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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

#15

Genre junkies love to argue about points. Like, for instance, whether fantasy and science fiction are compatible, or whether horror and sci-fi can be legitimately cross-pollinated. What a colossal waste of time. I've gone on about the genre wars in this column before, and I'm not going to rehash old points; it's enough to say that both horror and sci-fi often use elements of fantasy (for horror, the supernatural, for sci-fi, everything that's not a reality). And science fiction and horror have not traditionally existed independently of one another.

In fact, you'd have to be willing to forego a lot of history if you're of the opinion that horror and science fiction are somehow incompatible. You'd have to overlook, for example, horror's second great Hollywood boom, namely, the invasion films of the 1950s: movies like *The Thing*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *It Came From Outer Space*, *Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers* and *War of the Worlds*. Although these films incorporated science fiction motifs, they were horror all the way; they represented the paranoia of the McCarthy era, not the genuine speculations about the nature of visitors from outer space. In other words, they were about fear.

A much more direct link between science fiction and horror was made with the arrival of cyberpunk in the late 1970s, particularly in the work of Philip K. Dick. His novels, *A Scanner Darkly*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *We Can Build It* were unique in their portrayal of the possible future as a dark, unhappy place. Gone were the utopian dreams of the future; the blonde-haired, blue-eyed perfect people who ate exotic meals in a pill and roamed the skies in their boozering space-ships. Dick's world was the flipside; a dystopic dream of gritty realism, imperfect machines, urban blight, incessant rainfall and robots with identity problems. At its heart was a much more personal, much more penetrating kind of paranoia, and so we had the issue of fear — we large this time — in the cosmopolitan nightmare that Dick dared to call our home.

Dick's vision became the new science fiction once it was elaborated by William Gibson and adapted for the screen by Ridley Scott, whose movie *Alien* remains the perfect specimen of science fiction horror to date. One of Scott's breakthroughs (and there are many in his film) was the introduction of traditional horror motifs — a monster marauding around and bringing crew members to messy ends — into Dick's cyberpunk world. Here, more than ever, the collective paranoia of Dick's universe was given a tangible focus in the story in the utterly inhuman, reptilian creature that preyed on human flesh.

Science fiction would never be the same.

Nevertheless, things have changed a lot since those days. Though cyberpunk left an indelible mark on the genre, eventually science fiction returned to contemplating the less optimistic — but still comfortable — space fantasies of speculation and adventure. And so it came to pass that, fuelled by the bloodless, antiseptic visions of the *Trekker* generation and even a firmly values *RoboCop*, the old argument was revisited: can horror and science fiction be legitimately mixed?

For those who know better, it has always been that way.

-RG

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RUE MORGUE

MAGAZINE

HORROR IN FILM, TV & ENTERTAINMENT

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RUE MORGUE #15 would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of

RODNEY BODA,

BRAUN EATERS FONTS,

GREG FIZZARD, AL MCVILLAN,

DAVID B. SILVA, RAONA STAMM LER.

Cover RoboCop: Peter Dinklage

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RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE #15

ISSN 1481-8103

Agreement No. 1259408

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Bob Gudeno - 2000

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PRINTED IN CANADA

POST MORTEM

QUESTIONS · COMMENTS · CRITICISM

Trees

Thank you so much for sending the wonderful issue of *Rue Morgue* with the *Troma 25th Anniversary* cover story! *Tree*, Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D. and *The Troma Team* all enjoyed reading it. My mother is finally proud of me. Now she no longer refers to me as her "little mistake." Thank you Rod for being such a brilliant writer. Hope to take you for a nice lunch in TromaVille one of these days.

Very Truly,
Lloyd Kaufman
President
Troma Entertainment, Inc.

The Galliping Genre-mat

I love the new column featuring the *Gore-Mat*, and his menu of the miscible. It's high time horror fans get a dose of REAL horror, not the teeny Hollywood slashers featuring TV's hottest teen idols. People tend to forget that this is what horror is all about - raw, in-your-face blood 'n' guts mayhem! Yes, these films are low-budget, often dubbed and may not be shot on 35mm, but that's what makes em' so great! So put aside your prejudices, straddle towards film formats and production values, grab a beer, and throw *Dr. Butcher M.D.* in the VCR. You won't be disappointed!

My only bitch is that the column is only one page, hopefully that will change in the near future. *Gore-Mat*, you rock ass!

Rob Kramann
Brooklyn, Ontario

John Brown, Somebody Loves You After All

A review from *Rue Morgue* of my feature *Messed Avenger Vs. Ultra-Villain* is the Lar of the *Wicked Bitch*! was recently sent to me. I read it with great amusement and appreciation. It made me so happy that someone had actually understood the film and what I was trying to do with it. I wish you all the very best with your magazine and future endeavors.

Regards,
Mark Savage
Australia



R.I.P.

Issue #14 March/April 2000

Fill My Mailbox!

Hi! This is my first time writing. I bought your magazine three weeks ago and it gets a five star rating from me. I love it! My name is Cindy, but my nickname is "Bubba Girl". I am 40 years old and love horror movies. I remember as a child I would watch *Monster Movie Mithras*. I have never lost interest in horror movies. I'll be 90 years old and bring dust and still be watching my #1 movies.

I would love to correspond with open-minded people who believe in the unknown and love horror movies. Lifelong friendships! I hope you will print my letter. Fill my mailbox!

Thankyou,
Cindy "Bubba Girl" Smith
4 Serpentine Lane
Kingston, Ontario K4L 4W1 Canada

The Final Outrage

Rue Morgue is the next best thing since bread. All ass-kissing aside, there is a major disturbance within the force. Southern Ontario has been forced into censorship again and it's not pretty.

Final Destination was cut from an R-rating to a 14 AA only after one week of the R showing. I

thought the reason would be that they (the corporate pigs) found the film disturbing. On the contrary, they cut it to make more money! So what they are saying is as adults are being basically date raped out of our rights just so the little leazy bopping Screen lens can see the movie and snail out the movie! This is a tragedy. Beyond that, *Final Destination* is a great movie, I was able to catch the uncensored version, and it was the most fun I had watching a movie since *Re-animator*. For more news on the *Final Destination* cut check out www.augonline.com/movies/sh014horror/index.html

Sincerely
Phil Wepel
Somewhere in Southern Ontario



A Valentine From ZombGhoul!

Greetings from the Gothic Palace. Tears of blood will flow as streams. That's what the Gypsy told me when I asked her if I would ever find true love. So what do you think? Tears of blood probably aren't good huh? Oh well, I still have my *Rue Morgue* to keep me company and fill my wants and needs. Most of them anyway. It's not that I don't find *Rue* sexually attractive. I do, I do. That last paper cut almost didn't tear. What am I supposed to do? Go out and dig up a girlfriend? I pledge my heart and soul to *Rue Morgue*, and I'll love no other 'till next time. may your tears never turn to blood.

Sincerely,
ZombGhoul

LETTERS POLICY

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to light@rue-morgue.com or POST MORTEM c/o Rue Morgue Magazine, 1944 St. Clair Avenue West, 2nd Floor, Toronto ON M6H 1B6 - CANADA.

NEEDFUL THINGS

what you want, what you get, what you want, what you get



THE DRACULA TOUR OF TERROR \$1,595

There's a wrong way to do Transylvania, and a right way. The wrong way you and your folks, sporting Bermuda shorts and plaid shirts and wearing your costumes around. Stay dressed. Please. Okay, now the right way. The Dracula Tour of Terror, an exclusive one week (Oct 28 - Nov 3) which follows the footsteps of Jonathan Harker through the picturesque Carpathian mountains into Vlad a Castle and beyond.

On the itinerary, a sunrise in a secluded graveyard in Brasov, a visit to the Clock Tower and Square History Picture Museum, as well as the Black Church and the haunted Farmer's Market in Sighisoara (the birthplace of Vlad Dracul himself). Core conspirators will revel at the trip's high point, a trek through Borgo Pass for a Mississippi Ball night in Dracula's castle! Unbelievably this seven day trip doesn't end here. The group then explores the Snagov Monastery (home of Dracula) and the Transylvanian Castle of Brno, a fortress built in 1377 and preserved as a national monument. In between, there are bonfires, neck with this, clanking, cauzzing and even a few surprises.

Honestly, The Dracula Tour of Terror will run you about the price of a mid-range Caribbean vacation. \$1,595 USD. Although we haven't personally sampled it, we can tell you that there's lots of good press from participants of the two previous tours in 1998 and 1999. Anyone with a morbid appreciation for the sublime, a touch of lunaticism, and a sense of humour will likely enjoy this ghoulish getaway that is, if you manage to stay clear of those damned Transylvanian vampires.

More info: www.laurenstvents.com/DraculaTour.html

THE SWORD OF THE DAY WALKER \$159.95

God knows there are enough people wandering around who think they're vampires. So why not go the other route and be a vampire slayer? And you can forget about wooden stakes and those gaffic thanks to the Sword of the Day Walker, those nights are long gone baby! The sword is a 1:1 scale replica of the one used by vampire slayer Buffy Summers in the movie Blade. Designed directly from the actual studio sword, this blade measures over 30 inches in length and is made of polished 420 stainless steel with a full metal handle. The specialty item retails at US \$199.95 (plus \$8 S&H) and comes with its own black, knurled wooden display stand. Order direct from Factory X at: www.factory-x.com or by phone at 610-454-7910



SLEEPY HOLLOW PREMIUM TRADING CARDS \$1.99/pack

Sleepy Hollow, yeah, that was life's stuff alright. And trading cards are for kids too. If you're a kid or kid at heart, you may dig this glossy set of ninety cards featuring stills and stills from the film, including the main characters with profiles, and gory scenes with special effects notes. The cards are glossy and professional, but not perfect, I landed a few that looked kinda fuzzy. Hardcore fans may still want to scold these out though, a typical eight card pack (US \$1.99) may include one of nine etched foil cards, one of six metallic mini-lobby poster cards designed in classic horror film style, or a Colonial scandal sheet with a story about the murders. Info: info@wotw.com

TAARHA WITH ROBE \$119

No surprise that Merry Black has been using this hot naked chick as their poster child for who knows how many years now. This US scale sex'n' model kit is immaculately detailed, whether you get Taarha with(ju) her robe or in a suit of armour with five pets, it's pretty easy to piece together, but bringing her to fanily life is another story; model hungry types need only apply.

Info: www.monsteraction.com
Speaking of Heavy Metal, the franchise is celebrating some anniversary or another (maybe they're just glad they made it to 2000). We've got a bunch of CDs to throw at you. Got a mailing address? Send it through to info@mer-movie.com, first fifteen get the price.



MONSTER SHOT GLASSES \$19.99/each

That's right, Frankenstein, the Wolf Man, The Mummy and Dracula have got their mug etched in these cool sunglasses. Each decorative shot glass has a hand-painted finish, set on the bottom of each base and stands 2 1/2" tall. We into beer more but couldn't resist the idea. Ultra cool! Order directly from 810-475-1096



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BLOOD, BULLETS & STEEL

BY
BRAD ABRAHAM
& JOSEPH O'BRIEN

ROBOCOP RETURNS TO THE SCREEN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEARLY A DECADE, BUT IT WAS NO EASY TASK FOR ITS SCREENWRITERS TO DO JUSTICE TO A CHARACTER BEATEN DOWN BY FAMILY VALUES AND PC WHITEWASH.

SO THEY GOT BACK TO BASICS... AND KILLED SEVENTY PEOPLE IN AN HOUR.

Julian Giez has a philosophy he shares with fellow Canadian filmmaker James Cameron: "Less isn't more... MORE is more!"

It's not enough that, at 6'2", he towers over the rest of his crew; it's not enough that his wild mane of grey-black hair gives him a quasi-primeval, threatening appearance; it's not enough that he suffers from what some might term an "excess of personality." Julian is ALL of those things. He's also the only filmmaker who could have pulled *RoboCop: Prime Directive* off.

\$15 million doesn't buy you a lot of movie these days, and it buys you considerably less when you're making an eight-hour, four-part miniseries top-heavy with stunts, pyrotechnics and special effects. But this is a Julian Giez show, there isn't a moment of *RoboCop: Prime Directive* that isn't more than we even put in the script. More blood, more violence, more explosions. We want "A

bottle costume. A squad of soldiers are wiped out." The Julian version, severed limbs, crushed skulls, blood-spattering straps and, in at least one memorable instance, a Goldfinger-style vertical laser insertion that turns one unfortunate character into a (heavily) living anatomical cross-section. TV-MA. Parents strongly cautioned.

Our involvement with the much-maligned cyborg began about the same time as our association with *The Mergers*. The 30-day, \$6-plus movie marathon/half-century experience that was the 1998 Toronto Fest/Asia Festival (see KMFJ) was in full swing. We were both there for the fun of it, pushing the limits of sleep deprivation, struggling with yet another rewrite on our suburban cannibal script *Hot For Breakfast* and mixing up lots of Babes-style gore and HK-style action (which clearly influenced what was to come—*Prime Directive* is loaded with both) in the interim. Our partner was the aforementioned Julian Giez, a prolific B-flick producer/director whom Joe had known for a few years working in the city's tight-knit low-budget filmmaking community.

On a break from the film grind, Julian was programming Fest/Asia while we hawked sexual robots (PLOT DOES MATTER), made trouble in the lobby (thanks to a misapprehended paraphrase) and saw so much kung-fu, exploitation and horror that it eventually blended into one long movie starring Bruce Lee, Christopher Lee and Jet Li.

In the midst of this mayhem, Julian had been approached by Foxworks Entertainment (the folks behind the *La Femme Nikita* series) to resurrect a once-great SF/horror hero who had met his ultimate foe in the form of '90s political correctness and "family values."
—R.D.D.C.O.P.



Robot of Death: John Cullis (Alonso Durruti West) at the mercy of some Robo versus Bone Machine.

"RoboCop?" you say, your mind reeling from the film-yet-still-painful memory of *RoboCop 2* & 3 as, God help you, the "audience-friendly" miniseries that was *RoboCop: The Series*. "Who gives a shit about RoboCop?"

Not that we could blame you, truth be told, we had a similar reaction when Julian asked if we'd be interested in writing the script for a television miniseries that would represent the cyborg's first new screen appearance in five years. *RoboCop? For TV? Blech!*

But Julian's enthusiasm is infectious. And besides, we never say no to work.

Fire in the Sky: Director John Giez's crew "have it warm" in action.

ROBOCOP RECAP

ROBOCOP (1987) was the story of Officer Alex Murphy (Peter Weller), who was slain in the line of duty only to be resurrected as a Cyborg crime fighter by an all-powerful corporation. One of the finest action/science fiction films of the 1980's, *RoboCop* was a monster success, dictating the need for...

ROBOCOP 2 (1990) brought the crime fighter back for more, this time facing off against a crazed drug czar named Cain (Mantel's Tom Noonan), and a replacement cyborg, with the original name *RoboCop 2*. While upping the gore quotient, a screenplay by the great Frank Miller (*Sin City*) and sterling work from Phil Tippett (*Starship Troopers*), the sequel failed to capture what made *RoboCop* so special – Alex Murphy himself, the man in the machine. Undaunted, the makers went back to the well again for

ROBOCOP 3 (1993) found *RoboCop* on the other side of the law, protecting displaced citizens from the evil OCP and a robotic ninja. This PG-13 film alienated the characters' hardcore fans, destroyed at the lack of hard-edged gore that the series was known for. Just when they thought it couldn't get any worse.

ROBOCOP: THE SERIES (1994-1995) represented the low point for the character in the eyes of many fans. Armed at a TV-friendly audience (i.e. children), the series refrained from showing any gore or violence. In its single season, *RoboCop* didn't kill anyone ANYONE.

ROBOCOP: PRIME DIRECTIVES (2000) marks Murphy's return to the small screen, an eight-hour miniseries aimed at adults and hoping to recapture the edge of the original film. The verdict will be decided when it debuts in the fall.



Two Gun Kif Hong Kong and Spaghetti western influences abound in *Prime Directives*.

And there was, like a beacon in the back of both our minds, the shining memory of Paul Verhoeven's high-perfect 1987 original film – darkly comic where the sequels had been merely cheeky, emotionally engaging where the TV show had been a conglomeration of cliché. The thrill we still got to this day when Peter Weller tamed to Dan O'Hanrahy at the conclusion, "Nice shooter" son "What's your name?" There was that hint of a smile, a symbol of his lost humanity regained, and then simply, "Mugby!" Audiences used to cheer that moment. Coward men would weep.

RoboCop was cool... once. Maybe, just maybe, he could be again.

"Can we make it like the first one?" we asked "Only... never?"

"More," said Julian with a smile. "Lots more."

The possibility of failure in such a momentous task was a constant fear. Let's face it, if Frank (Sin City) Miller, Wilson (The Wild Bunch) Green, Irvin (The Empire Strikes Back) Kershner and Fred (Night of the Creeps) Dekker couldn't pull it off, what hope did we possibly have? Radical re-examination was required, what made *RoboCop* so successful in his first incarnation? What made him fail so miserably the second, third and fourth? We discovered that the answer

to both questions was exactly the same thing.

RoboCop is essentially a satirical film dressed up in genre garb. Edward Neumeier and Michael Minar's script is a vicious pastiche of the ultra-capitalist, slow-witted mentality that dominated Reagan-era America (and, by default, the rest of the world). Verhoeven's film, informed by the Dutch director's wonderfully perverse and subversive sensibilities, took those ideas even farther.

The sequels followed that model a little too well. Many of their humorous stunts would have been fine gags in 1987, but were only works if it has contemporary relevance. By the time *RoboCop: The Series* came about in 1994, the world had changed. *RoboCop* had not. And people tuned out.

In addition, the film sequels had been made by Americans for Americans, and as such lacked that all-important outsider perspective on the USA that Verhoeven brought to the table (did we mention Julian's from the UK, and we're Canadian?).

We knew that our first action would have to be to get some distance, promptly and creatively, from earlier attempts. Given the increasingly poor reception that had met the Cyborg Formerly Known As Alex Murphy with each successive incarnation, we had an obvious desire to disassociate our project

“Radical re-examination was required; what made Robo so successful in his first incarnation? What made him fail so miserably the second, third and fourth?”

“If nothing else, the story *RoboCop* reminded us of more than any other is Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*. A man cobbled together from ‘spare’ parts and re-animated through science is reborn.”

from them as much as possible.

Our solution was to simply return to the source – the original film – and proceed from there. We deliberately set the action of *PD* a decade after *RoboCop*’s creation, partially to wipe the slate clean—sty-wise, but also because, here in the real world, a similar span of time had passed. It also gave us room to maneuver in terms of bringing in new characters and recreating the world they inhabited without feeling like we were treading on old ground.

We created a past for Alex Murphy, barely touched upon in other versions, allowing us (via flashbacks) to revisit the man before his death and subsequent resurrection. This was both a story-driven decision – one of the themes of *PD* is the way that actions in your past can come back to bite you on the ass when you

least expect it – and a practical one. The likelihood that Peter Weller would be willing to step back into the 55 lbs. *RoboCop* at this stage of his career was remote at best. We not only had to comb through a new actor in the role, we had to make the audience accept him as the definitive Alex Murphy, not merely a Weller substitute. Seeing him for extended screen-time as a real human being, not just *Guy-in-A-Suit*, would go a long way toward that.

If nothing else, the story *RoboCop* reminded us of more than any other is Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*. A man cobbled



SPLATTER MATTER

Shooting genre scripts for nighttime television has always been a solvent sport, but you gotta give it to Julian Grant for attempting the well-nigh-impossible to put a splatter punk test on a appealing 266-minute sci-fi epic. Helming *RoboCop*, Prime Director has been Grant's main task for the past half year: the results which will go a long way to putting the colour back in TV onto the show platform. The bid (on Space TV in Canada and yet to be announced in the US).

"I never felt that I wouldn't get a chance to work in the genre given today's political climate," Grant told Rue Morgue. "But the executives over at First-Week Entertainment have been great. They said the bloodier the better, go full balls out and did it. A few days ago we went through 3000 rounds of ammunition eight gallons of blood, 450 square inches of blood spitting, faces being smashed in with sledgehammers. I mean, this is not your father's *RoboCop*, it's a lean, mean killing machine."

Having directed a number of blood-drenched dramas (Cripes, see *RM98* and the upcoming *Dargard*), Grant hopes that *RoboCop*. Prime Director will bring the pendulum back from the graphic image that science fiction has generated over the past decade.

"The gutter is such a seminal element in film when you look at the design element in play there," he notes. " Ridley Scott created a world that was usable that was functional, it was wet, it was decayed, it was nasty, yet it was still far flung into the future. Our world is not so much futuristic as it is one step to the left and that's kind of groovy for me because the world that we're parlaying here can actually exist, zapping genes, urban night soil infighting among radical science politicians, neuro-ethology and the mind control shit that we come up with — all that is based on fact. What we are trying to do is make it applicable as a modern day popular western and of course have a lot of fun doing so at the same time." **E**

—Rod Godwin



Splatter Man Julian Grant with director of photography Gerald 'Rusa' Goosie



Point Made: *RoboCop's* return will be marked by the violence that once made him great.

blat together from "spare" parts and re-engineered through science is reborn. He faces the question: why was I brought back? What purpose is there in giving me a second chance? These were the questions Alex Murphy asked himself in *RoboCop*. In *Prime Director's*, our quest was to supply him with answers.

We were incredibly fortunate that Julian cast Page Fletcher. Page is a veteran actor, probably best remembered as the eponymous host of *The Hitchhiker*, and he's got real strength and presence. He took the role completely seriously, and imbued the character with an incredible humanity and dignity in both human and cyborg form.

By complete coincidence, the first time we met Page was also the first time we met *RoboCop*. We came upon him during his very first suit fitting — We walked in just as Brian's suit handler was slipping the helmet on. He turned around, walked up to shake our hands and — as character — said "Pleased to meet you. Have a nice day."

RoboCop is cool.

We wrote the crucial role of John T. Cable, Murphy's former partner, with Maurice Dean Wain in mind. Maurice, best known for his psychotic turn in *Cable* (*RM98*), jumped at the chance to portray the duality of the character — the world-weary, all-too-human police officer in *Dark Justice*, and his transformation into *RoboCop's* steely nemesis, a more streamlined, denser cyborg whose provenance until in *2-Meltdowns*.

Like Page, Maurice was required to don full *RoboCop*, courtesy Academy Award winning Ft. Bergras's Rob's Betts, (who subtly upgraded and streamlined his original *RoboCop* design for *Prime Director's*). While undeniably cool to look at, both suits are torture devices worthy of Torquemada,

with each piece individually bolted in place by a team of handies, and both actors spent over 60 of *PD's* 85 shooting days locked inside them. In the run in the winter in Canada. We grew concerned Maurice might not be as keen at our suggestion. Fortunately, in addition to being extraordinarily talented, Maurice is also a really nice guy.

PD's real on-set coop came with the arrival of Genant Wyn-Devis (Former *Knight*) as Kaylock, a marauder villain well-tuned to Ger's predilection for OTT theories (as he describes it, "taking the 'B' out of 'subtle'"). But our big thrill was hanging with Francine Yip, who had fought *Ki Li* in *Blood Meat* and Jackie Chan in *Awful in the Bronx*, who makes a brief but memorable performance as a cybernetically-enhanced necessary in *PD*. Francine is graceful and charming and could seamlessly look both our ways. Francine is cool.

It's worth mentioning that the one thing Julian doesn't have an excess of is ego, on his best days and his worst, he never veered from the concept of Team Robo — we were all in this together. True to his word, we were given unprecedented access to *Prime Director's* production — a rarity in an industry where screenwriters typically get low respect than parking attendants. The sheer joy of watching an army of technicians, craftspersons and artists show up every day for the explicit purpose of transforming our mere words into cinematic reality is almost indescribable. Also, there are free catered lunches. Free catered lunch is cool.

What does the future hold for *RoboCop*? Only time — and the audience response when *Prime Director* hits the screens that will tell. Are there more adventures out there for Alex Murphy?

More. Lots more. **E**

Fear and Trembling

In an era when rationalism reigned supreme, Danish philosopher SOREN KIERKEGAARD was contemplating ideas that would haunt humanity for the next hundred years.

by Rod Gudio



When people look to honor's greatest thinkers, it's unlikely they'll think of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. How could they? Kierkegaard lived in seclusion for most of his life, he devoted all of his energies to the study of philosophy and the Bible. And yet, from those readings and his own esoteric thought, Kierkegaard managed to pen the first inspirational lines of one of the darkest chapters in the history of thought.

Soren Aabye Kierkegaard lived in a time when his fellow countrymen were not sympathetic to his ideas. Neither the Christian right, who shared his faith, nor the political left, who shared his views on liberty, wanted anything to do with him. Posthumously, he was branded an intellectual hero by people who rejected his religious views.

Born in 1813 and a full-time writer by 1841, Kierkegaard was the last of a dying breed, he philosophized about Christian ideas and doctrines at a time when those ideas were coming under scrutiny by the European intellectual community. Nevertheless, he found a common man in the writings of the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel, who had deconstructed the technical language of philosophy to fit his own revolutionary concepts and ideas. Kierkegaard followed suit, only his vocabulary of choice was infinitely darker, his words — "despair," "leap," "dread," "horror" and "absurdity," were uncommon to say the least. That these terms would eventually become lexicons in the later philosophical thought of 20th century existentialism was something that neither he nor his peers ever imagined.

One of Kierkegaard's main writings was a small, 150-page book titled *Fear and Trembling*, which outlined his reflections on the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. In the story, an elderly Abraham is called by God to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, as an offer-

“Kierkegaard seized on the story for what the Bible does not describe; the mental and spiritual anguish which torments Abraham throughout the night and into the morning; the mind-numbing dread that grips him along the trek to the mountain and to the very moment when he raises the knife, ready to plunge it into his son’s exposed chest.”

ing, Abraham dutifully takes his son to a remote place, ties him up on an altar of wood and brandishes the knife with which he plans to carry out the bloody deed. At the last minute, God stops Abraham from committing murder, asking him to sacrifice a goat instead.

Kierkegaard seized on the story for what the Bible does not describe, the mental and spiritual anguish which torments Abraham throughout the night and into the morning, the mind-numbing dread that grips him along the trek to the mountain and to the very moment when he raises the knife, ready to plunge it into his son’s exposed chest. Kierkegaard tried hard to understand what Abraham could have been thinking, and to sympathize with his actions, but he could never comprehend how a father could resolve to murder his own flesh and blood.

Rather than see Abraham as a Biblical hero who dutifully carried out the will of his God, Kierkegaard began to see him as a religious fanatic who had somehow resolved to kill his own son in the name of God. And so, what was a cherished Bible story about a man’s faith before great adversity became, from Kierkegaard’s pen, a story of spiritual dread, what he called “religious horror” since, in his view, Abraham was guilty of the highest moral atrocity.

But Kierkegaard, ever the penetrating thinker, dug deeper. He compared Abraham to classical heroes like Xerxes, Agamemnon and Brutus, all of who shared similar peculiarities, forced as they were to kill their siblings, their children and the head of the state in the name of freedom, victory or peace. Abraham, however, was different, since there was no greater good at stake when he lifted his knife in his desire to follow God’s inexplicable will. For Abraham, there was only a voice in the darkness urging him to murder his own son. Abraham, Kierkegaard concluded, was incomprehensible and abhorrent, major words for the patriarch of Judaism and Christianity!

Strangely, the young thinker drew from his confusion to articulate a different, yet strangely chilling version of events. Kierkegaard ultimately rescued Abraham from being branded a finished killer, he

explained that while Abraham walked outside of the boundaries of accepted morality, he could only do so out of faith. The reason Abraham’s actions could not be explained was because faith cannot be explained through moral categories. This is why Abraham’s faith can only elicit “fear and trembling,” because faith – real faith – involves a “monstrous paradox” in that it can only be explained as an irrational, absurd act.

Not surprisingly, Kierkegaard’s writings on the story of Abraham were largely explained by his Protestant peers, as were his subsequent writings on the spiritual life of a Christian. But that didn’t stop him from giving voice to his unwelcome ideas. In a later book, *Sickness into Death*, Kierkegaard went on to describe how sickness amounts to a state of spiritual despair. This despair, he suggested, is a final “melancholia” with varying levels of severity; at its worst, it is a kind of conscious egoism, a state he called “demonic.” Later still, in *The Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard outlined his idea that dread is a vital principle of human experience.

While these and other writings fell on deaf ears in the parish, they were read by later philosophers, who became fascinated with Kierkegaard’s thoughts on absurdity and spiritual anxiety, and took up his then-progressive habit of identifying himself in his writings. Philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Jaspers and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others, went on to elaborate Kierkegaard’s ideas on irrationality and existential fear. Strangely, they did not comment much on the Danish philosopher’s ideas on his beloved God, whom Nietzsche declared dead at the end of the 1800s.

The resulting buzz of anxiety around Kierkegaard’s writings impacted much of the art and thought that came out of the first half of the 20th century. Kierkegaard’s intensely argued ideas on humanity’s percep-



THE DANISH PHILOSOPHER SØREN KIERKEGAARD FEAR AND TREMBLING



Greed, Despair, Absurdity
Kierkegaard’s unusual ideas made him the unlikely forerunner of modern existentialism

ual state of anxiety were a breeding ground for an entire artistic movement that came to redefine art in the same terms, now, psychological, physical and spiritual decay became major concerns.

The tone of Kierkegaard’s writings seeped far and wide, in the disquieting writings of authors like Franz Kafka and Albert Camus, who did much to bring anxiety into modern thought, as well as surrealists like Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, whose dark fantasies found company in the early horror films of the 1940s.

In all of this, however, Kierkegaard continued to be misunderstood. While later thinkers glorified him as the Grandfather of Existentialism, it is a tale that may have misled Kierkegaard to burn his writings, had he known that history would bestow it upon him. However extreme his explanations into spiritual despair became, Kierkegaard always saw himself as a proponent of Christian values and ideals. His profoundly disconcerting concepts, however, were de-Christianized by his admirers, who eventually became convinced of his dire philosophical problems, but not his religious solutions.

Kierkegaard died alone and largely unrecognized in Copenhagen in 1855. To say that he continues to be misunderstood is to state the obvious. His probing ideas continue to fascinate people into the 21st century, but not the God he so longed for to rescue humanity from his excruciating darkness. ■



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It Came From the East!

The Bloody Rise of Japanimation

For the past fifty years, the Japanese have been telling their stories through manga, a unique post-war version of the American comic. Gradually, these strange, elaborate fables evolved into a boom in visual animation. No kids stuff here, Anime has since breached the extremes of modern entertainment and given horror a whole new face.

by Donald Simmons



BIG EYES, BLUE HAIR

A Short History of Anime

The roots of anime stem from the early days of modern Japanese comics, called *shojo*, which flourished in Japan after the Second World War. With two of its main cities reduced to rubble and the fastening sore of physical annihilation still festering in their psyche, aspiring artists turned to manga when they found filmmaking an economic impossibility. Manga was seen as a way to tell their stories the way they wanted them to be told, and they often told them using cinematic techniques in their artwork. Manga volumes, generally printed on cheap news stock to save money, easily ran to hundreds of pages, providing ample room for long, slow close-ups, tracking shots, and other movie tricks that were impossible to reproduce in a standard 22-page American comic.

As Japan prepared, artists began moving into animation mainly inspired, oddly enough, by Americans. Many of the great animators, such as Osamu Tezuka (*Astro Boy*) and Hayao Miyazaki (*Porco Rosso*), acknowledge that their role models were Walt Disney and Max Fleischer. Even the word "anime" comes from the English "animation," but rather than just copy Western styles, Japanese animators kept to the idea that the story comes first, and not only the look of things was translated onto the screen, but the love of complex stories told well.

Probably the most distinctive feature of anime character design, evolved directly from manga. Hands, feet, and head are usually exaggerated in order to allow movements to have greater impact and, in terms of the face, greater range of expression. Often, faces are designed in a way that allows for a completely different emotion by changing a single curve. The use of huge glossy eyes (anime's trademark) especially lends itself to ease of expression, which may explain why Caucasian features predominate. Nevertheless, this tendency towards westernization has caused some to come under attack in its homeland for perpetuating "ethnic self-denial," a condition, some say, that has suffused Japanese society particularly since the end of the Second World War. **E**



You've heard of it. Heck, you may have even seen a few at your local video store. You know the ones; their covers all blight and fantastic, featuring big-eyed cutie-pie girls and huge antacidal monsters. They look like they might contain a lot of over-the-top kids stuff, until you spy the words somewhere on the box: "Contains graphic animated violence and mature situations. Parental discretion is strongly advised."

No, these books aren't for kids, despite the fact that they've been known to rill off the Saturday morning staff, on occasion featuring giant robots and sword-wielding heroes. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that animation is definitely not the same thing as anime.

Japanese animation, or anime, has been around for decades but it's only really been in the past few years that it has made serious inroads into North America. Only now are the stereotypes beginning to crack that it's for kids (*Sailor Moon*, *Speed Racer*), or that it's cartoon porno for adults who get off watching sex between demons (*Crossed Doll*, *Legend of the Overlord*). In reality, anime has never been all about one thing or another. The great thing about it is that, unlike most Western animation, it spans all genres. From science fiction (*Gundam*) to soap opera (*Kingsgreave Orange Road*) to romantic comedy (*Maison Ikkoku*) to soft-core (*F2: Fists, Fists and Fists!*), anime is on all ages radars. Because the Japanese like being scared as much as anyone else, they've

also brought a look and feel to horror that is uniquely their, incorporating their own legends and myths (such as *Mystical Forest*).

Those of us weaned on the gore shocks of *Rob Bottin* and *Tom Savini* will no doubt have a hard time trying to envision a cartoon with any degree of bite, but, in fact, there are real advantages to using animation as horror. In live-action, filmmakers are limited to whatever makeup and special effect techniques they can afford. If the audience doesn't think a movie looks real, then they'll inevitably dismiss it as just another B-flick.

Animation, however, avoids the zipper-up-the-back problem. A good animator is free to create a fantastic landscape (or a particularly gruesome death) from the ground up, without the huge budget demands of today's Hollywood blockbuster, and still scare the pants off of people. Granted, animation is hardly "real" in the conventional sense, but that hasn't prevented animators from creating riveting worlds with solid characters and storylines. Under the best circumstances, animation can achieve visuals that live-action would find impossible to duplicate.

One of the best examples of realistic world-building is Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (1988), the first full-length anime feature to get a limited theatrical release in North America. *Akira* is set in neo-Tokyo, rebuilt 30 years after the original city's nuclear destruction at

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unknown heads. We follow Kaneda and Tetsuo, two motorcycle punks (heroes only because no one else is any better) in their usual routine of bloody street fights, set against a backdrop of towering skyscrapers, lit-from-below streets, riot police crackdowns, mad cultists, and anti-government rebels. Things start running even more out-of-control than usual when Tetsuo gets caught up in a massive government project to tap human psychic potential, and begins to transform into something more than human. As his new powers run increasingly amok, the refinery, previous survivors of the experiment, and finally Kaneda (armed with a battery-powered laser cannon snatching off his motorcycle engine) try to stop Tetsuo, before he finds the semi-mythical Akira, the only other to possess such powers.

Akira was a breakthrough picture for anime, unlike anything seen on the big screen before. It had a cyberpunk feel, spot-on anime animation (which still looks amazing today) and ultra graphic visuals, such as a dog getting its head blown off in the opening minutes of the film, and Tetsuo's eventual transformation into a mass of writhing flesh which explodes outward, at one point crushing a girl inside its folds.

Akira also demonstrates the Japanese obsession with "body horror," where the protagonist (or victim) finds himself transforming into a monstrous form through a grotesque, organic fusion, with appendages or organs swelling out-of-control.

This theme also permeates with the other successful Western licensed release of the late '80s, *Gunsala Daji: Legend of the Overlord* (1989). Remember the "terrace sex" stereotype anime once had? This is the movie that did it. Demons seek to reclaim the Earth, and along the way they'll rape — in every way possible — any Japanese school girl who comes along. Visually stunning and completely grotesque, *Gunsala Daji* was a midnight showing hit in repertory theaters and its many sequels demonstrate the "dark side" of anime. It's still a tough act to beat.

The demons, there is carnage on in *Wicked City* (1987). When the annual summit conference between Good and Evil is disrupted by someone killing off the delegates, a weary human detective is partnered with a female demon (who keeps turning into a spider at odd moments) to get to the bottom of it. *Wicked City* features a very dark, very twisted look at sexuality and relationships, and features a lot of real scenes along the way. Anime splatter at its best.

Those with a taste for more refined horror will note that the art of psychological horror is also well represented by Japanese animation: Naoyasu *Professor Mitsu* (1992) often



ANIMANIA!

The influence of anime titles into North America has boomed in the recent years, as has the number of importers bringing the material from overseas. Those of you wanting to get a fresh eye view across the spectrum need look no further than the world wide web. But be forewarned: because there is such an overwhelming amount of material out there, we recommend you do a little research into different titles and/or series and avoid yourself of an overly catalogue, if possible. Most of the information you're looking for can be found at the sites of these major distributors:

AVI FILMS: WWW.AVIFILMS.COM

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VIZ COMMUNICATIONS: WWW.VIZ.COM

remains nothing more graphic than a single drop of blood, but its use of light and shadow makes it one of the most eerie (in our styled series around. In it, Hareki, a personal detective, keeps crossing paths with Mitsu, a seemingly unstoppable vampire girl with a mission to hunt rogue demons and seal her prison for collecting "beautiful" people along the way. The original series consists of a collection of four straight-to-video Twilight Zone-like episodes, featuring a boy who falls in love with a doll, and a suit of Japanese armor that comes to life.

Between the unsettling nature of *Mitsu* and the aggregated gore of *Akira* you will find *Tokyo Babylon* (1994). The series is the work of CLAMP, a famous studio founded by four women, which specializes in

a "pretty" style of anime called *shojo* (surprisingly, shojo generally refers to women-appealing to girls (and drawn by women), but these stories often have a broad appeal due to their focus on relationships and characterization. Nevertheless, they don't stay away from the dark stuff either. The two one-hour episodes in the *Tokyo Babylon* series feature Subaru Sannomiya, the most powerful medium in Japan, going up against the darkest man in Japan and a brutal subway killer who leaves blood-drenched cars in his wake.

Of course, the proliferation of titles hardly means that all anime is worth watching. Just like in the live-action industry, you can find formulaic schlock (*Zillion*, *Healy Project Zero*) without any good ideas or vision to speak of. But in Japan, anime is not in a ghetto like SF and horror is in North America. Here, there's no end to the low-budget, no-plot, cheesy SF and splatterfest horror market, high quality is a rarity and, inevitably, people settle for the bad stuff, in turn, producers have no incentive to improve their work. It's an old story with the end result that the genre remains few and far between.

Animation has had the same problem, rarely moving beyond clearly defined lines (generally either Disney-type movies or Saturday morning type). The exceptions (and there are many fine examples) tend to serve niche or cult markets, and have little impact. But because anime is mainstream in Japan, it is held to a higher standard. The bad studies go under, the good ones flourish and we're rewarded with quality worth watching. Maybe that is why many of the most successful domestic films in Japan have been animated (*Princess Mononoke*, which certainly isn't cuddly, took the Japanese all-time box office record away from Steven Spielberg's cuddle-fest *E.T.*) For our North American audience, which is just stepping into this great artform, it means there's a whole new side of horror to discover. ■



TERROR HAS BIG EYES!

RECENTLY RECEIVED

AD POLICE TRILOGY

Animeigo

Three 40 min. episodes/English Subtitled

AD Police is a loose spin-off of the very popular rock'n-roll cyberpunk series *Battle Angel Alita*, but taken most definitely to the next level. EGG seem to lightened it, but ACP takes the heart and sticks a knife through it. In Tokyo of the near future, humanoid robots called "boomers" perform every manual (and sexual) task, but with a tendency to run amok. Enter the AD Police, a super SWAT team, although considering their cutbacks, they're the Police of the Damned.

The three half-hour episodes feature the rookie Leon, and his hard-core hero-body partner Jena. They track down bionic boomers that kill while wearing lingerie, help an inexperienced paleontologist investigating a series of prostitute murders.

It's in a semi abandoned subway line, and even in an old-time boomers-hunter cyborg whose tongue is the only piece of flesh he had left.

Graphic violence and asynchronous women (both human and mechanical) threaten to tip the scales into the just-erotic-anime sleazy pit, but it does above average. Thanks to top-notch animation, dark atmosphere, and brooding characters who keep asking hard questions and are denied easy answers. The blood sprays throughout, but never becomes less than shocking, and always comes with consequence. In a world where people get with their flesh and blood limbs and organs for quick death or job security, no one is sure just how human anyone is anymore. Simple survival seems to be all you can hope for.



A CHINESE GHOST STORY

Viz Communications

84 Minutes/English Language

Visions: Hong Kong filmmaker Tsui Hark's Chinese Ghost Story live-action series of movies are classics, but he must have been asleep at the switch here. Very loosely based on

the second movie of the series, Chinese painter Hong wanders into a city of ghosts, gets involved in a war between competing exorcists (one with a giant toad-beast) and falls for the ghost of a young girl, who's collecting souls for her mother. They plan to be reconnected together, assuming they can defeat the Void Monitors.

All this is neither scary nor interesting. The ghosts are just gaudy, and the cinematic design is unimpressive (There's a good scene with a kindly steeple and his wife who are just skeletons in suits, but that's about it.)

The dating exorcists are only concerned with their market share, and interfere with our heroes for no good reason. There are two meaningless musical numbers: The narration is a mixture of tradition and CGI. This can work if you're careful to blend the two, but here the CGI just sticks out like a glaring eye-ball. And the main story you've seen done better a dozen times.



PET SHOP OF HORRORS - VOL. 1

Urban Vision

50 Minutes/English Language

A story for "adults" gets run by a Count comes to the attention of Leon, an in-your-face homicide detective. Due to the high rate

of mysterious deaths among its patrons, Countess the shop is selling drugs, he finds that the Count simply tells you the pet you need to fill the void in your life, as long as you follow the care and feeding instructions exactly (if not, then the shop takes no responsibility).

And responsibility is what it's all about. The patron of the shop haven't committed great glaring evils worthy of Poi Poi but they have failed others, and come to the shop of their free will for a second chance. And so we have grieving parents looking to replace their dead daughter (and girl's homicidal rabbit a LOT meaner than the one from Liberty Pylon) and the Holy Grail, and a widower

whose wife "accidentally" drowned on their wedding night who finds a mermaid bearing a striking resemblance to her (but with much different "appetites").

The interplay between the two leads is one of the series' many highlights as Leon alternately bewitches and bribes the Count for information, while the Count gives above it all, assure that he ALWAYS tells the truth while his patrons decide themselves and come to bloody ends. The detailed character designs by Heidi Abe (Memento Hunter 2) and the computer animation by Hideo (Flesh Fantasy) II assembly with the high production values of the series, and the English voices sound completely natural. Pet Shop of Horrors has got it all: characters, plot and style.



BABEL II - PERFECT COLLECTION

Streamline Pictures

111 minutes/English Language

One day you're just going to school, when suddenly some mysterious beauty is stalking you, some police strangers are trying to kill you... the UN Security Police are after you, and you find that you're the most powerful psychic on Earth, heir to a ship-wrecked alien traveler who could be the Tower of Babel. That's what happens to Kaichu, a student who gets caught in a war between the psychic population

of Earth and the authorities. At first approached by the psychics to join them, Kaichu discovers his powers and his heritage, acquires three superpowered guardians, gradually tames Babel II and becomes a one-man strike force to protect humanity.

Babel II has creep colors and animation. Fluid battle scenes (especially the psychic duels), but there's no depth to the story. The psychics are bad. Babel is good. Ordinary people we don't meet. Once Babel gets his three guardians he's unbeatable so there's no tension in his battles with increasingly annoying henchmen. Ideas that might be interesting (like a pal

of psychic powers) are raised and dropped in minutes.

The English translation by the infamous Carl Meehan is his usual over-literal stilted job ("You neutralized my Death Blast" "That's right!"). This works for cheap Hong Kong movies, but not here. Babel II: The Perfect Collection contains the original four half-hour releases. It's not a bad box set, but it sure isn't perfect.

BABEL II PERFECT COLLECTION



Donald Simmons

The Neo-Vampirism of Agathodaimon

by Aaron Lupton



Sathorjys
gabriel

Marko T.
Auer

Hypocrite
gabriel



Christine E.
Arje

Marko E.
Auer

Aukin
vlad

Black metal. The name itself conjures up visions of one the most sinister, malicious and controversial trends in modern music to date. But just like its nomenclature of decaying gothic castles and necropolis, the trend has largely become stagnant, faced with the cobwebs of neglect. Indeed black metal often seems impervious to experimentation. While shrieking vocals, pulverizing beats and eerie guitar wailing have created some truly spine-tingling moments, few bands dare to drop from the sign of the inverted cross to transgress the fastidious of pop culture and explore the true dark art of horror.

Thus we have Agathodaimon. Gathering influences from myth, literature, and eastern Europe's blood-soaked history, Agathodaimon use gothic-metal as an expression of their ideology, the pursuit of near-perfection in both life and music. Deriving their name from ancient Greek lore (lit. "good demon"), Agathodaimon kill whatever preconceived notions one has of vampire metal. Yet, as guitarist Sathorjys explains, the name has more than one meaning. Of particular interest to the band is the so-called Riddle of the Agathodaimon, a number based enigma which is taken from the late Symbiotic oracles. Apparently, there is still no known solution to its ancient puzzle.

"There were many scholars like Leibnitz and Moore who tried to translate the riddle," he explains, "but nobody has been able to do it so far. It is said that the one who is able to solve the riddle will be initiated with the wisdom of the Gods."

For the band, the riddle and its riddle became an emblem of their instant god to "become better every time and develop in music and as a person," hardly the sentiments espoused by their bile spitting black

metalist brethren.

Not surprisingly, Sathorjys reveals that, for his band, black metal serves only as a creative template. The Gothic atmosphere is their music's overhauled basic metal ingredient, owing in part to Romanian lyrics and song titles (lead vocalist Vlad is native of Romania).

"We want to extend our musical horizons but still keep the dark atmosphere that belongs to black metal," explains Sathorjys.

Key differences are a lack of constant blast beats and "hard Saxon" lyrics, staples of individual Scandinavian black metal. Turning their backs on Devil-worship, Agathodaimon opt instead for a kind of somber poetry that is as ambiguous as their name.

"Vlad's lyrics are difficult to understand," agrees Sathorjys, "because he uses a lot of stylistic elements to make everything a little more complicated. Just by reading the lyrics, you get a different point of view concerning their context."

Despite being rooted by a man named Vlad, and notwithstanding the black lace costumes and fangs, Sathorjys insists that there are few formal elements of vampirism in Agathodaimon. Vlad takes his name from the tyrant who reigned over Transylvania centuries ago, the person who actually inspired the world's most famous vampire.

Tellingly, a song called Neo-Vampirism, from Agathodaimon's latest, *The Higher Art of Rebellion* (see RME14), doesn't explore the vampire myth so much as the vampire metaphor, and the distancing effect that modern society has on the individual. Here is the revolution of Agathodaimon; though they share aspects with many other similarly dressed bands, they refuse to dwell on the superficiality of the black metal scene.

Both Sathorjys and Vlad do admit to a personal fascination with vampires, however, even if they do not bring these elements into the Agathodaimon stage show. Sathorjys is enthralled by the UK magazine *Bloodstone*, a publication dedicated to vampire lore, and has recently discovered the book *In Blood We Trust: Depraved Sexual Fascination For Vampires*. He also admits a fascination with writers such as Peillon and Shelly, who were among the first to explore the concept of vampirism in literature, and Goethe and Le Fanu, who elaborated it.

"The vampire was connected with sex because when you bite someone on the neck, it was always compared to something like anal sex," says Sathorjys. "But vampires also have an interesting touch about them because they are immortal and have supernatural powers."

Nevertheless, he reveals that pop culture vampirism is just as trendy in Germany as in North America, referring to the success of films such as Francis Coppola's *Dracula* (one of his personal favorites) and books like *Cradle of Filth*.

"Perhaps we would go in the direction of vampirism if everyone shared my taste," says Sathorjys. "But Agathodaimon is the sum of every individual person. Our tastes vary very much." ■

Dreadlines.

News Highlights  Honor Happenings

Teen werewolf sighted in Canada



Ginger Snaps: Supernatural GIRL power

Even though *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf in London* were milestones in horror, the werewolf film has fallen to the wayside in recent years, in circumstance that *An American Werewolf in Paris* did little to remedy. But the werewolf will finally be getting its much-awaited resurgence, courtesy of director John Fawcett (*The Boss*, *Cash*). The name of the project is *Ginger*

Snaps, a Canadian production set for a Fall release and expected to expand the lycanthrope subgenre to teenage girls.

"We wanted to make a smart horror film," Fawcett told *Rue Morgue* during a break in filming. "We actually wanted to have a little purpose, we wanted the film to have some meaning. As a result, I think there are a lot of things in there about adolescence, the idea that a young girl's body is changing, that she's developing new appetites and her hormones are running amok."

We stuck around to watch the shooting of the film's grisly climax, which featured co-star Emily Jean Perkins wandering around a blood-spattered house with a flashlight before coming face to face with her sister, now fully transformed into a grotesque monster. The scene left little doubt in our minds that *Ginger Snaps* will deliver as much hard horror as intelligent drama.

"I was reluctant to do horror because I'm a

character-driven writer and I don't find horror — at least the horror I was familiar with at the time — particularly character-driven," noted screenwriter Karen Walton. "We sort of agreed that as long as we could break all the rules and not have a couple of leads running around and hiding and depending on men for all the answers, it might be fun."

Filmmakers have tinkered with the werewolf transformation sequence, which will not be handled in the traditional way. Fawcett said he drew a lot from fellow Canadian David Cronenberg's movie *The Fly*, which depicts a transformation sequence over the course of the entire film, rather than at key points in the story.

"Our transformation is similar," he said. "It's something progressive and it doesn't occur by the light of the full moon."

Janeane Garofalo for *Ginger Snaps* are stars Katherine Isabelle as her sister Ginger, and Mena Rogers as the mother of the two girls. So impressed were we by the shoot, that we'll be bringing you in-depth coverage of *Ginger Snaps* before the film hits theatres. Stay tuned.

Buffy the vampire game

In the continuing trend towards getting any and every licensed product as fifteen (or so) minutes of computer time, it has been announced that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* will be coming in digital age this Fall. Fox Interactive is promising an adventure game

for Sega Dreamcast, Playstation and PC that will deliver "all the action, fighting, humour, drama and characters from the show that fans have come to know and love."

Expect a third person action adventure game where players take on the role of Buffy Summers, typical high school cheerleader by day and fierce, but snovy, destroyer of the undead by night. Relying the help of her allies and feared characters from the TV series — Angel, Xander, Cordelia, Willow, Oz and Giles — Buffy destroys the enemy by using her powers, martial arts, slaying swords and quick healing ability. Players will have the opportunity to experience the game in environments that are familiar to fans of the show, such as Sunnydale High School, the cemetery, town



square, the shopping mall, The Bronze nightclub and Buffy's home.

Fox Interactive is adding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to a growing stable of horror-oriented computer games, among them the 3D platform game *CRUC 2*, the top-selling PC hit *Alexis Versus Predator* and *The X-Files*. Fox will also be releasing an *Alexis Versus Predator* Gold Edition later this year.



Dreadlines.

The Fly, The Thing for Movie Maniacs 3

Todd McFarlane has announced an October release for the third installment of *Movie Maniacs*, his ambitious toy line based around the greatest works of horror. This time out, McFarlane will be unleashing two figures based on John Carpenter's remake of the '51 classic *The Thing*, the Norris monster which bursts from a dead character's chest (this figure will come with the dismembered head-creature), and the Blair creature (the huge "thing" that appears at the end of the film).

Joining Carpenter's creature is cult figure Ash from *Army of Darkness*, the anti-hero portrayed by Bruce Campbell, who will be packaged with a chainsaw, a shotgun, a mini-evil Ash, a parallel glove and the Book of the Dead. Long awaited by fans of the *Evil Dead* series.

Also included in the set is Edward Scissorhands, which has been created from Tim Burton's fairy tale character, as portrayed by Johnny Depp. Snake Plissken, from John Carpenter's *Escape from L.A.*, looks like he's ready for battle, featuring adventures with his signature eye-patch, two handguns, a shotgun and a noticeable overcoat. Last but certainly not least is a figure based on fellow Canadian David Cronenberg's '86 remake of *The Fly*. Brandyfully that is. This action figure is based on the fly-creature that appears at the end of the film, the one that gives Geena Davis those puppy-dog eyes.



Movie Maniacs 3 Brandyfully, Ash and Edward Scissorhands join the ranks

(www, you couldn't beat a fly, could you?) Comes with a custom froof base. Also expect 18" figures of Michael Myers and Freddy Kruger plus shock-rockers Alice Cooper and Rob Zombie.

As a contrast part of *The Morgan's*

spontaneous giveaway programme, the first five people to e-mail us the name of Todd McFarlane's home province at info@morgue.com will win a complimentary Geena Stevens Special Edition figure, courtesy of McFarlane Toys.

Phantasm to make official comic book premiere

You heard it right, *Phantasm* phans! The first official comic book based on the highly successful cult horror film series will see release this Fall, courtesy of Blackout Heart Media, the folks who brought you *Luce Fido's The Beyond* comic and, more recently, *Luce Fido's Zombie*.

The *Phantasm* comic series is officially authorized by director Don Coscarelli and will feature a special forward by Angus Scrimm. More importantly, the comic will be adapted from scripts that, for budgetary reasons, never went before the cameras. Working off of Coscarelli's original ideas, the series will unfold, for the first time, the true *Phantasm* story, as it was meant to be told by its creator.

Keep an eye on www.blackoutheart.com for updates.



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Dreadlines.



Rock puts heel in Mummy 2

WWF superstar "The Rock" has confirmed speculation that he has been offered a villain role in *The Mummy 2*.

"Romanos moved pretty fast!" the incredulous wrestler (born Dwayne Johnson) commented to *Rue Morgue* at a recent Toronto press conference to promote his best-selling autobiography *The Rock Says...* (co-written with Joe Layden). "Yeah, there is a myth to that. We're looking at playing a major heel role in *The Mummy 2*, which has, from what I know, the original cast back. It should be fantastic; look forward to doing that."

The "heel role" Johnson is talking about is a character called The Scorpion King, described as looking half-man, half-serpent—on Jensen Johnson in the villainy department will be the first film's Arnold Vosloo (as Imhotep the mummy) and Patricia Velásquez (as Imhotep's lover Aak-Su-Namara). Also rejoining the cast will be *The Mummy*'s principal stars Brendan Fraser, Rachel Weisz, and John Hannah. Production was scheduled to start in April, with locations to include London, Morocco, and Egypt. Expect a May 2001 release.

Set ten years after the "original," *The*

Mummy 2 will see the return of Imhotep and Aak-su-Namara brought back to a London museum. The movie will center around the 9-year-old son of Rick O'Connell (Fraser) and Evelyn "Eve" O'Connell (Weisz), thought by the resurrected Aak-su-Namara to be the reincarnation of the Egyptian God, Isis.

Director/co-creator Stephen Sommers' remake of the 1932 original (starring Boris Karloff) was one of 1999's biggest box-office successes, although some critics bemoaned its replacement of the original's dead-with-Indiana-Jones-style adventure and comedy. For his part, The Rock sees his evolution from WWF heel to Hollywood villain as completely natural.

"As far as expanding The Rock's horizons, yeah, that's something I definitely look forward to. Again, it fits right in line with The Rock being an entertainer first, and I certainly look forward to doing that in the future. But make no mistake about it: From now until eternity, The Rock is WWF all the way."

—Sean Plummer

Leisure Books herald boom for horror fiction

The *Morgue* readers may have noticed that many fiction books recently reviewed in our book column have borne the Leisure Horror stamp. This isn't a case of favoritism, just a reflection of the fact that Leisure is currently the only North American publishing house with a dedicated horror line in mass markets. While other houses have ventured occasionally into the genre, sometimes calling it suspense or dark fiction, no one else publishes horror on a regular basis every month.

"If our line is any indication, the comeback of the horror genre has begun," says Don D'Ausa, the company's horror editor. "Our sales have been steadily increasing, and our major accounts have been eager for more horror. We gradually expanded our line from eight books a year to twelve, then to eighteen, and we may expand some more."

The recent success of horror films, he adds, has opened the book industry's eyes to the viability of the market. According to D'Ausa, many publishing houses that used to dabble in horror in the past are seriously considering going back into the genre by re-issuing older titles from their inventories.

"My only fear is that they may make the same mistakes they did before and smother the resurgence in horror before it can really take off," he says. "If they try to do too much too fast, and publish second-rate books, the market will shrink again. But if they do things carefully and let the genre grow at its own speed, we could be looking at a new boom."

For their part, Leisure Books has responded selectively, placing an emphasis on books that have not traditionally been easy to come by. Their choices have also reflected an interest in fresh talent, such as Mary Ann Mourhe, Gerard Daniel Hamner, Sephers Giron, Tina LeBlanc, Barry Hoffman, and Tom Powers.

"For too long it's been difficult to find quality horror fiction except by the biggest publishers in the genre," says D'Ausa. "I know I haven't been the only horror fan frustrated by the lack of variety and the attitude the other houses have had. There are a lot of us horror readers, and it's about time we can walk into a bookstore and actually find the books on the shelves."

Leisure recently announced they will be re-issuing Jack Ketchum's original novel *The Last novel* just when D'Ausa calls "brutal, absolutely thrilling and prime Ketchum." The release will be printed by a limited edition hardcover, due yet to be disclosed. Also appearing from Leisure Books are Graham Masterton's *The House that Jack Built*, set for release in June, and Rick Hamish's *The Mountain King*, slated for next year.

Got a suggestion? Don't want to hear it, Contact us directly at:

dhwatco@dorcherrypub.com

—Dale L. Sproule

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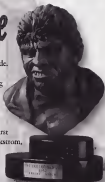
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What's Brooding...

with *Vahnasia Wick*

JASON FAR OUT We told you we'd be doing updates on the story and here it is. *Rue Morgue* was fortunate enough to visit the set of *Jason X*, currently shooting in Toronto. We wandered around a huge spaceship and watched as a revitalized Jason got up to his old shenanigans by lopping off some heads. We promised not to give too much away just yet, but you can expect a film that will draw heavily from *Alien* and *The Terminator*. Sure, there's even a holoduck here, which means the transition from horror to sci-fi will happen relatively seamlessly. Production wasn't kidding when they said they were planning to kick the franchise off in a new direction, we're just glad they got tired of making the same film rereunions in a row. Extensive coverage to follow.

BLOODSUCKING PARAGONS IN PITTSBURGH Progress Power Entertainment has announced plans to release this classic ultra hard-to-find horror hybrid no later than summer 2000. The DVD special edition will apparently include an assortment of bonus material, including production stills, original script, artwork, behind-the-scenes commentary footage, out-takes, special effects test footage and narrating commentary from director Dean Teicher. Like most of you, I've heard of *Bloodsucking Parasols* in Pittsburgh but haven't actually seen it. Keep an eye out for both DVD video and DVD-ROM as part of Progress Power's *Lucky 13 Collectible Series*.

WINE SIGHTINGS It's no news that some of the best horror has come from the independents, and with this in mind, we've got a heads up on a couple of projects currently in the works. From writer/director Mike Watt comes *Necronomicon*, a film being described as a cross between *L.A. Confidential* and *Days of the Dead*. In production for almost a year and a half, *Necronomicon* stars Ray Yoo, Kristen Pfister and Francis Velin with a cameo from Debbie Rochon (*Tron* and *Jahel*). Watt and company are still seeking investors for the ongoing production (interested parties are asked to contact them at emul@hololantic.net).

Writer/director Sal Cuvarella is working hard on his first feature, *Hardware Possessed Eyes*, based around the existence of a global Satanic cult with affiliations to the Son of Sam and Charles Manson. The project is currently in production and will, hopefully see the light of the moon sometime before 2001. More info at:

www.hardwarepossessedeyes.homestead.com

BE A STAR! Anzac Books may have a chance of starring in their own lesson, courtesy of Urban Vision Entertainment. The company has rigged up two new releases - *Put Shop of Horrors Vol. 1* (out this past month) and *Vol. 2* (in stores May 23) with hidden passwords to their website, located at www.urban-vision.com. Use the password to access a hidden portion of the site and you may very well reach stardom! The company is promising to fly the winner to their Los Angeles recording studio for a session and will pick up the tab on all travel expenses and accommodations. Keep your mouse on the site, a winner will be announced May 23.

NEW FROM BARKER AND GABRIAN After degrading his horror show into dark fantasy (*Halloween II*, *The Grind* and *Secret Show*), it looks like Clive Barker is making a return to the more formal aspects of the genre with a new novel called *Colloquial Canyon*. Described as a *Dorian Gray* for the contemporary age, Barker's latest tells the story of a ghastly life after fame. It's expected to hit stores in the Fall. Also, here's advance notice on the new Neil Gaiman novel, *American Gods*, vaguely described as a story about "the soul of America."



Necronomicon: Work in progress

This one's just meant to get you rehydrating. *Guerra's* book is slated for retail no sooner than Spring 2001. You heard it here first.

LEXX It's thirteen new episodes for Canada's *LEXX*, the tale of a gun, genetically enhanced penis shaped spaceship and its four stowaway occupants. The series has garnered a cult following in three years (see *RM* premiere issue - those of you who actually have it) and will continue to push the boundaries of outrageous dark sci-fi on television. *LEXX 3* stars Xena Seaberg as Lex, Michael McManus as Kai, Brian Dewray as Stanley Tweedle and Jeffrey Hirschfeld as the Sci-Fi Channel in the US and Space The Imagination Station in Canada.

ANOTHER GIANT Apparently Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich (*Independence Day*, *Godzilla*) will be taking up where *Armageddon* left off. Instead of lots of spiders, their upcoming project *Arch Attack* will feature really BIG spiders that become larger than life after taking a dip in some toxic waste. The horror-comedy will blow about \$30 million on the spiders, which is bargain compared to the price of one *Godzilla*.

FINALIZING THE REAL STORY The life and times of Vlad the Impaler will finally be chronicled in *Passions of Dracula: A True Story*. The docudrama will star Raleigh Martin in the role of Vlad alongside Peter Weller (*RoboCop*) and Roger Daltrey of *The Who*. Reportedly, Daltrey will play King János of Hungary, who rashly enters gay rice to Vlad's bloody reign.

HITCH TO T.O. Those of you in the Toronto area will want to check out *CineMachopee Ontario's* Hitchcock bonanza at Jackson Hall (Art Gallery of Ontario). From May 26 to June 30, *CineMachopee* will screen a near-complete run of Hitchcock's films, including *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Vertigo*, *Psycho*, *The Birds* and *Prey*. See ya there. For more info, call 416-968-61m. ☪

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THE GORE/MET

Fans of splatter films may find the shelves of their local video store drier than a thousand year old corpse but there's not to say the genre is dead. The Internet is a garden of gory delights, providing a previously unknown avenue of distribution for the amateur aviator specializing in the woefully ignored video format. Two of the best recent shot-on-video gore films you've never seen are to be found online, and are this issue's prescription of perversity.



The Negro Files Starring Steve Sheppard, Isaac Cooper and Gary Browning; directed by Matt Jesside; written by Todd Tjersland and Sammy Shapiro; Threat Theatre International, Inc.

Threat Theatre is a low budget filmhouse specializing in gory horror and exploitation films: the bastard branchchild of the PT Barnum of independent films, Todd Tjersland. The jewel in the Threat Theatre catalogue is the sex and shock zombie gonzo *The Negro Files*, an instant cult classic tirelessly begging for attention. Detectives Orville Sloane (Gary Browning) and Martin Masters (Steve Sheppard), two cops who put the X on excessive force, are on the trail of a sadistic serial rapist. Logan (Isaac Cooper) is the brutal sex killer with 200 (!) victims to his credit, including Sloane's sister. Only one victim has survived an attack and carries Logan's child. Sloane and Masters catch him on the scene of his latest crime, and viciously gun him down.

Nine months later, a hooded Satanic cult led in a ceremony by Tjersland, resurrect Logan by sacrificing his infant child on his grave. The cover leader starts to urinate on the grave to complete the ritual when the zombie Logan bursts forth, ripping off the Satanist's penis and stabbing another cultist with it in a short and shocking rampage! Two of the Satanists barely escape with their lives, leaving the zombie to wander off in search of women to rape, his two foot penis hanging out like a sexual Giger counter.

The Negro Files is a laugh riot of cheese gore, nudity, and full on stoner, beginning life as a proposed XXXX gonzo schlocker but sealed back in context before eventually landing to life as a bloodily comic horror film. The movie was cut through an advertisement in a swinger's magazine and a cast was assembled that no Hollywood agent would touch with a two foot dildo. Gary Browning's brain-damaged performance as Orville Sloane is a landmark of bad acting that succeeds because of his entirely earnest take on the role. Matt Jesside directs with confidence and the film is well edited and polished, having been run through the Film Look process and hand edited to make it watchable!

The Negro Files is available from Threat Theatre International at www.angelfire.com/movies/negrofiles/index.html or send \$20 (+\$5 S&H US/\$5.00 Foreign) along with a signed age statement certifying you are 18 years of age or older, to: Astrotalk Entertainment, POB 7633, Dept. AF, Olympia, WA 98507-7633. Major credit cards accepted.



The Bride of Frank Starring Frank Veyen, Johnny Horizon and Steve Bullock; Written and directed by Escalpo Don Bullock.

This is a review of love. And evil. This is Frank's review. Frank lives and works in a warehouse. He is a proud man, a working man. But Frank is lonely. He wants a woman, because as he says, "I like 'em."

Frank is ugly and doesn't make a good first impression. He has a hard time meeting women. People call him a bum. Frank doesn't like to be called a bum. He'll hit them with a pipe. He'll bite their dick off. He'll cut off their head and slit down their neck. And you will watch. And laugh. Hell, you might even cry. Because amidst the copious toilet humour and cheese gore lies a simple message: give a man down on his

back some respect and allow him a little dignity.

The Bride of Frank is one of the most wickedly funny, outrageously offensive, yet ultimately endearing films you'll ever see. It takes us through Frank's daily life, his very bad dreams, his pursuit of love, his revenge on the bullies of the world, and his gracious stepdown. The cast of real-life characters is a large part of the charm of this film, with Johnny Horizon's lead fixation on the size and use of his penis nearly stealing the show.

This ain't no chick flick, it's a 90 minute fart joke that isn't ignored on the sidewalk of life like so many of society's down-trodden. Add *The Bride of Frank* to your video collection, follow Uncle Vic's maintenance on the art of love, and avoid chok-

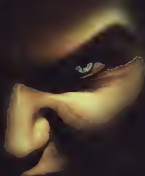
ing on your beer. You'll never look at laundry the same way again.

The Bride of Frank costs only \$25 bucks and that includes shipping and handling. Must be 18 years of age or older. Send a check or money order payable to *The Bride of Frank* at *The Bride Of Frank*, PO Box 1348, Maplewood NJ 07040, USA. Visit the official website at www.brideoffrank.com



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SICK TO BE SQUARE

American Psycho

Starring Christian Bale, Willem Dafoe and Jared Leto

Directed by Mary Harron

Written by Mary Harron and Guinevere Turner

Liza's Gate Films

I never much liked the eighties while they were happening, although I admit, some of the music from that era occasionally strikes a nostalgic chord with me. Maybe I miss those days when I could die society in one fell swoop and feel moderately justified. So watching a film that amounts to a rant about how crassly commercial, how ethically compromised and how vacant the whole eighties experience was is hardly a stretch, even as a blanket statement it works for me. Come to think of it, if I ever find myself taking up jogging while listening to Huey Lewis & The News, Phil Spector's Collins or Whitney Houston, I may have to kill someone.

So I guess I could relate to American Psycho's stellar homicide, a guy by the name of Patrick Bateman (Bale) who may as well be — and often is — Anybody Dies in this corporate planet of Gishler suits, top sales and young urban professional haircuts. Difference here — and stop me if you've heard the story — is that Bateman occasionally breaks his facade with a sharp cutting object and extreme prejudice directed at his peers, usually of the female persuasion.

No, these aren't as many senseless people in a world of corporate whores as this guy Patrick screws his thread's drug addled facade, watches splatter films while working out and organizes throwaways with street hookers and paid escorts on the weekends. When he feels particularly inspired, he plays Hip to be Square (or some other adult contemporary pop absolute) as he slips into a mascot red plunger on his into some hap-



American Psycho. Ah, the pleasures of conformity.

less victims.

Nevertheless, co-writer and director Mary Harron plays Broa Eason Ellis' controversial novel partly as satire, without the ball-wag game that landed the book a year's worth of headlines. Bateman is a walking commercial for his time, perma-smile plastered on his face, he talks in clichés and measures his personal worth by how competent his business card looks. It makes for a ludicrously funny film, but not one that is completely satirical or controversial or even amusing. That isn't really a complaint, sensibility, splatter violence is just social commentary. And watching a frustrated yuppie carve holes in his like-minded peers is pretty okay commentary.

—Emma Anderson

LEAVE THE UNKNOWN ALONE

The Ninth Gate

Starring Johnny Depp, Lena Olin and Frank Langella

Directed by Roman Polanski

Written by Enrique Urbizu, Roman

Polanski and John Brownjohn

Alliance Atlantis

The devil owes a bit to Roman Polanski. Where would he be, after all, without Rosemary's Baby, the watershed event that brought about a barrage of interest in the Horned One, including *The Exorcist* and let's not forget all those rock stars who give their souls away in the early 1970s. (Since then, it seems Satan has done some collecting, which may explain the sudden fondness for sad masochists to immerse themselves in soulless adult contemporary.)

No doubt about it, Lucifer wouldn't be half the Hollywood basket were it not for the efforts of Roman Polanski, himself an originator terrified by an unhealthy proximity to the Tate/La Bianca murders and an unwanted thirteen-year-old girl. It's entirely appropriate, therefore, to see the aging director revisit his eleven hooded friend in yet another go at the genre, perhaps his last.

A lengthy, plodding affair, *The Ninth Gate* is a journey into the heartland of Polanski pastimes — the occult, mystery, adventure, sexual deviance and postcard perfect camerawork. The focal point is Dean Corso (Depp), a guy who moves in the ostensibly shady, corrupt and highly wealthy world of antique book collectors. The truth is, Corso will do anything for money, even if it means embarking on a quest to compare the contents of the only three existing copies of *The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of the Shadows*, a book which Satan himself is reputed to have penned.

Soon Corso begins to uncover discrepancies in the books, centered around rare illustrations that comprise its riddle (which, once solved, provides the Satanic equivalent of *The Ripper*). Corso's journey is shadowed by deep mystery, grisly murders, and strange



The Ninth Gate A misanthrope of Poltergeist parables and a Satanic industrialist (Liam Orlin).

creeps, including a white-haired Negro who passes her, and a cat-eyed woman (Olin) who protects her.

Lapsing between moody horror and dumb comedy, Polanski's mystery is salted by some wildly inappropriate boy detective stuff, some laughable dialogue and a few nostalgic references to the early seventies, when you could apparently jump into someone else's sitting Lamborghinis and embark on a covert car chase. Not that the devil won't appreciate the press, even if it isn't all good. Truth is, *The Ninth Gate* is far from the beautiful demology of Rossellini's *Baby for Sale* (or even *Macbeth* for that matter), but it has enough occult reverence to perhaps give the younger generation a couple of bad skins. Maybe they'll pick up the slack and get the devil by respect back, especially after *End of Days* and all that Swedish black metal.

-Rod Gudino

SPOOKSHOW BABY

Final Destination

Starring Devon Sawa, Ali Larter and Kerr Smith
Directed by James Wong
Written by Glen Morgan & James Wong
and Jeffrey Beckett
Now Late Cinema

I didn't have much on this movie prior to going to see it. I missed the trailers and hadn't even glanced at the press kit, all I had prior to checking myself into the theatre was a glimpse of the creepy poster (which looked way cool). Still, I was harboring some doubts; ever since the term "teen slasher" became a bad excuse to make a million bucks in Hollywood, I've been suspicious of any film that sports a too-beautiful cast of teenage 90/10 look-alikes.

But *Final Destination* got off on the other

foot, you know, the right one. A kid by the name of Alex Browning (Sawa) has a premonition, just before take off, that the plane carrying twenty of his classmates is going to explode in mid-air. He breaks out, gets dragged from the plane (along with a few friends) and together they watch the jumbo airbus go kablooie in the sky. Alex and his friends, it turns, have cheated death, but soon it becomes apparent that the powers that be are less than thrilled about it, and are anxious to see the six survivors off to their graves.

Veteran horror buffs will point out that this sounds suspiciously like a teen slasher film (only the slasher is supernatural and aviatable), and honestly *Final Destination* plays out a little bit like that. The difference is that it's creative and smart, due in no small part to X-Files staples Morgan and Wong, who co-wrote and directed, respectively. Thankfully, they scrapped the expected barrage of empty shocks for a lot of gloriously moody scenes, like buses coming out of nowhere to splat gorgeous blondes, and a strangulation that goes on for an apparently long period of time.

This review won't be complete without comparing *Final Destination* to Sawa's own debut, *16 Wishes*, which was released last year. It seems these two films are trying to put the restraint back on horror, the gags, the gore, the suspense and, above all, the humor. It works. Stick around for the credits and notice how the characters were named after the genre's vintage celebrities, Alex Browning, teacher Valerie Lewton, FBI agents Wanda and Schreel, and friends Billy Hitchcock, Terry Cheney, Larry Marrae and Blake Decker. Appropriate, because *Final Destination* amounts to a cool little spookshow homage for the teens. Even if those days are long gone for you, don't fight this one, it's good.

-Emma Anderson

LUCK OF THE IRISH My Ass

Leprechaun Is The Hood

Starring Warwick Davis and Ice T
Directed by Rob Spere
Written by Doug Hill & Jon Huffman
Terror Home Video

British writer/director/producer dude Stephen Fry once opined that everyone should try everything at least once except for meat and country line dancing. Here's another go-go for your ho, Steve: never try to upset new life into history's most dumb-ass horror franchise by transplanting it to Coquette. The concept of a killer leprechaun smoking weed and talking like a G might (theoretically) provide some levity for about thirty seconds in a *Mad* TV skit, but stretched out to ninety minutes it becomes the most antic kind of spew since well, okay, they haven't released *Final* from Jason yet. (And let's keep it that way.)

What could Ice T have been thinking when he agreed on for this? The guy spent most of the nineties proving himself as a capable (if limited) actor, which is always a difficult jump for any pop star, so it's hard to fault him agreeing to a potential career destroyer like this one. Instead, he does his damndest here as an expunged turned reformed crook (aren't they all?), but the film banks his efforts under its own avalanche of stupidity.

Even a low budget item like this is redefining when you consider how many wacky superior scripts could have been produced for the same budget or less, somewhere in Hollywood right now, courtesy *Blair Witch*.



Final Destination Don't letta for leech



Lep in the Hood when Hollywood execs wore our time on

Projects, *Evil Dead* and *Phantoms* are languishing in some analyst's dark drawer. It's pretty safe to assume that most studio execs are unfamiliar with Stephen Fry, hell, they probably think H.P. Lovecraft wrote sex manuals.

-John W. Bowen

YOUR FUTURE IS BLEAK

The Prophecy 3: The Ascent

Starring Christopher Walken, Vincent

Spano and Dave Bazzone

Directed by Patric Cassar

Written by Joel Sussan and Carl Dupre

Although *The Prophecy* was far from box office success, it created a large enough cult following (myself included) to warrant two direct-to-video sequels. As is usually the case with these films, each becomes progressively worse, and it should come as no surprise that *Prophecy 3* is simply the suck-er of the bunch.

What was really appealing about the original *Prophecy* was that it had a complex and unique story that combined myth, religion, and philosophy into the pulp genre. *The Ascent* follows instead the more commercial script of the first sequel. Here, the war in heaven continues, yet Gabriel (Walken) is now a shadow of his former self, succeeded by the ghoulish Pynel-Havner's sinister mate in Danyael (Dave Bazzone), a seshlike (half angel, half human). Although Gabriel is a fallen angel, he now finds himself Danyael's protector.

Despite the theology, *The Ascent* looks and sounds like a crappy version of *The Terminator*: a dark, mysterious, seemingly invincible figure (Zophiel, played very poorly by Vincent Spano), relentlessly chases a young man. The youth learns that he is destined to fight for a higher purpose, comes to terms with his fate, and the film closes-

es with the final showdown between good and evil. This climax by the way, is a classic example of a failed attempt to create emotion and excitement with CGI effects.

Even if you are a huge fan of the series, you may want to skip *The Ascent*, as it suffers from a weak and confusing script and across the board horrible performances. The only saving grace here is

Walken, with his consistently intriguing and exciting portrayal of the archangel Gabriel. However, what was once a delicious anti-hero has now become a source of comic relief, much like Anthony Hopkins' role as Van Helsing in Coppola's *Dracula*.

Still, we should probably praise Walken for his commitment to appear in straight-to-video films, most actors of his status probably wouldn't. Yet, watching this, it wasn't pride I felt, so much as pity. Pity that such talent is continually wasted on boring attempts to squeeze cash from what was once a respectable title.

-Aaron Lipton

CROC AROUND THE CLOCK

Lake Placid

Starring Bridget Fonda, Bill Pullman and Oliver Platt

Directed by Steve Miner

Written by David E. Kelly

20th Century Fox Home Ent

Perhaps mainstream film critics have been permanently traumatized by a recent string of really awful big-budget horror and sci-fi films, it's more likely, however, that these imbeciles have simply never understood what about genre films and never will. Either way, the *Placidians* were quite sadyly bank on a tasty little gem called *Lake Placid* during its theatrical run, and as I sit here watching it on vid for the second time in as many days, I'm determined to set the record straight.

It's really no bad that 20th Century Fox is marketing *Lake Placid* as a comedy, because despite David E. Kelley's sharp and often hilarious script, it's every inch a thriller. Director Steve Miner (*Friday the 13th Part 3* et al.) executes an impressive balancing act, a character-driven horror-movie that detaches us with humor, then punches



SECOND-STRING ENTERTAINMENT

Six-String Samurai "DVD"

Starring Jeffrey Falco and Justin McGuire

Directed by Lance Mungie

Written by Jeffrey Falco & Lance Mungie

Palm Pictures

To properly understand *Six-String Samurai*, a brief history lesson is in order. This film was the darling of many Internet fan sites a couple of years back, well before it garnered any kind of release. The hype built up over the months as *Six-String Samurai* received positive word-of-mouth and expectations were rising high. The film played the festival circuit through much of 1998, and the advance word was so strong, filmmakers were breathlessly anticipating a new classic.

As is the case with all things Internet, backlash was inevitable (i.e. the post-*Star Wars* *Witch Prayer* fiasco). The film debuted and disappeared from the horizon as quickly as a first arrival. However, its impact is still felt today. Why?

Six-String Samurai isn't a great film, but it's not a complete failure either. It's just another case of a film being treated as the voice of indie film, but in reality, it's a fairly conventional post-apocalyptic yarn populated by beauty-loving bowlers, coonabai subcultures and the Russian army. The hero—a sword-wielding warrior named Buddy (probably because he looks like the late singer) wanders from adventure to adventure (with Death himself literally on his tail) in a series of haplessly cut fight scenes, accompanied by the ear-punk music of The Red Elvises (who appear in the film). Ironically, the music is one of the few things to make the *Six-String Samurai* experience memorable (the DVD features two music videos for the band).

Nevertheless, *Six-String Samurai* was the first film to really begin to unlock the potential of the Internet, surely the most efficient marketing tool in existence—one easily accessible to major studios and scrapping indie filmmakers. What it proved was that you could get your film noticed without having to spend millions on advertising. Were the film better, it would be remembered for more than that fact.

-Brad Abraham





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A thirty-foot crocodile takes up residence in a remote Maine lake, mauling on unwary swimmers and the occasional cow; big-city scientist and full-time sexy and Bridget Fonda is dispatched to investigate, immediately locking horns with genre warden

surprise – differences are set aside as the ragtag crew unites against a common scaly foe

I can't stress this enough: it's better than it looks on paper. The Bad Animal sub-genre is a dodgy one at best, if you start at the top with *Jaws* and work your way down through *Of Unknown Origin* and *Cape*, eventually bouncing out with *Tentacle: Lake Placid* – while hardly the most innovative film of its type – is a clever and energetic thriller that belongs about half way up the top tier

—John W. Bowen

Palman upon arrival. There's more bickering among the cast than a Gator 'n' Roses reunion, but eventually – surprise,

GORE BLIMEY!

Zombie Icon

Starring Thomas J. Moore, Adrian Ottwell and Robert Taylor

Written and directed by Thomas J. Moore

Shock-O-Rama Pictures

The whole How-Low-Can-You-Go home aesthetic may have started back in the 1960s with Hershey Gordon Lewis, but the direct-to-video boom of the nineties made the lo-fi homemade gore flick a more distinct sub-genre than ever. An unwritten rule dictates that the cheaper the movie is, the more hilariously gross it must be, and *Zombie Town* manages to simultaneously raise the bar a notch while plunging the brow lower than ever. Leave it to the British...

The box cover blares, "It's Monty Python meets *Dave of the Dead*", and for once the ad copy is pretty accurate. Plot descriptions would be futile – the film slugs tentaculously to coherence as the best of times – so here instead are the highlights: multiple decapitations, dachshundism and disembowelings, projectile vomiting, explosive diarrhea, Adolf the neo-Nazi, his sidekick Gerbil, a small army of homicidal airborne weed bottles and Mary Poppins, the juristic axxy Old, yeah – flesh-eating zombies, too. All this is bizarrely complemented by a background score consisting of various themes from Dvořák's *New World Symphony*, lovingly rangled on a really cheap synth.

With a cast of six men in multiple roles (playing both genders – you know how those racy Brits are) and doubling as technicians, Thomas J. Moore sets new standards for seat-of-the-pants filmmaking. And as primitive and dappled as *Zombie Town* is, its inventiveness and identity will be applauded – not devalued – by a certain segment of the horror audience (i.e. myself, Joe O'Brien and possibly Brad Abraham).

If your idea of a great horror film is *Urban Legend*, you should probably avoid *Zombie Town* and simply spend the rest of your life cheerfully unaware that you suck. If, on the other hand, your passions include *Evil Dead*, *Brain Damage*, *Bad Taste* or *Mashed Avenger*, *Zombie Town* is *The Last of the Naked Skins*, drive right in.

—John W. Bowen

THE BEDROOM THAT BLEED

Urban Flesh

Starring Marc Velloncourt, Méliné Dubreuil and Marin-Eve Petit

Directed by Alexandre Michaud

Written by J-F Grosier and Alexandre Michaud

Hellfire Studio



Crawling out of the bowels of the Montreal underground comes *Urban Flesh* (*Meatlove*), a cannibalistic capophony of gore and brutal violence that amazes, disgusts, and disturbs with striking impunity. Fear young thrillkillers with a voracious appetite for human flesh up their way through the catacombs of Montreal, dogged by a hardboiled police detective determined to bring these sadistic meatheads to justice. The atrocities become ever more nefarious and our hero, and his awe-inspiring mustache, will not rest until this bloody sanguage has been stopped.

The critics are concurring him, as it were. And oh, what errors they are. Hapless victims are tortured, sliced open, nailed to kitchen counters, hauled apart and eaten raw, the camera never deviating from documenting the dazzling dispersal of cheekback gore flung at the screen. The first hour is merely a set-up to the last 40 minutes of the film, a non-stop onslaught of savagery so brutal it leaves the viewer dryheaving.

Urban Flesh is a definitely amateur shot on video gore film, raw and offensive, made for under \$2,000. What it lacks in budget, however, is made up in attitude and enthusiasm. So what if much of the film was shot in a bedroom? So what if this bedroom is used in different locations? So what if they never took down the *Nightbreed* lobby poster that greets this way? The filmmakers have the black hearts of hardcore horror fans, delivering the gore groceries with a healthy dose of black humour, along with lengthy pans of their collection of horror props and memorabilia. The anatomically correct mammified woman is hilarious!

Urban Flesh is dedicated to Lucio Fulci, 1916(?)–1996 (Fulci died before his 80th birthday, do the math), but it is linked to the German underground gore films of Joop Buijter, Andrew Schizas, and Olaf Innebach, with a nod to the gory shorts of Jim Van Belcher. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* makes a brief audio cameo early in the film and a spiritual cameo to the greuling climax. Fans of low-budget shot-on-video gore films rejoice by slipping Michaud twelve bucks for a limited "Preliminary Editing Copy," before a much shorter and more polished final edition comes out next year. Visit the *Urban Flesh* web site for ordering information or send some dough to Alexandre Michaud, 5012 Doms, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3W 1W2.

Urban Flesh French Canadian gore

—The Gore-met



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PLAN NINE FROM THE OK CORRAL

Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter
Starring John Lupton, Carl Solder and Roda Gray
Directed by William "Doc" Beaudine
Written by Carl Hittlerman

Our appetite for pulp school reissues unabated, as evidenced by the recent resurgence of interest in Ed Wood's films (not to mention those of Wood's nascent counterpart, Herschell Gordon Lewis). Ironically, the Great Man's giant shadow has obscured several other notable buffoons from view, including William "Doc" Beaudine.

Beaudine's career as a cheapie director began in the silent era and stretched into the late sixties. His twilight years were capped by two howlingly peppy horror-westerns, *Jolly the Kid Heroes Dracula* (1965, with John Caeserle as the Count) and *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter* (1966) MGM has re-released *JMDFD* as part of its Midnite Movie line, with one hitch, this will be the first step toward restoring Beaudine's, or, reputation to its former, um, glory.

What really separates Beaudine from Wood is his technical expertise — this film is surprisingly well shot and edited, and its vivid colors belie its budget. Come to think of it, the acting's pretty competent, too. But Christ on a crutch, what of the subject matter?

The outlaw gangster and his harking sidekick Hank come *twifit* into town and hook up with some local buddies to plan a robbery; meanwhile, the daughter has taken up residence nearby and is performing experiments on hapless locals. Needless to say, the robbery goes awry and a whole bunch of really ludicrous shit happens and eventually an injured Hank ("He was clearing his gun and it went off," Jesse keeps telling everyone) winds up in the clutches of Dr. Mene Frankenstein. It's rather slow going, but the dramatic (?) bit scene alone is worth twice the rental price for its non-empirical effects.

MGM's ultra-cheapy new Madmax Movies line of vid reissues is pretty impressive, and you're bound to notice many more of these titles being toaded — for one reason or another — in future *AM* issues. And I'm sure that the top dogs of this monstrous multinational corporation are both proud and relieved that I approve.

—John W. Bowen

THE COOLEST VAMPIRE

Count Yorgo, Vampire
Starring Robert Quarry, Roger Perry and Michael Murphy
Written and directed by Bob Keiljan

Count Yorgo, Vampire is a formidable crap classic, an organic thrill ride of clichés from the 1970s. The male characters wear their pants tight, the females wear their bras high and a groovy Mc Generation sex appeal comes from all, particularly the "dashing, dark and deadly" Count Yorgo, played by Robert Quarry.

At the Count's castle, a group of young hipsters gather for a séance to summon the ghost of Doris's mother. Yorgo's formerly living girlfriend Noree suspects that the Count had something to do with her demise and they unite in his powers as a psychic medium. But after the botched séance, Noree is sever the same again for Doris, her boyfriend Michael and especially their friends Paul and Erica.

Michael wakes up after a night of free love in his Volkswagen van to find that Erica's got strange googles on her neck. That day they're off to the doctor to discover the origin of this unusual malady. Dr. James Hayes (Roger Perry) immediately suspects a vampire is to blame, and the hunt commences.

Always Inebriat, Count Yorgo, Vampire, is the quintessential possessor of the '70s, including the dream-smoking Dr. Hayes who flirts with his patients and wears an obnoxious hell-buttons and a Count who dresses up like a Vegas lounge lizard. There's even some kitch gone when Michael pugs Erica's pud and finds her gawping on a lousy cat, a scene that is worth the price of admission. The film was enough of a success to warrant a sequel, unimagingly titled *The Return of Count Yorgo*, which, as of press time, I have not had the pleasure of viewing.

—Mary-Beth Holliver

THE BAD NEWS BEES

Invasion Of The Bee Girls
Starring William Smith, Anitra Ford and Victoria Vetri
Directed by Denis Sanders
Written by Nicholas Meyer

Just think about it, boys — coming and going at the same time! — Dr. Nardoni. The good doctor pony reach sums up this flick, in which someone has taken their fixation with bees aorta most too far. A government agent (Smith) is called to a small California town to investigate a mysterious string of deaths. The victims — all men — show signs of having been essentially flunked to death, and while the prevailing attitude among the townfolk is that there most certainly are worse ways to go, the trend has got everyone understandably spooked.

Anticipating *The X-Files* by several decades, this 1973 film follows Smith as he slowly unravels the fiendish plot of a race of insectile superwomen. And don't jump out of your seat crying "repoll!" when you catch sight of these bodacious babes with obedient eyes, since *ITING* actually produces *The Singled Men* by several years. Yup, the truth really is way the hell out there.

Of course it's not unreasonable to expect this flick to be pretty creepy — and it sure is — but it's creep with a c, not a k. It's not nearly so over-the-top as some of its contemporaries like *Death Race 2000*, *Flesh Gordon* or various masterworks by Russ Meyer, the absurdity of the story speaks for itself, and doesn't really need to be punctuated with a lot of jokes. Accordingly, director Sanders has his cut — including Anitra Ford, best known as one of those human boob ornaments who used to point it priss on *The Price Is Right* — play it relatively straight. The result isn't so much a scree of guffaws as it is one long snort, and that ain't 'so bad, really. Hey, it beats the crap out of *Love Seeds of the Sun*! Whew.

As intentionally campy-seventies-drive-in-flicker goes, *Invasion of the Bee Girls* has a surprising amount on its philosophical plate. It's a silly satire on gender roles, a cautionary tale about our urge to reproduce and — above all else — a big, sexy metaphor for male performance anxiety. Oh, to be eighteen again.

—John W. Bowen





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REISSUES

SUNSTROKE

Autopsy

Starring Mimsy Farmer, Barry Primus and Ray Lovelock

Directed by Armando Crispino

Written by Lucio Battistrada and

Armando Crispino

Anchor Bay Entertainment

The giallo was a staple of Italian cinema from the '60s through to the '80s, a mix of mystery 'n' murder and stink 'n' slash that was the forerunner of the American slasher cycle. Inevitably giallo have exotic and titillating tales. Like *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* or *Strip Nude For Your Killer*, and feature a black-gloved killer slaying women. Liberated splatters of nudity, skanky sex, and gore are tossed in for good measure.

The plots are convoluted, full of twists and red herrings designed to keep the identity of the murderer a mystery until the final frames.

Thus we have Armando Crispino's 1973 giallo *Murdero solitario* (*Solar Storm*). The film was re-titled for North American release as *Autopsy* and has home video through Primus, minus 15 minutes and comprehensibility. The restored footage re-introduces plot devices missing from the initial release, but there are no revelations. *Autop-*

"THE BODIES BEAR TRACES OF CARNAL VIOLENCE"

sy is a case of extreme sunstroke, playing like a supernatural fever dream.

A wave of violent suicides is filling the morgue of Rome with mangled corpses. Simon (Mimsy Farmer) is a forensic pathologist writing her thesis on decaying staged suicides. She works in a variable assembly line of autopsies, plagued by hallucinations of leering, naked corpses rising to dance and copulate on the stainless steel slabs. Father Lorenzo (Barry Primus), a hard-footed priest prone to fits, is the brother of an apparent suicide victim. He is convinced his sister was murdered and enlists Simon's aid. Together they investigate the rash of deaths while people continue to die around them. Ray Lovelock shows up as Simon's nice car driving love interest, a cruel bastard who thinks nothing of ripping her clothes off. The mystery thickens to a choking point, but all is explained in the end. Sort of.

Autopsy is interesting in that it deviates from the giallo formula by eschewing the standard black-gloved killer and putting a pseudo-scientific spin on the murders. A brief scene restored from the Italian language print suggests the deaths may be the result of tarantol activity. It may be challenging to follow, but *Autopsy* is a stylish and atmospheric film with the requisite nudity, skanky sex, and gore, and cloaked in rich visuals and a haunting Ennio Morricone score.

Anchor Bay digitally re-mastered Crispino's film from the original negatives and presents a gorgeous transfer, crisp and bright with vivid colors, fully uncut and letterboxed at 1.85:1. The international trailer and the U.S. theatrical trailer are included at the end to booties. Bottom line? Euro horror fans won't want to miss this worthy re-issue.

-The Gore-met

BOOBS AND BLADES

Terra

Starring Suzy Kendall, Tina Aumont and Luc Merenda

Directed by Sergio Martino

Written by Ernesto Gastaldi and

Sergio Martino

Anchor Bay Entertainment

Sergio Martino's under-rated *Terra* (*If Corpses Presented No Trace of Violence Carnal*) is a classic example of the giallo. Suzy Kendall, who also appeared in Dino Zari's first giallo *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (*The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*), stars as Jane, an American art teacher attending college in Italy. When a masked, black-gloved murderer begins slaying and



SO BAD IT'S GOOD

Night Scream

Starring Joe Manno, Ron Thomas and Rindy Lindford

Directed by Allen Fone

Written by Bill L. Hart II and Mitch Brian

Warner Pictures



About a month ago, *Raw Story* staffers congregated for our weekly Contemporary event (see website for details) and were delighted by the new slasher film *Dread of Night* (RMM14). The film brought style, straightforward and genuine fright to the sleepiest of all sub-genres, the stink 'n' slash. In other words, it was the complete opposite of *Night Scream*, perhaps one of the cheesiest, most predictable, joyless attempts at the teen slasher I have ever seen.

Here's the plot in three short steps: 1) local Football Hero has a party, 2) drinking

and giraffe excursions for sex ensue, and 3) if I have to tell you, you're standing in the wrong part of the magazine display. Granted, there's a bit of a twist (it seems Football Hero is on medication for severe hyperactivity, and without it, he can become violent... and morning fogot to refill his prescription... so we know who the killer is right? Wrong), but they still manage to give it away half-way through the film.

If there was ever a textbook case of the

'80s slasher flick, this is it. *Night Scream* uses every dumb horror stereotype there is, and very badly at that. The opening scene is a blatant rip-off of *Mulholland*, right down to the score. From there on we have girls running around with their breasts flying out, people going off to make-out and be murdered, women tripping as they try to outrun the killer, etc.

Seeing *Scream* would have a field day with this one. It doesn't help that there aren't any real actors in this film. In fact, *Night Scream* makes *Depraved* *Night* look like a Shakespearean actor's guild. Despite all that, I'll concede that *Night Scream* is so bad it's funny, and I'd be a liar if I said I wasn't entertained watching it. That isn't a recommendation, but as a hardcore horror fan - true to the end - it's an honest opinion.

-Aaron Lupton

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VINTAGE HORROR REISSUES

CLASSIC CORMAN

The Haunted Palace 1963

Starring Vincent Price, Debra Paget and Lon Cheney Jr.

Directed by Roger Corman

Written by Charles Beaumont

MGM Midway Movies

MGM's Midway Movies line has yielded a crop of dark beauties, among them this overlooked vehicle for Vincent Price and Lon Cheney Jr. circa 1963. The carters rise on New England socialite Charles Dexter Ward (Price) who inherits an ancestral home in the town of Arkham, where, it turns out, his great, great grandfather was burned to death a century earlier for being a warlock. It seems his predecessor had entered into a bargain with otherworldly beings to supply them with the means to mate with humans. To this day, their twisted and deformed offspring stalk the fog-shrouded streets of this sleepy New England town.

The undeniable power of the gothic house casts a strange spell over Ward – is he becoming possessed by the spirit of his ancestor? His wife (Paget) believes so. And just what is the motivation of Ward's groundskeeper and servant (Cheney)? As the story unravels, and gruesome murders happen, the terrified townsfolk sharpen their pitchforks and light their torches.

Combining some of my favorite horror

mons – the inimitable Price, directed by Corman from a script by Beaumont – *The Haunted Palace* (taking its title from Edgar Allan Poe and a story from H.P. Lovecraft) delights on every level. If, like many of us at *Rue Morgue*, you grew up on fright films that whaled away many a rainy Sunday afternoon, then you know there's no encouragement strong enough to get you to relive those days. With an moody score, gothic sets and tear-di-force from the always reliable Price, *The Haunted Palace* is exactly the type of horror film we don't see enough of anymore.

All the same, it's unfortunate that this re-release is cropped for television, skimming Corman's intricate wide-screen compositions and spoiling some of the collective shocks scattered throughout. Maybe with the advent of DVD, *The Haunted Palace* – along with all of Corman's Poe adaptations – will get a third chance and be restored to the wilderness glory it richly deserves.



The Haunted Palace: A Saturday afternoon fright film.

WEE THE PEOPLE

Attack of the Puppet People 1958

Starring John Agar and John Hoyt

Directed by Burt I. Gordon

Written by George Worthington Yates

MGM Midway Movies

Mr. Finn (Hoyt), the kindly old proprietor of Dolls Inc., has a less-than-kindly method of manufacturing his private collection – he shrinks 'em down to size from real live specimens, with the help of his handy-dandy people-shrinking-glowing-kum-mung-things.

Gordon was actually best known for bigger-than-life-people movies including *The Amazing Colossal Man* (a clip from which plays during a scene at a drive-in). He should have stuck with a good thing, because *Puppet People* could use a little of that same kind of spectacle to distract us from a horrendous script and concert-hall performances (including genre stalwart John Agar).



-Brad Abraham

-John W. Bowen

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"Great art and a clever plot." *David Smith (The Werjag)*
"Looking amazing! I normally don't read comics, but I'm enjoying this book!" *Peter Steele (Paper-D-Magazine)*

Comics by Pedro Cabezhelo

Blood in four colours

first issue.

If the first issue is any indication, Teff's ambivalence is being questioned and her ultimate destiny as destroyer or force for good will be one of the series' major themes. After all, Swampy was inhabiting the body of *Hellblazer* had buy John Constantine when she was conceived, so it's only natural the girl has a mischievous side. The first issue certainly shows a lot of promise. The artwork by Roger Pitzer and Joe Robinson is crisp and detailed, and perfectly fits the bizarre tone of the story.

Vaughan has set up a lot of questions, most notably where Teff has been all these years, why she's reappearing as another girl, and where her parents are. With their invisible appearance just around the corner (along with Constantine, I'm sure) that is definitely one to watch, especially if you were a fan of the old series.

Another character making a return appearance to comics is Marvel Comics' *The Punisher*, one of the loner shoot-em-up characters of the 80s (and *Helix Swampy*, a one-time movie star). For those unfamiliar with his tale, Frank Castle became the scourge of the underworld when his family was murdered. But unlike Batman, *The Punisher* likes to riddle people with little holes. Eventually though, *The Punisher* became a bit passé and vanished from the comic racks. Now he's back, but can he be a bit a second time? Well, if the sales of the first issue are any indication, the answer is a resounding yes. The secret of this success, however, does not lie in re-inventing the character or avoiding protagonists. Rather, this book's strength comes from the creative team of Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, who have signed up for twelve issues of pain.

Ennis and Dillon are well known to comic fans for their work on *Hellblazer* and *Preacher*, and if you're thinking their version of *The Punisher* will be in a similar vein you're right on target. The first issue sees the Punisher renew his vow to clean up the streets with some drastic results, including a terrific shoot-out in the city morgue. There's little more to the story, just a lot of clever executions.

Ennis knows his work is over-the-top violence for the sake of violence and he makes no apology in his favour, he certainly doesn't

SWAMP THING #1
by Brian Vaughan/DC Vertigo
THE PUNISHER
by Garth Ennis & Steve Dillon/Marvel Comics
COTYAN KNIGHTS #1
by Devin Grayson & Dale Eaglesham/Vertigo
MOLE #1
by Christopher Golden/Dark Horse
Missy
by CLAMP/Vertigo Cosmopolitan

regard his trademark and if you're a fan of his work, his wife will certainly not disagree. Dillon demonstrates his usual artistic flair with a sequence on top of the Empire State Building a definite highlight. This duo have always been a huge hit before and it looks like this time will be no different (kudos to editors Joe Quesada and Jimmy Palmiotti for convincing these two to do the book).

Also with a new number one on the stands is the aforementioned *Batman Gotham Knight* is yet another *Bat* title which will explore the relationships between the caped crusader and his "family" (*Absin*, *Nightwing*, *Batgirl*, etc.) Each issue will contain a lead story by Devin Grayson and Dale Eaglesham as well as a backup black and white tale by a rotating artistic roster. Still, the question remains, do we need another *Bat* title?

The first issue quickly gets to the root of the character by having Batman investigate the mysterious murder of a teenage boy's parents. As expected, the recovery of his parents leads the Dark Knight to take a somewhat personal role in the investigation, to the point where it blinds him to the inevitable truth. The black and white feature by Warren Ellis and Jim Lee gives us a glimpse of Bruce Wayne's training as he solves the murder of a pregnant prostitute.

Both these stories are perfect indications of why *Batman* remains the most intriguing character in comics. They both portray him as a relentless champion of justice, obsessive and fanat-



Those of you with long memories and concave back issues will recall an article way back in *Rue Morgue* #1 chronicling the misadventures of *Swamp Thing*. Once DC/Vertigo's crown jewel, *Swamp Thing* was finally put to pasture a few years back. The problem with writing about an omnipotent character is you soon run out of convincing storylines. So how do you reinvent the title while sidestepping this little problem? Simple, you make Swampy's daughter the protagonist.

Writer Brian Vaughan has decided to reinvent the title by focusing on the offspring of Alice Holland and Abigail Aronow, Teff. When we last left Teff, she was just a toddler, unaware that she was the offspring of an earth elemental and a human female, little knowing what her powers were or her ultimate destiny. *Swamp Thing #1* shows us a Teff in her late teens, with the usual teenage angst colliding with extraordinary powers. It seems that not only has she inherited her father's mystery over vegetation, she has a gift for molding

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real in his methods. At the same time, we are reminded of what drives him and what leads such a lone, and lonely, crusader to depend on others. With any luck, this title will deliver us promise of exploring these relationships, and

prove that yes, there is room for one more Hellman title on the shelves.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer made the successful transition to the comics page so it's no surprise that spinoff *Angel* would do the same. Published by Dark Horse Comics, *Angel* continues the adventures of the

good-guy vampire and his encourage, half-demon Doyle and Cordelia.

Written by Christopher Golden and penciled by Christian Zales, *Angel* #5, is a surprisingly good yam. I say surprising because most comics based on television shows tend to be rather pedestrian, with little in the way of character growth and complex storylines. *Angel* doesn't quite avoid all the pitfalls — after all, it can't radically alter the characters or their situation — but it does demonstrate that you can still write an entertaining tale worthy of the source material.

The story is simple enough. *Angel* and

Doyle investigate a woman's claims that her abusive husband is possessed by a demon. The pace of the story, the addition of non-TV characters and the cliff-hanger ending help to elevate the comic from a cheap fix for fans to a worthwhile use of the medium. Other TV comics would be wise to take notes.

Viz Communications is the leading U.S. publisher of Japanese (in English) manga, which are as different from North American comics as anime is from traditional cartoons. April sees the long-awaited release of the sixth volume in the *X/1999* series by Clamp, a four-woman Japanese artist group. *X/1999* began publishing in Japan in the early '90s and began its run on these shores in 1997. Needless to say, fans of the series are experts in patience.

Those who have stuck with the series' irregular schedule have been treated to a complex and elaborate story, full of a wide array of quirky characters. The storyline revolves around Karma, a young man with psychic powers who returns to Tokyo to embrace his destiny. Will he be Earth's destroyer or its savior? The Seven Seals favor the latter, while the Seven Harbagers, the former. Torn between these two occult forces, Karma must also deal with the prophesied death of the girl he loves.

Reviewing manga is no easy feat. The inherent differences found in the style automatically makes the work attractive and unique, from a North American perspective, definitely one of the medium's appeals. However, taken from a purely narrative point of view, *X/1999* offers little that's new. Most of the standard Japanese character types are here: the moody, lonely hero, the doting lover, the tragic parents, the cocky, rebellious friend, the wise mentor, the schoolgirl and, of course, the princess. As well, end of the world stakes taking place at the turn of the century is hardly groundbreaking either.

Despite this, however, the characters are well-drawn and the storyline is intricate enough that the air of samurai is quickly dispelled. Read in one sitting, the story can be accused of lacking a certain pace, but this is a result of the semi-lead nature and the constant re-capping of major events is necessary. There is also enough 'Japanese' touches to keep novice manga readers amused — exaggerated facial gestures and comic modes — although it's possible that veterans may find most of the work typical. **B**



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Dean Koontz is one of the only writers in history to make no bones about deliberately setting out to write bestsellers. After beginning his career in the seventies as a science fiction writer, he immediately recognized the limitations of being trapped within such a small genre ghetto, so he decided — in those days when horror was the hottest thing going — to make some serious cash by writing horror. To say that he was successful would be an understatement. He quickly became one of the most popular novelists in America. And in horror literature lost its cachet, he neatly expanded his range to “suspense/thriller.”

Koontz is an excellent writer with good instincts. His latest book, *False Memory*, is a dandy thriller about mental illness and kidnapping. Along with an assortment of strong, likable protagonists, it features a truly twisted, brilliant and ruthless villain who would give Hannibal Lecter a run for his money. And for the first two thirds of its substantial length, this is a tight, scary book that successfully explores one of the most enduringly frightening prospects in life and



literature — fear of oneself, madness, loss of control and near darkness.

But, it seems that *False Memory* wasn't hitting enough checkpoints on the best-sell-o-meter. Because about two thirds of the way through, the story stops being about individuals and families — and disperses all the tension it has worked so hard and well to create by unsuccessfully trying to expand its periphery to become a government conspiracy novel.

To a large degree, Koontz is a victim of his own success, and has done himself and his readers a disservice by compromising his immense talent to put out “product.” Come on Dean — you can't need the money anymore; it's time to write the book you're capable of writing. Now that would be a text I'd recommend to anyone capable of reading.

—Dale L. Sproule

You Come When I Call You
Douglas Clegg
Cemetery Dance Publications

You Come When I Call You is Douglas Clegg's seventh novel, and his most ambitious to date. A true epic (clocking in at 408 pages) in the grand tradition of such classics



as Stephen King's. And Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*, it effectively establishes Clegg as not only the direct heir to the crown of contemporary horror fiction, but as a gifted chronicler of the stark social realities of poverty-stricken American life — both rural and urban — at the century's close.

In 1980, a group of young people from the desolate desert town of Palmesta, California, encounter and challenge a demon, Larra, who appears to them as a beautiful young woman. The novel explores the physical and emotional devastation that Larra inflicts on her ravage, and follows the characters 20 years later as they seek redemption and resolution. Clegg possesses a master's suspense touch for horror: there is nowhere to hide from his nightmare vision of Larra's holocaust.

But if horror is the spice of *You Come When I Call You*, its heart is a terrifying, unforgettable vision of the vulnerability of human life to grinding poverty, abuse, and the struggle to stay alive in the face of relentless adversity. Clegg powerfully evokes the verminousness of trailer parks and pit bull fights, drug deals and blasted urban nightscapes, as a backdrop to Larra's ageless, supernatural evil. The novel is as much a searing indictment of the horrors human

being a visit on the most defenseless of their own kind as it is a brilliant achievement of occult fiction.

In short, *No Cover When I Call You* is a superbly crafted piece of modern Americanism with multitudes to offer, a horror novel flavored with enough moral integrity to leave the reader wiser, smarter, and more aware than ever that the bridge between real-life horror and the realm of demons, is short, narrow, and treacherous.

-Michael Rowe

Necronomicon Book Three

Andy Black, ed.

Noir Publishing/Marginal

Trying to get intellectual about most horror films is a daunting proposition. Basically, you're damned if you do, "cause most eggheads don't take horror films that seriously and even fans are prone to think you're missing intellectual drizzle on their

thrill parade. Nevertheless, a guy named Andy Black can still make a respected (and respectable) series out of doing the academic boogie on the likes of *Scream* and *Scream Again* and Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu*.

Miscellaneous perhaps, because Necronomicon's scholarly handwidth is about as wide as a BA is worthless. Black kicks things off, for example, with a full-on interview with Bryan Yama that amounts to a lengthy fanboy article, run-on sentences intact. Forty pages later, University of Kent senior lecturer Michael Grant is discussing how language functions as a deconstructive metaphysical principle in the works of modern fantasists such as Franz Kafka and John Carpenter. For his act, he conjures up the ghorns of Hegel and Wittgenstein.

What is *Necronomicon's* greatest strength - Black's willingness to swing back and forth from heady academic to fanboy journalism - is ultimately the weakness that deprives his book of a cogent point. But one



Pain, No Pleasure, body horror in Faceless

will has to tip the hat to him for milking the discussion in the first place, no matter how inconclusive and/or finally things get.

Creatural work-outs are to be had in essays on the Sadler aesthetics of *Friday*, *Dead Till Dawn*, body horror in *Eyes Without a Face* and *Faceless* and notes on *The Wicker Man*, *The Story of Q* and *In the Mouth of Madness*. Heavy gossip about *Solidad Miranda* and Jean Rohde's *Les Jevrons des vampires* swing the podium back to a worthy if irregular update on horror and movie cinema from around the world.

-Emma Anderson

Darker Than You Think

Jack Williamson

Orb Books

Jack Williamson has had quite a career - everyone should be as dedicated as this guy. In his seventy-two (!) year-long writing career, Williamson has published nearly fifty books and has received a *Brim Stoker* award for lifetime achievement as well as the Nebula-awarded title of Grand Master for his life's work.

With a career born out of the *Gemback* pulp, Williamson is considered a pioneer of the space opera genre and has been credited with coining such terms as "transforming" and "genetic engineering." His roots lie very obviously in science fiction. Nonetheless, his 1948 novel *Darker Than You Think* was enough of a landmark in horror fiction to deserve a reissue in that most aesthetically pleasing of printed formats, the trade paperback.

Darker Than You Think is an anything-but-typical werewolf novel, it offers a take on the true reason behind evil in human society, told from the deeply-in-denial perspective of the story's key character, a journalist named Will Barbone. Barbone falls for a seductive witch/werewolf who slowly lures him into a world of magic and power and a race to prevent

CLAN NOVELS FOR MASQUERADERS

Assamite
Gherbod Fleming
Ravnos

Kathleen Ryan
White Wolf Publishing

I haven't played *Ravnos: The Masquerade* on the internet or otherwise, so I can reasonably conclude that the game's fans will appreciate *Assamite* and *Ravnos* more than I did. Those of you with an eye for games (*Play Dead* pg. 56) will appreciate *Ravnos: The Masquerade* and its world-wide make-believe society of folks pretending to be vampires in an intricate little vampire world.

These two novels are number seven and eight of a thirteen part series. Number eight, *Ravnos*, does not quite stand up to the praise the players gave the game, it has more bark than bite and lacks the strength to make me care. *Assamite* is better, more involving, with strong characters and a tight plot that seems to have a point of some sort. I don't mean to be vague, but much is left hanging, perhaps for the series reader to resolve.

Written by Gherbod Fleming, *Assamite* is about Fatima al-Fajrah, a thousand-year-old assassin set on destroying all creatures who feed off the blood of mortals. The

dilemma set before her is that the most precious Allah and eventually kill the only creature she has ever loved - a "bride" of her clan's enemy. As the day of reckoning approaches, she struggles with the decisions she must make while carrying out the missions that her elders order.

Ravnos is about Khalid Ravnos, one of the few lucky vampires left in the world. His lack of savoir faire gets him into some nasty near-escapes. I have to wonder if author Kathleen Ryan based Khalid's character on one of The Bookworm Boys. He is a lightweight in every respect, and contradicts none. The story revolves around the Eye, an object not really described, which has immense powers of destruction. The chase for the Eye is on, and as in *Assamite*, little is resolved.

Even though I lack enthusiasm for *Ravnos*, it did bring up the *Masquerade*, a disgusting, misshapen clan that is central to the series' last book. This clan is mentioned in both novels and only cryptically, but well enough to pique my interest. So while I'm sure that many black club web

prentices would suck up the whole series, if you're not one of them, maybe you'll want to read number darker all by itself.

-Nisa Mouszichka





PARALYZED AGE
Empire of the Vampire
Dancing Frenzy Discs Inc.
 This independent Goth writer from Germany rears its mid-eighties Cure/Silly Movie with the help of some wimpler folkie post. The retro synth do little to expand or rethink Goth's New Wave roots, but the lyrics work in spite of the obvious. Over references to Poe, blackcat and the dying beautiful may be overdone, but they're never main-
 weight. Occasionally Paralyzed Age even manages to pierce the skin. Look for the forgettable cover. **-C 3.5/5.2**



LE'RUE DELASHAY
Music in Theory
and Practice
Root-D-Evil Records
 The lofty ceremonial marriage between classical music and blue-blooded terror is the substance of Le'Rue Delashay's music. Drawing inspiration from haunted houses and occult texts, Delashay gropes with stony keyboards and tubular organs in evocative voices of Murray and the Planets of the Opera. But despite my admission, I don't like Music in Theory and Practice as much as its architect, The Court Composer (RMR). There's an over-
 the-top or interpretation of the obscure

of totalitarian, played down in the haunting, abstract music of Hopschloider and Piero Soma in *Am Opus 23* which won't sell well before *NeverBroke*, there are pieces here - *Evocation of Midnight Manifesto* and a black-melting of Bach's *Bacchanale Opus 33 No. 6* - that are among the most beautiful music I've heard all year. **-C 3.5/5.5**



GRAVE ROCKERS
Various
Lo-Fi Entertainment

Whatever said there's no such thing as horror rock and roll would probably give the existence of this CD. Let me take the time to show this review even your throat, you holy relics, because this is the kind of stuff no at *Rue Mignon* (see last site) for a scintillating collection of swamp rockabilly and Elvis inspired grooves done up Halloween style. While Rob Zombie has been working at the same in LA with his Zombi 2, Go-Go label, *Grave Rockers* shows left on still there's coming out of the underground in New York, Texas and Seattle. The difference is that these sounds are a lot more raw and committed to weed horror rather than the silly fun stuff on *Zombi 2*. Go-Go though there's some of that here too. Moments of musical mobility include *Psycho Changer* (Grave Rockers From Outer Space), *The Fix* (Dugga Up a Den), *The Sinners* (Satan's Cradle), *The Spectres* (Rockabilly Wasteland), *Two Hellbeasts* (Satan), *The Lustrous Kings* (Through The Devil's Head), *The War* (New Jack Six) and *The A-Primates* (The Bells). Drawing heavily from *The Coney*, *Blues*, *Ed Wood* and garage, Johnny Cash and George Remort, *Grave Rockers* is a sudden wave of pure evil but gutted rock and roll adrenaline horror surf park

zombie rock to go go go psycho punk-
 ably industrial rock a bit and weird.
 Enjoy! (Call 1-800-404-4117 to order)
 -C 3.5/5.5



RHEA'S OBSESSION
Between Earth and Sky
Mamorous Records
 You'll find lots Goth and low shadows in the new disc from Toronto slayers *Rhea's Obsession*. If you're at all familiar with the group (see RMR), you'll know that they have been increasingly progressing a Goth-based sound towards world beat rhythms in a sultry mid-eastern vibe. *Between Earth and Sky* is clearly their breakthrough album, a lushly scored, full-bodied collection of guitar and synth manipulations spiced with soft melodic breaks and Indian scales. Unlike a lot of Goth music, this album is bright like a midnight sun and never uninteresting - a major one although for a genre that has always defined itself through redundancy. **-R 3.5/5.5**



THE CRUXSHADOWS
The Mystery of the Whipper
Dancing Frenzy Discs Inc.
 Okay, we all know that Goth music is about brooding and melancholy and such, and no one in their right mind would want to inject life into it (it's all about death and it is). But that's exactly

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THE RESIDENTS!
George & James
Stars & Hank Forever!
East Side Death.

It's all that familiar with the music of George Gershwin or John Philip Sousa. Everyone, of course, has heard James Brown and Hank Williams. Leave it to *The Residents* to bring those four names together in two theatically linked albums. Originally released in the early eighties

heavy eighties, these albums are the music of these American composers as the musical equivalent of trying to get Pee Wee Herman to explain David Lynch. Dr. George & James Gershwin's jazz (*Phillythy in Blue I Got Rhythm*, *Summerdays*) is interpreted through moody magic. *The Residents' homage to James Brown* is a faithful domestic reconstruction of Brown's live performance in the Apollo in 1962.

Stars and Hank Forever! is more successful, with a couple of his (*Williams' How-Dee*) and a creepy rendition of *Janis Joplin* to offer the over-the-top justly laudable wilderness of *Southern March* music. Part of the American Composer Series that the four-time embroiled on and discarded in the 1980s, these two albums offer a few classic creepy

and Freaky Residents moments, fitting the mark between hysterical and uncaring. I would have liked it better if Brown was hooked up with Williams, but that would probably make the other album unbearable. Take your chances with these ones. **-R 3.5/5.5**
Stars & Hank Forever! 3.5/5.5

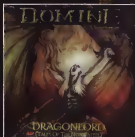
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Deceased into a little different, for one, they take a lot of cues with their lyrics, finding inspiration in The Twilight Zone (Pronounced, Trilogy of Terror/The Doll With the Hideous Spirit) Take From the Casket (Chambers of the Wasting Blind), The Black Witch Project (Bly's Demons) and Edgar Allan Poe (Dark Chilling Heartbeat) among others. What may sound like an excuse to power/freak is actually pretty traditional metal for the frost peat, with doses that are reminiscent of Meadens I Ammy and Sethi, and Pissed a Tiplan and Gowing. Although I would have liked a little more diversity in the music, there's no denying the death metal outfit is looking to reanimate the heavy corpse of heavy metal and doing a good job of it. -OC 8.8.11



SOUL REAPER
Written in Blood
NUCLEAR BLAST

As you know, would the Audio Drone be without another dosage of Swedish death metal? Actually, considering the competition that thrive over there, there is a

maggot breeding ground. Written in Blood is a distinctive debut EP. Soul Reaper are incredibly fast of course, but there is emphasis placed on creative song structures and technical musicianship. Similar to early Morbid Angel, the band sings the lyrics of devastation through such fare as Sodom and Labyrinth of the Damned. There's no two ways to look at this. Written in Blood is an essential on your radars, but for those who like that kind of thing, Soul Reaper is a great entry into Swedish prone export. -AL 8.8.11



FLESHCRAWL
As Blood Rains From The Sky We Walk The Path Of Endless Fire
METAL BLADES/ATYK

Fleshcrawl aren't as gay as their zombic artwork suggests, but they doesn't stop them from delivering the bloody goods. What makes up this latest album by one of Germany's finest death deserts is a collection of intense, brutal death metal with a few well straggling

bits. **9/10** Fleshcrawl engage in quite a bit of Slaytwerkship, they also pay tribute to Cannibal Exciter, one the first metal acts to ever commit themselves to the dark side. There is nothing particularly progressive about this band, but when you've got the Dark Lord on your side, does it really matter? -AL 8.8.11



SHADOWS FALL
Of One Blood
CENTURY MEDIA

Of One Blood stands as one of the most unique and captivating American metal albums of late. Here, death and black metal dismember the melodic sound that has been made famous, ending up with something that sounds similar to the mega-death metal of In Flames. Along with these styles are three distinct vocalists in a length of complex song structures and rock-solid heaviness. I have to give it to Shadows Fall: these aren't melty bands that can pull off having great lyrics and acoustic pulses in the same song. Lyrically, these guys are obsessed with personal loss, as is noted

in the song's misanthropic To Ashes and Pleasid. This CD hasn't left my stereo yet, and considering this game is a bi-monthly, that's quite a long time. -AL 8.8.11



UNLEASHED POWER
Absorbed

VERDICT ENTERTAINMENT

The new EP by U.P. is a bit of a re-visit backwards through time, beginning with a new track and then featuring material from previous sessions. Lead man Matt Jacobson's Genial roars remain present as his power metal-tinged reflects a sound that will no doubt find greater audiences overseas. Unleashed Power are unique in creating complex songwriting around interesting chord changes and lyrics that not only avoid falling flat, but are damn near socially relevant. Only no-frills dark. Unleashed Power may still please the masses, but they of metal connoisseurs with their unusual mix of technical power metal that is often melodic and occasionally pushing. -AL 8.8.11

SHADOWS FALL Of One Blood

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PLAY DEAD
GAMES by Wes Johnson

EDITED: Halloween & Gore; NEWS & CR: Error Books

DEMON CITY SHINJUKU

PLAYABILITY: XMAS
GRAPHICS: HALLOWEEN
SHIVERS: XMAS

Action is one of those things that people either love, or just don't get, and one range from easy-to-fool, to hard-core porn. Personally, most of it leaves me cold, but I do have my favorites. The author of this game is one of those people who loves the stuff, and you can tell.

Demon City Shinjuku is a role-playing game based on the anime movie, and is the third sourcebook from this company. Like the first, the game takes place in a neo-future Tokyo, one that has suffered a deadly earthquake, and is now swarmed with powerful demons, sinister and martial artists. The premise is that all the evil that has already occurred is only a prelude, the real terror will come after a permanent portal to hell is opened. The result is a movie and game packed with truly nasty demons, magic, great fight scenes, a certain amount of angst, and epic heroes and villains. Think about it—with all this available, it's only one small step to moody gothic scenes or total carnage with exploding body parts, showers of gore... you get the picture.

Players can be anything from cops and swordsmen to magics and demons. It is up to the players to decide which side they are working for, and the ref to make it happen. A complete range of skills and abilities is supplied, and the character generation rules can be used to construct villains. The city is described in detail, and several scenarios are supplied. The rules are pretty straight forward, and have a lot of flexibility. In other words, if there isn't a specific rule for what you want to do, it's easy to fudge something.

In the right hands, this subject matter allows for an horrific a gaming experience as



DEMON CITY SHINJUKU
Send Your Characters to Hell
(Role-Playing Game)



ABERRANT
White Wolf Publishing
(Role-Playing Game)



SOUL REAVER
Crystal Dynamics
(Platform)

you want, as long as you are willing to put some effort into it. If you're going to play this, I advise reading the movie or something similar, watching it first, and then play. But if you're gonna run *True Death* or *Legend of the Overlord* as your inspirational viewing, I really don't want to know about it.

ABERRANT

PLAYABILITY: XMAS
GRAPHICS: XMAS
SHIVERS: EASTER

Another role-playing game from a company with a rep for horror/gothic type games, but this time it's about superheroes.

Well, so, that isn't accurate, not really. *Aberrant* is a game set in the very near future, where some people have developed super-powers. To prevent this setting (and let's face it, have any appeal, you had better [like comic books] close your eyes and imagine the dark history variants from Marvel and DC, add a little X-Files, and a heaping spoonful of WWF Raw. Now you get the picture.

Art in these books is standard for the industry, that is it ranges from way good to not bad. The layout is nice, and seems to be meant to evolve Web surfing. The writing is very strong, it managed to capture my interest enough that I would have read all the source books cover to cover even if I didn't have to write this review. The rules seem pretty similar to White Wolf's other games, (although I could be mistaken, I'll admit I only skimmed that section), and so should not, other than hinder play. As usual, lots of detail and options are given for character development, as well as a lot of detail on the history and setting. I'll admit, my favorite part is the evaluation of pro wrestling with superheroes and mutants to provide abilities.

While this is not a particularly scary premise at first glance, like all role-playing

games, the mood of the game is up to those playing it. The idea of super-powered serial killers, or stalkers, or pro-wrestlers can be pretty cool. Mix and match demons and vampires or ghosts with what you are given and it could be pretty entertaining. I think this game is worth a look, if nothing else.

SOUL REAVER

PLAYABILITY: HALLOWEEN
GRAPHICS: HALLOWEEN
SHIVERS: XMAS

The first class graphics of *Soul Reaver* shine through on the newest system available on the market the Dreamcast console by Sega. Set in a twisted landscape of mythic proportions, your character, Raziel, sets out on a trek for revenge. Apparently, Raziel was once a vampire lord who helped rule over the world of Nagga by conspiring all of the human kingdoms. As the centuries passed, Raziel became too prideful and too dark, the supreme commander had him thrown into the River of the Dead. But Raziel's soul survived and, one thousand years later, he is resurrected. Unfortunately, he's out for blood. *Tremulous Soul Reaver* is a slash 'em up, beat 'em up game chock full of swiftings, burning pits of fire and that great vampire boos staight.

The game plays smoothly and the graphics are better on the Dreamcast over the other consoles available at present. The intro in particular is slick with a real 3D feel. The first part of the game allows you to get acquainted with the operations of the controller while revealing the ongoing story. You jump, back, slash and glide your way through the levels meeting a number of different opponents and solving small puzzles. Every once and a while you get a chance at ridding some wrongs with so old enemies. A cool time waster with a drawaway, though *Syndicate*, horror who. **B**

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Stephen King's Danse Macabre

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Understand death? Sure. That was when the
monsters got you.

— *Salem's Lot*



Re-reading *Danse Macabre* in 2000, it becomes readily apparent that a follow-up would be timely, to say the least. The years immediately following its publication saw a number of pivotal events in the field, including some innovations which would change horror fundamentally: 1983 saw the release of *The Evil Dead*, a film King himself has lauded in numerous interviews, one which would revolutionize the splatter film genre with its energy, creativity and sheer audacity. And let's not forget that while that decade saw continued success for King, the late eighties essentially belonged to Clive

Barker, a staggering talent whose ultra-shocking yet highly literary and unapologetic works really were a shot heard 'round the world. After a string of successes in only a few years, Barker would more or less abandon horror for fantasy, eventually, King's close friend and onetime collaborator Peter Straub (who certainly garners his share of praise in *Danse Macabre*) would drift away from pure horror and devote his energies to writing convoluted mystery-thrillers.

What's particularly interesting (and revealing) is to track King's 1981 picks to the present, particularly with respect to film: *Alien*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *Malfunction*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and to a lesser degree *The Exorcist* all continue to exert considerable influence among horror filmmakers; *The Omen* and *Deliverance*, while still deservedly popular, do not.

A few inaccurate productions aside, a second volume would no doubt yield a wealth of opinions on events in horror over the last twenty years. And what a pair of decades! *Deliverance*, the splatterpunk craze of the late eighties, the ridiculous death-by-sensitization of *Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween*, the bizarre success story of *The Blair Witch Project*, the post-*Screen* teen horror fad, *X-Files*, *Buffy*, the home video boom, the death of the drive-in—King certainly wouldn't find himself short of material.

—John W. Bowen

Nearly twenty years after its first edition hit the stands, King's *Danse Macabre* remains probably his least popular full-length work. And while the book is both an impressive accomplishment and a very entertaining read, it's hardly surprising that as sales are still pretty insignificant compared to those of, say, *The Stand*, King's sole non-fiction book (so far) is an extensive overview of horror themes in film and fiction, focusing primarily on late twentieth century works, a later-day counterpart to H.P. Lovecraft's treatise *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. In essence, the aforementioned popularity gap serves as a reminder that while Stephen King is indisputably the pre-eminent horror writer of the century, only a fraction of his huge audience is actually made up of die-hard horror fans.

In typically self-deprecating fashion, King downplays his own considerable expertise as a social commentator while delivering a refreshingly enlightening examination of our apparent addiction to fixations of the horrific in the arts. Even a brief cruise through the opening chapters should make it abundantly clear that King—if ever disinclined to construct writing fiction—could easily find success as a pop culture analyst. One suspects that the raw-shock delivery is a defense mechanism against an indifferent and distant literary intelligentsia who have only ever begrudgingly acknowledged King's talents.

Flipping back and forth with apparent ease, King regales us with personal anecdotes, then trots out various theses with neo-cadaveric detachment.

We hear about a pivotal childhood event that took place at a ten-year-old Steve took in a matinee showing of *Dark Horror: The Flying Saucers* in Stratford, Connecticut, many pages later, he examines *The Thing* as an embodiment of middle-American cold war paranoia.





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