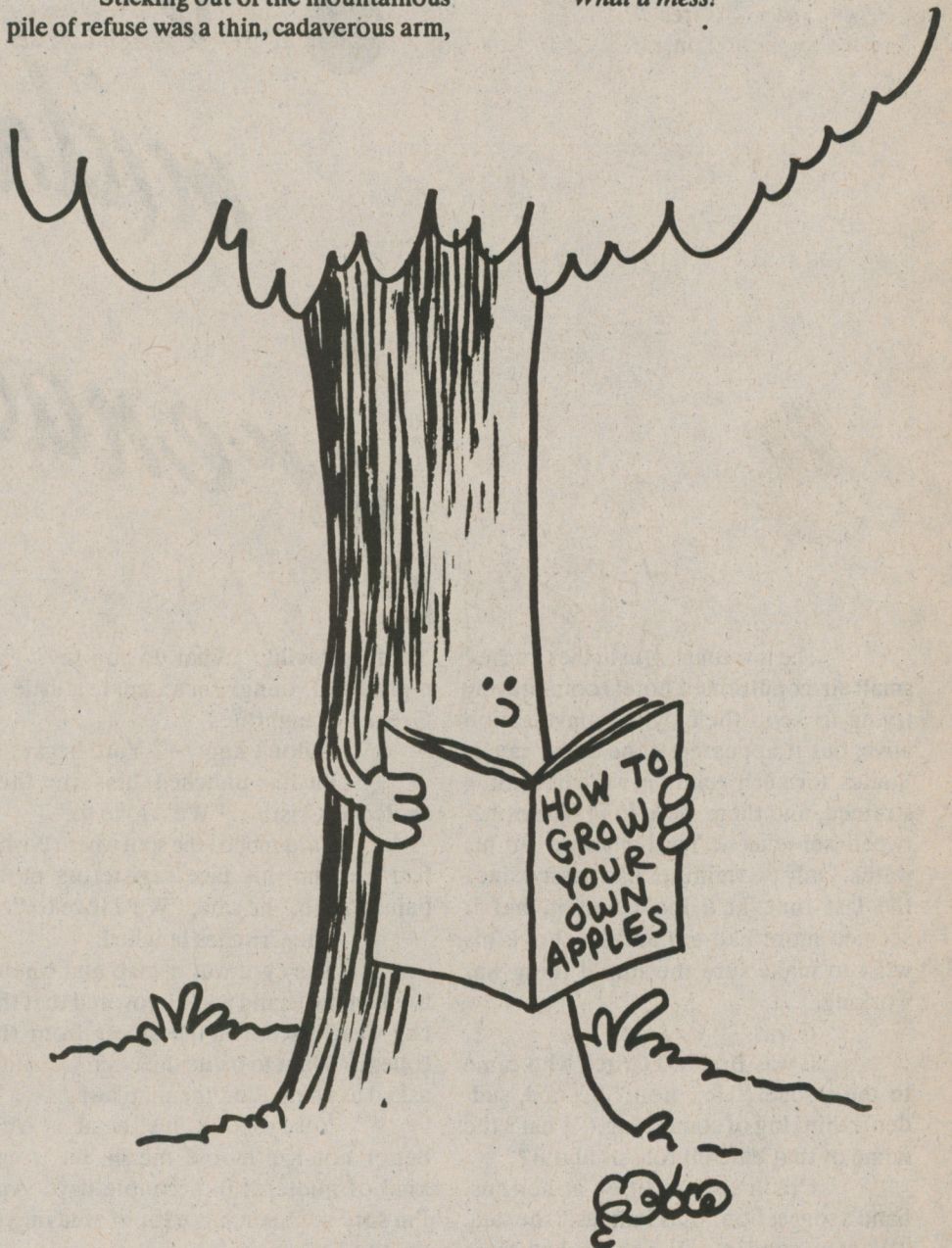
What?

I did it.

What, what?

I killed them all, the last of Dorothy thought.

What a mess!



Bentley Little

• five to midnight, grenada time

The two couples sat in the Critches' small air-conditioned hotel room bravely trying to keep their dying conversation alive, but it appeared to be a lost cause. Smiles, formerly genuine, were becoming strained, and there were long pauses between sentences. Yard glanced at his watch. Only two minutes had passed since the last time he'd looked at it, but it seemed more like ten and he shook his wrist to make sure the stupid thing was working.

It was.

It was Bernard Critch who came to the rescue. "Hey, hon," he said, suddenly thinking of something. "What's the name of that bar Jeff told us about?"

Cristine's face lit up at her husband's suggestion. "Las Palmas," she said. "What a good idea." She looked from

Yard to Phyllis. "What do you say? The night's still young. Let's sample a little of Grenada's nightlife."

"I don't know—" Yard began.

Phyllis punched his arm then smiled at Cristine. "We'd love to."

Yard rubbed the spot where Phyllis had hit him, his face registering mock pain. "Yeah," he said. "We'd love to."

The Critches laughed.

They got out a map and phone book of the island and discovered that the bar was just down the street from the college. "Want to invite the boys?" Cristine asked as she pulled the map away.

Yard shook his head. "We'd better not. Keith told me he has some kind of midterm in a couple days. And I'm sure your son has a lot of studying to do, too."

Bernard grinned. "Besides, while kids are away the adults can play."

Yard smiled. "That too."

Outside, it was still warm. A breeze blew in from the ocean, but it was a hot wind—hot and dry—and it offered no relief. The breeze brought with it the hyper-festive sounds of junkanoo music and reggae from parties elsewhere in the city, and the two couples stopped for a moment to listen as they emerged from the lobby of the hotel. Then the wind shifted, taking with it the music, and they started walking up the poorly-paved street toward the college.

Aside from changing their plans for the rest of the evening, Bernard's suggestion had injected new life into their conversation, and they talked happily and ceaselessly all the way to the college, like



old friends.

Fifteen minutes later they were standing outside the Las Palmas, looking dubiously in. Yard examined the outside of the bar. It was crammed between what looked like a tenement apartment house and a rundown butcher's shop. The outer facade was wood, but the boards had been torn off in several places and brown crumbling adobe showed through. All that was left of the sign above the door was the word "Las."

"This is the place your friend raved about?" Phyllis asked.

Cristine nodded. "Hard to believe, isn't it?"

"Come on," Bernard chuckled. "Where's your sense of adventure?"

Yard was not sure he had a sense of adventure. It was dark and getting late,

and they appeared to be the only Americans on the street. But he didn't say anything.

The thin red sheet that was tacked over the bar's open doorway suddenly swung outward and a dirty, bloated man stumbled backward onto the street. He barely avoided hitting Cristine, who stepped quickly out of his way. Mumbling to himself, he staggered across the road.

Phyllis laughed nervously. "Are we sure we want to go in there?"

"It looks a little rough for me," Cristine admitted.

"That's what makes it fun," Bernard smiled. "Besides, do you think Jeff would tell us to go here if it were dangerous?"

Cristine nodded. "Yes."

"Well, you're wrong." He walked forward and grabbed the red sheet, holding it aside. "Come on, let's go in."

Cristine stood unmoving for a moment, then, sighing and shaking her head, she followed her husband into the bar. There was nothing for Yard and Phyllis to do but follow suit.

The inside of the bar was not as dilapidated as the outside. In fact, with its antique lamps and hardwood floor, the establishment seemed almost luxurious. It was dark, though, and smoky, and Yard could not see into the corners of the large room. The four pressed closer together. At the far end of the counter a group of young toughs talked loudly amongst themselves. One of the young men yelled something out in a harsh

Spanish dialect, and the others laughed hysterically. Yard did not know what the youth had said, but he was sure the joke referred to them.

From the shadows behind the counter the bartender stepped toward them. Even in this darkness, Yard could clearly see the long scars that ran from the base of his chin to his empty eye-socket. Phyllis grabbed Yard's hand and held tight.

Only Bernard seemed not to be fazed. He smiled and stepped forward, his confident manner that of an experienced salesman. "I'd like a scotch and water," he said.

The bartender nodded and turned to look at Yard. Yard wondered fleetingly if the man could speak English. Probably not. But it didn't matter. Drinks had a universal language of their own. "A margarita," he said.

"Margarita for me also," Phyllis said.

Cristine just shook her head, holding her right hand out in a classic stop position to show that she wanted nothing.

The bartender moved off to fill the orders.

The four stood there, surveying the room. Now that his eyes had adjusted, Yard could see a little better. There were six young toughs hanging out at the end of the bar, not four as he'd

originally thought. He could not see their features because of the thick cloud of smoke hovering in the air before them, but they all appeared to be staring in his direction. He looked quickly away, and his eyes settled on the opposite wall. Here, several booths ran along the length of the room. In the booth closest to them, a hugely obese woman, great folds of flesh dripping from her massive arms, was patting the head of a small weasel-faced man. A pile of empty bottles lay on the table in front of them. Yard turned toward Bernard. "What the hell did your friend see in this place?"

Bernard shrugged. "He said the place had great drinks, great atmosphere and great entertainment. He raved about the entertainment."

"You sure it wasn't a joke?"

Bernard shook his head. "His daughter goes to school here, and she said this is a big hangout. Hal said he'd heard of it, too."

Yard looked around and chuckled. "You think maybe there's been a change of management?"

The bartender returned with their drinks. Yard started to reach for his wallet, but Bernard waved him down. "I got you into this, I'll pay." He handed two bills to the bartender. "You don't happen to speak English, do you?" he asked.

The bartender nodded. "*Poco. A*

little."

"Well, look, my son's a medical student here at the college and—"

"The bartender's face lit up. "Medical student?"

"Yeah. His name's Hal Critch. Maybe you know him?"

The bartender smiled. "Hal Critch." He nodded. "I know him."

Bernard looked back at them, an expression of triumph on his face. "Well," he said, turning back toward the bartender, "we heard a lot about this place, and we were wondering—"

The bartender interrupted him. "I'm sorry I am so mean. There are so many..." He struggled for the word "...touristes since the invasion. They come here and try to impress us with their money and their rich clothes."

Bernard chuckled. "We're not like that."

"I know," the bartender laughed, and Yard could see yellow, rotted teeth. "Hal Critch es good boy." Suddenly his face lit up. He looked from Bernard to the rest of them and back again. "Would you like to see the show? We have great show."

Bernard grinned with delight. "That's exactly what I was going to ask about."

Phyllis had scooted closer to her husband. "You don't think this is some kind of sex show or something, do you?" she whispered. "I've heard of those."

Yard shook his head. "I doubt it," he said, though he was far from sure.

The bartender pointed toward Yard and Phyllis. "Is their son a medical student too?"

Bernard nodded.

"What is his name?"

Yard addressed the man, trying to avoid looking at his horrible scar, intensely aware of the missing eye and the empty socket. "His name's Dan," he said. "Dan Stevens."

The bartender smiled again. "Dan Stevens. I know him, too." His glance took in all four of them. "Both good boys. Both help with the show."

Cristine looked interested. "Helped with the show? How?"

The bartender started walking toward the other end of the bar. "Come. I'll show you."

They followed him past the group of young toughs, and he led them through

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a narrow doorway into a back room. The room appeared to be empty. The bartender knelt down on the floor, steadying himself with one hand while he pulled open a trapdoor with the other. It was dark, but they could see the steps leading down.

Phyllis grabbed Yard's hand. "I don't like this," she whispered urgently.

The bartender started down. "Wait," he said. "I will turn on the light." His hand apparently found a switch, for the hallway leading down was suddenly well-lighted. Taking Cristine's hand, Bernard followed the bartender down. Phyllis followed Cristine, and Yard brought up the rear.

The steps ended at what looked like a small theatre. There were five or six rows of metal folding chairs, all facing a curtained stage. "Sit," the bartender said, rushing toward the stage. "I will start the show."

Confused and somewhat uncertain, the four of them shuffled toward the middle of the center row, where they sat down. Yard looked at Bernard. "This is weird."

Bernard smiled. "But it's interesting."

The bartender disappeared around a corner of the stage, only to appear again a few minutes later pulling the curtains aside. He disappeared once more, and the lights in the small theatre dimmed. A series of spotlights trained on the stage flashed on simultaneously. The bartender emerged from somewhere behind them and sat down. "I must explain," he said. He thought for a moment. "How do I say this?" he mused aloud. "Okay. Grenada is a small country, no?" He looked to them for an answer.

Puzzled, the four of them nodded.

"Our college does not have...the equipment of your colleges, no?"

Bernard frowned. "What's the point?"

"After the invasion, the medical students have enough bodies to practice on. There are plenty of dead." He smiled, and in the refracted light his face took on an almost fiendish cast. "But since then they have to go back to their old ways."

Yard felt a tingle of fear at the base of his spine. "Their old ways?"

"Not many people die in Gre-

nada. Not enough for the medical students. So they have to practice on live people. They learn from people like me." He pointed to his scar, his finger tracing its path upward to the empty socket.

Phyllis gasped.

The bartender smiled at her. "I am one of the lucky ones. The others—" his single eye moved from Phyllis to Yard to Cristine to Bernard "—they get to be in the show."

As the four of them sat unmoving in shocked silence, the bartender stood up. He clapped his hands loudly twice. "Sancho!" he called. "Sancho!"

A man with no arms and only one leg hopped, with one great leap, into the center of the stage. He twirled, ballerina-like, on his single limb.

The bartender turned toward them. "Sancho es new." He paused. "HalCritch sold him to me last week."

Cristine let out a small cry, and Bernard started to say something.

The bartender held up his hand, silencing them. "Sancho already lose his

leg," he said. "HalCritch try to save his arms, but he could not. Es okay. the audience seem to like Sancho. They are getting tired of the old people, anyway." He clapped his hands again. "Maria!"

A short woman came running out on spindly legs. She was no more than three feet tall. In the glare of the spotlight, they could see clearly that she had no breasts. Her face and arms were horribly scarred.

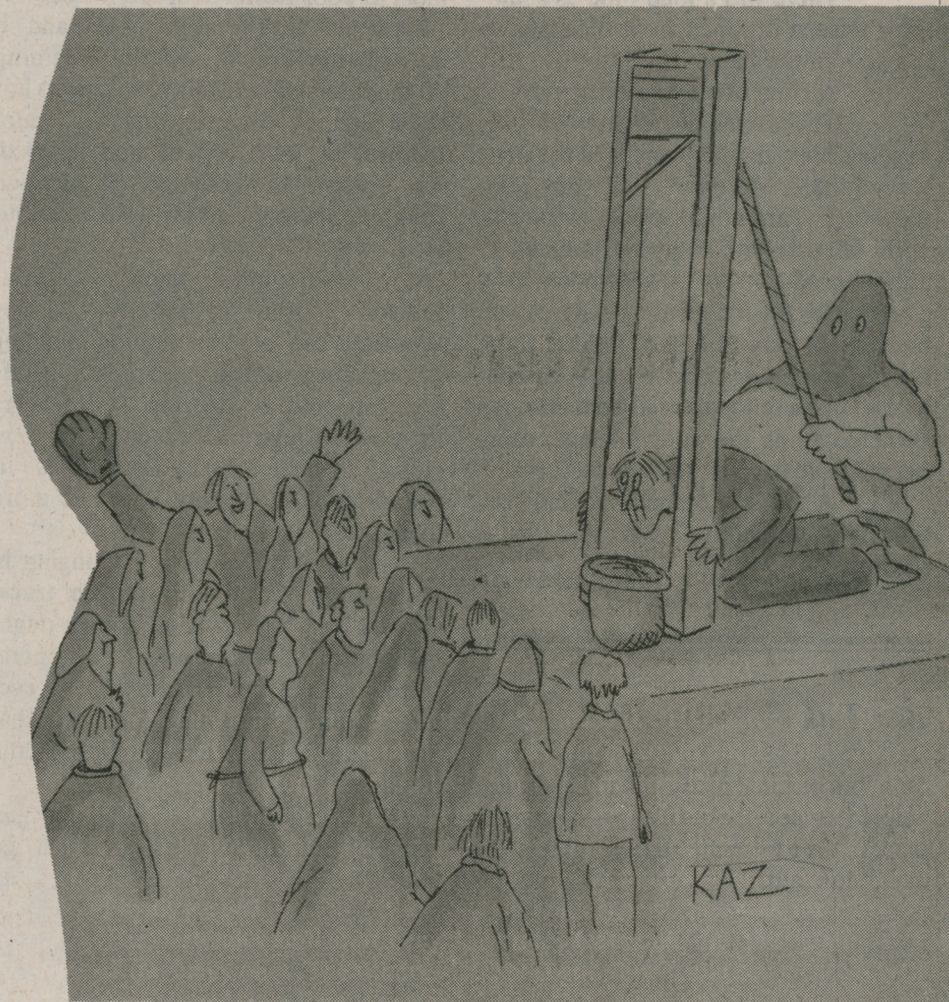
"Maria es different," the bartender said. "She is fine until DanStevens has to study muscles." His voice grew harsh. "He uses her to study, then sells her to me."

Yard was afraid to rebut the man.

"Now she has no place to go but the show. The show es now her home." He looked hard at all of them. "Of course, these are nothing compared to the experiments."

"The experiments," Phyllis stammered.

The bartender smiled, and there was now a definite tinge of malice in his



features. "The experiments medical students do for fun. Sometimes they take different parts of the body and switch them around. Sometimes they switch around different bodies. Sometimes..." His voice trailed off.

"Now listen—" Bernard began.

The bartender moved abruptly toward the stairway. "Enjoy the show," he said. He clapped his hands three times and slammed the door behind him. There was a loud click as the door was locked.

Yard stared up at the stage. They were coming out now.

All of them.

The experiments as well.

Some of the disfigured people were dressed in outlandish costumes. Others held stupid props. But none of them did their regular show routines. Instead, they stared out across the empty front rows to where the four of them sat. Their scarred faces were filled with open hostility.

Bernard stood up. "That's it," he said. "Let's get out of here."

There was a loud thud as something unseen dropped from the stage to the floor of the theatre.

All four of them stood up, scared.

The cast members were crawling, wiggling, hopping and jumping of the stage toward them. More were emerging from the wings. Yard could see an extraordinarily tall man with inappropriately short arms approaching them, accompanied by a hideously twisted creature with cloven hooves and clawed hands. Behind these two, an armless, legless woman with what looked like a tail grafted to her abdomen slithered along the wooden stage, using her chin and head to pull herself forward.

A monkey leaped suddenly before them, and both Cristine and Phyllis screamed.

(cont. on page 65)

Bar Talk . . .

Talk," an original piece sold to *Espionage* before it folded, is one of Lansdale's older pieces. "One from my *Twilight Zone*-style days," Joe said.

Old Hacker . . .

hollow.

As far as I know, the thing never returned to the dilapidated shack beside Silver Creek again . . . and neither did I.

I mostly keep to myself these days, preferring not to involve myself in other people's affairs. Every now and then I can't help it, though, especially where the old man's childhood buddies are concerned. Lately there's been a lot of talk going around about them and the grisly death of Jess Hedgecomb. Whenever some busybody asks me about those last days with Old Hacker, I politely tell them to mind their own damned business.

Lester Wills died the other day over in McMinnville. There was a big ruckus in the newspaper about it. Seems that a wild animal got into the nursing home somehow and tore out most of poor Lester's throat. Of course, I know that ain't what happened and so does Charlie Gooch, the last remaining of the three. Charlie ain't looking so hot these days, either. Every time I see him in town, his face is pale and worried. And when he has one of his bad coughing spells, I turn my head, afraid to look.

Sometimes, when I'm out squirrel hunting in the West Piney Woods, I can hear something crawling through the honeysuckle. Something just a-puffing and a-wheezing as it makes its way through the shadowy hollows along Silver Creek. Sometimes it sounds as though there might be more than one.

My twelve gauge is hanging in the window rack of my pickup truck, cleaned and loaded with double-ought buckshot. I hang around the general store and the courthouse in the evenings, waiting, listening for word that old Charlie has finally kicked the bucket.

And, when I do, I'll take my gun and a pack of hounds, and I'll go hunting.

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But it was not really a monkey. For grafted on the monkey's body was the head of a malformed man.

Yard turned and started to run, but before he could move something grabbed his ankle, sending him sprawling. He felt a tentacle slither up his pant-leg. A reptilian claw pinched the back of his neck. Before his eyes, he saw the broken face of his watch, its black hands pointing to the eleven and the three. Two fifty-five.

Five to midnight, Grenada time.

Behind him, Phyllis screamed.

There was a grunt as Bernard went down. Yard twisted his head to see the slimy red legs of a creature that had once been human.

Then something hit the back of his head and he was out.

When he awoke, his body was screaming. Bolts of intense searing pain were flaring up both his arms. His head felt as though it were run through with hot needles. His mind was on fire with agony, the nerves in his body overloaded with pain.

But his body was the only thing that could scream.

His mouth had been sewn shut.

He could not see, either, and he was sure that he had lost both his eyes. But the pain in his head was so numbingly all-encompassing that his brain could not sort out individual hurts, no matter how intense.

He could hear, though, and he listened, trying to figure out where he was, trying to discover if Phyllis was still alive. He listened, but he heard nothing. Nothing save the pulsing throb of blood in his skull.

Then...

Footsteps.

They came from somewhere and grew louder, louder...

"I guess they were trying to sneak in to rob me." The bartender's voice. "Sorry to call you this late, but when I got there they were on the stage. The show people caught them." The voice came closer. "This one here already lost his hands and eyes. One of them had sewn his mouth shut, and they shaved off all his hair."

"That's fine."

Dan's voice!

Dan!

"He looks bad, all that blood."

The bartender.

"That's okay. His outside doesn't matter to me."

There was a loud thud in his ear and a few seconds later a new dully throbbing pain. He had obviously been thrown onto something. Probably some type of cart.

The bartender's voice was extremely close—too close—and it was filled with a malevolent glee. "Will you sell him back to me when you are through?"

Dan laughed pitilessly. "If he survives."

The bartender chuckled wildly. "What are you going to do to him?"

Yard knew what the answer was going to be before his son spoke, and he wanted to scream. NO! he wanted to shout. NO! DON'T! IT'S ME! DAD!

But his mouth was sewn tightly shut.

"Experiments," Dan said. "What else?"

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ART BY BILLY ROTTEN

BUG TEST

1. What actor played the scientist-turned-insect in the 1958 original of *The Fly*?
a. Vincent Price b. Jeff Goldblum c. Howard Keel
2. When the fly (1958) cried, "Help me! Help me!" he was trapped where:
a. in between a vise-like thigh-grip of the lonely neighbor, Mrs. Krave
c. in a spider's web b. on flypaper
3. Who directed the 1986 remake of *The Fly*?
a. David Cronenberg b. Clive Barker. c. Ma Barker
4. In *Suspiria*, schoolgirls were subjected to a rain of what during dinner?
a. worms b. flies c. maggots
5. South American cockroaches were used in *Creepshow* because:
a. they were easier to train b. they were cheaper c. they worked non-union
6. What word was on the underside of a New York City bus in *The Deadly Mantis*?
a. Midasized b. Tonka c. REDRUM
7. In *Beginning of the End*, giant grasshoppers took over what city?
a. Chicago, IL b. Los Angeles, CA c. Butthole, TX
8. *Mothra* (1962) had all the normal capabilities of a moth, except he could not:
a. fly b. make a cocoon c. wear stripes
9. Women were turned into man-killing bee-creatures in this 1973 film:
a. *Hives* b. *Queen Bee* c. *Invasion of the Bee Girls*
10. In *The Swarm*, Henry Fonda noted that African bee venom smelled like this:
a. pussy b. bananas c. honey
11. Nuclear testing produced what giant insects in *THEM!* (1954)?
a. bees b. ants c. wasps
12. In *Phase IV* (1974), a burst of solar radiation caused ants to become:
a. bitchy b. invisible c. intelligent
13. *Empire of the Ants* contained no nudity, even though it starred Joan Collins, little bloodshed, and laughable effects. This movie was _____ minutes too long.

BUG TEST ANSWERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| 13. I didn't feel like looking. | |
| 12. c | 6. b. |
| 11. b | 5. b. |
| 10. b | 4. c |
| 9. c | 3. a. |
| 8. a | 2. c |
| 7. a | 1. a |

BUTCHER'S BLOCK

"For God's sake, HELP ME!"

In the bedroom of a three-story clapboard house in Queens, New York State, Albert Snyder's pitiful cry for his life came in the early hours of Sunday, March 20, 1927.

His plea was answered by his wife's lover, Judd Gray, who promptly smashed Snyder on the head with a sash weight for the second time.

But Albert desperately clung to life, even after his wife Ruth took her turn with the weight. She then stuffed chloroform-soaked cotton into Albert's mouth and nostrils, then tied her husband's hands and feet and choked him with picture wire until he was dead.

Blood was everywhere.

On May 9, 1927, Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray were found guilty of murdering Albert Snyder. They were both sentenced to die in the electric chair and, within four minutes of each other, perished on January 12, 1928 in Sing Sing Prison. They did, however, have one last rendezvous—when they were laid out side-by-side in the prison's autopsy room on a pair of stone slabs.

In Paris, on the afternoon of April 25, 1792, a red-shirted highwayman named Nicholas-Jacques Pelletier became the first official victim of the guillotine.

Pelletier was led to the scaffold and made to kneel beneath the instrument and before the executioner of High Works, Charles-Henri Sanson. Before a crowd of thousands, Sanson proceeded with the decapitation. Pelletier's head plopped like a rotten apple into the bucket placed before him; his body dropped into a coffin-sized basket near by.

Dr. Guillotin himself was pleased with the effectiveness and humaneness of the device. "The victim

"She then stuffed chloroform-soaked cotton into Albert's mouth and nostrils, then tied her husband's hands and feet and choked him with picture wire until he was dead."

does not suffer at all," he said. "The subject is conscious of nothing more than a slight chill on his neck."

But despite Guillotin's belief in the "speed and mercy" of the instrument, other medical men had their doubts, even as early as the 18th century. One doctor wrote that "the severed head still retains the faculty of feeling and thinking during several seconds." Two French doctors stated that "death is not instantaneous... Every vital element survives decapitation... It is a savage vivisection followed by a premature burial."

Though the instrument of death, the guillotine, was named after Dr. Guillotin, he did not invent it, nor was he the first to advocate its use. Both those honors go to the Persians at an earlier date.

On the morning of May 23, 1934, six police officers waited in the bushes by the side of the road eight miles from Gibsland, Louisiana. Shortly after nine o'clock, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow appeared in a Ford V-8 sedan. The police opened up, firing a quick 167 shots in all. Bonnie and Clyde died almost instantly. Said one of the policemen: "We just shot the hell out of them, that's all... they were just a smear of wet rags."

The myths of Bonnie and Clyde portrayed them as underdogs and social

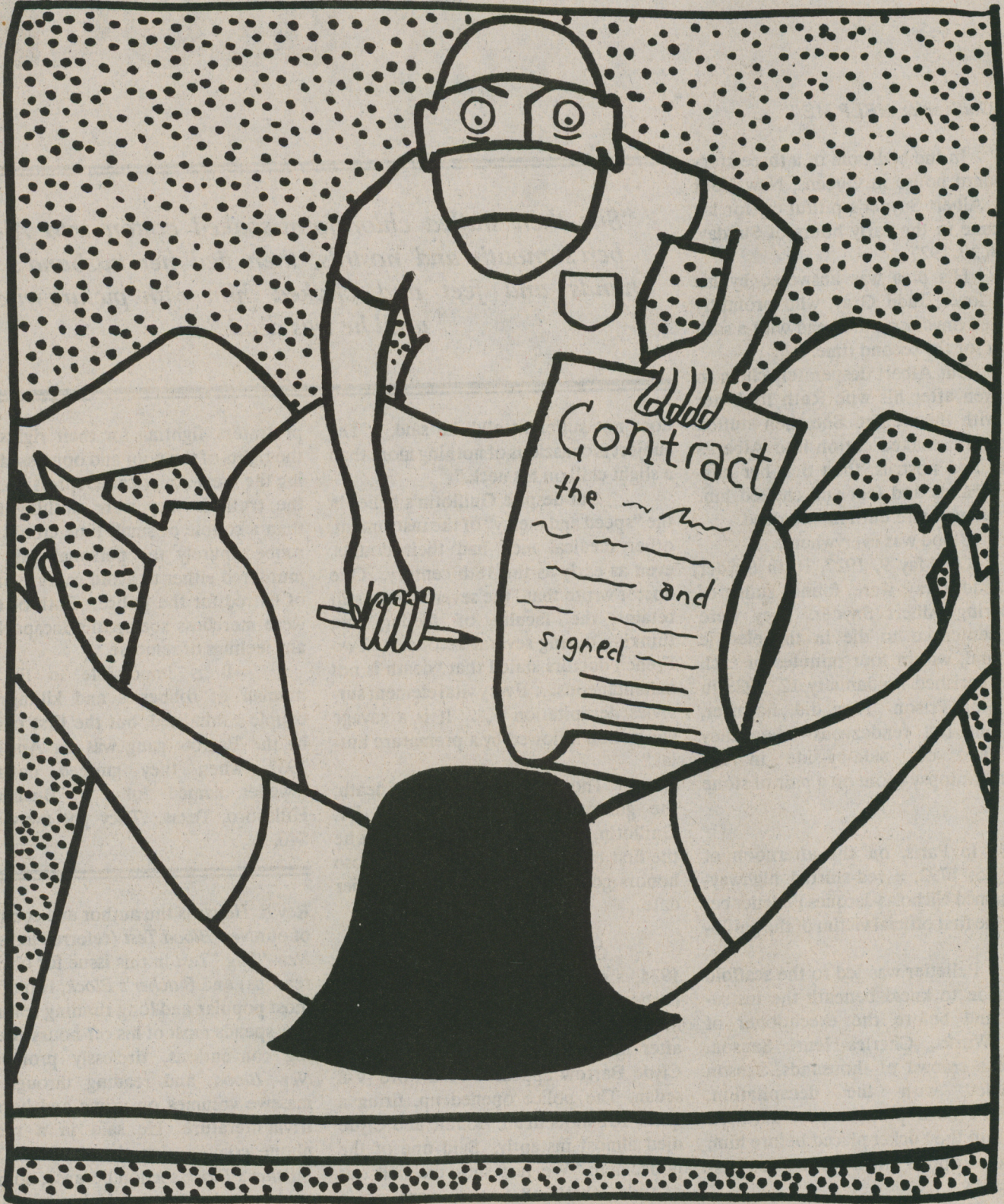
protesters, fighting for their rights and the rights of the poor and oppressed during the great American Depression. But the truth is they were nothing more than a couple of small time crooks who robbed purely for personal gain and murdered either to avoid capture or out of hatred for the police. Both of them were merciless sociopaths incapable of any feelings of remorse.

It is impossible to list the number of robberies and killings the couple committed, but the first murder by the Barrow gang was on April 17, 1932, when they gunned down a jeweller named John V. Bucher in Hillsboro, Texas. They got away with \$40.

Ray R. House is the author and compiler of our *New Blood Test* (referred to as the *New "Bug" Test* in this issue for obvious reasons) and *Butcher's Block*, two of our most popular and long running features. Ray spends most of his off-hours attending conventions, tirelessly promoting *New Blood*, and reading through his massive volumes on crime and horror-trivia/literature. He said in a recent phone conversation that he "likes the *Butcher's Block* section because, no matter how twisted and sick things may get in the magazine, nothing can hold a candle to real-life brutality." Jeez, nice thought, Ray.

A Knock Off

ira hirsh



He says he wont come out until you sign this agreement.

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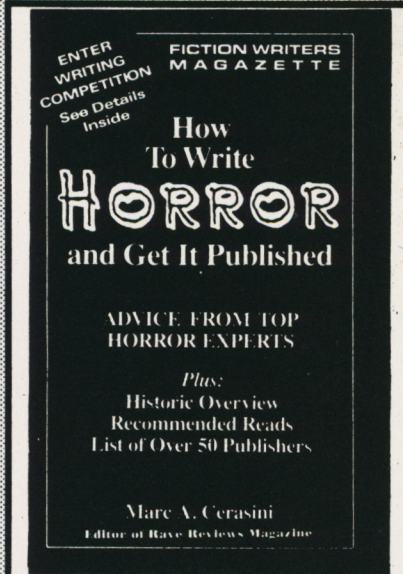
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