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\$7.00 Canada

#7

Fall 2005

MICROFILM™

The Magazine of Personal Cinema in Action



Lars von Trier wields **THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS**

FIVE YEARS • QUALITY OF LIFE • THIS OLD CUB
RETURN IN RED • Haxan Films • SCUMROCK
Cinemaker • MICRO-FILM @ 5 • Sarah Jacobson

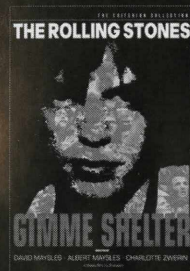
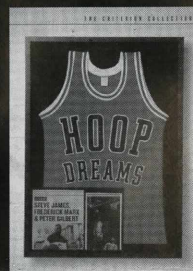
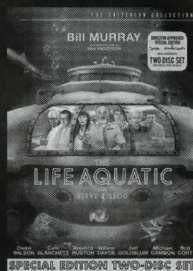
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Model: Devin Atkins Camera: Tower/Sears 584.91890 8mm, c. 1961 Photographer: JaPan Location: Carle Park, Urbana, IL

issue 7

fall 2005

- 8** **A POSITIVITY MORE POTENT THAN THE CURSE:** Amongst the heroes and myths that color professional baseball lives former Chicago Cub everyman **Ron Santo**, whose chin-up battle with diabetes is documented by his filmmaker son **Jeff Santo** in **THIS OLD CUB**. **Anthony Zoubek** cheers on their efforts.
- 11** **NAVIGATING FORKS IN THE ROAD:** For their third go-round simultaneously covering indie movies in production, **Jeff Sartain** discovers that the makers of **OUR LADY OF SORROW** have drastically downshifted while **Jason Pankoke** races to catch up with the Hoosier folk behind the newly-titled **RETURN IN RED**.
- 15** **SPECIAL SECTION—MICRO-FILM @ 5:** This myriad selection of filmmaking stories takes an honest and mildly terse look at **MICRO-FILM** and the art it celebrates.
- 16** **SPECIAL SECTION—"FIVE YEARS" CONCLUDES:** One of the many covert operations undertaken by our man **L. Rob Hubbard** to aid cinematic creation landed him on the set of **Brett Wagner's FIVE YEARS** in Ohio. Roughly five years later, the director discusses a labor of love about to come full circle.
- 18** **SPECIAL SECTION—"FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS" AND THEN SOME:** Poet-journalist **Jason Watt** shares some time with veteran Danish filmmaker-poet **Jørgen Leth** to appraise **THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS**, a candid biographical experiment borne from a **Lars von Trier** challenge.
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- 24** **SPECIAL SECTION—FIVE IS A FESTIVE NUMBER:** For a long time as a child, editor **Jason Pankoke** loved the number five after turning five in 1975, probably when he realized Christmas and his birthday were only five days apart. Now as a (purported) grown-up, he contemplates the five-plus years that **MICRO-FILM** has brought joy, pain, and independent movies into his life—but not necessarily in that order.
- 33** **DEFINING ONE'S "QUALITY OF LIFE":** The lovely and spirited **Diane Kung** recounts her summer internship crewing on the San Francisco independent movie **QUALITY OF LIFE**, through which filmmaker **Benjamin Morgan** dramatizes the issues and sacrifices facing non-conformist youths and their culture.
- 39** **C-U CONFIDENTIAL #7:** While the good-hearted **Wilhelm** readies himself the morning of his philosophical showdown on the edge of town, **Jason Pankoke** finally resumes his reports with the lowdown on numerous youngsters attempting to make Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, a much better place for film.
- 4** **EDITORIAL:** Small proves to be beautiful in the ways which the motion picture can augment the daily grind.
- 6** **NEWS-REEL:** In which the Editor talks up tangents, more tangents, and even more tangents that may or may not have anything to do with this here periodical.
- 7** **LETTERS:** These appreciative outbursts prove that somebody out there digs **MICRO-FILM**.
- 45** **REVIEWS:** **I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW** piles on the creepiness, **SEAFARERS** treads water in Rotterdam, and **LAUGHING BOY** knocks 'em dead in this issue's wildly delectable cornucopia. Also, **Michael Wolinski** studies the ways of the **CINEMAKER**, **F. Scott Ferguson** attends "**\$30 Film School**," and **Robert Hubbard** plays hooky to read zines.
- 64** **CAST & CREW:** This page officially recognizes the "dependent" in independent.
- 65** **INNER CINEMA:** **Robert Hubbard** says a belated good-bye to **Sarah Jacobson**.



The Magazine of Personal Cinema in Action

Issue 7 Fall 2005

Publisher & Editor
Jason Pankoke

Contributors

Erin Anadkat Danielle Cloutier
Holly Day Damian Duffy
Chad Fahs Michael Hegg
L. Rob Hubbard Diane Kung
Jeff McCoy A.J. Michel
Aaron Matthew Polk
Andrew J. Rausch Jeff Sartain
Jason Watt Nichole Wleklinski
Michael Wolinski Anthony Zoubek

Special Photography
Holly Rushakoff

HQ Helper
Nichole Wleklinski

Graphic Design & Layout
Jason Pankoke

Webmaster
Eric Pankoke

Muse of the Issue
Devin Atkins

MICRO-FILM (ISSN # 1528-2562) is published on an irregular basis by Opteryx Press, P.O. Box 45, Champaign, IL 61824-0045. This issue is © 2005 Jason Pankoke. No parts of this issue may be reproduced in any form without prior written consent from the publisher. All bylined articles are © their respective authors.

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Contributions are welcome from film journalists and filmmakers alike! However, we accept no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts and materials. Please include a SASE with ample postage if you wish your materials to be returned to you. All correspondence is considered submitted for publication.

Printed by Crouse Printing, 3102 Research Road, Champaign, IL 61822, (217) 356-9115, fax (217) 356-1381.

Distributed by FM International, Ubiquity Distributors, and Tower Records. Also available at Quimby's, Exile on Main Street, and other fine independent stores and Web sites. **If there's a nifty place near you that doesn't stock this mag but should, SPEAK UP!**

editor@micro-film-magazine.com
www.micro-film-magazine.com
office phone: (217) 352.1312

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OPTERYX PRESS
the evolution of expression

a micro-film editorial

There You Are

In the Realm of the Senseless, where I've been mentally residing lately while juggling my work load at the Secret MICRO-FILM Headquarters, I've actually neglected to draft This Editorial until right before press time. It's a rare occurrence because I particularly enjoy the story-telling enlisted on these pages that might seem out-of-place in the film coverage proper, and I'm usually prone to drafting it well before other pieces that will engulf me with their research and transcription needs. What, then, should I talk about for this here Fifth Anniversary issue of MICRO-FILM on the literal eve before I turn it in to the printer? That's actually a tough decision, for as you might notice upon working through this jam-packed edition, I have *plenty* of opinions offered up for your consideration.

Why don't we go potluck and pluck some myriad observations drifting around in the thought balloon currently hovering over my head? With the total content of MICRO-FILM 7 locked in for months now, it's actually a minor blessing to be able to include a few extra points of interest. Pretend this is like the local paper's news bulletin in Section A, only unadorned with crime stories and county fair schedules.

Well, at least the county fair schedules....

VHS IS DEAD! LONG LIVE VHS?

Ask the cinephiles in MICRO-FILM Country where they rent videos and you'll almost always hear the same answer: "That's Rentertainment. Where else?" Heartbreaking, then, was it to receive their weekly e-newsletter a couple of months ago that announced the store would be selling off its entire VHS catalog in the inevitable effort to become an all-DVD paradise. Having lived in this town as long as I have and patronized That's Rentertainment for nearly the same stretch, I knew what treasures, guilty pleasures, and alleged "unofficial copies" lined their racks. Apparently, so did many other people, as their once-16,000 strong inventory has been reduced to a third that amount since the sale began. Owner and good guy Geoff Merritt has been putting the money in the right place by filling the vacated shelf space with digital versions of many films that have exited the store as analog artifacts. And, as we well know, a certain percentage of those movies *still* haven't crossed over to DVD.

In my adventures scouting the dwindling VHS collection, now relegated to the back of the store, I arguably hoarded way more than I should have, considering all the MICRO-FILM movie submissions still awaiting their day in the sun. That means I can only justify the many hours

spent walking the aisles in beat-up shoes, stacking dusty cassette cases on the front counter for purchase, and speed-typing Google and IMDb searches on the store computer by announcing a new project tentatively called *The VideoThrone*. Whether it goes print or electronic remains to be decided, but it will certainly prove to be an experiment in personal writing by yours truly combined with the type of film analysis that you might expect (or dread) from the editor of a movie magazine.

GUNMAN FOOTAGE RECONSTRUCTED

An anecdote in my CHARMING BILLY story from MICRO-FILM 5 attempted to illustrate the ingenuity that allowed director Wm. R. Pace and his production crew to capture a key shot, revealing beleaguered Billy Starkman (Michael Hayden) as the shooter on the water tower with gauzy Midwestern farmland filling out the horizon behind him. Somethin' crazy in my brain translated the information to say that their cameraman and actor climbed to the top of the actual water tower seen in various shots throughout the film, an impractical and relatively dangerous set-up to even *consider* for a low-budget independent film.

"I probably wasn't clear when talking about that," Pace told me in a subsequent e-mail as we discussed the article. "What we did was this—All of the shootings in the film take place at a crossroads about two miles south of Havana [Illinois]. One of the reasons I chose that location is because there is a large grain dryer/storage bin there. It's 80 to 100 feet in the air with a flat roof that can only be accessed via an iron rung ladder that's completely vertical. Up there was where we did all the POV shots of the road, plus the dolly that reveals Michael as Billy on the tower. The crew had to build a block-and-tackle to hoist all the equipment up to the roof, and then one crew member used climbing gear to attach himself to the side of the bin so he could get a reflector in position to help light Michael.

"If you look at the picture you published of the tower set [in MF 5, p.20], just off camera right is where this dryer/storage bin is located. We kept as many things as possible in that one location so we wouldn't have to move so much. The only person to climb the real water tower in Oakford—which is significantly higher than the dryer/storage bin—was stuntman Randy Huber. I would have loved to get some POV shots from up there, but that ladder climb was just too much to carry a heavy film camera.

"One of the most entertaining things about making the movie was editing three or four different locations together to create a water tower where there is none. We had to do a lot of pre-planning to pull it off, but that's the 'puzzle' part of filmmaking I like. As Hitchcock used to do, you figure the puzzle all out first, then you un-piece it to shoot it and re-piece it back together in the editing room."

As much as the entertainment press concentrates on certain individuals connected with any given project to represent its inner workings and (hopeful) outward successes—and MICRO-FILM is no exception—we certainly have to recognize that the vaunted Hollywood *auteur* theory does not apply in the absolute sense to this particular art. One or a few can be the driving force behind a movie, but it should go without saying that *teamwork* is what's most responsible for the product eventually seen by viewers like you.

DECADE OF EXCESS OFFERS TRUTH

Of all the popcorn features churned out during the Eighties—did you really think I watched "art films," "world cinema," or "underground movies" as a kid?—none has stuck with me more than *THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI: ACROSS THE EIGHTH DIMENSION*, provided a middling theatrical release by 20th Century Fox in late 1984 before it found its legs as a cult classic with pay cable television play and videocassette rentals. (The much lusted-after DVD didn't pop into our third dimension until 2002.) At the time I first watched W.D. Richter's pulp-fiction hybrid, I loved its offbeat flavor and colorful casting; who could ever forget John Lithgow's turn as the evil alien with the uncanny ethnic inflection, Lord John Whorfin? Especially telling is that, unlike with most other films, I actually *remember* lines of BB dialogue, from the camp-guard Pinky Carruthers (Billy Vera) telling a Rastafarian Black Lectroid that "*Everybody needs see Buckaroo*"—to the classic, such as when Buckaroo Banzai (Peter Weller) calms down a rock-concert crowd hostile to down-on-her-luck Penny Priddy (Ellen Barkin) by offering his signature stone-faced truism, "Remember—no matter where you go, there you are."

So here I am, 21 years later in the 21st century after *THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI* fizzled at the box office for being different and, yes, hard to market. Instead of the kid who got into the wild fashions, seashell-shaped spaceships, and geeky Orson Welles/*War of the Worlds* allusions, sits the adult who can now see the obvious budget trims, Weller's limited acting range, and the horridly "hip" Eighties costume design. Yet, I still love it and secretly wish that somebody's lawyers and money-men would finally clear the way for the sequel promised at the beginning of the original's end credits roll, *BUCKAROO BANZAI AGAINST THE WORLD CRIME LEAGUE*.

Most importantly, though, I've recently been stuck on that line—*no matter where you go, there you are*—which, I'm well aware, is a truism not invented by Earl Mac Rauch's screenplay or even Buckaroo himself. (Don't forget that the movie *is* a docudrama, after all; see MF 6, p.44.) In a period during which I've muddled through some hoary self-assessment, I keep settling on this sentiment if not always by the exact wording. You can't predict the

future and you can't change the past, so why not do the best that you can do right now?

Truer words never spoken by anyone, let alone a world-famous neurosurgeon/crime fighter/martial artist/rock star.

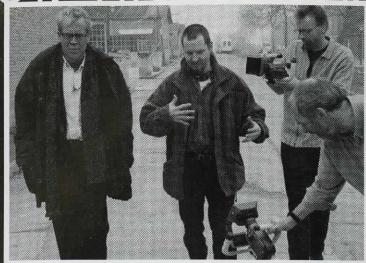
Jason Pankoke

August 2005



Not nearly as disheartening as the rusting film tins pictured with last issue's Editorial, this tower of video tapes still epitomizes the rapid change in media products we're likely to see in our lifetime. At least these items, rescued from a local video store selling off their entire VHS library, only sported dust. (Photo: JaPan)

ON THE COVER



Front: Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier, and crew in *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS* (courtesy Koch Lorber Films).

Back: (clockwise, from top left): Joe Odagiri in *BRIGHT FUTURE* (courtesy Palm Pictures), Shaun Toub and Mariam Parris in *MARYAM* (courtesy Streetlight Films), Choi Min-sik in *PAINTED FIRE* (courtesy Kino International), Cathy Doe and Todd Swenson in *FIVE YEARS* (courtesy D Train Moving Pictures).

Thank You

Kate Black, David Budge & Red Rooster Publicity, Dave Domal, Chris Folkens, Aaron Goldstein, Gregg Hale, Christie Hester & MPI Home Video, Chris Lukeman, Daniela Markoska & J. Goldstein PR, Marissa Monson, Dan Myrick, 90/94 Pictures, Robin Peters & Dreamscape Cinema, Ed Sanchez, Jeff Santo & Big Joe Productions, Paul Scrabo, Tempe Video, Tyler Tharpe & *RETURN IN RED*'s cast and crew, Brett Wagner, Dennis Widmyer, Carl Wiedemann

Also

Mom & Dad & Eric & Jamie & Hope & Rose & Adam, Allen Richards, Brian Paris, Matt Jenkins, Robert Hubbard, Nichole Wleklinski, Joe Monks, D.P. Carlson, Illini Film & Video, Jason Sibart, Jason Santo & *MicroCinemaScene.com*, Chris Gore & *FilmThreat.com*, Dave Krzysik & BrainwAsh Film Festival, Skizz & *MicroCineFest*, Chicago Underground Film Festival, Midwest Independent Film Festival, Jeff & Jim Brandt, Paul Riismandel & *MediaGeek*, Bill Kephart, Amy Carroll, Maggie & Nina, Devin Atkins, the Men of *Eye Trauma*, the contributors, and Third Stone for rocking this damn town so very, very hard in May

Dedicated to

Evalin Gurzynski (1922-2004), my maternal grandmother blessed with a full life, and John Lennon (1940-1980), a personal hero who would have finally been 64 back in October.

Quote of the Issue

"They're called pussy willows, Jelly, pussy willows, and we need a whole bunch of them, and their fuzz has to have a certain ... *panache*."

—What filmmaker-in-mind Miles Morgan (Kyp Malone) insists his producer Jelly Davis (Courtney Stephens) procure for metaphorical purposes in Jon Moritsugu's *SCUMROCK*.

the life of
micro-film

It's time to observe once again what transpires within the Secret MICRO-FILM Headquarters as well as acknowledge some additional developments ...

... As of March 2005, the new MICRO-FILM Web site is live and kicking! You will currently find all the basic MF contact and ordering information you need at www.micro-film-magazine.com, and "Stage 2" begins this summer as we add the main Content pages. Check out the Web sidebar in this issue's Reviews section for a preview of the material we intend to post for your reading pleasure ...

... Those wondering what in the world happened to the fantabulous MICRO-FILM spin-off, *Backyard Cinema*, can rest assured that this smashing new edition of MF contributor Mike Trippiedi's B-zine is still in the works! *BC* has a heap of cool material scheduled to run, including interviews with J.R. Bookwalter (OZONE), Pat Bishow and Jaime Andrews (IT'S A HAUNTED HAPPENIN'), David "The Rock" Nelson (DEVIL ANT), and the one and only Sir Alvin Ecarma (LETHAL FORCE). Go to <http://www.micro-film-magazine.com/signup.php>, get your bad self on our mailing list, and watch for future *BC* announcements to find their way to your "in box" ...

... I've never been a big proponent of eking out on-camera gigs during the rare times that I step on a movie set, but MICRO-FILM recently garnered a tad of screen presence in three distinct ways. When visiting northeastern Indiana last year to witness production on my "Parallel View" subject, *RETURN IN RED* (www.innerworldpictures.com), director Tyler Tharpe asked me to don a grubby factory worker's face after his scheduled extras didn't show on time. Watch me work towards my SAG card (ha ha) washing my hands in a stainless steel basin as actresses Amy Paliganoff and Linda Smith-McCormick trade dialogue. Also, check carefully the opening animated credits of the Film Threat spoof *MY BIG FAT INDEPENDENT MOVIE* (www.mybigfatindependentmovie.com) and you might see the MICRO-FILM logo fly right on by. Finally, in a bit of "product placement by proximity," examine closely the journalist's tabletops in Sub Rosa Extreme's *CHINA WHITE SERPENTINE* (See review on p.46. – ed.) for a glimpse of MF 2; co-director Eric Stanze sure gets a lot of mileage out of all those indie film rags he has laying around at home! Efficient set decoration, no less ...

... One extracurricular I should tell you about is my impending return to illustration. Years before MICRO-FILM, I intended to break into professional full-time comics penciling, or inking, or scripting, or whatever lent itself to the art. I've always been a light comic book reader at best, although something forever appeals to me about the format's potential, so when MF friends Damian Duffy

and Dann Tinchler asked me to contribute to their upcoming comix anthology *Eye Trauma* ... I said no. Well, "no" to drawing up a full-blown story while finishing off MF 7. Instead, making its debut in *ET* #1 will be *The Dirt*, an underground-ish pop culture insert hosted by my furry little alter ego, the Crimson Mole. What's C-Mole's trip? He'll unearth the best of my non-MF culture writing for *The Dirt*, including reviews of comics—*The Best of American Splendor* by Harvey Pekar, *Things Are Meaning Less* by Al Burian, etc.—and related media, like the DVDs of Nirvana's animated *ROCK 'N' RULE* (1983) and Terry M. West's comics-derived



No wonder *RETURN IN RED* director Tyler Tharpe never moved in for his close-up ... look at that hair! (Courtesy Innerworld Pictures)

BLOOD FOR THE MUSE (2000). The pint-sized punk will even lob some curve balls at you, such as mini-interviews with hard-working folks in the scene. Original art, snappy design, and a killer center spread will fill out *The Dirt*; click the *ET* link at www.rehab25.net every single day of your lives for further news ...



Superhero, *schmooper*-hero. Time to bring on the little critters with big sticks! (Artwork: JaPan)

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Received the copies of MICRO-FILM 6, thanks so much. I think the piece on THE INDEPENDENT turned out very well. I've sent along copies to Steve Kessler.

Best,

Mike Wilkins

Producer/Co-writer, THE INDEPENDENT

Editor's Note: Since we ran our story, THE INDEPENDENT has been pulled from video distribution although it airs regularly on Comedy Central. Wilkins and Kessler are currently seeking a new company to re-release the film.

Dear Editor,

Received the latest issue. Great job all around, particularly with my interview. It's the best one written on KWIK STOP so far: fair, intelligent, honest, and respectful.

Thanks so much for your support,

Michael Gilio

Writer/Director, KWIK STOP

Editor's Note: KWIK STOP is finally available on DVD from iFilm/Celluloid Distribution as of July.

Dear Editor,

I really enjoyed the latest issue of MICRO-FILM. It's a solid read all the way through. I appreciate you keeping me on your promo list. The mag doesn't come out often, but it's worth it when it does come out.

Talk to you later,

Sean Carswell

Razorcake magazine

Editor's Note: I can say pretty much the same for Razorcake, a well-written punk/culture/politics mag that Sean and Todd Taylor publish in Los Angeles every other month. Soon, we'll run Sean's first MICRO-FILM piece, a review of HOWARD ZINN: YOU CAN'T BE NEUTRAL ON A MOVING TRAIN from First Run Features.

Dear Editor,

I received the copies of the mag—thank you so much! What a great article on our film; I was very excited to read it. MICRO-FILM is a great magazine, by the way. I didn't expect it to be so polished. I hope you sell a million copies! Take care,

J.J. Huckin

Actor, RETURN IN RED

Editor's Note: RETURN IN RED is the new title for UNTITLED FEATURE 2 in our "Parallel View" article series.

Dear Editor,

Hi! I just want to let you know I received MICRO-FILM 6 and even if I hadn't had an issue in it, I still would think it is an awesome issue! Congratulations on putting together a terrific publication.

Best,

Matt Jenkins

Director, B AND BELOW

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much for the ShortKutz "Laughing Stock" DVD with MICRO-FILM 6. Now I have the whole ShortKutz collection! I think your promotion with ShortKutz will be great for MICRO-FILM. It's a great mag to look forward to, very slick in appearance and very in-depth, with all types of indie films.

Once again, many film folks are thrilled with the return of MICRO-FILM!

All the best,

Paul Scrabo

Director, DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS

Dear Editor,

Thank you for sending me the latest MICRO-FILM! It's really a great magazine. It's so refreshing to read cover-to-cover. It's both educational and entertaining! That's a great mix and often not followed through on. You've got it! Best wishes,

Steve Balderson

Director, FIRECRACKER

Editor's Note: The acclaimed FIRECRACKER will be covered in MICRO-FILM 8.



DR. HORROR'S EROTIC HOUSE OF IDIOTS' Debbie Rochon and Trent Haaga strike the same overwhelmed pose as the editor upon reading the kind notices in your letters. (Courtesy Paul Scrabo)

Dear Editor,

What a kick-ass magazine! Great job with it. I did a quick flip-through and it looks great. It reminds me of good old-fashioned indie magazines, the kind I read back in college that were filled with cool real indie flicks and some big names scattered about. Looking forward to reading it in-depth.

Love the metallic ink on the front cover. Nice touch!

Best,

Jeff Palmer

Director, ON THE FRINGE

Editor's Note: This is a pre-emptive apology to all the generous folks like Jeff who have sent in their work for review over the past year or so and will not see their films in print this time around. One of the unfortunate stumbling blocks for MICRO-FILM has

been a screener back-up; please keep in mind that we don't have a consistent army of scribes and editors like a FilmThreat.com. We're doing everything we can to divide and conquer the stacks. Thanks for your understanding!

Dear Editor,

Thanks so much for the copies of MICRO-FILM 6. It's exciting to see the article. Robert Hubbard did a nice job. I'm going to really milk that opening line!

Thanks again,

Jeff Krulik

Director, HITLER'S HAT

Co-creator, HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT

Dear Editor,

I received your publication just the other day and it is great! Congratulations! It looks very professional. I really enjoyed the reviews. It's exciting to see otherwise obscure and unknown movies I have seen surface in your press.

Thanks for all of your work for the independent movie community.

Best,

Dave Krzysik

Brainwash Movies

Dear Editor,

Just got the MICRO-FILM package. Looks great! Very professional! I have a dog of a schedule at work, so I will be glad to have something intriguing to read for a change. Also, your little piece on Backyard Cinema [in MICRO-FILM 1] was really interesting. I see you are resurrecting that magazine too? Sounds like a great project!

Best,

Rob Craig

Director, NIGHT OF THE FOOLS

Web master, www.KGordonMurray.com

Dear Editor,

I just wanted to say thanks for reviewing my flick, WHEN HEAVEN COMES DOWN. It was a great read, and I really enjoy the magazine. Keep up the good work.

Thanks again,

Gary M. Lump

Mind's I Productions

Dear Editor,

Thanks for the MICRO-FILM plug for Hollywood is Burning! Your mag still looks great after all these years. Congrats to you and the staff.

Talk to you soon,

Mike Watt

Happy Cloud Pictures

Want to submit a letter to MICRO-FILM? Please send it either to editor@micro-film-magazine.com with "Letter to the Editor" in the Subject line or to MICRO-FILM, P.O. Box 45, Champaign, IL 61824-0045. All letters received are presumed to be intended for publication. All letters are subject to editing for length and grammar.

Talent and Heart Strengthen "This Old Cub"

Decades after Ron Santo put down his Gold Glove, Jeff Santo picked up a camera with which to celebrate his father's stellar career and infallible optimism.

Interview by Anthony Zoubek

First, a confession of partisanship—I am a Chicago White Sox fan.

Huge. Diehard. *Extremist*.

The dubious Dick Allen set the standard for enigmatic egomaniac sluggers. The 1977 South Side Hit-Men put today's steroid-scorned homerun cavalcade to shame. Tadahito Iguchi, the rookie playing second base this year, is an international phenomenon.

These aren't opinions, people.

They're flippin' facts.

I don my white-on-black jerseys even in the off-season, just to spite my Chicago Cubs fan father (who, I believe, is a closet Sox fan). The summer of 1989, my dad took me to every single Wrigley Field night game, yet he'd boo Goose Gossage's relief efforts and whisper "it's root, root-root for the White Sox" during the seventh-inning stretch.

I was nine, maybe 10 years old at the time? Who the *hell* was I supposed to be rooting for? It was like knowing you're a boy but having your parents dress you up in girls' clothing.

Eventually, I found my calling on the South Side, thanks in no part to their Minnie Minoso prime rate ticket package. The Old Man, meanwhile, is griping about the inaccessibility of affordable Cubs seats. (I might get him out to U.S. Cellular Field when the Sox pound the pomposity out of new Baltimore Oriole Sammy Sosa.) Despite our divergent taste in teams, it's the sport and its rivalries, culture, and mythology that bring my dad and I together every season. The fresh air, midsummer sunshine, cracks of the bat, and smell of ballpark franks make every day Father's Day.

That, South Side and North Side fans alike, is why *THIS OLD CUB* is one of the greatest sports films ever made. Viewers need not be a Cubs fan—or a baseball fan at all—for the movie to leave them spellbound. An intimate, heartbreaking look at the courageous life of former Cubs third baseman Ron Santo as catalogued by his son, writer-director Jeff Santo, *THIS OLD CUB* plays like a video Hallmark card without the snappy, sappy sonnets stamped on the inside.

"I know a guy who brought his two young boys to the movie," Jeff told me following a *THIS OLD CUB* screening and DVD release party at the Castle Theater in downstate Bloomington, Illinois, back in the fall. "He said it gave him a chance to let his kids peek into their father's childhood, when he was a ball fan growing up. The Cubs have such a rich history. Seeing this movie is a way for adults to share that rich history with their kids."

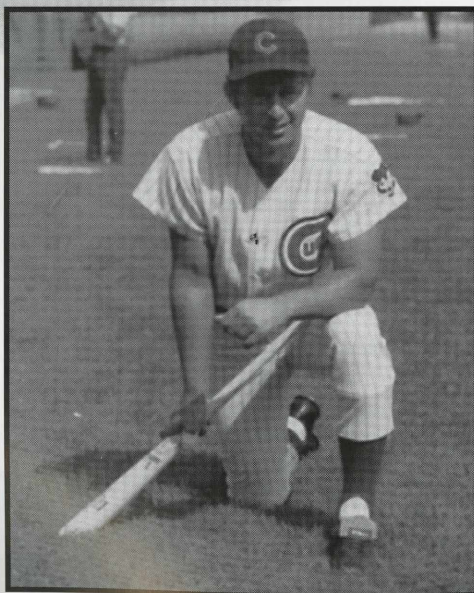
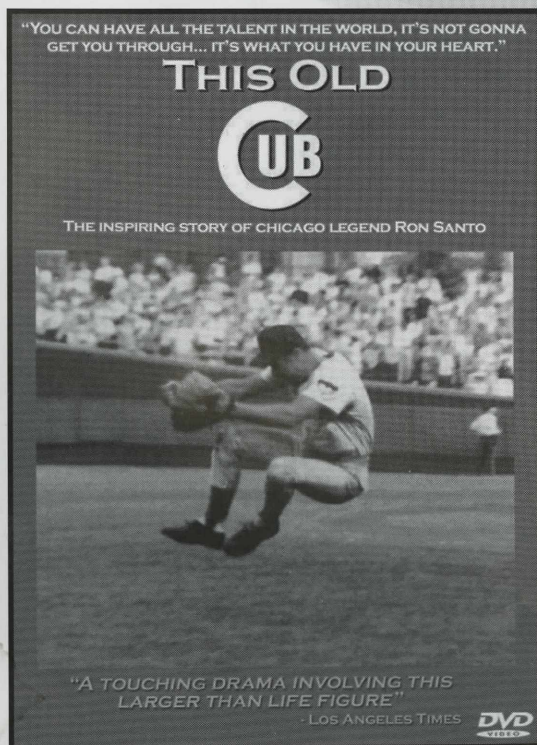
THIS OLD CUB teems with baseball nostalgia, specifically through a lengthy analysis of the Cubs' gut-wrenching 1969 season. Endless archival footage does not, however, overshadow the documentary's penetrating portrait of Ron Santo as a hero on and off the third base line, struggling with complications of Type One Juvenile Diabetes (insulin dependent). Diagnosed with the condition in his late teens, doctors said Ron had a life expectancy of 20 years, but the future Cub refuted those expectations and played his entire Hall of Fame-worthy career with the disease. "My dad's story is universal," Jeff said.

"It's about triumph, hope, and courage, and how the Cubs' story parallels my dad's story in that both are about being optimistic, knowing there's always next year just in case it's not this year."

Jeff and his producing partner Tim Comstock, who worked as a producer and music supervisor on *MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING*, set out to make an independent film that would reach baseball fans and non-fans alike.

"We had to make the movie more of a human-interest story connected to the 127 years of Cubs history," Jeff explained. "We wanted to mesh two stories together—the story of my father, which could appeal to anyone regardless of their sports preferences, and the story of the Cubs, which would appeal to the team's following."

Santo and Comstock did not want to pigeonhole their audience "because we didn't want to pigeonhole ourselves," continued Jeff. "I may not be a fan of something like European soccer, but if I watch



(Left) *THIS OLD CUB*, nationally distributed on DVD starting in August from Home Vision Cinema. (Above) Chicago Cubs fan favorite Ron Santo. (Top right) Santo happily signs an autograph at the annual Cubs convention in the Windy City. (All photos: courtesy Big Joe Productions)



a good, rich story about European soccer—and if that story happens to include some of the sport's rich history—then I am going to get into that story and into that history, too. *THIS OLD CUB* turns people on to the mythology of the Cubs [and] the sport in general.”

Making *THIS OLD CUB* gave the director a chance to relive “growing up a Santo.” Throughout the production—despite his attempt to emotionally distance himself from the movie’s subject matter for the sake of objectivity—Santo couldn’t help but be more awe-inspired by his father. “I was born into baseball,” Jeff explained. “Wrigley Field was my childhood playground. And when you’re born into something, you take it for granted. When dad took to the field, I saw it as my dad going to work, doing his job, and I stayed a normal kid. My brother and I didn’t sit there and watch our father to see how great a ballplayer he was. I did not have any appreciation for it.

“In doing this film,” he continued, “not only did I dive into his diabetes struggles, [but] I saw firsthand what this awful disease can do to a person. As a kid, it was like, ‘Dad takes an insulin shot in the

morning [so that] doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with him.’ As an adult putting his upbeat attitude on film, I didn’t want to sugar-coat it by making the movie a string of highlight footage. Watching his old plays while documenting what the disease is doing to him now, I saw, maybe for the first time, why he was such a great ball player and how he maintained being the only position player with diabetes.”

Actor Joe Mantegna (*JOAN OF ARCADIA*) narrates *THIS OLD CUB* and is one of a dozen celebrities who participated in the making of the film. “Joe and I have known each other for the last few years,” Santo explained. “He and Dennis Franz [who also appears] put up [the money for] my play in L.A. When this project came about, I called Joe and asked him to narrate the film. He not only said ‘yes,’ he asked if he could get the boys involved—other Hollywood [actors who are] big Cub fans. Joe made the calls to Bill Murray, Gary Sinise, and others, and said, ‘Hey guys, we should do this.’ And they all jumped on it right away because they love Ron.

“Tim and I knew they all would take and project the perspective of the fans,”

Santo added. “I mean, what better representation of the average Cub fan than someone like Bill Murray?”

The biggest compliment paid to the film came from a critic in Denver, miles away from the base of Cubs fandom. “The critic said fictional baseball films aspire to be what *THIS OLD CUB* is and to do what *THIS OLD CUB* does,” Santo explained. “That’s what we aimed for. We didn’t want *THIS OLD CUB* to play it like a regular documentary. We structured it—because my dad’s story is so big and stretches over so many decades—like a theatrical fictional film, with flashbacks into someone’s career, flash-forwards to what’s going on in the present, and the mystery of where the two will carry the lead character next.”

During its limited theatrical run last year, *THIS OLD CUB* played in five screens at one time, for 24 weeks. The final grosses are estimated to top out at \$500,000, an astounding amount of money given such limited distribution. For three weeks, the movie’s per-screen average made it one of the top 10 per-screen grossing films in the country. A portion of those revenues was donated to Ron Santo’s Juvenile Diabetes

Killer Stalks Chicago, Director Exhumes History

Damian Duffy on H.H. HOLMES

Independent filmmaker and Chicago native John Borowski spent three years making his debut project, an hour-long documentary on the Windy City's little-known, 19th century serial killer H.H. Holmes. Borowski's commitment shows, for *H.H. HOLMES: AMERICA'S FIRST SERIAL KILLER* is precise, small-scale filmmaking, its components keenly balancing each other in an attempt to answer the question posed by the production's teaser trailers and posters—"Who is H.H. Holmes?"

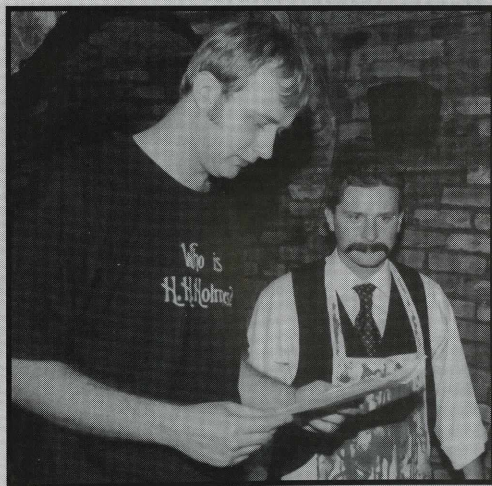
Borowski draws a relatively thorough biographical sketch of this Yankee Jack the Ripper through brief reenactments, minimalist animations incorporating original documents from Holmes' life, arrest, and trial, and interviews with experts on forensics, criminal pathology, and the murderer himself. Once known as Herman Mudgett, a New England med student from a strict religious background, Holmes is described as a "prodigy of crime" prone to pulling small-time cons, forgery, and theft well before his unprecedented killing spree.

His most famous criminal feat, covered in the film's meatier first half, involved the construction of a large building in the Chicago suburb of Englewood, known colloquially as "The Castle." Holmes rented out the rooms of The Castle's top floor to unsuspecting tourists visiting the city during the 1893 World's Fair. Some of these guests—the true number has never been determined—became acquainted with the lower levels of The Castle, which housed dungeons, torture chambers, lye pits, acid baths, and a crematorium. Among other nefarious schemes, Holmes made extra money selling the skeletons of his victims to nearby medical colleges!

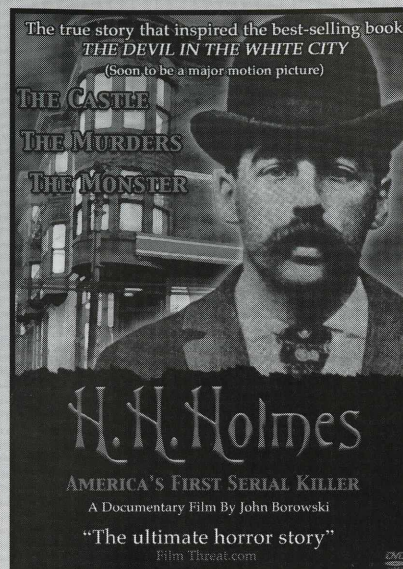
Perhaps due to a dearth of source material outside of the World's Fair murders, Borowski's depiction of the subsequent years in Holmes' life of crime are far more anemic in detail. Known is that Holmes eventually murdered his assistant Benjamin Pitezel and kidnapped the assistant's three children, crisscrossing the nation before depositing their bodies in Detroit and Toronto, as part of an elaborate attempt to swindle Pitezel's life insurance provider. Leading up to the fiend's capture in Philadelphia, the scheme is otherwise left unexplained past narrator Tony Jay's sinister intimation that "Holmes seemed to be having fun," and while the "Trial of the Century" receives a slightly more in-depth look, the obvious question of motivation is left dangling.

Special features on the *H.H. HOLMES* DVD include the aforementioned promotional pieces, a deleted scene offering a comprehensive comparison between 19th and 21st century forensics, a short videotaped visit to the present-day Englewood locations where Holmes once stalked, and a making-of featurette hosted by the director. Of these, the latter is perhaps the most interesting. Holmes' Castle was destroyed soon after authorities discovered its true nature, and the ways in which Borowski uses simple set design and ingenious camera work to recreate the serial killer's labyrinthine dungeon is an inspiration in independent filmmaking.

Overall, *H.H. HOLMES* is a well-crafted, academic glimpse of a lesser known true-crime figure, even with its sporadic lapses in focus, and seems ready-made for a long afterlife on A&E or the Discovery Channel. Even then, Borowski has apparently found himself a niche within a genre, as his next project will cover the early 20th century child-killer/cannibal of New York state, Albert Fish.



H.H. HOLMES director John Borowski and actor Harold Schechter (as Holmes) on the set. (All photos: courtesy Waterfront Productions)



Research Foundation.

THIS OLD CUB may pave the way for successful, limited theatrical runs of other documentaries. "We are promoting the movie in such a maverick and wholly independent way," Santo explained. "Most independent films require \$3 million in marketing just to let people know the movie exists. We didn't have that kind of cash. We had to get the word out by traveling to cities where the film played and doing question-and-answer sessions with audiences. We had the Cubs [organization] talking about [the film], but the rest was a grassroots effort that continues now with the promotion of the DVD."

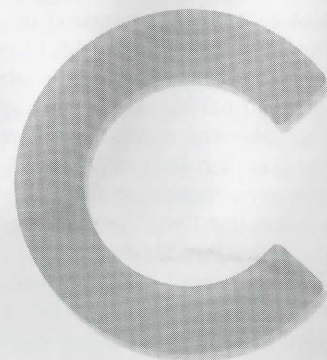
The younger Santo's labor of love turned THIS OLD CUB into a cult item. "It's the kind of movie someone would buy a Cub fan or a baseball fan as a gift, or that diabetics might consult to get them through their experiences with the disease," he explained. "The [sales] numbers we're forecasting may make us the number two best-selling DVD in the country, next to THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST."

His next film will be different from THIS OLD CUB in its content but similar in its context. "I want to make a feature film about a comedian who's at the end of his rope," detailed Santo. "It's called THAT'S NOT FUNNY. It's got a lot of the rise-and-fall that you see in guys like my dad."

"I can't help it—I'm Ron Santo's son," added Jeff with a laugh. "There will always be that thematic element in my stories, if I am fortunate to be telling them for the rest of my life." By capturing the aura of an era and its baseball hero, the movie will play "like a feature film. It's not a documentary; it's the story of a man, his journey, his love affair with a town and a baseball team, and how his adversity parallels the adversity of that team." ☉

The original version of this article was published September 30, 2004, on the Web site of The Daily Vidette, Illinois State University, Normal, IL.

H.H. HOLMES: AMERICA'S FIRST SERIAL KILLER. 2004, Digital Video/16mm, Color/B&W, 64 minutes. A Waterfront Productions film. Director/Producer/Writer: John Borowski. Associate Producer: Dimas Estrada. Director of Photography: Frey Hoffman. Editing/Sound Design: John Murray. Music: Douglas Romaine Stevens. Narrator: Tony Jay. With: Harold Schechter, Thomas J. Cronin, Marian K. Caporusso. Starring: Willy Laszlo, Ed Bertagnoli. Reviewed on DVD.



The Parallel View, Pt. 3

In this installment covering the lives of two disparate productions running concurrently, **RETURN IN RED** rolls film while **OUR LADY OF SORROW** steps aside for **ABSENCE**.

Articles by Jason Pankoke and Jeff Sartain

A different scene: *In defiance of the gusty wind coursing over the northern farmland, the rock-still camera gazes at aged homesteads anchored on this soil. Slowly-turning pinwheels stuck in front lawns go nowhere fast, "Welcome" signs swing on rusty hooks in no particular rush. People enter and exit the frame, walking paths that they have walked before and will most likely walk again. What if something trips up the routine, redirects these people by a step or a long mile, replaces neighborly trust with irrational fear? What if sacrifice follows in the wake of a man-made storm that deliberately strikes with barely a whisper?*

Surrounded by tilled fields, the property located near Fort Wayne, Indiana, at first felt rather neglected, its lawn dotted by gutted car bodies, rusting drums, and cinder block piles. I soon learned that the weathered clutter had accumulated as a side product of many years' tinkering by the owner in his scratch-built machine shop, an angular monstrosity providing Indianapolis filmmaker Tyler Tharpe with a peculiar setting for his second feature, **RETURN IN RED**. Upon my arrival, Tharpe led me through the oily space dressed with cutting and welding stations; I could taste the grit simmering in the air, appropriate for the factory setting required by the script.

For two days in April 2004, I happily observed Tharpe, cinematographer Anthony Hettinger, and key grip Charles Staley filming numerous scenes for the Innerworld Pictures production, concerning a sleepy town caught off guard by strangers undermining their lives. Many residents punch a time clock at the factory, including neighbors Ellsie (Becky Niccum) and Faye (Linda Smith-McCormick), Faye's daughter Katie (Amy Paliganoff), and sleepy-eyed Finelli (Michael Ray Reed). **RETURN IN RED** shows through Finelli's relationship with television repairman Bodecker (J.J. Huckin) that routine permeates their existence, and it is no wonder Katie writes in her diary about a desire to leave while sitting in a diner just days from closing. With all the small things requiring attention, little mind is paid to the strangely-equipped van roaming Cammack County for reasons unknown.

Much of the material ticked off the shot list during Saturday consisted of Paliganoff's character talking with co-worker Laurie (played by Kate Black) in the factory's cramped office, along

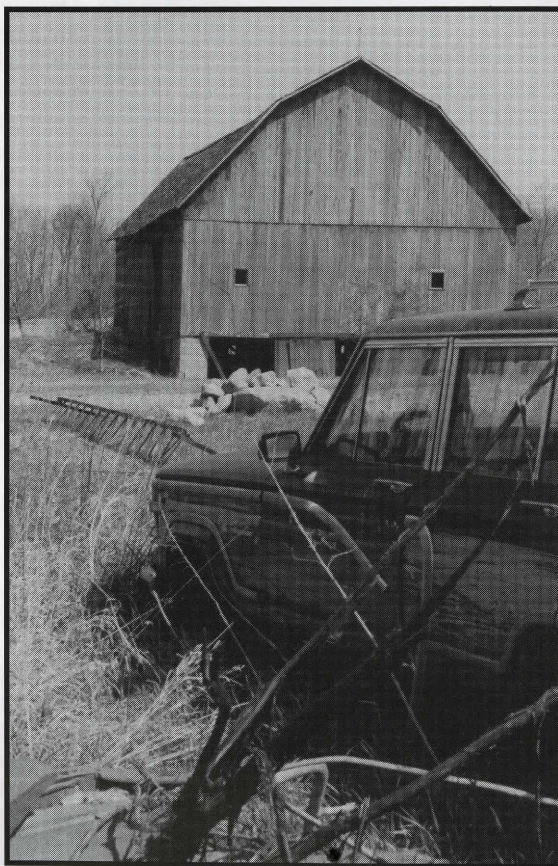
When **MICRO-FILM** last left Dennis Widmyer and Kevin Kölsch, writers and directors of **OUR LADY OF SORROW**, they were gearing up for principal photography in the fall of 2004 after having made a trailer for their film, secured limited funding through a t-shirt contest on the official site of author Chuck Palahniuk (*Haunted*), and fended off legal problems with a criminally libelous, disgruntled actor. Since then, **OUR LADY** has been temporarily shelved due to budgetary constraints, all too common in the world of truly independent cinema.

Widmyer and Kölsch haven't been idle, though. Along with Josh Chaplinsky, they've run themselves ragged filming, editing, and distributing their first feature-length film called **POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE**, a documentary on the second Chuck Palahniuk literature conference at Edinboro University in Pennsylvania. The film received critical acclaim and has sold well as a 2-disc DVD through www.chuckpalahniuk.net, for which Widmyer serves as Web master.

In a discussion with **MICRO-FILM**, Widmyer elaborates on the impact **POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE** is having on their other film projects. "The success of our Chuck Palahniuk documentary has been two-fold," he says. "On the one hand, it's legitimized us as filmmakers who know what we're doing and can successfully deliver a film. Not only did we produce, direct, and shoot it ourselves, but we also edited the whole thing in my office! Now, with the DVD selling on the Web site, we've brought more attention to **OUR LADY OF SORROW** in the form of the investment trailer which is included on the supplemental material of the Chuck DVD."

Daniel Wilbe from *FilmThreat.com*

has lead the pack regarding critical notices for **POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE**, saying that, "This is a well-structured, crafty bit of filmmaking." Widmyer weighs in on the documentary's reception. "For the most part, it's been very enthusiastic," he offers. "In the local Oregon papers, we were mostly commended for giving Chuck himself the spotlight in our film, and letting his great screen presence and inspiring way of giving speeches dictate the pacing of the piece. But we've found that the film has taken on a life of its own since its premiere in Portland in 2003, and major critics are still discovering the doc-



Off to the side where Tyler Tharpe and crew shot factory scenes for **RETURN IN RED** sat these weathered artifacts, at peace with the countryside. (All **RETURN** photos: JaPan)

RETURN continued on next page

LADY continued on next page

RETURN continued from previous page

with assorted business in the hallway as Katie investigates eerie late-night screaming. Black and Paliganoff had the only dialogue exchange that afternoon, which I watched on a video tap wired to Hettinger's Arriflex 16-millimeter camera. I took advantage of the pauses required by the skeleton crew to carefully frame and light the location, walking the grounds under a pristine blue sky to take pictures of its waste-topped terrain. Blackbirds and crows often sounded in the distance, adding audible texture to a marvelous stillness in the air, and for some reason I felt comfortable there.



Actress Kate Black (left) takes direction from Tyler Tharpe (center) as cinematographer Anthony Hettinger (right) lines up the shot. Tharpe is currently shopping *RETURN IN RED* to distributors.

During one extended break I talked with Black, whose appearance marked her second for Tharpe after a small part as a mental-ward director in *FREAK*. "The role that I play is not a critical role," said Black. "I'm certainly what they call 'fifth business' in theater; I'm there to help move the action forward for the main characters." The actress lives in Fort Wayne with her husband and teenage sons, averaging two to three plays annually in the area as well as San Francisco, where she trained and performed for a decade. "It's always a pleasure to work with Tyler," continued Black. "He's just an easy-going person who's really sure about what he wants."

Sunday entailed the filming of establishing shots in the populated factory, preceded by short dialogue exchanges between Paliganoff and Smith-McCormick. Intending for extras to walk through the background during the latter scenes, Tharpe had to think fast when his expected actors failed to meet call time, eventually settling on a better-than-nothing solution—me. Despite all the native grime present in the location, the director had the presence to come prepared with Ben Nye "dirt" make-up, which I rubbed all over my face and hands to help sell the illusion. After mussing my longer-than-usual hair and perfecting an elastic pose, I received my mark at an off-screen doorway and did my best to convincingly shamble into view and wash my hands in a steel basin after the actresses hit the proper lines. Since nobody chased me out of the machine shop after the few necessary takes, I guess I earned the baked goods and juice I took from the back of the truck that morning.

A thespian convoy eventually arrived, meaning that Hettinger and Staley could prepare the shop itself for filming. While it had been interesting to see how the duo manhandled nooks and crannies ill-suited for proper movie illumina-

LADY continued from previous page

umentary and celebrating it in positive articles. It's also attracted quite a dedicated rating on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), as evidenced by its very positive user reviews among fans. So, we couldn't be happier."

Even with the extra exposure from the trailer included on the DVD of *POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE* and the profits from sales of the documentary, Widmyer and Kölsch haven't secured the budget they hoped to have for *OUR LADY OF SORROW*. In the current declining economy, with inflation on the rise, money harder to borrow, and investor confidence waffling, it's become increasingly hard for indie filmmakers to put together an ambitious project like *OUR LADY*. What's become of their dream project?

"As of about four months ago, we decided to temporarily shelve *OUR LADY OF SORROW*," explains Widmyer. "The aim is to first do something smaller and not as vast a project. If all goes to plan, *OUR LADY* will be our second feature film, and when we make it, we will have a better understanding of making a feature film, as well as give any tentative investors more assurance in our talent and vision."

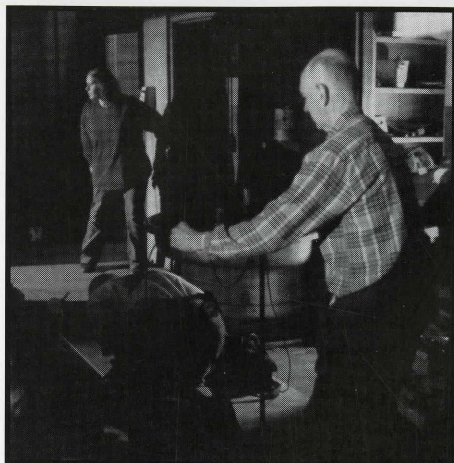
The project Widmyer refers to is a less location-intensive film

tentatively titled *ABSENCE*. "With this project, we know going in how much money we actually have," he continues. "With profits raised from the documentary, we have what we feel is enough money to actually go out and shoot a micro-budgeted feature. *ABSENCE* may not be as ambitious a project as *OUR LADY OF SORROW*, but it's every bit as good a story, as well as a great structure and concept in which to make an independent film. It tells the story of a kidnap victim, as witnessed and experienced from three points of view. It's slated for production June and July 2005 and we hope to successfully enter it into film festivals in the fall of 2005."

In the world of indie cinema, delays may lead to better things. As Widmyer and Kölsch cut their teeth on *ABSENCE*, they hope to work out the kinks in their directing style so, when the time is finally ripe, they can approach *OUR LADY OF SORROW* with the grace and confidence of seasoned directors. ☪


— Jeff Sartain

For more information on *OUR LADY OF SORROW*, refer to www.ourladyofsorrow.com, while news regarding *ABSENCE* can be found at www.kinkymulefilms.com. Also look in upcoming issues of *MICRO-FILM*!



Hettinger (*kneeling*) and key grip Charles Staley set up a tracking shot that will show lead actress Amy Paliganoff exiting the factory office in order to investigate a strange racket in the building.

tion, I loved watching them achieve a more stylized look in a space large enough to allow for it. Hettinger arranged the Arriflex and off-camera floods while Staley set up atmospheric back-lighting hidden on the set. After Tharpe and Paliganoff finished readying the actors, everybody took their places and, upon the call of "Action," proceeded to electrify the shop with sawing, clanking, and sparking. Each take ended with the workers leaving their stations and exiting screen left, while I had to exit stage right myself before the crew would move on to the close-ups and detail shots. So it is when a long-distance drive awaits.

More than a year later, Tharpe has finally pulled together RETURN IN RED and hosted a private Fort Wayne screening for the crew and friends. "I forwarded a copy of the film to my producer's rep in Los Angeles who handled FREAK," says the director in a July e-mail sent to MICRO-FILM. "He thought that it looked great, having very good production values." Now begins the final third of the movie's gestation; where once Tharpe and company poured over the development and production of RETURN IN RED, they must concentrate on selling it to distributors in the immediate future. "I'm hoping to attract a larger company than what handled domestic video for FREAK and I think there's a good chance," continues Tharpe with confidence. Time will soon tell if this project has the legs to travel any farther than the boundaries of rustic Cammack County. 

— Jason Pankoke

To keep up with the progress of RETURN IN RED, please observe www.innerworld-pictures.com. Also check out upcoming issues of MICRO-FILM!

Family Synergy Begets a Kansan Carnivale

Robert Hubbard on WAMEGO

"Undertaking the production of a motion picture...is not something to do lightly."
—Clark Balderson, producer

Kansas-based director Steve Balderson, who made the acclaimed indie PEP SQUAD in the late Nineties, recently finished post-production on FIRECRACKER starring Karen Black and Mike Patton. A pet project of his, FIRECRACKER is based on a true incident that took place in his Kansas hometown of Wamego, and the process of translating his vision into tangible reality is detailed in the companion piece, also named WAMEGO.

WAMEGO is a collage of many things. It's a record of making FIRECRACKER, starting from pre-production in January 2003 after a long period of flirting with Hollywood money and celebrity to get the project off the ground. It's also a press kit for FIRECRACKER and the Baldersons, featuring interviews with various cast and crew members as well as a look at Steve's career in filmmaking, including early video projects and PEP SQUAD.

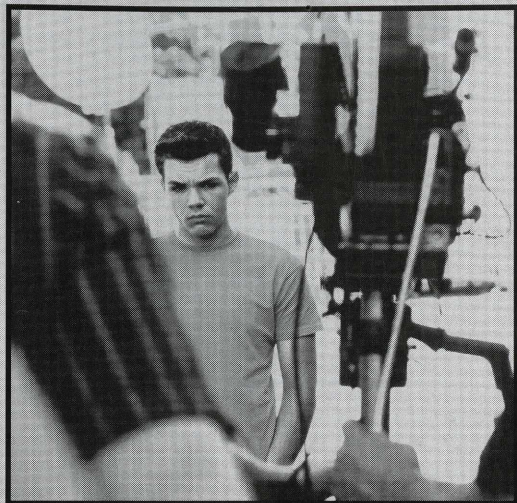
Every aspect of the production is covered: the building of props by the Balderson family, production meetings with Balderson and his cinematographer Jonah Torreano (discussing shots and scenes) and production manager Jerry Magana (hammering out budget concerns), the chaotic activity of the physical shoot, the myriad support needed. One good thing the documentary captures is the little moments of cooperation and triumph that occur on the project. It doesn't shy away from showing the frustration that also occurs, such as venting over budgetary concerns and coordination snafus, all part and parcel to almost any film production.

The heart of WAMEGO lies in its subtitle, MAKING MOVIES ANYWHERE; if one wants to find subtext and substance in this documentary, look no further than the phrase "follow your dreams." The latter is explicitly heard throughout in relation to Balderson's desire to make a film at this level in his hometown, far from the Hollywood/Indiewood Mecca of Los Angeles. It also applies to prospective filmmakers or those of a creative bent living in the "flyover country" or anywhere else outside of the traditional filmmaking centers. In this sense, WAMEGO is a home movie of sorts, with members of the Balderson family and the community helping to bring the project to life.

One's appetite to see the completed feature, the festival play of which has been severely limited as of this writing, is thoroughly whetted after watching WAMEGO and a very enigmatic trailer included on our preview disc. Those who have filmmaking ambitions of their own will get a little more out of it. Clark Balderson's comments on the experience provide some of the highlights in the documentary, and despite however FIRECRACKER fares in the marketplace, I think that he'll be getting a lot of calls from people wanting him to produce their projects.

WAMEGO: MAKING MOVIES ANYWHERE.

2004, Video, Color, 105 minutes. An Image-makers, Inc. production in association with Dikenga Films. Director: Steve Balderson. Camera: Steve Balderson, Joshua Kendall, Ed Leboeuf. With: Clark Balderson, Steve Balderson, Rhet Bear, Karen Black, Ariane Chapman, Pleasant Gehman, Jak Kendall, Selene Luna, Jerry Magana, Mike Patton, Sean Shuford, Daniel'e Taylor, Jonah Torreano, Susan Traylor. Previewed on DVD.



Kansas actor Jak Kendall stands on the set of the dark tragedy FIRECRACKER, which dramatizes the real-life story of Wamego murders tied to a travelling carnival.



Mike Patton, best known for fronting the bands Fantômas, Tomahawk, and Faith No More, makes his acting debut in Steve Balderson's FIRECRACKER, the primary subject of WAMEGO. (All photos: courtesy Dikenga Films)

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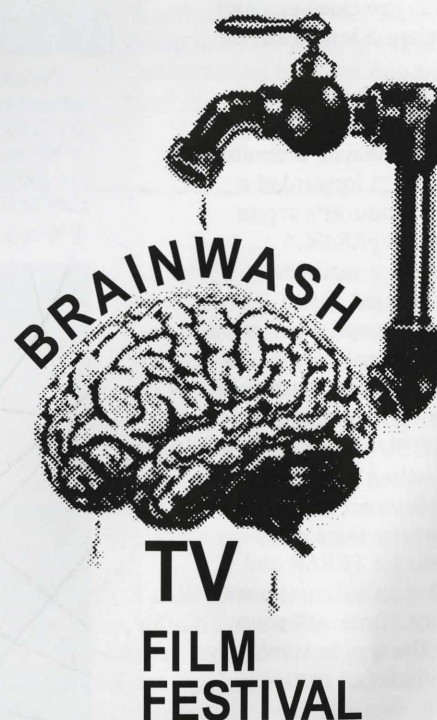
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micro-film @ five



It may be quite unnecessary to sequester the following features for a "special section" marking the fact that MICRO-FILM has managed to stay alive for more than half a decade, especially given that this issue has overshoot the actual anniversary date by nearly 10 months. However, this material could instead stand as a testament to what we've attempted to accomplish with our independent film coverage since 1999.

L. Rob Hubbard's interview with director Brett Wagner about his movie, *FIVE YEARS*, is a classic tale of passion and perseverance. Jason Watt discusses *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS* and the nature of film art with "the sweetest man," Jørgen Leth. Yours truly sets a plan in motion to conjure anecdotes aplenty from the fellows behind Haxan Films. And what might initially seem to be self-congratulatory—the long-form interview with some poser named Jason Pankoke—is intended more for its archival worth as well as a verbal litmus test to provoke reactions to the issues discussed therein regarding MICRO-FILM now and in the future.

We hope you find interest in this collection along with the rest of MICRO-FILM 7, a reason to rejoice by its very existence in an age when media outlets large and small succumb to greater forces every day. — Jason Pankoke

(Left) Timothy Altmeyer as Eric and Todd Swenson as Colson. (Below right) Eric cozies up to his wife Renee (Kris Carr), who can sense that something rather dire remains unspoken.

(All photos: courtesy D Train Moving Pictures)

The "Five Years" Plan

Brett Wagner will soon get to let out the proverbial family secret when his film FIVE YEARS finally becomes available to the public.

Interview by
L. Rob Hubbard

What if your life was perfect?

What if you had the whole package: a nice house in a good community, a loving spouse, a business that's prospering, a child on the way ... basically, everything that a young couple hopes for?

It's all in your grasp, and then it begins to fall apart due to an unwelcome houseguest—the younger brother of your spouse, just released from prison. Increasingly, your spouse becomes obsessed with every move the brother makes and tensions tighten until one day, they both disappear.

What if you start to realize that your good life is all based on a lie, that the odd habits and haunted stares of the brother and the bizarre behavior of your spouse have a basis in a big secret from five years ago?

This hypothetical dilemma forms the core of the acclaimed debut feature from writer/director Brett Wagner, FIVE YEARS. For such a simple two-word phrase, the title resonates greatly with Wagner and collaborator David Zellerford; they produced the feature as graduate film students five years after their first meeting, and now it will finally hit DVD courtesy Vanguard Cinema in 2005, five years after principal photography concluded.

Back in 1995, Wagner and Zellerford met in the graduate program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Through the course of their studies, culminating in MFA degrees and awards for their film work, the duo crewed on many projects including each others' shorts. Then, in 1999, Wagner approached Zellerford with the prospect of producing a feature film.

"I did start with a loose idea about a kid getting released from juvie at 21, because there had been so many stories in the paper about younger and younger kids being tried as adults," recalls Wagner. "I often find that I'm more interested in the story that's next to the apparent story. The kid getting out of prison is the obvious protagonist; the older brother of the kid, who has to put him up and look out for him, is maybe the next clear choice. But, I wanted to write about the wife, whose role in the proceedings seems so initially marginal."

Wagner wrote the script over a two-month period, and then revised it over the length of a year with the idea of fashioning a narrowly focused story with few characters and few locations. Says Wagner, "I developed the story within the confines of what I could get my hands on: a house

in rural Ohio, an 18-wheel truck, a hospital ... That said, I didn't really manage to write as small-gauge a story as I set out to. It had 50 locations, countless vehicles, night scenes, dawn scenes, and 20-some speaking parts."

Casting the film took place in early 2000. All of the key talent had extensive experience on the theatrical stage and in commercial work. For Renee Unger, the housewife, Wagner and Zellerford approached an actress named Kris Carr who played the lead in a short film they had crewed on in Oklahoma, KALIN'S PRAYER. Other discoveries included Todd Swenson, cast as Colson, the younger brother who is the story's catalyst; Timothy Altmeyer, chosen to portray Renee's husband Eric; and Cathy Doe, entrusted with the character principal in unraveling the mystery at the heart of FIVE YEARS, Renaye. An additional casting coup netted Michael Buscemi, brother of Steve, who has made a name for himself in New York indies such as MARGARITA HAPPY HOUR, HABIT, and HAPPY ACCIDENTS, as well as THE SOPRANOS; he plays Renee's brother Dean.

Principal photography kicked off during July 2000 in the Ohio cities of Oberlin and Wellington; a few extra days in Cleveland

filled out the 24-day shooting schedule. "Everyone who worked on the film, and the people of Oberlin and Wellington, came through to make it possible," says Wagner. Although the normal pressure of production played out expectantly—equipment mishaps, an ever-dwindling money supply—the hardest part encompassed something that most first-time feature filmmakers don't necessarily have to deal with.

"My father was dying of cancer during the course of production," reveals Wagner. "I had given a lot of thought to canceling the shoot, but he had encouraged me to go ahead and do it. I was living in his house during the course of production and in the end, I spent much more time with him than I probably would have if I had been living and working in New York instead of shooting in Ohio. He visited the set often and took some stills and in the end, it was a meaningful thing for both of us, a chance for him to see me at work."

The production wrapped at the end of July; that September, Wagner went back to Oberlin with a skeleton crew to do some pick-up shots. On the final day, his father passed away. "All the other extraordinary pressures of low-budget filmmaking paled by comparison to the emotional burden of his illness," said Wagner. "The lesson to find in it is, whatever happens on set, don't get too worked up about it. It's not life and death, it's just filmmaking."

Editing and post-production began in early 2001, with the picture fully completed in late January 2002, four days before its world premiere at the Victoria Independent Film & Video Festival in Canada. Its "Best Feature Film" award at the event launched a stream of accolades for *FIVE YEARS* as it traveled the circuit, including a "Best Screenplay" nod at the 2002 Avignon Film Festival and a "Best of Festival" honor at the 2003 Sarasota Independent Film Festival. "[It] was great," says Wagner. "We played more than 25 festivals around the world, and I figure 5,000 to 10,000 people have seen the film which, depending on your perspective, is either nothing or a lot ... to me, it feels like a lot. But, we never got any [distribution] offers at the festivals."

That fact is rather surprising, considering the good word-of-mouth and reviews garnered by the film. "I'd say that the audience and critical reaction has been overwhelmingly positive," reasons Wagner. "At the Cleveland International Film Festival, a guy raised his hand and said, 'I've seen 26 movies at this festival so far, and this is by far the best.' 600 people heard him say that, and it felt great,

but the closer the viewer gets to being in 'the Industry' the weaker the response.

"I think the explanation is that people who attend film festivals are looking for a good story; they're looking to be convinced by characters and environment, and *FIVE YEARS* is pretty successful at doing that," continues the director. "People closer to the business are looking for a hook, for something that makes this movie an easy sell, and *FIVE YEARS* is *not* an easy sell. It's a relatively dark, quiet drama starring unknown actors. You can see it in the reviews. We had stellar, wonderful reviews in the local papers, but the two reviews in *Variety* were kind of grudgingly positive and quick to observe that the film would have limited distribution appeal."

Such a reaction would possibly be bittersweet news to the filmmakers, but Wagner surmises that better things could come out of the screenings than Industry Buzz. For instance, one poignant moment occurred at the Phoenix Film Festival where Wagner talked with a woman who had just watched *FIVE YEARS*. "Occasionally, I'd heard people express doubts that anybody could sustain a lie like the one these characters perpetuate, to the point where it ceased to be a lie

what it feels like to be in a family that's living a lie. *FIVE YEARS* just cracked her right open—emotionally—because it dramatized her own experiences.

"By the end of our conversation, she was crying on my shoulder," continues Wagner, "and it was a very, very humbling experience, because you realize that when you put a story out there, you have a certain responsibility to try to be honest. You aren't going to affect everybody, and for most people your film will just be a two-hour diversion, but stories really do have the power to move people, if you do it well."

With that aforementioned DVD on the way, *FIVE YEARS* will finally have an opportunity to reach an audience beyond the festival circuit. Zellerford is currently working on projects with writer/director Raymond De Felitta (*TWO FAMILY HOUSE*), including *MURDERING MICHAEL MALLOY* for Filbert Steps Productions, as well as the documentary *CRAZY SEXY CANCER*. Wagner now lives in Hawai'i, saying that, "I moved here on a lark, when I got the opportunity to do some advertising work. I've been directing television spots and working on a handful of other projects," including drafting scripts for two features and developing a short called



and just became a part of the fabric of their lives," says Wagner. "But, this woman had a very similar experience in her life, [sensing] a giant elephant in the room that nobody acknowledged in her family for 20 years or more. She'd never really talked about it outside therapy because she just didn't think anybody would believe her, or be able to relate to

CHIEF, about a Samoan high chieftain who becomes a cab driver in Honolulu.

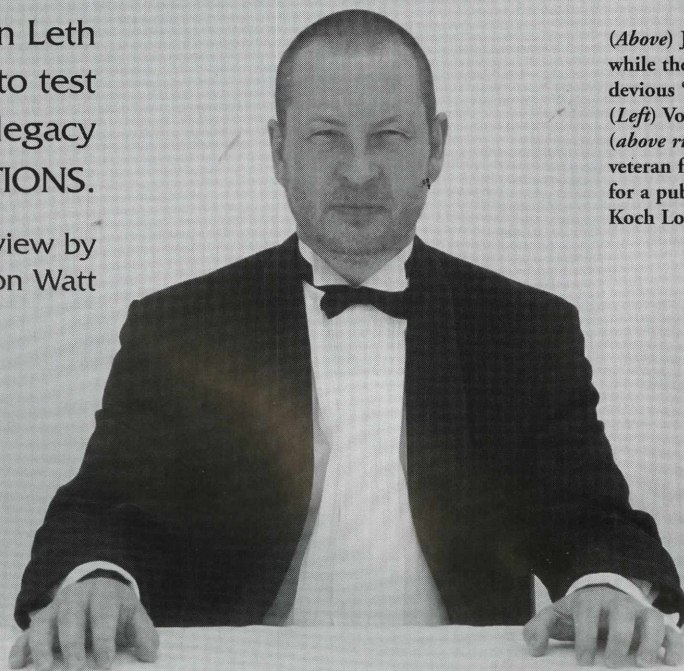
"When I was in New York, every day that passed without my getting closer to making my living as a filmmaker felt like a day of failure," he surmises. "Here, I'm much mellower. No less ambitious and no less passionate about filmmaking ... but, maybe, I'm in less of a hurry." ●

Toward a More Perfect Human



Danish filmmaker Jørgen Leth allowed Lars von Trier to test his mettle and filmed legacy in **THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS**.

Interview by
Jason Watt



(Above) Jørgen Leth walks with Lars von Trier while the director of **MANDERLAY** hatches a devious "plot" for **THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS**. (Left) Von Trier mimics Leth's own appearance (above right) in the Bombay remake of the veteran filmmaker's **THE PERFECT HUMAN** for a publicity still. (All photos: courtesy Koch Lorber Films)



Lars von Trier has made a career of upsetting people.

His movies aren't just sophisticated tragedies; they are treatises of spiritual tarnishing, close-ups of human deception. His characters stumble through dark maze-like plots, tossing pieces of their humanity behind them like a breadcrumb trail.

Before long, the bread is gone and they have no way back, the trail gobbled by beasts.

They face another dead end, or death, or worse.

Of all working directors, von Trier is perhaps the best at locating a character's breaking point. He keeps his finger on it, applies steady pressure, and then spans it repeatedly with an anvil. You can easily spot members of his audience exiting the theatre. They look stricken and wary, as if they'd just witnessed a funeral or gruesome crime. Because, of course, they have.

On occasion, von Trier's cast leaves his movies under more duress; after all, we keep coming back to his movies. Björk won't. After *DANCER IN THE DARK*, she called von Trier a soul-robber. Nicole Kidman was to play the lead in all of the director's "U.S. Trilogy" but she backed out after *DOGVILLE*, citing other obligations. (She was last seen taping up "Reward for Lost Soul" posters on Hollywood street lamps.) I'm assuming von Trier didn't deliberately offend his co-

workers, and that they simply experienced the unlucky fallout of artistic difference.

But what if he *wanted* to be sadistic? What if he chose a real person as his research subject for one of those mazes and filmed it as a documentary? That doesn't sound like tragedy. It sounds like horror. *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS* is that documentary, co-directed by von Trier and Jørgen Leth, the Danish director and poet who volunteered to be its research subject. I recently spoke to Leth about the experience.

"I was paranoid for a moment," says Leth. "I thought, 'Lars is trying to destroy the whole film and destabilize me.'" But, that moment passed. "During the process [of making *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS*], we became much closer. I regard him as a friend today." Before *OBSTRUCTIONS*, the two knew each other only as colleagues.

In 1993, von Trier produced one of Leth's films, but according to the former they had actually met once before. "Lars tells me this story all the time," Leth says, laughing.

In 1967, Leth made a 13-minute black-and-white film entitled *THE PERFECT HUMAN*. At the time, he was already an established artist and teaching at the Danish Film Institute, where von Trier was a young student working in the archive. During coffee breaks, von Trier would sit at the editing table and watch *HUMAN* over and over. "Then he wanted to talk to me about it, about filmmaking," Leth says. "According to Lars' version of the encounter, it was a non-encounter. I turned him down."

In 2001, after years of revenge-plotting, von Trier—accompanied by a film crew—again approached Leth about *THE PERFECT HUMAN*. This time, Leth talks.

THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS opens with their conversation; Von Trier calls HUMAN the film that most influenced him. Then, smiling devilishly, he challenges Leth to remake it five times under five different sets of limitations. "I like challenge," Leth says, "that's why I accepted his invitation. He's known for being devious."

Suggesting Leth remake THE PERFECT HUMAN is devious enough; the film is acutely minimal. The set consists of a white room where two actors, a young man (Claus Nissen) and a woman (Maiken Algren), engage in random activities (jumping, falling, dancing, disrobing) while an antiseptic voiceover offers observations and questions. Some are serious—"What is this human thinking about? Love? Death?" Many are silly—"Here is an eye. Here is a knee. Why does he move like that?" The perfect female is mute, apparently, but the male occasionally bemoans his existential condition. It's a quirky and crisp film that operates economically, like poetry.

"I wanted to get to basic elements, reduce environment," Leth says about the original PERFECT HUMAN. "I was revolting against the documentary tradition of the time—boring people and situations, the excess. I wanted to make a pure film in an empty space, something more inspired by commercials than by other films." He refers to the piece as a "crazy anthropology sort of thing, an essay about life." Von Trier calls it "a little gem that we are now going to ruin."

"Nothing's planned, nothing scripted," Leth says. "We don't discuss the obstructions. I don't ask him, 'What do you really mean?'" This element of uncertainty makes THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS seem like high art's response to reality television. The plot moves in episodes: the two men chat, von Trier devises some ruthless rules, Leth follows (or breaks) them. Then the two men watch the remake, and the game resets.

The first obstruction is technically vicious. Von Trier sends Leth to a place he's never been (Cuba) where he must forgo set and limit his edits to 12 frames. In other words, no shot can be longer than half a second. When Leth wakes jetlagged in a Havana hotel, he looks like he's already lost more than sleep. But soon we see Leth working on the remake, speaking Danish to his crew and fluent Spanish to the locals. Rather than give the film spasms, the 12-frame shots allow exhilarating zooms and motion sequences. When Leth returns to Denmark, tanned and happy, von Trier takes offense. "You ought to look battered," he bemoans.

"He was frustrated because it's so good," Leth says. "This is a duel, between him and me. He attacks, I defend. That's why [after the first remake] he gives me no more technical obstructions. I turn them to my own advantage." The subsequent obstructions test Leth's mettle. Von Trier even sounds a bit like Björk's soul-burglar when he asks if Leth would film a dying child in a refugee camp and add the text of THE PERFECT HUMAN. "I'm not perverse," Leth responds.

But von Trier believes there is a certain perversity in Leth's aesthetic distance.

For the second obstruction, Leth must choose to make the film in a "miserable place" and—just for good measure—play the lead. In India, Leth comes face to face with some of the poorest of the poor. Von Trier hopes the pathos of poverty will erode Leth's stoicism while the cameras are rolling. At one point, it appears von Trier gets what he wants. A woman carrying her baby begs Leth for money. He ignores her at first, then hands her a few rupees. Later, he considers popping Valium before the shoot. But, he puts on a tuxedo and performs, stone sober, in the middle of a street surrounded by dilapidated brothels, prostitutes, and untouchables.

"It was nerve-racking," says the filmmaker. "The Bombay scene could have been interrupted at any moment. I have to be composed to go through that scene. I think you can see the tension, but I'm proud of being able to perform it. Lars expected a breakdown, but I think that's a romantic thought. I'm not as dispassionate or cruel as he claims. What I made there made an impression on me."

It also makes an impression—a bad one—on von Trier. He finds Leth guilty for breaking one of the rules. As punishment, he insists Leth return to Bombay to remake the remake. "I resisted and said no," Leth tells me. He doesn't resist because he's scared to go back; he resists because it would damage the film. He prioritizes his art's well-being over his own. "I did not want to repeat something. That would've been harmful. I was conscious of the fact that we'd done two interesting remakes. We had some work done and now the film became real. I could not afford to waste one of the obstructions on something I didn't believe in."

The disagreement marks a turning point in THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS, while creating art takes precedence over winning the game. Von Trier never fully explains what he means by wanting to make Leth more human, but he does say that he wants Leth to "make a crap film." He wants to "banalize" Leth, to attack his ethics, his

role as an observer. But these things define Leth's work, just as human aberrance defines von Trier's. "My interest is in doing a good film for myself," Leth says. "I cannot simply be a slave to his fantasies. I have to do it my way." Leth won't cash in his artistic impulse. He can't.

"Observing is my strategy, my technique—sometimes desperate—to put some order in the chaos I observe," he continues. "Lars von Trier, he's a calculator. Many of his films are marked by a very

Alexandra Vandernoot as the Perfect Woman in the Brussels remake of THE PERFECT HUMAN.



cool calculation. It could be a game, his attacking my ethics. You never really know with von Trier. Some of his films I dislike for their cold calculation. I don't think he's in an eminent, evident position to criticize the observer in me. He's working very consciously with melodrama in a way I don't always find tasteful. He uses that calculation in THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS and I think that was good for the film. I think he knew more about where it could go than I did."

We see some of that cool calculation when Leth refuses to return to Bombay. The next obstruction is no obstruction—Leth has total freedom. “I’m not being funny when I say this is the worst obstruction he could give me,” the filmmaker claims. “That was devastating as a condition. It disturbed me enormously. I was ready to take any condition and work out of that but not go back and do an entirely new film; you can imagine what that means when you’re as proud as



I am of the original. You want to respect your original and now I had to do a new one. Again, I found a solution.”

The original is so compact that Leth has no choice but to expand it. The scope of the film grows, and so do its human subjects. In the original, the humans never leave their tiny white room. They are objects to be observed. In this version, the humans are capable of travel and self-observation, which literally happens when the man photographs himself, and the

woman finally speaks. Their actions aren’t random anymore, but hint at a larger narrative, an objective. I ask Leth how his notion of the perfect human had evolved over the years.

“They’re not so naïve, and in a way are more alter egos for myself,” describes Leth, who filmed this edition in Brussels. “The way he’s examining his own life, considering possibilities of what to do. There’s a certain melancholy, some action to be done. It’s a new level of consciousness. The self observation, that’s on a much more conscious level—a big move. The person in the third remake, he’s a kind of product of the original. The perfect human is less innocent, more determined, dealing and not dealing with human limitations. The woman is more prominent. Already in the Cuba remake, there’s more balance between the woman and man.”

At one point in *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS*, von Trier says the whole movie has been a “Help Jørgen Leth” project, but as Leth keeps delivering better and better films, it becomes obvious that this is no longer just a game, and that the veteran filmmaker is in no need of charity. “Von Trier wants to destabilize me in a good sense,” reasons Leth. “We have common interests; we respect each other’s work. I’m very interested in crossing limits for filmmaking and trying to invent new styles and going back to basic elements and finding new storytelling strategies. I don’t think I need help—I’ve been active all the time. I’m happy for *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS* because I attempt to do some things I could only do because of it. It leads to new work.”

Ultimately, it is not the obstructions but Leth’s desire to produce new work that drives the film, and watching that process unfold becomes more interesting than the banter and debate of these two talented men. Leth’s most difficult obstruction is the high standard of his ambition. Case in point is his long-range solution to von Trier’s fourth obstruction—to film an *animated* remake—for which Leth enlisted and visited the Austin, Texas-based studio of Bob Sabiston, wizard behind the technology that made Richard Linklater’s *WAKING LIFE* possible.

“I cannot follow [von Trier’s] advice and make crap. I want to get my thing out of it,” he says. “This was a chance to do some extraordinary and innovative work, but I have to do that work on my terms, while still adjusting to certain rules. This is the playing field, and I’m taking full advantage of that. He has obstructions

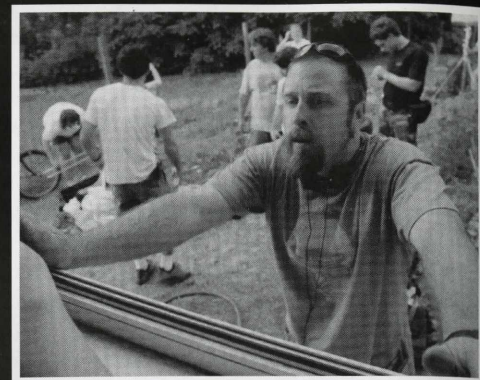
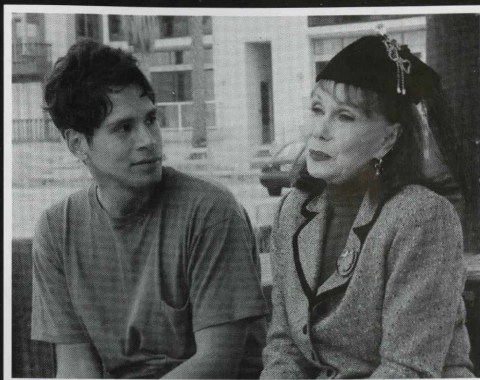
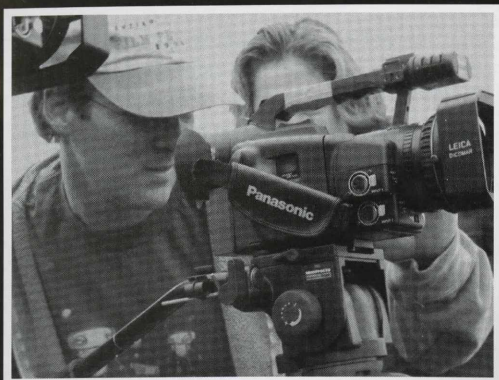
that are difficult and pose a big risk to my reputation. That’s the danger. But I have to solve them so the film is good for me. There is a marker between those two things. The real obstruction is that I believe in difficulty but I need to make a film I can be satisfied with. He probably had that in mind in some way.”

I’d say that’s certain. However much he rooted for Leth to fail, von Trier more than acknowledges Leth’s brilliant handling of the limitations. For the final obstruction, von Trier himself remakes *THE PERFECT HUMAN* using the documentary footage recorded throughout the entire project. His remake shows Leth engaging in random activities around the world, speaking fluently in Danish, Spanish, and English, but Leth is perhaps most fluent in the language of film and *that* is the essential message behind von Trier’s flattering rendition.

“I highly appreciate it,” Leth says. “I think it’s an admirable piece of cinema. It’s revealing. He’s exposing his vulnerability, admitting failures. He’s very open, probably revealing more about himself than in any other film. It’s a mixture of pointed fun but behind it there’s a kind of love, a kind of tenderness. I think it’s the perfect epilogue for the film.” It’s certainly uncharacteristic—a von Trier film with a happy ending? Now I’ve seen it all.

THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS is now available on DVD through Koch Lorber Films after serving as the company’s first theatrical release in mid-2004. Jørgen Leth is currently working on a sequel to *THE PERFECT HUMAN*, called *THE EROTIC HUMAN*. When I asked what it was about, he couldn’t tell me much—not because he didn’t want to, but because he didn’t quite know.

“When I start a poem, I start in the upper left corner and see where it leads me,” he says. “I don’t have a message, I’m not a preacher. I’m a kind of gangster of documentary. Most political documentaries have the answers before they go out, and they film just to illustrate their arguments. That’s the most uninteresting kind of film I can think of. My ideal is to have film be as close to the creative process of a poem, that you don’t know exactly where it’s going to lead you. You’re open to the process. Of course, that’s a high and exclusive idea, an eccentric idea of filmmaking. I want to be as free as possible. I don’t want to know exactly where they’ll end up. *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS* is a film where process is the main thing, and process is unpredictable.”



(Above left) Daniel Myrick lines up a shot for *THE STRAND*. (Above center) Peter Pasco and Katherine Helmond in *THE STRAND*. (Above right) Gregg Hale on the set of *SAY YES QUICKLY*. (Below right) Suli Holum in *SAY YES QUICKLY*. (All *STRAND* photos: courtesy Gearhead Pictures; All *SAY YES* photos: courtesy @lien LLC)

In an "Altered" State

Daniel Myrick, Gregg Hale, Eduardo Sanchez, and the Haxan Films team return with multiple gigs and nary a *BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* in sight.

Article by Jason Pankoke

As fabulous as it is to have *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS* front and center this issue, I once planned a "second cover story" that would have explicitly addressed the MICRO-FILM life span in accordance with a much more familiar indie film watershed. All my interviews took place way back at Halloween, which certainly allotted plenty of time to nail this project down ... right? Guess again, true believers.

For once, I deferred to the half-dozen other hats sitting upon my head and held back one of my own stories for the sake of expediting this issue. Until a legitimate MICRO-FILM staff materializes to give me breathing (and writing) room, I guess I shouldn't be apologizing—but then again, I *should*. What you don't get to read this time is a full-blown extravaganza with Haxan Films players Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sanchez, and Gregg Hale discussing the wake left by *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*, the stench that *BOOK OF SHADOWS: BLAIR WITCH 2* dropped, and their recent and upcoming projects: *SOLSTICE*, *ALTERED*, *SAY YES QUICKLY*, *THE STRAND*, and the new *BLAIR WITCH* Web site, www.blairwitch.com. Now you may mutter a collective "damn."

Myrick, Sanchez, and Hale, who all took time out of their ultra-busy schedules for phone interviews with your editor, talked up such a valuable range of topics and commentary—on their own work and a movie business that still doesn't quite fathom the Haxan mindset—that I would be remiss to rush the piece and stick it in

print prematurely. What I *can* do is briefly address the inclusion of well-known filmmakers in a magazine bent on championing the best of the barely-known and unknown, and it all goes back to that fateful fall of 1999.

MICRO-FILM is not directly inspired by *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*, nor was the first issue published in an attempt to ride the film's coattails after it conjured \$140 million at the domestic box office. As with many people at the time—at least, the ones that didn't come out of theaters hating the film—the apparent possibilities it seemed to open up for low-budget producers astounded the mind. Not counting all the obvious rip-offs, the cheeky spoofs, and the initial batch of SOV theatricals pre-24p that simply didn't hold up visually on the big screen, *BLAIR WITCH* at least made the shooting medium less of an issue for commercial releases. It took Austin maverick Robert Rodriguez (*EL MARIACHI*) to make electronic pop filmmaking sexy and lucrative with *ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO*, *SIN CITY*, and the *SPY KIDS* series. Is the sky finally the limit?

Savvy readers obviously understand that digital tools only aid the effort, not supplant human involvement. In the third issue of our short-lived local-zine *MICROSCOPE*, I ran an essay about how *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* might open the floodgates to perilous ends. "Indie cinema is often as reliant on technical expertise—organization, control, craft, economy, design—as its bloated Hollywood brethren,"

I wrote as a caution, "but we have to remember that true 'indie' goes beyond the mechanics, especially when filmmakers don't have the resources which only corporate money can buy. On any level, a slick exterior with middling innards spells trouble for any movie, no matter what length, format, or content." The completion of a movie worth its weight is *still* only half the battle, especially when it comes to marketing the piece to its potential audience.

I remember reading Stephen Rebello's excellent book on the making of *PSYCHO*; one of many intriguing things discussed therein is the novel methods used by Alfred Hitchcock and Paramount to sell the public on what was then a non-typical Hitchcock thriller. The infamous "Psycho House Tour" trailer and the poster depicting Janet Leigh in—gasp!—a brassiere and slip certainly ranked as ingenious attention-grabbers in 1960, and could be analogous to the infamous original Web site and the cloudy Heather Donohoe "confession" image (grabbed from video because, of course, no still photographer went along with the filmmakers into the woods) of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*. What ultimately cemented the riches and notoriety for both camps forty years apart came not from "the creatives" but their target, the general public, who helped milk these shockers for all their worth by divulging the gory details to their acquaintances and water-cooler co-workers ... *except* for the endings.

Friends and I went to see *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* its second weekend of

wide release, and even then, other friends *still* weren't spilling the beans. (Although, come to think of it, the "we're-cool-because-we-know-what-happens" effect could have directly carried over from *THE SIXTH SENSE*, which opened a few weeks before *BLAIR WITCH*.) In *MICRO-SCOPE 2*, contributor A.J. Michel traded opinions with me on the film. Michel wanted her money and 82 minutes back. I had a different reaction:

"While many felt cheated because of its low-tech atmospherics, helter-skelter camerawork, and aggravating confrontations, I saw those 'flaws' as part of the film's effectiveness," I wrote. "*BLAIR WITCH* is not supposed to be a beautiful thing to watch or experience. You are a voyeur as three headstrong kids allow abstract ideas and fears to close them into the woods and onto their deathbeds, almost making the existence of the Blair Witch a moot point ... it didn't scare me. It burrowed under my skin and stuck with me several hours after the end credits rolled. I liked the damn thing, pure and simple."

All that, and I had to agree with many a critic and voyeur that experiencing the movie's harrowing dread could only really work upon first viewing; watching it again while preparing to interview Sanchez, Myrick, and Hale didn't hold a candle to what occurred five years prior. Yet, it still shames *BOOK OF SHADOWS*, and I honestly wonder what makes that misfire's director, Joe Berlinger (*METALLICA: SOME KIND OF MONSTER*), believe a good film could still prevail had Artisan not pulverized it. Lions Gate Films, the franchise's current keeper, took pitch sessions with

Haxan late last year for *BLAIR WITCH 3*, which Sanchez vehemently claimed to me would not happen with their participation unless the script did something vastly different with the concept.

For the time being, the fathers of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* have plenty other irons in the cauldron. Sanchez, along with *BLAIR WITCH* producers Hale and Robin Cowie, wrapped *ALTERED* (www.probed-movie.com) for Haxan at the end of June in Orlando, Florida. This privately-financed horror opus, about human guinea pigs taking hostage one of their alien abductors, has already been sold to Rogue Pictures, the Universal offshoot responsible for *UNLEASHED* and the *ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13* remake. Myrick will soon make his own solo directing debut on *SOLSTICE*, a Southern gothic chiller for Endgame Entertainment (*HOTEL RWANDA*, *WHITE NOISE*). This comes after the launch of Gearhead Pictures' *THE STRAND*, an on-line Web series (www.strandvenice.com) described by creator Myrick as a multi-character drama in the Robert Altman vein set within the boardwalk culture of Venice Beach, California. Hale struck first in 2003 with his own Haxan feature, *SAY YES QUICKLY* (www.sayyesquicklymovie.com), about a woman who treks cross-country to hook up with a mysterious Internet acquaintance. Recently, this effort screened at festivals in Palm Springs, Orlando, and Los Angeles.

"In the grand scheme of things I really don't complain about *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*," Hale told me during our October discussion. "We definitely have

access to things on the filmmaking front that we would have never had otherwise, like our agent and our lawyer, the people who will take meetings with us and answer our phone calls." The current upswing of Haxan Films activity follows an apparent "down time" marked by the outfit's virtual non-involvement in *BOOK OF SHADOWS*, the still-born comedy project *HEART OF LOVE*, and the legal action that tainted the *BLAIR WITCH* phenomenon. "I went to film school to learn how to make films, and there I was trying to glean information from these gigantic contracts," said Hale. "There were lawsuits going both ways and it just got ugly. Basically, every bad thing we heard about Hollywood was true."

One common sentiment between the interviewees is a relief that they've retained control of their destinies, not rushing into undesirable studio assignments to cash in on *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*. Instead, they've plotted their own time tables and will now see the fruits of their labor and patience once *ALTERED*, *SOLSTICE*, and the Haxan Films logo hit the big screen where once stood three other young-gun movie makers, shivering and shaking in that chilly Maryland forest. "You have the dream of being Steven Spielberg and George Lucas," admitted Hale, "but, you know, I never wanted that anyway." Amen, brother. ☺

MICRO-FILM will cover **Haxan Films** in-depth in an upcoming issue.

Nichole Wleklinski helped transcribe the Gregg Hale interview used in this article.





Survivor: Champaign

Interview by
Margo O'Hara
with Jason Pankoke

(Left) Your editor surveys
one of his typical haunts,
the downtown area of
Champaign, Illinois.
(Photo: Holly Rushakoff)

The few interviews that I've given about MICRO-FILM and indie cinema culture have mostly run in local papers and e-zines, with the exception of Chris Sharpe's Oklahoma-based *Eyeball* mag in 2001, the only MF press to date other than a 2002 *CU Cityview* feature that I would term extensive. As always, I'm grateful to those who find this publication worth covering in any way, shape, or form, but sometimes I have to wonder—especially when people all but ignored MF 6 last spring—who *really* pays attention to what we do here at the ol' HQ.

One peculiar drought had been the lack of MICRO-FILM *anything* in *The Daily Illini*, the local independently published student newspaper that employs University of Illinois undergrads. I always found it odd that their peers an hour away at Illinois State University could easily look me up time and again for short features or quotes, but that MF somehow failed to blip on the *DI* radar. Last summer, that changed (briefly) after then-editor Marissa Monson interviewed me for a class paper on independent media.

I suddenly was going to be profiled in *The Daily Illini*'s alternative weekly, *buzz!* To my chagrin, the resulting piece that ran in June 2004 utilized probably less than five per cent of what I had spent several hours plunking down in my e-mail responses to questionnaire author Margo O'Hara. Yet another interview whittled down to stock comments on MICRO-FILM, yet another profile gutted of any discourse about community film matters.

Months later, I realized that many of the subjects I blathered about in my *buzz!* interview would be the same relative blather I'd probably incorporate into MICRO-FILM 7 anyway, offering readers my perspective on where the magazine (and yours truly) stood after five-plus years of publication. So, I gathered, why redraft my commentary when I had already written it usefully the first time?

I have edited the following to correct past/present tense, being a full year after the interview took place, and excise details that I felt extraneous to its inclusion here. What I *haven't* edited are my opinions regarding a variety of issues, some of which will not come off as positive or even polite. But, with every word that I commit to paper, there's usually a damn good reason for it. Cheers. – Jason Pankoke

REVVING AND REVIVING THE REAL THING

Q: Tell us a little bit about MICRO-FILM.

A: MICRO-FILM grew out of my involvement with the late, great local indie film event founded by Grace Giorgio and Eric Fisher, the Freaky Film Festival. It ran four successive years in late October from 1997 to 2000. My friend Gerry Kissell¹ introduced me to Grace, Eric, and other volunteers during the planning stages of the 1997 show. I had sort of drifted away from watching movies because I couldn't get past the relative sameness of everything that was playing at commercial movie theaters each and every week. Yet, the Freaky Films program in 1997 consisted of all these no-budget, punky, obnoxious, inventive, and wild short films, along with the Bruce Campbell "real-time" crime caper *RUNNING TIME*, which seemed to erupt from this magic little black hole that I had never noticed before. I learned that year that you didn't have to bask in the glow of a Hollywood film production to have fun at the movies, and that even the most rinky-dink effort

might actually find an audience if the right elements converge.

I also learned that you could make your own movies without being a human cog in the Hollywood wheel.

The following spring after the first Freaky Film Festival, I started working on an idea for a Freaky Films newsletter-type thing that, when I realized I was flying solo (a situation that persists to this day, for better or worse), eventually morphed into MICRO-FILM. The first full-blown issue made its debut at the third Freaky Film Festival in 1999, and there have been five more since.²

MICRO-FILM combines my professional abilities as a graphic artist with my personal interest in independent and underground films that buck the norm. It's my method for supporting the unknown filmmakers who create these works as well as learning about the many paths these people tread to translate their visions into a concrete form that others may experience.

Also, it's my own personal primer for whenever I finally get my butt in gear to make my own cinema, a desire that's been in place well before I ever decided to publish this mag-

¹Mr. Kissell, along with his merry madmen (and madwomen Charity and Zoë) in Springfield, Missouri, have finally embarked on their own feature opus called *THE NEW VIKINGS*. www.thenewvikings.com.

²Actually, there is one other issue. *MICRO-FILM: The Warning Shot*, a 12-page copy-shop special, came out in March 1999 after being e-mailed as an extremely obtuse newsletter to friends and acquaintances that January.

³NEITHER COULD MAYA is nearly complete after 2½ years, thanks to University of Illinois student Joey Burgess. A second meditative piece, *CICADA SONG*, will finish shooting this fall.

⁴My level-headed bellyaching on this subject can be read about in issue #10, p.50 (the Emma Goldman cover) of everybody's favorite L.A. punk zine *Razorcake*. www.razorcake.com.

⁵Especially since this festival had scheduled numerous *MICRO-FILM* flicks including *THE INDEPENDENT*, *KWIK STOP*, *CHARMING BILLY*, and *MARYAM* (see "Reviews" this issue). To be fair, after personnel switches and other reorganization, Route 66 has carried on since as an annual event.

⁶My PBS relationship looks to continue with a short-film showcase program to be produced by WILL-TV's Brian Paris. It has a projected winter 2006 airdate; keep an eye on www.cuvideo.org for updates.

⁷And now, hopefully, you might consider *MICRO-FILM 7* to be the "best issue ever!"

⁸Ken has decided to move on, announcing at press time the sale of *ShortKutz DVD* to one Robin Polley of Middleton, Ohio: www.shortkutzdvd.com.

⁹Here's a not-so-humble postscript to my comments regarding *MICRO-FILM* in print. As much as it may be a publishers' taboo to even bring it up, I'm actually holding my tongue (minus the *ShortKutz* snafu) regarding the mortifying lack of sales and support for MF 6. Don't disappoint me with this edition, people. See footnote #8.

azine. I have one short film that's photographed but not completed³ and hope to start producing one a year after I get some personal roadblocks moved out of the way and this first one finished.

Q: What happened in the two years when it wasn't printing?

A: A lot of little things, really, but they all added up. The fifth issue of *MICRO-FILM* came out in June 2002 during relatively sour times. I was unemployed after finishing a short-term layout gig, preceded by the loss of my job at a news weekly due to ownership change and tightened purse strings.⁴ Not being in much of a hurry to jump right into the next issue, as the fifth one itself took almost a year to complete, I puttered until I found gainful employment again that October. At that point, you'd think that my ship would be righted, right?

Let's say that losing momentum is never healthy for independent projects, especially ones lead by a virtual one-man band, and I simply was not able to engineer a good enough push for the sixth issue to come out within a reasonable time. I errantly thought that I could give *MICRO-FILM* a lift by being involved in the Route 66 Film Festival, which premiered in Springfield, Illinois that September, but the fest tanked spectacularly and didn't help my personal motivation.⁵

So, I just let the sixth issue crawl to the finish line on its own timetable. I'm not that sure I should admit it, but that's the truth. I wrote a few pieces for friends' publications, helped with bits and pieces for local and student filmmakers, but still pretty much everything I've done on the side has been geared towards *MICRO-FILM*. Well, I also designed DVD packaging for three movies and shot a segment for WILL-TV's Champaign episode of *A DAY IN OUR HOMETOWN*.⁶



Dominique Gallo in Carl Wiedemann's short, *A PRIMER FOR DENTAL EXTRACTION* (1999), shown at the final Freaky Film Festival in 2000. (Courtesy Carl Wiedemann)

Q: What was the biggest challenge for you starting up *MICRO-FILM* again?

A: Again, recapturing that whole-hog momentum that I somehow mustered during the magazine's first two years and four issues. With all the time that passed between the sixth issue and the fifth one in 2002, it almost feels like *MICRO-FILM 6* was my second #1. It's not drastically different from its predecessor, but it is larger than MF 5 by almost 20 pages, and I made some belated adjust-

ments to design elements throughout the issue. Also, my printer had instituted new pre-press methods during the hiatus, and the print quality on the new issue makes the prior issues look like crap in comparison. I just tried to make sure that this was the "best issue ever,"⁷ especially for people who might have forgotten about it or will read *MICRO-FILM* for the very first time.

I attempted to drum up some excitement and "added value" by offering free copies of Ken Westermann's DVD publication *ShortKutz* with early sales of *MICRO-FILM 6*. Ken and I figured it would be a shoo-in package that many videophiles hip to indie films might check out, giving a boost to both of us at the same time.

I had 150 sets of magazine and DVD for the promotion and couldn't even unload half of them. Needless to say, I was pretty fucking embarrassed, partly because the supposed *MICRO-FILM* faithful couldn't come through on such a measly and achievable goal, but mostly because I felt that I let Ken down. I like his product and he's struggling even worse than I am.⁸

That said, the second biggest challenge is convincing people to actually purchase *MICRO-FILM*. It's the ultimate conundrum for do-it-yourself media and arts, especially when you really don't want to stress the money side of what you do. "How do I reach commercial success with a non-commercial endeavor?" Just as I felt like issue six was a "new" *MICRO-FILM*, I also got nervous when I realized that I had to start jonesing for sales and advertising dollars again, almost from scratch since it'd been so long.

I'm sure this is the point where some people are going to wonder why the hell I don't just do a Web zine to save money or swallow my pride and shop *MICRO-FILM* around to a larger publisher. And to that I humbly answer that the many reasons can be found on each and every page of *MICRO-FILM* itself. Read the text and read between the lines—it's there in glorious black and white.⁹

Improving distribution is always a fun task. Music fans are hip to the trials and tribulations that bands go through with their records, almost regardless of whom they sign with anymore. Getting your low-budget magazine on the stands is ultimately easier, in my estimation, but instead of having to sell your soul you're forced to cough up a minor mint in set-up fees, bar code fees, shipping fees, and promotional items like fliers before most of these places even accept your first shipment.

Then, of course, there's the infamous affidavit, the distributor's half-page notice that claims how many copies your magazine sold, in lieu of actually returning unsold copies or even torn-off covers as concrete proof of what *didn't* sell. Thank god for Clint Johns and Tower Records; they actually treat publishers and zine-makers like human beings and give them the benefit of the doubt.¹⁰ Brooklyn's Ubiquity Distribution has been fair with *MICRO-FILM* as well. I need cash to sign up with the others!!! To me, getting your small-press deal on the stands is actually a form of advertising, not saleable goods—you merely hope that readers find your book, dig it, and then either subscribe or purchase back issues directly from you in the long run.

Oh, I guess I should qualify my griping a little bit—*MICRO-FILM* is not my day job¹¹, folks! Even after five years. Try doing constructive business "after hours" ... not as easy as it might sound, even in this day and age of the Internet and cheap communications tools.

Q: What kind of issues do you want *MICRO-FILM* to address?

A: If you mean issues as in "aspects of the indie film world," then I would say as many as possible! I like for each *MICRO-FILM* to cover as vast a canvas as we can muster—not in the vain attempt to be as complete as possible about the state of indie film as we speak, but to provide a semblance of voices, ideas, and subject matter that offers a lot of variety.

A LIST OF 5

On rare occasions, during crystal-clear nights when bar-crawling and music-making take over the downtown area near the Secret MICRO-FILM Headquarters, I bump into local film pal Brian Robertson, with whom I became friends during our tenure volunteering for the now-defunct Champaign-Urbana Freaky Film Festival (MF 2, p.22-23). Other than discussing life woes over cheap beer and blaring deejay mix marathons, we invariably hit upon one particular sore spot regarding how Roger Ebert's local Overlooked Film Festival rarely acknowledges the short subject. I can see why Brian can get irked about it, being a short filmmaker himself, although "Ebertfest" is really designed more to be an annual feature-film showcase and a university-sponsored hobnob event rather than a true public forum for the art form.

I often think about the staggering number of shorts that must be floating out there on the festival circuit, through the Internet, in compilation DVDs, and occupying filmmakers' shelves after their brief livelihood. Brief, that is, when compared to the apparent durability of features, even the most obscure cult films. It's not impossible to explore the short film, given the venues outside of the multiplex that will show them, but is it worth wading through the herds to lasso the prize stock? I venture to say "yes." An inspiration to me despite his self-destructive nature, Edgar Allen Poe championed the short story format and made it successful for his own purposes. I believe that, if I attempt to get in the film production game myself, I might simply accomplish what I can with abbreviated works I care about rather than mustering feature-length attempts for the masses or the film festival crowds.

The following five productions are good examples of what can happen when creative filmmakers take the time and effort to assemble something distinct and honestly reflective of their own voices without simultaneously winking and nodding incessantly at future employers and the current hipster intelligentsia.

THE ADVENTURES OF FRATMAN AND PLEDGEBOY (2002)

A stone's throw away from MF HQ is the University of Illinois, which boasts among its many qualities the largest Greek system of any school in the United States of America. Dependent upon whom you ask, it's either a blessing or a curse to have that many nice buildings housing so many oversexed pretty boys and underdressed college girls within the two-mile radius around the Main Quad. Yet, I doubt that our Greeks have ever produced the upstanding likes of Darren Whitebread (Steve Massoni), the protagonist in Dire Wit Films' supremely amusing short, THE ADVENTURES OF FRATMAN AND PLEDGEBOY. Here's a bright young man from the well-respected ITK (I Tappa Keg) fraternity—lover of Dave Matthews music, wearer of comfy sandals, big brother to the wildly mincing Pledgeboy (Mark Colegrove)—charged with protecting his beloved university from "left-wing liberal ideals and divergent thinking" after accepting the Fratman mantle on his 21st birthday. Lo and behold, our heroes stumble upon the nefarious Creative Man (Tim Dugan) and his art-school FemiNazis (Tami Menear and Jennifer Stahon), plotting to spread culture across this academic land. Fisticuffs ensue!

FRATMAN certainly reeks of its student film origins, and "sophomoric" is the most convenient adjective one might use to describe the humor found here, but its combined parody of television do-gooder shows, newsreels with awkward production values, and Three Stooges-style physical comedy tickles the funny bone anyway. Shot in black-and-white 16mm, this cheeky little subversion from

director Massoni, producer Menear, and writer Colegrove entertains more thoroughly in its brief seven minutes than most other class projects that I have seen.

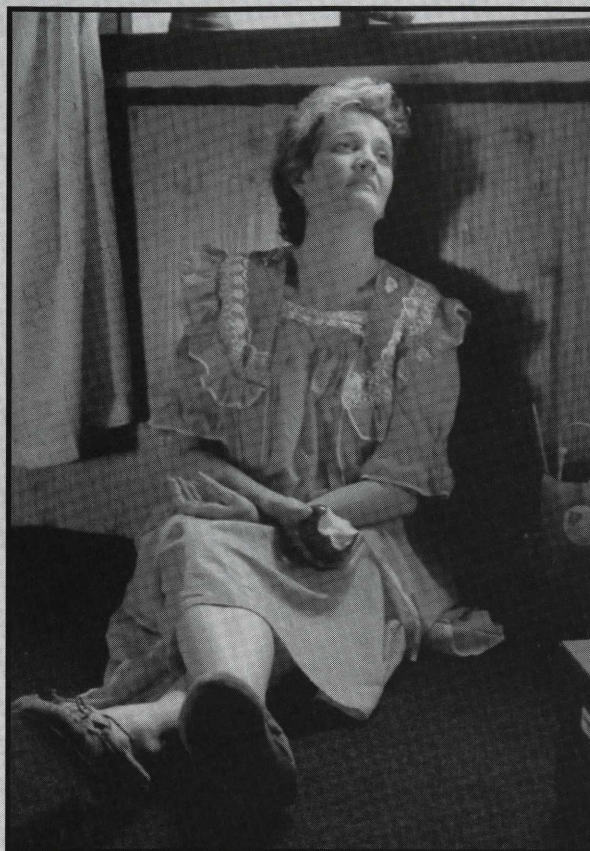
Available for viewing at www.direwitfilms.com.

FARMER MCALLISTER'S THINKIN' MACHINE (2001)

Flustered farmer Red McAllister (J.D. Sutton) finds himself pushed to wit's end by his wife Saffron (Peg O'Keef), a major league battle-axe who seemingly expends all her daily stamina by criticizing her hubby's intelligence and nagging over the chores. Early one morning, after hitting the hay completely dressed in overalls and grease, Red directs Saffron to look out the window at the new farmhand zipping across the front yard. A primal scream precedes a trip downstairs with shotgun in hand, where Saffron comes face-to-face with Red 2, a robotic barnyard special cobbled together by Red to not only take over his chores, but to distract the wife and give his ears a welcome respite. While Saffron slowly becomes more curious about Red 2, especially his lower-region copper appendage, Red confides with boozy neighbor Ignacious (Jim Gunshanan) that the possibility of physical *amor* between woman and android is indeed his ulterior motive.

As with many prior reviews in other publications of FARMER MCALLISTER'S THINKIN' MACHINE, I halt the plot description here to avoid spilling certain twists that truly define this raucous pleasure, created by director/writer Brady Koch and producer/editor David Hayman while attending the University of Central Florida. Little needs to be elaborated about its top-notch technical qualities, although a special mention is due the believable heartland setting assembled by the crew and captured beautifully by Tony Foresta's cinematography, while actors Sutton and O'Keef shift between manic abrasiveness and down-home humility with ease during the comedy's 12-minute running time. Here's hoping that many folks will nag these guys to make more quality, personable movies like FARMER MCALLISTER in the near future.

Not commercially available; more information can be found at <http://redsrobots.tripod.com/>.



Peg O'Keef in FARMER MCALLISTER'S THINKIN' MACHINE
(Photo: courtesy Brady Koch)

Five Stupendous Fits of Madness in Relatively Short Order

by Jason Pankoke

THE KETCHUP AND MUSTARD MAN (1995)

Way before eclectic music combo The Billy Nayer Show left audiences' mouths agape with the launch of THE AMERICAN ASTRO-NAUT (2001, MF 5 p.8), there arrived on planet Earth a trio of unique "BNS" excursions involving the handsomely roguish persona of lead singer/lyricist Cory McAbee. In BILLY NAYER (1992), a lo-fi rotoscoping technique depicts McAbee's impromptu sing-song at a party. THE MAN ON THE MOON (1994) strings together the episodic fashion in which

our crooner deals with a devastating break-up, expressing his frustrations to the lens of a Pixelvision camera as a *faux* variety show broadcast from space. And then, some divine inspiration (or jungle juice dunked into San Francisco's waterways) directed BNS to merge the offbeat qualities of their entire cinematic/musical output into one spectacular half-hour flight of neo-cabaret fancy.

Adapted from an original stage piece first performed by BNS in 1991, THE KETCHUP AND MUSTARD MAN involves a riotous exchange between McAbee, filmed solo against black as a greaser-type, and the entire band performing in

LIST OF 5 continued on next page

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a living room set with McAbee as the title character, a grotesquely deformed fellow with buck teeth and *papier-mâché* complexion. What erupts from their instruments and mouths can only be described as a stream-of-cornucopia, redefining itself nearly every minute with fresh non-sequitur storytelling that introduces everyone from accident-prone "Fickey" and hotdog folk hero "Scottsy" to the little princess who moved to Paris and the chickens put in their place by the farmer's wife. As a whole, *THE KETCHUP AND MUSTARD MAN* exudes a fluidly acerbic bliss sure to enchant even the most adamant anti-musical grinchers in the audience.

Available on DVD from www.billynayer.com.

THE PERPETUAL LIFE OF JIM ALBERS (2002)

This exhilarating knockout from Brooklyn filmmaker Matt Goldman (*BROKE*, MF 5 p.27) dramatizes the life of a white-collar nebbish named Jim Albers (Stephen Butler) who is prone to inhabiting a mental Zen cosmos whether at rest or reluctantly partaking in the rat race. On this particular day, brief respites such as brushing his teeth and chowing down on a lunch-time hot dog fail to offset the hurried racket of his workplace, a high-ceilinged office maze teeming with well-dressed power mongers, cubicle monkeys, and the random playa with tales of sexual conquest to tell whether or not anyone wants to hear them. All this intense monotony finally overwhelms Jim, who faints to the floor as his psyche momentarily whisks him away to a protective fluid sac floating among the stars. Revealing that Jim snaps out of it and bolts for the hills should not be a surprise; how Goldman cinematically builds up to his protagonist's breaking point without office-humor cliché or any intelligible dialogue is sheer gold. Kinetic fast-forward motion, freeze-frames with animated captions, an inky NOVA-esque universe, and other creative signifiers push this 12-minute, 16mm wonder way above what you might expect from a low-budget expression of corporate, consumerist paranoia.

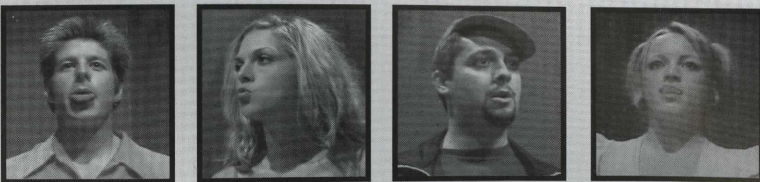
Not commercially available; more information can be found at www.brokefilms.com.

PORNOGRAPHIC APATHETIC (2003)

Stud-boy handyman makes house call. Stud-boy handyman comes on to horny cheerleader. Stud-boy handyman and horny cheerleader have sex. Mature mistress arrives. Mature mistress dominates stud-boy handyman and horny cheerleader in three-way. Smarmy, dumpy pizza delivery guy arrives. Smarmy, dumpy pizza delivery guy shares his salami with stud-boy handyman, horny cheerleader, and mature mistress. "Monkey slave" becomes the most hilarious euphemism in the world. Typical skin flick? Not exactly, my dear wanker. Reposition these naughty thespians in four chairs surrounding a single table on a cheap cable-access set with no other dressing than the pizza box and cigarettes. Press "play" again, and keep your actors and their sweet asses seated the entire time. Monotone delivery reigns, hilarity ensues. Don't believe me? Go score Caught 'Em Productions' *DIRTY LITTLE SHORTS* compilation and revel in T. Arthur Cottam's six-minute masterpiece *PORNOGRAPHIC APATHETIC*. You'll love me for it. If not, send over the hot mama bondage queen to teach me a lesson. Go on. I dare you.

DIRTY LITTLE SHORTS also features the perception-impaired gas station comedy *BEER GOOGLES*, which is no relation to the superior *BEER GOOGLES* that conquered the festival circuit a couple of years ago, and the "perv pop" music video *SPANKY! SPANKY!* by Dick-N-Jayne, a slight novelty "hit" that will haunt you for weeks afterwards with subliminal echoes of its über-catchy beat and the duo's titillating "schpanky"-speak.

Available on DVD from www.caughtem.com.



(Left to right) Jim Lightfoot, Annie Teegardin, John Falchi, and Jenna Leigh talk naughty in *PORNOGRAPHIC APATHETIC*. (Photos: courtesy T. Arthur Cottam)

C-U Confidential footnote: *FARMER MCALLISTER* director Brady Koch grew up in nearby Bloomington, Illinois, before moving with his parents to Florida as a pre-teen.



Low-budget movie magic: film critic Roger Ebert steps it up to be interviewed for D.P. Carlson's film, *CHICAGO FILMMAKERS ON THE CHICAGO RIVER*. (Photo: Jessica Feith/Film Foetus)

The *BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE* piece in *MICRO-FILM* 6, written by Anthony Zoubek, was a nice departure from what I've run before. He politely took Michael Moore to task on possibly overstepping his bounds in terms of manipulating the facts of the Columbine massacre and guns in America for his own ends. Because the concept of "documentary" is so ingrained in our minds as a specific form of filmmaking, and *COLUMBINE* completely bucks that model despite being called a documentary and winning its Academy Award in that category, I think many people have a hard time accepting the film as the leftist Moore soapbox that it is. Not that I don't agree with Moore's sentiments about what he's discussing, but he came up with a hybrid commentary piece that's invigorating as it is frustrating. It will be very interesting to see how he handled *FAHRENHEIT 9/11*.¹²

Of course, there was a common thread between several articles about mavericks overcoming numerous obstacles to get their films finished and distributed. *THE INDEPENDENT*, with Jerry Stiller and Janeane Garofalo, kicked around for years before it received a bare-bones release through an outfit called Arrow Films. Michael Gilio's *KWIK STOP*, which played the Overlooked Film Festival in 2002, still needs distribution.¹³ Local filmmaker Robin Peters wrote about going to the American Film Market in 2003, one of the largest events to buy and sell film rights to territories the world over. Chicago filmmaker D.P. Carlson talked about having to completely re-edit his documentary, *CHICAGO FILMMAKERS ON THE CHICAGO RIVER*, because he couldn't come up with the cash to extend the rights to show film clips from his interviewees' work. Not every little film strikes gold, as did *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*.

Finally, that issue of *MICRO-FILM* got into the tools and tricks of the trade for the first time. The writers have always touched on this dimension of the filmmaking process, but in that case we had our first tech review column by Chad Fahs, who talked up the home computer effects suite *Magic Bullet*, as well as Matt Jenkins' matter-of-fact piece about realistic goals you can set for yourself when making a no-budget film. I don't think *MICRO-FILM* can ever come close to being a sort of film school in print—experience is your best teacher, anyway—but providing more explicit peeks into the methods of a filmmaker's madness will give our readers more presence of mind as to all that goes into a movie production, large or small.

Q: What is *MICRO-FILM*'s ultimate goal? To make more people aware of this other film industry? What do you hope to accomplish with it?

A: I don't know that it's a matter of being a separate film industry. It's more about recognizing that the world of filmmaking is very wide and vast, and that so many avenues exist through which one can experience these films apart from the multiplex. It's also about understanding that many films are created outside of the industry with the hope that someone in the industry will eventually pick it up and that, more significantly, many other films are created outside of the industry to

retain artistic control over their content and *modus operandi*, with distribution merely icing on the cake. Even more so, there's the contingent who create film as art, with the late Stan Brakhage¹⁴ arguably the figurehead, and that working a selling point into these pieces really is never an issue in the first place. These films are made to be made, not to be sold.

MICRO-FILM exists to put a human face on independent and underground filmmaking. It is not the last word on the subject at all—how *can* it be when all these Web magazines and larger publications can tackle so much volume seemingly overnight? I don't compete with that mentality, not one bit. After almost five years and "only" six issues, quantity is not exactly my priority.¹⁵ It's always about giving readers a good read, giving novice and independent filmmakers a positive push and an honest window into their world, and giving unknown cinema its due in a world glutted with depressing, crass, manipulative, commercial media.

THE HEART OF THE MICRO-FILM WORLD

Q: What made you so interested in independent filmmaking?

A: I'm a hands-on type of person. If I write something, I proofread it. If I draw something, I refine it. If I photograph something, I'll figure out how to make it look better on the computer. Fascinating to me is the general process of making a movie, but even more so when it's brought down to a human level, when certain films are made by certain people with a lot more personal vision and idealism at stake rather than cash.

If you go to the right events at the right time, you can actually meet these people, talk to them, hear horror stories (and votes of confidence) about the whole thing. With independent filmmaking, regardless of how long the end credits crawl runs, it's usually a given that the director, producer, writer, set designer, composer, even the actors, have a lot more invested in the project than on a Hollywood set where you disappear to your trailer or office except for exactly when you're needed. Independent filmmaking is a lot more accessible all-around than Hollywood filmmaking, where it's all about being in the right place at the right time with the right people.

Not that simply talking to a film director in a hotel lounge for two hours after her film screens at a film festival will give you all the insight and gumption to run out the next day to make your masterpiece, but with the indie film scene, it is certainly possible to find a support network for the art where you're on a more level playing field with your seasoned peers, rather than finding the bottom rung of the Hollywood ladder a precarious first step.

In a broader stroke, you know how the average Joe and Jane MovieGoer drive out to the multiplex to watch a movie for two hours as good, old-fashioned escapism? I dig independent films because they afford me an escape from exactly the type of movies that hog up the screens at these multiplexes. Mind you, I'm hardly anti-Hollywood in practice—I need my LORD OF THE RINGS and SPIDER-MAN fixes like many other people—but I'd usually rather spend my time with films that are not slicked up, not dumbed down, and are interesting, quirky, and most importantly, heartfelt in their imperfection. Give me something that speaks to me, not zooms over my head at two hundred miles an hour. Unless, of course, it's the *Millennium Falcon*.

Q: Are there any misconceptions you see independent films suffering from?

A: I think we first have to vainly attempt a definition of "independent film." Most productions that you see play-

ing in the multiplex that you may have heard reference to as an independent film really aren't. They may be quality films, sure, but independent? ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND was a creative, quirky piece (from what I've read) released by Focus Films, but how did they get the money for Jim Carrey, Kate Winslet, Charlie Kaufmann, director Michel Gondry, and all the professionals that worked on it? Universal Pictures, the parent studio.

Probably the only reason that Miramax releases can have the star power that they do is because they have a line on Disney money, and now look what's happened in that regard when the Weinsteins spend Disney money on something not guaranteed to please the total populace—namely, FAHRENHEIT 9/11.¹⁶ In this weird way, the vast majority of movies termed "independent film" these days are actually rather dependent on studio backing and wide distribution, just like THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW or TROY.¹⁷ Therefore, marketplace needs compromise who works on these things and how much money is dumped into them.

I won't even go into the discussion of whether or not THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST or the second STAR WARS trilogy count as independent films, other than to say that they were independently made for the masses but not so independent in spirit, where it really counts with me.



Gunnar Hansen as Leatherface in THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (1974), an often-cited influence on the current horror movie scene. (Photo: courtesy MPI Home Video)

Occasionally disrupting due course, naturally, are the films truly made independently that rise to the top through their audacity or cult status, not to mention strokes of luck that insured they would be remembered in our collective consciousness. Better-known films in the American indie pantheon would include THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, CLERKS, RESERVOIR DOGS, MEMENTO, and SEX, LIES, AND VIDEOTAPE, and nearly every famous contemporary horror film including THE EVIL DEAD, HALLOWEEN, DAWN OF THE DEAD, THE RE-ANIMATOR, THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE, and even the first FRIDAY THE 13TH, which Paramount picked up after it was completed. These movies, and many others, were produced with money raised through private investors and/or personal connections, scratched out over weeks and months of bare-bones production, and earned the right amount of box office numbers, critical notice,

¹⁴If you distribute your magazine through Tower, get your deal in writing, especially concerning their "partial payment up front" hook. It hadn't been a problem with MICRO-FILM until earlier this year, when I called their accounts representative to ask the whereabouts of said payment for MF 6. I finally received it (a full year after I delivered MF 6) and it was noticeably discounted due to middling MF sales. It *always* catches up to you.

¹⁵I currently work in pre-press and have 11 years' prior experience in textbook production and newspaper pagination. These places actually have cool things like paychecks and health insurance.

¹⁶FAHRENHEIT 9/11 opened the week after I originally did this interview. I saw it with a packed house at Boardman's Art Theatre, just down the street from the Secret MICRO-FILM Headquarters. I had mixed feelings about the piece; it's way more unified than BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE if lacking in the prior film's cinematic zip. But, once again, Michael Moore's strength is that he makes people *talk* after the end credits roll.

¹⁷The very day I began editing and annotating this interview for MICRO-FILM, I received an e-mail from Michael Gilio announcing the DVD release of KWIK STOP through iFilm. That's indie synergy for you!

¹⁸See the Criterion Collection's two-disc omnibus from 2003, "By Brakhage."

¹⁹Unfortunately, the gap continually widens between little publications like this one and warhorses such as Fangoria, FilmThreat.com, Cinefantastique, and Rue Morgue, all of which have branched into multi-media branding—including the production of original feature films save for Rue Morgue, although I honestly doubt that will last too long. Hope their journalists learn to love typing the word "disclosure."

²⁰By now, it's common knowledge that the Weinsteins will officially split from Disney in September, leaving Miramax at the Mouse House while taking along genre label Dimension Films to reside under their new distribution company. What a difference a year makes!

¹⁷Or *CONSTANTINE*, or *SAHARA*, or *HITCH*, or *XXX: STATE OF THE UNION*, or....

¹⁸Isn't it amazing how it took a hit remake (*DAWN OF THE DEAD*) and a hit spoof (*SHAUN OF THE DEAD*) for Universal to pony up a budget for the long-mooted, legitimate heir to *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*? I would love to see *LAND OF THE DEAD* eventually three-packed with *DAWN* and *SHAUN* on DVD for the sake of investigating what corporate mindset warranted running so many rings around George A. Romero.

¹⁹Interestingly, the *Entertainment Weekly* pages accessible through www.CNN.com actually do provide capsule reviews for independent films with meager distribution, usually after they open in New York City.

²⁰See footnote #13.

and viewer appreciation to cement their own paragraphs in the history of indie film.

Now, it could be argued that several of the films I just mentioned are just as commercial (and critically derided) as what Hollywood produces. That may be true for certain ones like *FRIDAY THE 13TH* and we've gathered enough hindsight to see how they've influenced so many more productions that have been released in their wake (and I'm not even counting the recent "reimaginings" of *TEXAS* and *DAWN*).¹⁸ But the other major misconception about indie films that I can think of, other than mistaking those "independent films" that amount to little more than small-scale Hollywood movies, is that independent and underground films are hedonistic, vulgar, damned-to-hell garbage through and through. Well, ha ha, some if it probably is! (Laughs.)

There are so many cool little movies with interesting approaches, good actors, and fresh perspectives that have a life well beyond what *Entertainment Weekly*¹⁹ decides to review. Sadly, because of their non-commercial appeal, a lot of these efforts make the film festival rounds for a year or two and then earn the barest of releases from an indie video company or wind up sitting on the shelf. Some of my favorite MICRO-FILM movies have been in distribution limbo for years, including the cyclical drama *KWIK STOP*²⁰, the anarchistic musical comedy *EXISTO*, and the pseudo-retro road comedy *RADIO FREE STEVE*.²¹

Part of it is the sheer saturation of product available out there. Part of it, such as with *STEVE*, is legal (in this case, the infamous problem of a hefty price tag on clearance rights for the music on the soundtrack). Most pointedly with *EXISTO*, it's the left-bending politics—if *FAHRENHEIT 9/11* went after George W. Bush, then *EXISTO* would gang-tackle the rest of the religious right in one fell swoop. Or, maybe it's the penis pogo stick and foam rubber vagina collars. I don't know. (Laughs.) But seriously, the farther away from Hollywood one ventures, the more breadth one is likely to experience. We're all up for learning something new and feeling something a bit more authentic than what the current CGI spectacular provides, right?

Q: Where do you see independent filmmaking going in the next five years?

A: In terms of content, I couldn't guess. In terms of quality and accessibility, it will depend on how quickly the price tags on High Definition cameras²² and editing gear take a dip, whether for purchase or rental. HD and digital are on the lips of so many people, that it's inevitable the mind-set that will be ingrained on today's up-and-coming filmmakers is that they *have* to shoot digital. I personally feel that film stock as a medium will take a long time to wither away; it still has such an organic beauty (assuming the cinematographer knows what he or she is doing) that digital can't match without being tricked up a whole hell of a lot.

I can easily see a lot more political work being shown, especially since more and more filmmakers are taking their own work on the road, presenting it at colleges and independent film theaters off of a tape or a DVD. I think we may see a slight upswing of personal filmmaking being shown in theaters, such as Jonathan Caouette's *TARNATION*²³, but I think such films and filmmakers will need to be tutored by industry professionals (and not those working for the big studios) to shape them into something digestible. I also am wondering how much more monopolized the multiplexes

will become by the studio system, and how much more risk that small, single-screen theaters might take to differentiate themselves, even from standard-issue "art house" programming. That might partially be dependent on whether digital satellite delivery will be made available and affordable soon.

PUTTING A FOOT DOWN ON TRANSIENT TURF

Q: What brought you to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois? Where are you originally from?

A: I moved to Champaign a few months after I graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University in 1993.²⁴ My long-time friend Brian Driscoll started law school at the University of Illinois that fall and hadn't found a roommate, and when I realized that the peace and tranquility of my basement apartment out in the Bloomington boonies was getting to me, I decided to return to civilization. I also failed to find gainful employment during that time, so the lack of cash and companionship also had something to do with it.

I grew up in the western suburbs of Chicago—Berwyn, Forest Park, Hillside, Plano during grade school, and Aurora during high school.

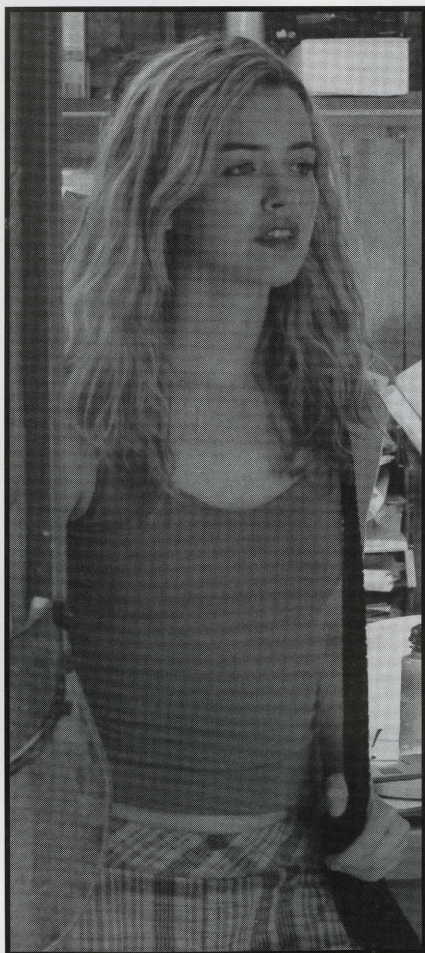
Q: Are there any challenges you find being located in Champaign?

A: Absolutely. Regardless of the constant brouhaha that the mass media raises over the Digital Video revolution which will make production and distribution so much easier and cost-effective, movie-making *still* takes time, talent, resources, and god forbid, money. Unlike Chicago, which has a plethora of film festivals for screening and networking purposes, a handful of film schools like Columbia and the Art Institute, numerous filmmaking organizations and collectives such as IFP/Chicago, Women in the Director's Chair, and Movieside, and dozens of working, living, breathing filmmakers, Champaign-Urbana²⁵ is hardly what one would call a hotbed of film activity.

A large chunk of this dearth can be attributed to the lack of two specific things—film industry and film school. (Is anybody from the University of Illinois taking notes here?) Most cities of a reasonable size do have companies that produce industrials—basically, "in-house" productions made for other companies that are used to sell clients on goods, train employees, or present at conferences—and a small population of individuals who edit wedding videos and the like for cash. As you can gather, my concerns are more with artistic filmmaking, documentaries, and experimental and personal work, of which very few locals engage in.

Champaign-Urbana has several pockets of sporadic film activity that more or less orbit around certain individuals—Mike Trippiedi (*MURDER TOO MANY*), Jay Rosenstein (*THE AMASONG CHORUS*), Robin Peters (*DISCONNECT*), Jason Butler (*THORAXX II*), and of course, Roger Ebert. However, precisely because their sum presence in this town is sporadic, as opposed to theater companies continuously performing or artists continually exhibiting in public spaces or musicians continuously playing out, they take on this mysterious aura when they do emerge with a completed film to show. Or, when JB decides to shoot yet *another* scene for one of his comedies in a local bar, which is actually a hallmark of a JB production, come to think of it....²⁶

Filmmakers are arguably the cicadas of the arts and entertainment world, emerging once every two or three years when their current piece has matured enough to take flight.²⁷ What the average person forgets is how much time is spent before *and* after the actual on-set



Steffany Huckabee stars in *DISCONNECT*, produced and directed by Champaign County filmmaker Robin Peters in summer 2004. (Photo: courtesy Dreamscape Cinema)



Young J.R. Bookwalter (with Super8 camera) films zombie action in the cult favorite, *THE DEAD NEXT DOOR*; a Bookwalter interview will headline *Backyard Cinema*. (Photo: Tempe Video)

shenanigans, in planning and post-production, away from the public eye.

Other than Peters' Dreamscape Cinema company, which recently completed two productions (CRAB ORCHARD and LINK) and has a third show (DISCONNECT) late in post, the only other group making films is Illini Film & Video, the U of I club started by Andrew McAllister and Mike Stone a few years ago. To its credit, IFV has been flying by the seat of its pants relatively solo, scraping together cameras and computers for students to piece together their projects.²⁸ Its unofficial supervisors have been members of the Champaign-Urbana community, *not* U of I faculty. The club should be commended for creating something out of nothing!

That, of course, leads into the question about what *more* could this community could do for filmmaking. The Overlooked Film Festival is a big hit every April. What about the other eleven months of the year? Ebert apparently donated thousands of dollars as seed money for a bona fide film school at the university. Why is the U of I not acting upon this gesture? The Cinema Studies department shows a full slate of international cinema during the academic year and sometimes brings in filmmakers to speak. Why can't these happenings be a more public draw? The persistence of Illini Film & Video, I would *think*, demonstrates that students at the U of I (who *aren't* here to go to film school because it *doesn't* exist) actually *do* have interest in film and media production that isn't your average television newscast.²⁹ Why is the U of I not recognizing a potential need to fill that void in an academic way, and why can't U of I alumni working in entertainment reach out to give the club some guidance and connections to the working world? Do those people even know that this club exists?

As for MICRO-FILM, the largest constraint is *not* having access to movies—trust me, filmmakers worth a spit are more than willing and able to send screeners and press materials and the like in hopes of getting coverage for their work. However, actively returning the favor by visiting the sets of their films or attending film festivals with their work in it is not so easy. This sort of outreach takes lots of planning ahead, money for travel, and time to burn. Unfortunately, I still have to work a day job. That should tell you a whole lot about my flexibility right there.

Q: Tell us a bit about the upcoming project, *Backyard Cinema*.

A: One idea I dreamt up that I will be curious to see how it works is to publish themed one-shots in between the

regular MICRO-FILM issues that zero in on particular (and peculiar) microcosms of the indie film world. These would involve guest editors and designers, charged with giving the magazines a fresh spin and feel to make them unique.

The special thing about *Backyard Cinema* being the first such effort is that it is actually a revival of a low-budget magazine done in Champaign a decade ago my Mike Trippiedi, whom I mentioned before.³⁰ He is arguably MICRO-FILM's first-ever fan and has supported my efforts since the get-go, so I decided to offer

him the chance to revisit his own title with an upgrade in production quality and visibility.

Mike's original *Backyard Cinema* consisted of reviews of no-budget genre work, the type of shot-on-video horror and exploitation pictures that began popping up in the early Nineties once the prices for prosumer video equipment dropped far enough to allow for it. Before the explosion of DVD and the Internet, these specialty titles were nearly the exclusive product of mail-order companies whose advertisements you would find in magazines like *Film Threat*, *Alternative Cinema*, and *Draculina*.

Mike's novel approach was to run multiple reviews for each film, providing a breadth of opinions for the sake of reader interest. The new incarnation will follow suit in this respect, but we're also cooking up cool interview features and essays, as well as a full-color cover. I have several other ideas ping-ponging around in my head right now, but let's see how *Backyard Cinema* fares first!

Q: What about the advantages to this location?

A: The advantages are more personal than professional. Champaign-Urbana is a relatively comfortable and low-cost place to live, and since I have never lived in a big city (although I did grow up in the Chicago suburbs) I've never been in a rush to take one on. You could argue that, considering my pursuits, maybe high-tailing it to Los Angeles or New York or Chicago would help make *la vida* MICRO-FILM a lot more fruitful. More indie films at my fingertips. More contacts. More like individuals that would be willing to chip in on the creation and production of MICRO-FILM. Better-paying day jobs that will help me to afford my vice. (Laughs.)

Here, I can easily think and relax when I need to. I've made numerous friends here over the years, many that sadly have moved away, but that shouldn't be a surprise considering how transient a town this is. There are some days, I will admit, that I do get cabin fever—not merely at home, but within city limits—and I wonder if I should move on. Who knows. ☹

Margo O'Hara originally interviewed Jason Pankoke via e-mail the week of June 6, 2004. *The Daily Illini* ran O'Hara's profile in the June 17, 2004 edition of *buzz* magazine. This material is being reprinted with the permission of Marissa Monson and The Illini Media Company.

Watch for the massive **List of 5** feature in the next MICRO-FILM!

²⁸KWIK STOP: MF 6, p.12; EXISTO: MF 4 p.14; RADIO FREE STEVE: MF 3, p.28, 30.

²⁹Sony recently introduced the HVR-Z1U High-Definition camcorder, retailing for \$5,000. JVC is set to release the GY-HD100U High-Definition camcorder in the fall for \$5,500. Panasonic's entry in the low-cost Hi-Def sweepstakes, the AG-HVX200, does not yet have a street date or retail price.

³⁰Wellspring Media issued TARNATION on DVD in May.

³¹Illinois Wesleyan alumni in the film/television business include producer Reinhold Weege (NIGHT COURT), actors Frankie Faison (IN GOOD COMPANY), Richard Jenkins (SHALL WE DANCE), Kevin Dunn (I HEART HUCKABEES), and Allison LaPlaca (THE JOHN LARROQUETTE SHOW), and comedienne Lea Delaria (EDGE OF SEVENTEEN). Andy Dick (NEWSRADIO) lasted only one semester at IWU. Surprised?

³²Insert the non-metropolis of your choice right here.

³³And for that, among other things, the townies and college kids love him so.

³⁴Unless you happen to be Woody Allen or Jeff Krulik (MF 6).

³⁵The art of student filmmaking at a university *sans* film school will be explored further in MICRO-FILM 8 and *Backyard Cinema*. See also "C-U Confidential" in this issue.

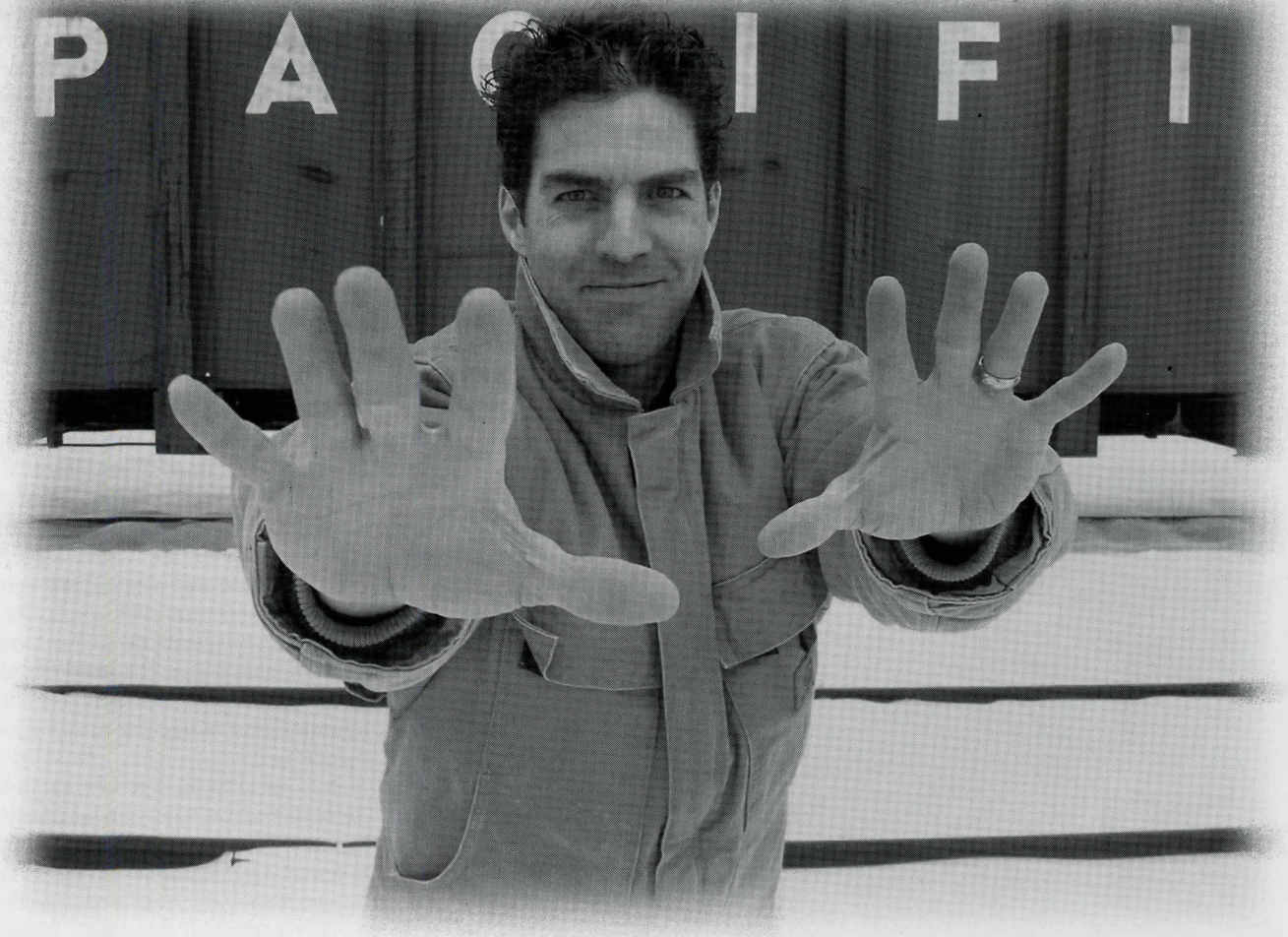
³⁶And, yes, I have read the books listing hundreds of film schools elsewhere. This is local cheer-leading, folks.

³⁷I actually didn't know Mike had it in him until I discovered a rogue copy of *Backyard Cinema* in a record shop!



Front page
This page

Photo: JaPan; Model: Devin Atkins; Location: Carle Park, Urbana, IL
Photo: Holly Rushakoff; Model: JaPan; Location: Mike 'n' Molly's, Champaign, IL



QUALITY OF LIFE director Benjamin Morgan. (Photo: Amy Morgan)

Pieces of the Larger Picture

A Bay Area native spends her summer break wisely by earning production experience on the set of director Benjamin Morgan's contemporary youth drama, *QUALITY OF LIFE*.

Article by Diane Kung

INTRODUCTIONS AND TEAM VALUES

"What's everyone's favorite cereal?" asks producer Brant Smith as an icebreaker during the first staff meeting for the independent feature, *QUALITY OF LIFE*. Laughter breaks out around co-producer Meika Rouda's living room as the answers range from Raisin Bran to Count Chocula, revealing the diverse tastes of the group. Introductions made in this joking manner keep the atmosphere comfortable and easy-going, even though the majority

of people in the room are strangers to each other.

Writer and director Benjamin Morgan sits quietly among the group. He smiles charismatically and sports a tan shirt that boasts Summershines, the name of his production company. Five years after giving birth to his company, *QUALITY OF LIFE* will be the first big project, a feature film planned for theatrical release. Assembled around Morgan at the moment is the team that will help make it happen.

Having just finished my junior year at the University of Illinois at Urbana-

Champaign, I sit wide-eyed among the bunch, visually and aurally probing my surroundings down to the tiniest of details. Filmmaking has been a dream of mine since I was in grade school and sitting among a company of filmmakers is a surreal experience. I imagine how Morgan is feeling, as his dream of making a feature film is being realized this very moment.

Outside, the early June sun begins to set on the Portrero Hill District. Located high up on the South East end of San Francisco, the view of the city is grand

from this point as the orange-tinted sky turns to a heavy indigo color. Twinkling lights from the Financial District can be seen in the distance despite a light fog. Although there are signs of coming rain, it's a gorgeous night in a city where Beat writers, anti-war protestors, and underground artists once dwelled, with their 21st century counterparts to be found walking the streets today.

'Frisco is an appropriate and fascinating setting for *QUALITY OF LIFE*, a contemporary coming-of-age narrative about two young graffiti artists searching for an identity and an outlet from their unstable lives. The city's Mission District is where

ignored by the public, from the struggles of at-risk youth to the billions of dollars the United States spends each year on graffiti prevention. *QUALITY OF LIFE* gives audiences a rare glimpse into the subculture of graffiti art, providing meaning to the colorful "scribbles" that one might see on buildings. More importantly, it recognizes the artist behind the work.

Graffiti art is not only the topic of the film, but the film's completion would also be based on the same work ethics used by the artists of this medium. Producer Brant explains this idea as the staff meeting commences after about 10 minutes of playful introductions. Agenda sheets are passed out and the crew takes note of

HOOKED, his previous films, were all made for less than \$5,000 combined, driven mostly by his commitment to helping at-risk youth. Although his films are fiction, they are also true-to-life in their depiction of troubled teens and their families, being that he grew up as an at-risk youth himself. Live and Learn Productions, another one of his projects, is a video company he parented that allows local teenagers to gain hands-on experience with video equipment, giving them an opportunity to channel their creativity. As one can see, Morgan's filmmaking skills are used for more than just storytelling.

In the spirit of the values mentioned earlier, the meeting wraps up with a group effort in making hundreds of flyers for the upcoming fundraiser titled "Putting the Pieces Together." It is an art auction featuring local artists, where a portion of the proceeds from sales will be contributed to the film. Glue sticks, scissors, and other craft materials are laid out on the dining table ready to be used. As mindless as the job might seem, everyone from the interns to the marketing director put in their effort.

It is amazing to see how committed each member of the team is. Many have full-time jobs and will be accepting deferred payment or no payment at all for the work they do. The director sits among them, pasting and cutting.

FUNDRAISING IN THE STREETS

It is a busy night at the Punch Gallery in San Francisco. Hip-hop music spins on the turntable as people begin spilling into the stuffy second floor of the gallery. They examine works by numerous talents, including locals from Dave Schubert to "Peace." It is unusually hot outside for a city that is often too cool from the ocean wind that passes over it. Guests sip on wines, beers, and sodas, munching on veggies as they make their silent bids on clipboards posted beneath each artist's creation.

The venue is covered in graffiti art, but on canvases with price tags rather than the actual walls of the building. One of the topics *QUALITY OF LIFE* covers is how artists can use their creativity in beneficial ways that could improve their circumstances and influence others to see their art in a different light. In the film, we see the lead character, Heir, trying to utilize the techniques he gleans from the street in a corporate environment.



Real-life turntablist D Sharp spins during a party scene. (Photo: Kev Robertson)

much of the action takes place. This section of San Francisco bursts with color as bright Latin-themed murals cover most of the district's walls, bringing out the culture of the majority population living there. It is also a community that welcomes young independent artists with venues such as the Roxie Theatre and Artists' Television Access (ATA). For the most part, *LIFE* begins and ends here.

After "Heir" and "Vain" get caught tagging in the streets, the different paths the young men take to deal with the threatening consequences leads to a deterioration of their life-long friendship, as well as dampers their methods of venting creative passion. The film touches and interrelates many important subjects of the present-day teenage experience that are often

point number 2, which speaks of the project's framework.

It is termed the "Graff Model." It states that the goal is to "produce a powerful, compelling piece with limited resources. Success requires thorough planning, passion, commitment, and teamwork." Point number 2 continues to describe the values and the themes the crew should have while working on set. It stresses the freedom of expression, respect for all members, and the invitation/welcoming of all those who want to help out. It captures much of what independent filmmaking strives to be.

Looking at his earlier projects, it appears as if director Morgan is used to this style of production. *COMING DOWN*, *420*, and

Once viewed as a "street thing," graffiti is now a medium that can be sold for high prices in galleries, proven at the fundraiser.

The night does not end here, though, as a party is scheduled later on as part of the fundraising plan. Promotion of this event has been going on for weeks. Crew members sent out e-mails and letters, made V.I.P. lists, and walked from store to store by foot through all districts of the city during some of the hottest weeks of the summer to tape up promotional flyers, which were also handed to people entering and leaving hip-hop events. Every possible opportunity needed to be taken to ensure success.

By the end of the night, approximately \$5,000 is made, adding to the funds already in the pot.

PRODUCTION BEGINS AT LAST!

About three-fourths of the way into the 18-day shoot in early August 2003, I received an e-mail from Rouda, asking if I wanted to assist in the production as a 2nd assistant director (AD) helping out 1st AD James Duisenberg. The swamped production crew, already working 12 hours or more per day, six days per week, had taken on a load of responsibility. I generally knew where the production stood, since I'd read the script earlier, attended the first meeting, and helped out with the fundraiser. I cautiously accepted the position even though I had never done this type of work. At the time, I was working on film school applications and had recently completed production in Berkeley for a short film I wrote. This was the perfect opportunity to gain some experience on a larger scale.

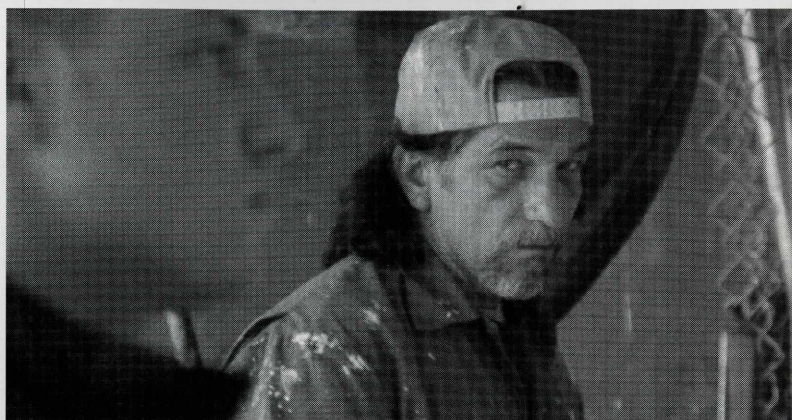
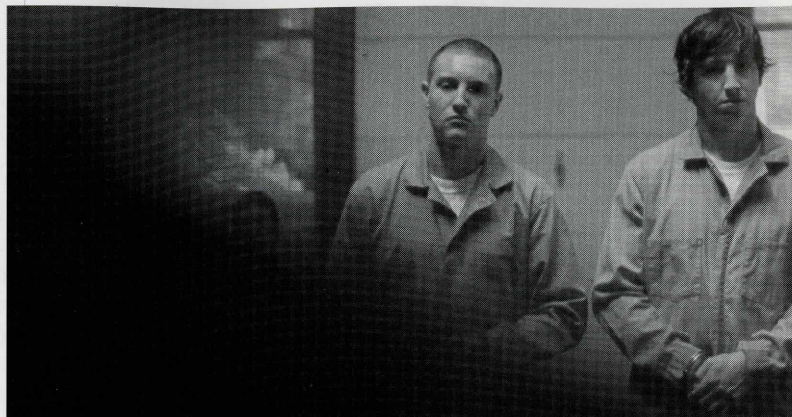
It was the 12th day of the shoot when I arrived on the set at around 4 p.m. I was scheduled to work 12 hours like everyone else that Sunday, meaning I would leave the city around 4 a.m. with a 40-minute drive back to my parents' house in the South Bay. I braced myself for the long night. The crew had been preparing to shoot the "club scene," a relatively action-packed sequence requiring the majority of the main cast to be on call along with 50 or more extras. Friends, family, and the general public were asked to appear. DJs and artwork were also solicited to help generate a club atmosphere.

While the remainder of the team worked upstairs preparing the "club," they set me up downstairs to be in charge of the "club goers" that would be arriving later, before the actual shoot began. Hundreds of release forms awaited them, ready to be filled out.

At 6 p.m., the scheduled call time for the extras, we wondered whether or not we'd even have 20 people show up. A few heads checked in, filling out the paperwork and flashing their identification.

8 p.m. arrived. A huge line of extras stretched out in front of the table where I sat. Apparently, word had gotten out that there would be a huge party, and I became overwhelmed by the amount of people that decided to show up. My body began to ache from writing release forms, checking identification, logging in the main cast when they trickled in, and filling out contracts for newly-hired actors. To worsen the situation, the crowd started to get rowdy. Many were drunk, guzzling beers and 40s in the small hallway. "When's the party going to start?" a guy asked impatiently.

By 2 a.m. the "party" was well under way, with the shoot far from over. The crew shot and re-shot scenes, even improvising at times. At one point, a street rapper emerged from the gathering and began to freestyle. Morgan and director of photography Kev Robertson were impressed and captured his performance on film. Unexpected moments that would have passed by and vanished like summer breezes are now exposed on celluloid for the world



(Top) Mikey "Heir" Rosario (Lane Garrison) and Curtis "Vain" Smith (Brian Burnam) appear in court. (Above) Heir and Pops (Luis Saguar) paint houses for a living. (Below) Vain and Heir tag a dark alleyway. (Bottom) Cinematographer Kev Robertson captures actors Garrison and Burnam walking the Mission District in San Francisco. (Photos: Top, Above/Kev Robertson; Below, Bottom/Meika Rouda; all images courtesy Summershines Productions)



to experience. "Lock it down," Duisenberg yelled out to the crowd for, it seemed, the millionth time. Not usually a coffee consumer, I loaded up on the caffeine in anticipation that I would have to drive home two hours later.

Two days later, I would meet lead actors Lane Garrison and Brian Burnam in a Redwood City courtroom where their characters would be sentenced to punishment for vandalism. The production had sent out casting calls in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, specifically seeking actors who could "tag," or vice versa. Seasoned graffiti artist Burnam co-wrote the script for *QUALITY OF LIFE* and stars as Curtis "Vain" Smith, who refuses to back down from a fight. Garrison plays his best friend Michael "Heir" Rosario, who keeps an eye out for the both of them. Clad in orange jumpsuits and handcuffs, the duo jokes around as they wait for cues. They lack the flashiness and arrogance of seasoned actors, taking liberty to explore their characters by having fun. The two get along with the crew members as if they were family, sporting boyish grins. "Show me the keys," Garrison demands before he is handcuffed by one of the staff. He may be an actor who follows the instruction of a director, but he has a mind of his own.

CHAPELLE'S SHOW blares on the television in the Mission District home serving as Vain's apartment. Garrison, Burnam, and some of the crew have a good laugh before shooting yet another scene in their 12-hour work day. Warm pastries made by Mackenzie Firgens sit on the dining table, waiting to be devoured. On her resume is Greg Harrison's *GROOVE* (2000), an independent film about raving that exploded at Sundance; this will make *QUALITY OF LIFE* an additional San Francisco flick about a criticized subculture that she'll be able to add to her growing filmography. Instead of playing a drug-induced raver in *GROOVE*, here she plays "Lisa," Vain's single-parent girlfriend who works hard to make something of her life.

Near the doorway, production assistants attempt to create the effect of wood splinters flying as the door is kicked open by cops for this particular scene. They nail pieces of jagged wood to the door frame, hoping to create an explosion. Grips, gaffers, and electricians prepare the lighting for the shot. In the meanwhile, Morgan goes over details with the actors. Duisenberg and I confirm tomorrow's call sheet with the producers, and I rush out to the nearest copy shop to print the updated schedule for the crew.

When I come back, dinner has arrived. Tonight, it's delivery from an Indian restaurant. One of Morgan's priorities was that the crew be well-fed. In my opinion, mission accomplished. In four days, it would be all over.

We sat freezing at a truck stop, watching Vain and Heir color the sides of semis while DP Kev Robertson maneuvered around them to capture the activity. The atmosphere had become tense as disputes between crew members began to arise. At 1 a.m. on a Saturday morning, the scene was far from finished. Until a couple of hours ago, my Friday afternoon and evening had already been spent at a Buddhist temple in Japan town and a

informed that the "night" had wrapped at 10 a.m.

Production ended the following Sunday, August 17, 2003.

CLOSURE AND FUTURE DAYS

In the same "hit and run" manner in which graffiti art is composed, the team produced *QUALITY OF LIFE*. It held true to the "Graff Model" related to us at the first staff meeting and it remained the framework that would support the making of the film. After the production wrapped, I returned to school to finish my last year at the University of Illinois while QUALI-



Heir finds solace in an abandoned warehouse-turned-graffiti cathedral. (Photo: Kev Robertson)

street alley in the Mission. There was reason to be cranky, and I had only been on production for the final six days. Everyone else had trudged through 17 days of 12 to 16-hour shifts, yet there was hardly any complaint.

At 3 a.m., it appeared as if the scene would never be as perfect as the crew envisioned it. "Let's do that again," director Morgan yelled out to Burnam and Garrison, who patiently returned to their original positions even though they had worked on the same shot for the past two hours. An hour or so later, I left groggy and drove home. A portion of the crew remained on set to finish the scene. I crashed on my bed around 4:30 a.m., falling into a deep sleep. Later, I was

TY OF LIFE went through post-production. Last spring, it was accepted at the Berlin International Film Festival where it won a "Special Mention" award in the 14Plus "youth generation" category. My parents saw the film even before I did during its North American premiere at the Cinequest Film Festival in San Jose, California.

Having been busy with school and living several states away from the film's headquarters, it would be more than a year after production wrapped before I'd see the completed movie during the Film Arts Foundation's Independent Film Festival. I greeted Morgan and Smith at the entrance of the Roxie Theatre. They were excited to be back in San Francisco, here in the Mission District

Something hit me while belatedly taking in Jon Moritsugu's most recent exercise in filmic punk fiction, *SCUMROCK*, and that is how much I needed to see this movie last summer. Despite still churning out a full-blooded magazine and other expressions on my own ragged dollar after several years' time, I've found how little I truly have in common with the curveball-laden lives of the underground and progressive—except for that key parallel in fighting for the right to partake in non-mainstream art. I'm otherwise a middle-class white boy through and through; I earned my college degree, I've worked pretty much non-stop since graduation, and I've lived a decent, low-key life. However, my conscience and gumption involuntarily hit rock-bottom during the dog days of 2004 when I seemed capable of little more than lamenting mortality and terminal bachelorhood over nocturnal beers at nearby bars. Going through the daily motions, my heart screamed dire vociferations about whether or not to continually nurse this shit into existence anymore, although nobody ever really heard the pain.

Watching *SCUMROCK* at the time—I hate to admit I've had the screener for so long—would not have made me feel particularly better or more productive, but it might have taught me through raw, dramatized example to knock it off and get back to life. Not unlike late twentysomething slacker Miles Morgan, attempting to make his first art movie brandishing nothing close to a rebel yell, I've been diddling time and again with my own projects that exist only as wasted video tape and mounds of decorated legal pads. And, akin to late twentysomething punk-rock mediocrity Roxxy as she scratches, scrapes, and punches her way to a hopeful comeback gig with her current band, the Puerto Ricans, I wonder what hard steps it could possibly take to reinvigorate the snoozing "giant" called MICRO-FILM. Approaching the halfway point between ages 30 and 40, I try really hard to immerse myself in these activities without worrying whether all this time and money spent will make me ill prepared for my later life, if not flat-out bit in the ass by the Fates as they flash pearly Cheshire grins.

The characters populating Moritsugu's earlier movies seem doomed to inhabit their weathered urban pockets forever with a grimace, as in *MY DEGENERATION* (1989) and *MOD FUCK EXPLOSION* (1994), or merely scheduled to inhabit a family room in Hell as with *TERMINAL U.S.A.* (1993). And then, there's *FAME WHORE* (1997), the director's last feature prior to *SCUMROCK* and the first Apathy Production I laid eyes upon. My initial viewing made me feel disoriented as, possibly, John Waters neophytes reacted back in the Seventies heyday of the Baltimore *enfant terrible*. Instead of trotting out human grotesqueries gone amuck, *FAME WHORE* jarred me with its extra-broad performances and gently mocking dialogue, not to mention the bargain-basement production values.

Arguably loathsome and pitiful creatures inhabit the film's episodes: a self-defined multimedia diva (Amy Davis, Moritsugu's long-time collaborator), a tennis jock (Peter Friedrich) accused of a gay fling by the tabloids, and a mousey animal lover (Victor of Aquitaine) who converses with a less-than-cordial (and pre-DONNIE DARKO) invisible critter, the bipedal dog Mr. Peepers. They are not well-realized as in a traditional narrative but serve way more purpose than, say, the painful caricatures in a *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* skit.

The second time around, I simply dug it. *SCUMROCK* will also benefit from a follow-up viewing, although the accessible, stripped-bare nature allows one to latch onto its rhythms fairly easily. Out of necessity and preference, Moritsugu, Davis, and producer Andrea Sperling (BUT I'M A CHEERLEADER) crafted *SCUMROCK* from a nothing budget; that fabled settlement money the director collected after suffering an on-site accident (and which funded several previous films) finally dried up after *FAME WHORE*. But, as certain as Mr. Peepers will flaunt a proud middle finger at any naysayer, Team Apathy settled on the unthinkable to skim their costs; they chose consumer analog video (in this instance, Hi8) on which to film and the classic VHS deck-to-deck method with

which to edit. Much has been made about how the muddled, bootleg-quality look and straight cuts actually add to the day-in-the-life meter of the film. I'll contribute that in certain instances, the stillness of its electronic images—especially those coupled with voice-overs that emerge regularly between scenarios—is somewhat hypnotic in its muted colors and blown-out whites. Thankfully, the sound recording is generally clear if unadorned, save for Moritsugu's expected transitional punk-rock outbursts by the likes of J-Church, Skull Control, The Gossip, and Tori Ann, along with the tinny melodies of Casiotone for the Painfully Alone in quieter moments.

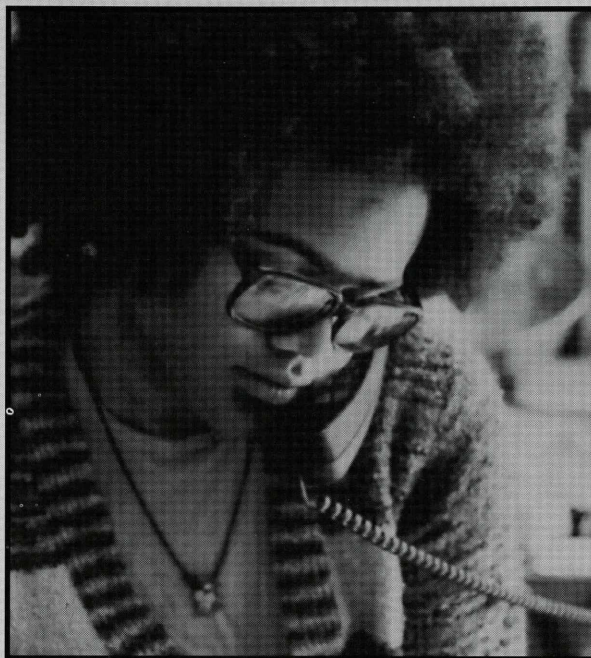
Actually, "tentative" may be a good term to use in describing the overall *SCUMROCK* viewing experience. Moritsugu's peeps come and go in staggering succession; for a movie filled with relatively staid asides (sans the parts where the Puerto Ricans jam), it motors at a breezy clip. As Miles (Kyp Malone of rock trio TV on the Radio) and green film student Jelly (Courtney Stephens) attempt to move forward with the art-opus "Death," their *faux*-Brit cinematographer Charles Coddington (Victor of Aquitaine) plots to get his reel in the hands of visiting transgressive artist Jared Okubo (Moritsugu, in a funny cameo).

That lecture-hall program is one of many part-time jobs Roxxy (Davis again) takes on to support herself while practicing with Maurice (Peter Lee) and Chuck (Chris Golden) for a headlining gig, eventually yanked from underneath them by competing rocker Church (Dustin Donaldson). Meanwhile, Miles' roommate Drew (played by, um, Drew) drums up a friendship with Asian lass Tara (Emily Ryan), who claims to be 15 years old and lacking intestines! It is her untimely passing that begins the chain reaction, lobbing bad luck into our ensemble's collective lap and forcing realignment in priorities, alliances, and—dare I say it?—the place of art in one's life. Joining in the fun is *FAME WHORE* vet Peter Friedrich (in an expendable side-story spent flirting with a cute punk chick) along with several underground film friends: Jennifer Gentile (*MY PRETTY LITTLE GIRLFRIEND*), Danny Plotnick (*SWINGERS*' *SERENADE*), Valerie Soe (*CYNSIN: AN AMERICAN PRINCESS*), and Craig Baldwin (*SONIC OUTLAWS*).

I don't consider *SCUMROCK* as either a true rock-and-roll-lifestyle portrait or anything remotely experimental. In its own tiny way, the movie is somewhat of a one-time-only occurrence comparable in effect (if not scope) to *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*, a project accomplished by unorthodox technical decisions and an unwavering dedication to follow-through by its makers. How many budding cineastes or schlock-slingers have started with less (say, below 16mm/DVCam and Avid) only to wind up with less, not more? We can actually accept the rough handling and non-pristine cinematography and slightly conscious acting as part of the deal in *this* movie

because it works within the "struggling scenester" context. By conventional standards, *SCUMROCK* might just suck; under its own terms and constraints, it succeeds in becoming the "more" that most filmmakers will never achieve.

As for what I ultimately got out of my poor, neglected screener—and I trust Moritsugu will release *SCUMROCK* on "outdated" VHS should he ever land distribution—I can only hope that, in line with the paths Miles and Roxxy seem destined to walk at film's end, I might also step back and see a clearer panorama depicting where my next direction lies. It's about life (and art) in the balance, even as a middle-class white boy with a degree.



Kyp Malone in *SCUMROCK*. (Photo: Apathy Productions)

Scumrock of Ages

by Jason Pankoke

SCUMROCK. 2002, Hi8 Video, Color, 80 minutes. An Apathy Productions film. Director/Producer: Jon Moritsugu. Producer: Andrea Sperling. Writers: Jon Moritsugu, Amy Davis. Associate Producer: Camilla Whyte. Director of Photography: Amy Davis. Sound: Kevin Cunningham, Caitlin Martenson, Jesse Hawthorne Ficks. Editor: Fred Tollhouse. Original Music: Mel Davis. Starring: Kyp Malone, Courtney Stephens, Amy Davis, Drew, Victor of Aquitaine, Peter Friedrich, Pete Lee, Melissa, Chris Golden, Emily Ryan. Reviewed on VHS.

Must-Wash Television!

Jason Pankoke on BRAINWASH TV

Here's a lively little pilot from the mad scientists behind the annual Oakland-set Brainwash Film Festival, hosted by straight man Hal Robins and the mischievous Ed Holmes. Kinetic splashes of on-the-street video and public domain footage bracket three segments introducing short film works and interviewing their makers. This episode includes Aron Ranen's TOW TRUCK ATTACK, where a city employee and a fuming car owner land on the JUDGE JUDY television show, along with Joel Berry's SHORTSTOP, a mock-doc about a hip-hop movement dubbed "All-Natural Rap" and its skinny white ambassador, and Billy Greene's THOUGHT BUBBLE, a nicely expressive stop-motion piece depicting a street bum's flights of fancy on a city corner paved with newspapers. Tight editing, solid selections, and an upbeat spirit make BRAINWASH TV a welcome excuse to lather up with the indies ... but wait, there's more! Included on the preview disc is a half-hour of additional picks, possibly added (sans bumpers and hosts) to fill out a desired hour-long slot. Although retaining end credits on them would have been nice for the sake of recognition, given a DVD without packaging or a booklet, the grouping still confirms that our Brainwash brethren exhibit good taste. BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH by Giorgio Rossoovich features the famous composer as he toils in his 20th century loft for the "da-da-da-duuum" that evades him. SHOES by Kerry Lambert is a bittersweet, black-and-white meditation on aging and memory set at a beach. MIKE FEENEY'S SECRETS OF SUCCESS by Matt Nix acts like one of those late-night infomercials promising financial improvement but instead delivers black comedy. THE SEX LIFE OF A CHAIR by Bernard Roddy is a wry animation about the study of the title phenomenon. Finally, IL SPAGHETTI OCCIDENTALI by Jeff "Jeffu" Warmouth is spoofery in the same vein as ORANGES: THE MOVIE (MF 5, p.33), but with much less set construction and some severely discombobulated Italian in the soundtrack.

BRAINWASH TV. 2003, Video/Film, Color, 26 minutes. A Brainwash Movies production. Director: Jesse Block. Producers: Jesse Block, David Kryzick. With: Ed Holmes, Hal Robins, Aron Ranen, Joel Berry, Dylan Nolfi. Reviewed on DVD.

Bay Area Rebirth

L. Rob Hubbard on POST-CONCUSSION

The traditional wisdom is that a director's first feature usually has a better chance of success if the director has been a film geek since he came out of the womb. POST-CONCUSSION is a distinct middle-finger salute in the face of "traditional wisdom," and in many ways a throwback to the indie filmmaking of the early Nineties. Danny Yoon, the director in question, also portrays Matthew Kang, a cutthroat management consultant whose life completely changes when he's struck by a car and sustains a head injury. As his life downshifts into a slower mode, he loses his management job and pseudo-bohemian girlfriend, beginning a journey of rediscovering himself via New Age "healers" while starting a relationship with his German graduate student neighbor (Jennifer Miller). POST-CONCUSSION quite successfully captures the zeitgeist of Bay Area life PIB (Post-Internet Bubble), deftly skewering all the pretensions of the characters involved. There's a very earnest and sincere core to the film, probably because the events are based on the director's life. Even more amazing, consider that Yoon had no aspirations in filmmaking until after his accident; that his debut is as accomplished as it is bodes well for his career shift. One rarely sees films of this level outside of festivals, unfortunately.

POST-CONCUSSION. 2000, 16mm, Color, 82 minutes. A Vanguard Cinema video release of a Bluewater Films production. Director/Writer/Editor: Daniel Yoon. Producers: Daniel Yoon, Destry Miller. Starring: Daniel Yoon, Jennifer Miller, Michael Hohmeyer, Kristy Bright, C.B. Yoon, Don Chen. Previewed on DVD.

where it all started, after a year-long festival run that took them across the United States and Europe.

To this day, when my out-of-state friends ask me what San Francisco is like, I think of this section of the city where the alternative theatre space Intersection for the Arts sits a few feet away from 16th and Valencia. The seasoned Bay Area actor Luis Saguar, who plays Heir's father "Pops" in the film, regularly performs here. I see the alleyways and residential doorsteps where we sat eating dinner and discussing the latest issue of *Variety*. Even the bystanders who wanted a little peek at the filmmaking process proved that QUALITY OF LIFE belongs here.

A long line unraveled down the sidewalk from the Roxie.

Tickets had sold out the previous night and an appraising review of the film ran in the *San Francisco Chronicle* earlier that week. As I waited in line with a friend for the doors to open, a young man standing in front of us turned around and asked, "Have you see this film yet?"

I sheepishly shook my head and responded, "I did get to work on it a bit."

"Really?" he exclaimed. "I saw this film at Cinequest. It rocked."

Through all the excitement, there suddenly sneaked in a feeling of pride. As small as my role had been, I was still part of this project that had touched the young fellow before me, clad in a hooded sweater and skater shoes. I've worked on a few film and theatre projects since QUALITY OF LIFE and been disappointed by a trend among artists and filmmakers to scoff at productions they are forced to accept for financial purposes which they deem too small or unprofessional. They forget the initial excitement of just being part of these films in the first place. To me, the reason we work in this industry, despite its unfairness, is because of the films themselves and what they represent. We should be proud and supportive.

As the house lights went down at the Roxie, I exhaled after holding my breath in deep anticipation of learning what made this film so compelling to that young man. I suddenly became aware of the theatre as a whole: the audience, the screen, the light beaming from the projector above. Time and again, we go to a movie and that feeling of visiting a theatre for the first time is lost. Interestingly, seeing a movie that you've been a part of recreates that original feeling.

Morgan's film is gritty and raw. Shot on location and in mostly natural lighting, the picture grabs you with its realness. Garrison and Burnham play their characters with genuine instinct and an untutored emotional connection with their parts. As images of Frisco flashed in front of me, I thought of the values Morgan pushed at that first meeting before any activity commenced. He stressed passion, commitment, teamwork, and most importantly, respect for others. They are values often forgotten in a business-oriented society and even in the independent film scene today. Morgan taught me a career-defining lesson through those points alone. He wanted his project to belong to the community and brought the city's artists a little bit closer in the process.

Regardless of how the film performs once Screen Gems releases it theatrically this fall, QUALITY OF LIFE deserves the respect of the industry and audiences alike for the underlying qualities that it represents. ☺

VOIA

C-U CONFIDENTIAL

by Jason Pankoke

Part VII

COULD IT POSSIBLY BE?

I still remember the first time that I laid eyes upon you. Eons ago in my college days, after spending a late-night with a girl who was a friend-of-a-friend, we decided to drag our sleep-deprived souls out to a nearby diner for earlier-than-usual breakfast. After all, we were up.

When we stepped outside of her dormer, we ran smack dab into a brisk breeze, smelling damp and sweet as the spring air can. And upon breathing in the air for yet another rush that barely stymied the grumbling in my stomach, I paused and noticed you above the deep silhouette of the campus buildings and trees, with only the kowtow telephone lines performing any incisions on your rich beauty.

You felt as comforting as a mother's hug, as fulfilling as the best gourmet meal, as enveloping as the deepest sea. Your hue, I thought at the time, was something that could never be replicated by any oil paint or eye shadow or natural elements mixed by mortar and pestle. I believed if I could simply fall *into* you that your lush perfection would carry me off to another land, maybe even another time, if I wasn't returned promptly to Mother Earth.

Won't you join me, then, for a cup of coffee this morning as I half-listen to the five o'clock news and toss some eggs and potatoes over a heated skillet with more scratches in its paint job than lines on my old face? I have no one else to share this moment with, so it might as well be with you, perfect blue. Let me pull up the blinds so I can see you more clearly as I ready myself for the trip I must take, to that damned meeting at the edge of town I've been pining for and dreading so long.

At the end of the tunnel, on the other side of the hill, behind that giant glittering silver screen, I will find the truth and with that, I can take care of the business that has evaded me. Assuming that all goes according to plan and the kid has done the kid-sized tasks he's been told, and the dame has cemented the human obstacles in place, and my letter has reached its proper destination, then all will be let out to unreel before our very eyes, and ears, and hearts.

Good god, I'm still tired, thinking too much and mouthing half of my words as I'm trying to down this food fast enough before the butterflies start up their fluttering.

Never a problem for you, is it, Rufus? Dog food it is, dog food it will forever be. Look, actually one step ahead of you this morning. Got your bowl set up and *everything*. No jumping in my bed and crushing my slumber with your ugly mug in my face and that garbage breath in my nose.

I hope I can effectively keep the pace and follow the parallel plan, although staying ahead of you and the others are two different things entirely. What are the odds that this old dog can finally perform a new trick after all these years? Um, perfect blue?

Damn. I shouldn't have looked directly out the window so soon. My eyes might not fail me, but sometimes my instinct is off kilter. Once the spots die out, it'll be time to get dressed and move on. At least I can finish the coffee first, and take one last look at this extra file that I found stuck in between the yearbooks in my study. Harking back to my past, daydreaming vicariously through others that stand in my old footsteps, makes me wonder if one's life can be redirected before it's too late.

In hours, I'll know.

CHAPTER XIII: When the scene erupts at the hands of the youth gone wild



Chapter XIII:

Five for Flinching

by Jason Pankoke

REALLY, IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO WORK OUT THIS WAY. Enough film madness has transpired here in MICRO-FILM Country during the past three years that I could have written a novel about it. (Okay, it would be one the size of *The Bridges of Madison County*, but still....) Instead, I've only afforded you fine readers a taste through the facts page last issue, boiling the stories down to mere sentences. Sad, sad, *sad*. It wasn't a question of whether or not to return "C-U Confidential" to its rightful prominence in the magazine, but *where* exactly to begin again. Taking a cue from my local movie diary in MF 4, the eyewitness accounts that follow happened over a five-day span in April, and I hope that this and our fresh "C-U Facts" page will bring you up to speed personally on what has been occurring around the Secret MICRO-FILM Headquarters (other than Illini basketball madness), reacquainting you with old friends and introducing new faces.

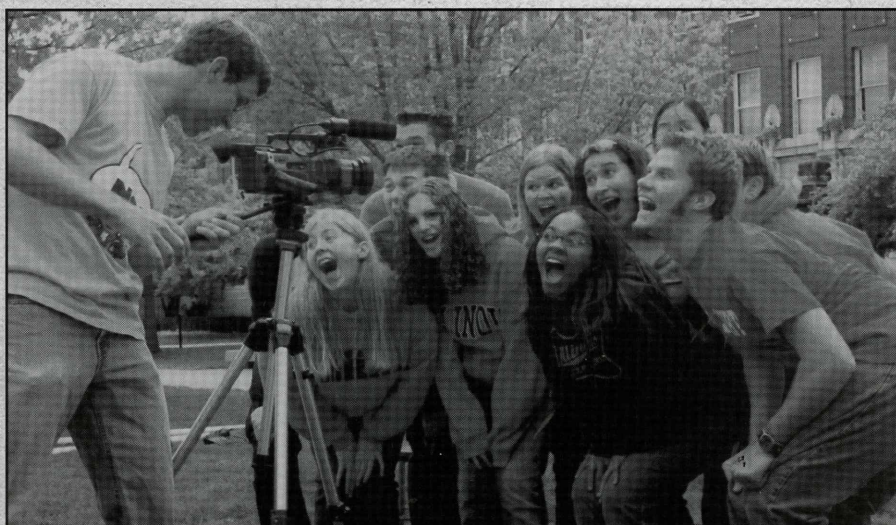
April 7, 2005

NIGHT—INTERIOR—HISTORY BUILDING

Entering the building on the Main Quad for the first time, I barely noticed any difference between this ground floor and those in other old-school learning facilities at the University of Illinois that I've stepped foot in. Dim lighting, low ceiling, wood trim stretching for miles and miles; I can map these places in my sleep. However, upon passing a well-illuminated hallway and catching the eye of the one and only Bill Kephart, I knew this would be no typical visit. Bill, a sometime actor who occasionally pops up in those true-life television

shows you might see on cable channels earmarked for History, Discovery, or the Weather, had arrived to sit in on a documentary and discussion about volcanoes. I came to look at a mummy.

Nor any mummy, mind you—*The Mummy*, Ted Johnson. First order of business had to be locating the bathroom, for which I circled the entire first floor twice to find. (Unfortunately, all those old doors look the same, whether classrooms, offices, or the little boy's room sit behind them.) I then procrastinated exponentially because, having never been in the history building before, I didn't anticipate certain adornments that would catch my inner child's attention: dioramas and exhibits of prehistoric life. Sweet! Of course, the college had nary a *bona fide* dinosaur specimen on display—and the little



You're not looking at just *any* pack of students, buddy; *these* brave underclassmen take on *The Mummy*, Ted Johnson—and they can sing, too! Just what *The Director*, Chris Lukeman, ordered for his B-movie spoof, *U OF I VS. A MUMMY*. (Photo: JaPan)

plastic figurines roaming model landscapes didn't count—but I *did* see several plesiosaurs, myriad mammoth parts, a complete skeleton of the lumbering amphibian *Eryops*, and the requisite armada of fossilized insects, mollusks, and fauna reaching back millions of years.

But still, no *Mummy* named Ted Johnson! I reconsidered the scenario at hand—college students covertly shooting a decidedly non-academic movie project titled *THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS VS. A MUMMY*. Where would such creative ruffians stage such mayhem and, hopefully, not attract security? *The basement*, by Jove! Within moments, I tracked down the set as director Chris Lukeman—the current president of the student club, Illini Film & Video—arranged a gag whereas main character Casey (Paul Karpenko, director of his own long-in-coming farce, *ASSASSINS*) drug around Mummy-kill Bill (Travis Murphy) without letting on to bubbly Sarah

(Jenni Kitchka) and snotty Jo-Ann (Andrea Gordon) that his buddy wasn't exactly breathing. After a round of physical comedy and reaction shots, along with some strange on-the-street business, the gang wrapped and dispersed without a Mummy sighting save the groovy t-shirts worn by crew members. Curses! Foiled again! I guess that's why Lukeman and his 21st century Goonies have still galleries galore posted at www.crimsonreport.com, where A MUMMY lurks supreme.

April 8, 2005

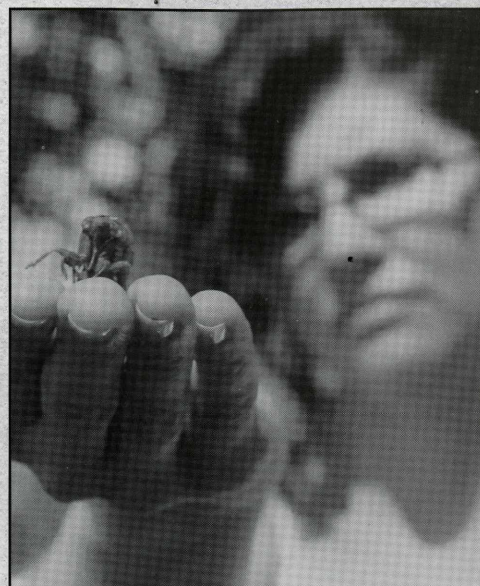
NIGHT—INTERIOR—COMMUNITY ART SPACE

Back in December, I met along with filmmaker D.P. Carlson (*CHICAGO FILM-MAKERS ON THE CHICAGO RIVER*, *MF 6 p. 13*) some art students that had opened a makeshift performance and gallery space called OPENSOURCE Art. Situated in an odd bend by downtown Champaign that includes a realtor, politicians' offices, an Irish bar, Carmon's Diner, and the old Orpheum Theater, OPENSOURCE is intended to be a flexible venue allowing all sorts of expressions including film. I finally got my chance to check out the digs on a warm, clear evening when the curators hosted two filmmakers from Chicago and their presentation, "Monster Lotería."

I arrived at OPENSOURCE Art early enough so I could snoop around, as did maybe two dozen other folks primarily of the college age. Carefully maneuvering around the metal chairs set up for the show, I looked at photographic architecture and unrelated assemblages divvied up between three interconnected rooms at the front of the gallery with an elongated back area housing three-dimensional sculpture and small, enclosed studios. A bit tight for anything of scope, I thought, but certainly workable for the range of events intended by OPENSOURCE originators David Prinsen, Jennifer Danos, and Jeremy Beaudry.

Everyone soon gravitated towards the seating as it became clear "Monster Lotería" would commence. An intimate presentation served well the quirky output of college instructor Jim Finn and graphic designer Arthur Jones, a decidedly unusual pairing of styles and sensibilities. Finn's numerous shorts mostly came from his "La Lotería" project, an ongoing series of whimsical/political collage pieces inspired by a Mexican card game that displayed humor and heart throughout. In contrast, Jones' "Monster" movies consisted of two Power Point "cartoons" with narration read live by the artist, followed by an animated music video for the Philadelphia band Need New Body and his Web Flash series, "Monster Team," starring diminutive classic creatures (and Caveman, my favorite) in their misadventures and toilet-humor quandaries.

Obviously weary if satiated at the end of their cross-country "Monster Lotería" tour, Finn and Jones graciously answered several audience questions after the show. Personally, I had mixed opinions about their work, but I liked the artists and enjoyed my first OPENSOURCE Art experience. I hope that the space will survive; future events will be listed at <http://opensource.boxwith.com>.



Amy Carroll contemplates life in your editor's short film, *CICADA SONG*. (Photo: JaPan)

April 9, 2005

DAY—EXTERIOR—SUNKEN GARDEN

In artistic fits and spasms, I had started rolling Super8 film during lunch breaks in fall 2004, shooting the surrounding canopy as well as the casings left over by adult cicadas after molting. I decided to make a collage film about heady shit like maturation, the passage of time, and cycles, using this footage and some extra material with a human element to make the film more relatable.

I had already spent an afternoon that August filming with my friend Amy Carroll, who plays a character in the midst of a long, long walk that notices the ex-cicadas clinging onto the trees. Naturally, I couldn't leave well enough alone and asked her if she'd do one more scene when the weather warmed up in the spring. Amy said "sure," because she's gung-ho like that, and we decided to go 25 miles out of town to Allerton Park, a forest preserve owned by the University of Illinois and located next to small-town Monticello.

This bit of business would take place in the Sunken Garden, one of many landscaped areas within the park, to utilize the steep stair flights ascending at opposite ends of the ovular space. Myself, Amy, and her beau Shane occupied the stairs not surrounded by dozens of collapsible chairs from a wedding that concluded before our arrival. I had packed water bottles and granola snacks in case we needed nourishment; Shane apparently snuck comic relief into the park in case we needed laughter. It certainly helped make the outing fun, although Amy became mock-annoyed due to continuous wet T-shirt comments emanating from our one-man peanut gallery.

Amazingly, the couples, groups, and families that ambled through our "set" pretty much ignored us. Two teenage girls came up to me at one point and, probably out of boredom, asked if we were "with the wedding." Little kids burning off excess energy ran up and down the

stairs right next to us without paying any mind. (Were we invisible?) In all, we captured what I needed, Amy and Shane departed to explore Allerton in the hazy sun, and I nibbled on a lonely granola bar before trekking back to my car.

April 9, 2005

NIGHT—INTERIOR—MUSIC CLUB

I reached the Canopy Club in west Urbana just in time for the beginning of the "John Heinze Really Overlooked Film Festival." Named in reference to the Roger Ebert-hosted event taking place two weeks later, this semi-underground show came about thanks to local college student John Heinze and the Chicago-based filmmaking troupe, 90/94 Pictures (www.90-94.com). Standing in a venue



John Heinze (second from left) and the boys of 90/94 Pictures are really diggin' that marquee right now. (Photo: JaPan)

A. that served beer and B. didn't serve food, I decided to C. hop over to a café down the block and dredge up sustenance while 90/94 played the opening segments of Jason Butler's THORAXX II. (We'll revisit the Master of Hum-Ants™ later.) In its previous life, the Canopy auditorium had housed a Brew-n-View that booked Hollywood garbage and frat-boy favorites; before that, the Thunderbird Theater occupied the space for decades, boasting the largest silver screen in town.

I returned to the Canopy and took a seat after locating MICRO-FILM intern Nichole Wleklinski in the sparse audience. The non-90/94 entries included several hip-hop videos, THE VAGINA TREE MONOLOGUES by Shadie Elnashai, THE ADVENTURES OF BOOB THE BUNNY by Nichole and the self-proclaimed "Duke of Uke," Dave King, and Johnnie May's animated ISOLATION (*MF 1*, p. 7, 26), showing at the same house where it premiered back in 1998. 90/94's DUFUS & DECENT restaged the morality-play comic strip *Goofus & Gallant* in a modern-day pub, while the event closed with the team's better-than-I-expected "reality show" spoof, THE RUBBER ROOM. Directed by Matthew Heinze, this penultimate "episode" finds six young people holed up together in an expansive Chicago loft sharing two common traits: mental problems and suicidal tendencies! The first one to go earns a fully-paid funeral in this extremely black comedy, which redeems itself with acceptable performances, clean production value, and a humanity that keeps its potentially mean-spirited approach in check. Strewn throughout THE RUBBER ROOM are "commercial breaks" with numerous fake ad spots ranging from clever to simply dumb; I'd love to see those gaps populated by the real thing on a legitimate television station.

After the final credits rolled, John's band Brother Noompsi rocked the house while I chatted away with Nichole and various 90/94 personnel. We were eventually squeezed out of

the Canopy by an influx of Indian college students, dressed to the nines for a social event inexplicably attended by blonde white girls offering up swag and parlor games for a liquor company that must have been a sponsor. Does that strike anybody as weird? No?

April 10, 2005

NIGHT—INTERIOR—MOVIE HOUSE

In all my running around, I realized I still needed to check out the Full Frame Film Festival at Boardman's Art Theatre in downtown Champaign. Sponsored and distributed by digital-friendly Emerging Pictures (also involved with *THIS OLD CUB*; see p. 8), Full Frame is an annual documentary program that runs simultaneously in numerous cities across North America. Much of the selection presented at the Art, I came to find out, had already been slated for PBS broadcast or home video release. Sure, that takes away from the "scarcity factor" of limited-distribution docs, but there's nothing wrong with giving such titles a shot in the twin effort to support indie filmmaking and independent movie houses! So, in that vaunted Pankoke fashion—complicated by beautiful pre-summer weather that had "Lazy Day" stamped all over it—I didn't go Full Frame until the very last show.

MANA: BEYOND BELIEF (2004) failed to thrill me as a great movie experience, but it did handily show off the new digital projector installed by Boardman's technical experts in time for Full Frame. Emerging Pictures actually supplied the theatre a server loaded with the festival's entire program as high-quality digital files, which the staff jacked into their equipment and, to simplify, pressed "play." Originally shot on high-definition video, MANA contained numerous passages of alternately bold and naturalistic color that held together particularly well on the big screen while the minimalist soundtrack came through crystal clear. I noticed only two particular flaws: a brief hiccup on the occasions the server couldn't keep up with playback, and a whacked-out aspect ratio that stretched the frame across the entire screen. (Apparently, the latter problem has been fixed.) As for the film selection, directors Peter Friedman and Roger Manley

traveled everywhere from Burma and Malaysia to Germany and Japan to develop a cinematic thesis on the nature of "power objects" as signifiers in human cultures. MANA works best when leaving the job to on-site sounds and visions, faltering significantly during scenes that come across as forced variations of superior "documentary bizarre" like Chris Smith's sublime HOME MOVIE or nearly any Errol Morris production. Regardless, this presentation in the 2005 Full Frame Film Festival proved that non-commercial films might have a better chance in the marketplace once digital projectors make permanent inroads to public viewing spaces.

The flip side of the coin displays not the picture of a shiny new projector, but a somewhat blemished image of the classic movie palace struggling to stay alive. Could the digital projector help save smaller theaters like the Art? Game impresarios might invest in the means to cost-effectively run movies off a server (supplied on hard drive or as a satellite download), a DVD, a Hi-Def DVD (whenever they become available), or a high-grade tape, redirecting moneys once wasted on shipping and insuring prints while building in the necessary draw for special-interest groups who might rent out the auditorium during off hours. Like a relatively small percentage that have taken the leap, Greg Boardman deserves credit for looking towards the imminent future of data delivery—although he'll do well to retain the 35mm warhorse for projecting bread-and-butter titles from the studios—but might have to go further for insuring survival. Maybe the more progressive minds need to divorce themselves completely from their reliance on high-class art films and second-run blockbusters, aggressively pursuing true counter-programming. It's a tall order that would require not only dedicated employees wired into the wide world of movies and trends, but also a surrounding community appreciative enough to give the new approach a chance.

April 11, 2005

NIGHT—INTERIOR—FUNKY CAFFÉ

Jason Butler. Mention of his name in certain quarters elicits fear, respect, even celebration. Uttering those same syllables in succession elsewhere might just inspire a whole different commentary track, such as, "Hey, ain't he the guy who made the Big Bug comedy where Barney gets ripped in half?" or "When on God's green Earth will that boy ever finish up his werewolf movie? I hope he didn't get intimidated by those cops chasin' him out of the graveyard!" However, in a highly elite subculture of Champaign-Urbana known only to the all-knowing as "Towniewood," where lateral career movement and nightly commiserating form a way of life, this brain-smart crusader walks tall in search of talent, props, and locations for his never-ending stream of light-hearted, no-budget romps. Off to the side, you'll hear the awe-stricken whispers as he passes by: "There he goes ... *that's* JB."

Yet, when JB turns back around wielding a smile and a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon, there's no question that he is simply one of us, trying to scrape together his brand of droll movie delirium on an average man's wage while dreaming about a possible full-time future in The Biz. All the same, not just *any* mere mortal could drum up the feature-length likes of THORAXX II: THE BREEDING (a camp spin on THE FLY featuring a drunken private dick played by a basset hound, a WEST SIDE STORY-inspired rumble with scientists, inflatable giant garbage-bag ants, and way too many domesticated hillbillies), THE TEETH OF THE BOTTLE (a college-town AFTER HOURS without Rosanna Arquette or a budget), and WEREWOLF CEMETERY (a lycanthrope vs. humanity smackdown). Well, actually, it takes at least two: JB and partner-in-crime Mark Peaslee, not to mention the host of friends, friends-of-friends, co-workers, employers, ex-employers, and bums on the street willing to risk life, limb, and general sanity by taking part in a Brainsmart Productions extravaganza.

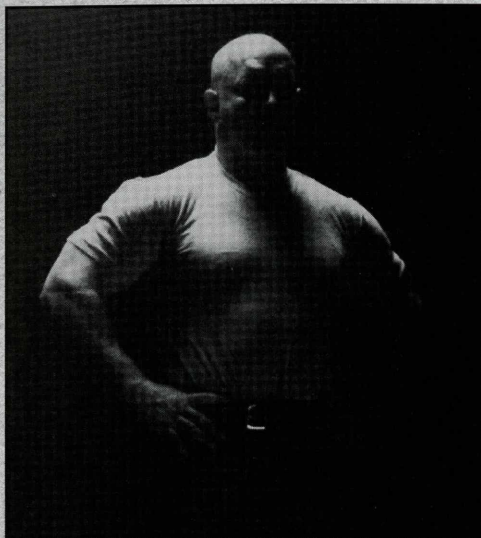
Sadly, there's one Brainsmart playa that decided to quit this mortal coil prematurely, leaving the unfinished WEREWOLF CEMETERY in dire straits—JB's MiniDV camera. This predicament inspired misters Peaslee and Butler to cook up a benefit dinner and free film screening at Urbana's Caffé Paradiso (yes, named after CINEMA PARADISO) in hopes of raising seed money for a replacement. Usually a haven for the artsier java-drinking university crowd, Caffé Paradiso turned into a surrogate "Towniewood" hovel for one night only in support of JB. After I and numerous other familiar faces chowed down on the dinner cuisine—Italian beef sandwiches, yum!—there came additional shoveling and snarfing as a half-dozen hardy souls faced off in the first-ever Brainsmart Productions brain-eating contest. (Rumor has it that the brain molds were actually filled with colorful, flavored gelatin.) THORAXX II and several pre-TEETH shorts followed to cap the event; towards the end I paid my respects to super-nice JB and entered the cool night air, satisfied that I had helped the cause of another local filmmaker in need. At least, I think I did. Hey, is that a full moon? ●



They may work ordinary jobs during the day, but Jason Butler's Superstars pack heat against a different type of fuzz at night. From WEREWOLF CEMETERY. (Poster: Brainsmart Productions)

FOR C-U EYES ONLY

HOT OFF THE CONFIDENTIAL TELEGRAPH: ... Former Tolono and Urbana resident **Mark Roberts**, now a writer and producer of the hit CBS-TV sitcom *TWO AND A HALF MEN*, returned home this summer to direct the world premiere of his play *Welcome to Tolono*. The darkly comedic tale of small-town eccentrics gathered in a church basement for AA meetings featured MF contributor Aaron Polk of Urbana and *Backyard Cinema* co-editor Mike Trippiedi (*MF 1*) of Champaign in major roles. Word has it that Roberts intends to film *Tolono* in the near future ... **Robin Peters** (*MF 5, 6*) of Monticello marches forth with additional **Dreamscape Cinema** productions: **DISCONNECT**, a time-bending murder mystery shot in Summer 2004 that stars Steffany Huckaby, Eddie Jones, Holmes Osborne, Michael Muhney, and Amanda Troop, and **ANGST**, a just-wrapped comedy with Muhney playing a young actor masquerading as an old man in a retirement home. Peters produced and directed both features in Champaign County ... Recent University of Illinois graduate and Peters associate **Chris Folkens** followed up his student ghost story **TRIAD** (*MF 6*) with the Hi-Def action-thriller **TOXIN**, which made its debut at New York City's Tribeca Cinemas in early April. Folkens now works for the Leo Burnett advertising agency in Chicago ... Laser-beam light has appeared



Rob Clark as renegade Collins in *TOXIN*, directed by Chris Folkens. (Photo: JaPan)

at the end of the long, dark, nasty tunnel where originates the intense output of **Hart D. Fisher** (*MF 2*). The former Champaign underground comix publisher has released his short film *CHANCE MEETING* through Chanting Monks Studios/CPI Home Video as a *Flowers on the Razorwire* DVD; glimpses of his fabled C-U serial killer feature **THE GARBAGE MAN** can be seen in the title sequence, a trailer, and a director's reel on the disc ... Other horror movies have recently emerged from Champaign-Urbana soil, courtesy of **Ed Glaser** and **Mobled Queen Entertainment**. His short subjects, **DEAD BY DAWN 2** and **NIGHT OF ANUBIS**, feature local magician Andy Dallas in contemporary black-and-white salutes to the terror films of yore—Robert Wiene's *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI* in the former, vintage mummy and zombie programmers in the latter. Glaser plans to produce his inaugural feature-length film soon ... And yet *another* ghoul will eventually walk the prairie cornfields! Coming off a lengthy stint working for Hollywood company David Foster Productions (*THE CORE*), Homer native **Ryan E. Hepp**e visited east central Illinois in August 2004 with partners Nicholas Bird and Amy Beth Hepp'e to shoot a teaser for **STALKED**, an Eighties-style scarecrow slasher that will serve as the first production for **Knightime Pictures LLC**. They'll collect some B-roll locally this summer, with full-blown stalking to commence mid-2006 ... WILL-TV Channel 12 editor **Eleanore Stasheff** has been furiously assembling the latest entry in her cable-access fantasy programs, **EIDOLON**. Like her numerous prior multi-part adventures, *EIDOLON* mixes intrigue, romance, snappy one-liners,

and confident heroines hoofing it from one cliffhanger to the next. Working with many long-time collaborators (including lead actresses Brittany Whalen and Morgan Thomas) from her days at Champaign's Parkland College and Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, Stasheff intends for *EIDOLON* to bridge the gap between her no-budget roots and professional narrative work ... **Carlin Trammel** of Savoy has completed two short films under his **Stormspeed Entertainment** banner. **DAVID VON FANGE** IN **TASTES LIKE CHICKEN** adapts a comics story about a restaurateur/superhero whose capacity to "turn off" his emotions interfere with getting the girl, while **MISSED ME** (in tandem with Farmer City resident **Josh Hawn** of **Ten44 Productions**) finds a pair of camouflaged soldiers tangling with "some rather unconventional weaponry" ... Members of the **Creative Dramatics Workshop** in nearby Sidney branched out into video production with a full-length rendering of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Adapted and directed by the theater group's **Robert Picklesimer**, *ANTIGONE* follows closely the classic war-tragedy set in Thebes with an unusually young-skewing cast, including 18-year-old Claire Cowles in the title role. The film made its bow in April at the Savoy 16 Theaters ... At the same time, the seventh annual edition of **Roger Ebert's Overlooked Film Festival** (*MF 3*) once again welcomed thousands of moviegoers to the Virginia Theatre in downtown Champaign, presenting several features and guests that should be familiar to MF readers: *PRIMER* (Shane Carruth), *BAADASSSSS!* (Mario Van Peebles), *THE SECRET OF ROAN INISH* (John Sayles), *ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW* (Miranda July), and a glorious Guy Maddin match-up, *THE HEART OF THE WORLD* and *THE SADDEST MUSIC IN THE WORLD* ... Correcting an error in last issue's *Telegraph*, **John Chua** (*MARION'S TRIUMPH*) actually earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature—not Cinema Studies—from the University of Illinois. Chua's documentary also had its first public C-U screening in April ... *fin*.

EPILOGUE: "C-U Confidential" is about "the locals" past and present, whose business and weekend activities revolve around cinema. For various reasons—income, family, education, simple preference—these folks live or lived in and around Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, located 130 miles due south of Chicago, 130 miles due west of Indianapolis. It is a comfortable little island in the middle of the Midwest where many people make a living as employees of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Beyond academia, we have a heavy concentration of computer, industrial, and agricultural vocations that dominate our marketplace, with little room for anything resembling an economically healthy arts community. However, film-related flourishes do pop up from out of nowhere, and you will get to read all about them in this novel collection of stories, curiously disguised as a novel.

Cinema

AMONG US

A Sub Rosa Studios video release a Polonia Brothers Entertainment production
2004, Digital Video, Color, 85 minutes
Directed and produced by John Polonia, Jon McBride, and Mark Polonia
Written by John Oak Dalton
Starring Bob Dennis, Hunter Mackenzie Austin, Jon McBride
Reviewed on DVD

Whether you love or hate the Polonia Brothers and their work, you have to give credit where it's due. John and Mark Polonia have made nearly 25 independent micro-films and almost all of them have had national and/or international distribution. Also, the brothers continue to develop as filmmakers and the quality of their work gets better and better. Sure, they're frequently razed for making (sometimes) silly exploitation-type films, but they do this by choice. Much of their work has a sly tongue-in-cheek quality which elevates it in some ways; rather than taking themselves way too seriously, their films nudge and wink as if to say, "We're in on the joke and dare you not to laugh." At the same time, they occasionally manage to create some truly chilling moments (see *THE HOUSE THAT SCREAMED*) which any low-budget filmmaker will tell you is hard work.

With *AMONG US*, the brothers Polonia once again re-team with frequent collaborator Jon McBride, taking on the Bigfoot legend. The bad news is that 1. it's about Bigfoot, and 2. much of the film is shot *BLAIR WITCH* style. Sounds like dreck, right? Now here's the amazing thing—it's not. *AMONG US* is actually a pretty good little flick. The Polonias accomplish this largely because of their willingness to poke fun at themselves. The lead character is B-grade filmmaker Billy D'Amato (Bob Dennis), his name taken from a pseudonym used by the Polonias themselves time and again. D'Amato laments the difficulties of making schlock films, all of which have featured either porn or Bigfoot. When scenes from his "films" are shown and their contents discussed, it's clear that the Polonias and McBride had a lot of fun with this.

AMONG US has its ups and downs, but when you stop and realize that it was completed for less than \$1,000, you have to respect what the Polonia gang accomplished here. The film soars in all of the technical areas—the sound, look, direction, and editing are terrific. Performances range from great to not-so-great, with the best provided by Dennis as D'Amato, and while *AMONG US* covers a lot of the same ground as the far superior *LEGEND OF BOGGY CREEK*, it is again the comical aspects that make it successful. Not only do they help us overlook the fact that the first two-thirds of the film aren't scary at all, but they also set us up for a genuinely creepy scene at the end. *AMONG US* is a witty and entertaining little film. — Andrew J. Rausch

THE BONESETTER

A Tempe Video/Splatter Ramage release of a Duede Productions film
2003, Digital Video, Color, 72 minutes
Directed, produced, and written by Brett Kelly
Starring Brett Kelly, Sherry Thurig, Anne-Marie Frigon, Mark Courneyea, Tara Rheume, Josh Grace, Jodi Pittman, Jodi Wood, Beverley Brooks, Jody Haucker, Kyla Smith, Lloyd Kaufman
Reviewed on DVD

THE BONESETTER would've been a lot scarier if the deathly pale zombies wandering about the screen were the movie's monsters and not just the all-Canadian cast. According to one of the behind-the-scenes features on the DVD, some of the movie's actors were culled from a drama class taught by writer/director/star Brett Kelly. The influence shows; everyone in the film seems to share Kelly's gift for delivering lines with all the emotion of the recorded listing of show times on a local movie theater's hotline.

Elsewhere, the attempted storyline concerns the ghost of a 19th Century traveling physician who returns every decade or so to steal children and sacrifice them to Satan. It prolongs his life or, perhaps, gets rid of split ends, it's not really clear. Anyway, 10 years have passed and he's up to his old kidnapping tricks again. Kelly, in the role of an Ottawa librarian turned unlikely hero, becomes involved with the mother of one of the missing children, played by Sherry Thurig, who deems his one-room library the ideal place to study the legendary creature she somehow knows is responsible for her son's disappearance.

As Thurig falls for Kelly's imperceptible charms and goes on a date with him where they conveniently (and clumsily) reveal their respective back stories, the librarian's plot-device daughter is also kidnapped. This might have added more drama if said daughter had occupied more than two seconds of screen time prior to her abduction. Kelly eventually lures the Bonesetter, who looks like Alice Cooper in blackface and talks like a game show announcer, out into the open with a baby doll. Satan's (apparently) nearsighted minion escapes, but our heroes track him down to a desolate farm full of really terrifying, rusty washing machines and spooky spooky cows for a final yawn-stifling showdown.

Needless to say, *THE BONESETTER* has quite a few flaws. Setting aside the muddled, ill-conceived story and the bludgeoning exposition, there is still the

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obvious fact that the filmmakers were unsure of what film they wanted this to be. As horror, it fails miserably. The moments not robbed of their suspense by comatose acting are rendered dead dull by shaky public access channel-quality camerawork and editing. There are also signs of intentional comedy, including a bewildering vaudevillian cameo from Troma Films president Lloyd Kaufman and a conversation about cow patties, but the laughs are as hollow as the screams.

For the adventurous, the DVD is stuffed with extras, including behind-the-scenes footage, outtakes, interviews, camera tests (?), actress Thurig's audition in what looks like a local restaurant (!), audio commentary with Kelly and crew member Anne-Marie Frigon, and trailers for other Tempe/Splatter Ramage efforts. — Damian Duffy

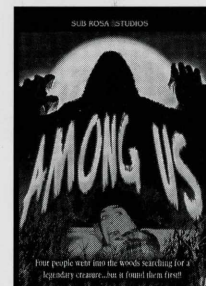
BRIGHT FUTURE (AKARUI MIRAI)

A Palm Pictures video release of a Bright Future Production Company film
2002, High-Definition Video, Color, 93 minutes
Directed and written by Kiyoshi Kurosawa
Produced by Takashi Asai
Starring Tadanobu Asano, Tatsuya Fuji, Joe Odagiri
Reviewed on DVD

BRIGHT FUTURE is a story of tiny revelations. Yuji Nimura (Joe Odagiri, *AZUMI*) and Mamoru Arita (Tadanobu Asano, *LAST LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE*) are friends that work in a moist hand-towel factory and are less than satisfied with their monotonous lives. They aid their boss Mr. Fujiwara (Takashi Sasano) by helping move his daughter's dresser, after which Fujiwara takes a special interest in the duo and asks them on as full-time employees. Yuji and Mamoru's friendship is the only cathartic solution to this man's infectious spirit as he begins to invade their lives, but it turns sour once Fujiwara learns the deadly truth about Mamoru's jellyfish, a poisonous *Dactylometra pacifica*, whose tank he unknowingly stuck his hand in during a visit. The boss fires Mamoru days later, which the stone-faced ex-employee retaliates against with a psychotic murderous rampage. Yuji enacts a similar violent impulse soon afterwards in denial of his now-jailed friend by toppling the aquarium and letting the jellyfish loose into the Tokyo River. Yuji then meets Mamoru's estranged father, Shin-ichiro Arita (Tatsuya Fuji), who begins to explore the nature of his son. In need of a friend, Yuji begins to work with Shin-ichiro as they bravely attempt to unravel the mystery of the missing jellyfish as well.

BRIGHT FUTURE is truly outstanding for its long takes and reaction shots that show the emotions of characters that we can't easily absorb because they seem to occupy the camera rather than engage it. Throughout the film a feeling of intense stagnation occurs, yet we are entranced by its visual beauty. Thus, the jellyfish transforms into a most provocative protagonist; shots of the creature provide the film with an ethereal mood. It drifts poetically on screen and motivates all those around it, becoming the symbol of Yuji's transformation from passive to assertive. While dreaming becomes a vehicle to set the surrealist tone, ambivalence lingers as we wait for self-contained Yuji to explode with apocalyptic conclusions.

In comparison to director Kiyoshi Kurosawa's prior work, specifically the crime drama *CHARISMA* and the thriller *CURE*, *BRIGHT FUTURE* is different because it becomes an emotive movie that comments abstractly on the gap between young and old. Abandoning formulaic devices, the film communicates a sense of forgiveness in order to start over and explains the many unique ways in which people care for one another. In the documentary special feature "Ambivalent Future" on the DVD, Kurosawa speaks about his difficulty of breaking free from genre conventions in order to create an emotional movie with indistinct characters. He reminisces about finding a piece of himself within the three main characters because they all reflect different stages in growing up, and although *BRIGHT FUTURE* doesn't quite find a day of reckoning for them, the film's conclusion leaves us with a few outstanding images of courage and pain as Yuji breaks free from apathy while other carefree



AMONG US



BRIGHT FUTURE

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youths roam the streets in their tedium. One may question who exactly will have a "bright future." — *Nichole Wlekinski*

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

A Sunday Club Productions presentation of a Kipp/Miller production
2003, Digital Video, Color, 19 minutes
Directed and written by Jeremiah Kipp
Produced by Rachel Gordon
Starring Pete Barker, Marilyn Bernard, Stephanie Foster, Austin Labbe, Meret Oppenheim, Tom Reid
Reviewed on VHS

One has to wonder if the Christian right in this country realizes how downright scary they can be. Do they know how damned obnoxious it is to force their beliefs upon other people? Or are they so lost in Godville that nothing fazes them? *THE CHRISTMAS PARTY*, directed by on-line movie critic Jeremiah Kipp, seems to take these questions very seriously, and if the film has a flaw, it's that it's too short at 19 minutes. However, it is well-written, well-directed, and well-acted, with what would be a star-making performance from nine-year-old Austin Labbe if this movie had been produced in Hollywood. It's also creepy, harrowing, and tightly-paced, and when I finished viewing it, I smugly said to myself, "Take that, you religious nut-jobs!"

Labbe plays Gabriel, a rather introspective child forced by the state to live with his grandparents while his mother detoxes. Christmas time is especially hard with no friends and no family, so Gabriel's well-meaning grandfather takes him to a Christmas party advertised in the local paper. It becomes immediately apparent from the host's inquisitive question of "What church does your family go to?" that Gabriel doesn't belong here—with these people, in this house, with these other children, all of whom are religious to the point of acting like brainwashed zombies. Eventually, the hosts decide that all they can do is save Gabriel's soul from eternal damnation.

It is a common complaint from Christians that they are always depicted in films as being crazy or stupid. This movie will not change that opinion. But I have to tell you, I know people like this. I know people like this who live right here in this very town, and it would be an interesting experiment to make them all watch *THE CHRISTMAS PARTY* and see if they get creeped out by the mirror you've forced them to gaze into. — *Aaron Matthew Polk*

CHINA WHITE SERPENTINE

A Sub Rosa Studios video release of a Sub Rosa Extreme production
in association with Fuzzy Devil Video and The Tin Ceiling
2003, MiniDV, Color, 70 minutes
Directed and written by Eric Stanze and Robin Garrels
Produced by Jeremy Wallace and Chris Belt
Starring DJ Vivona, Eli DeGeer, Amanda Booth, Jason Allen Wolfe, Rachel Lewis
Reviewed on DVD

After a solitary night of drinking, smoking, and pounding out words on his computer, high-strung journalist Dave Croninch (DJ Vivona) warily answers his door the next day to come face-to-face with his dead brother Trent (Jason Allen Wolfe), who hands over a DVD before dissipating into the summer haze. Convinced in his slightly loopy state that the deceased has a long-lost secret to spill, Dave calls their sister Karla (Rachel Lewis) and tells her that he's going to watch the disc to see if it contains evidence regarding Trent's untimely death. Sure enough, following an inexplicably eerie test pattern is footage of teary-eyed Beth (Eli DeGeer), explaining how she and Trent fell under the wicked spell of Tracey (Amanda Booth), a fountain of crimson hair, exotic tattoos, pierced body parts, and smirking disdain upon whom the duo became dependent for food, shelter, and a supply of china white (slang for heroin). Copious camcorder voyeurism intermixed with Beth's confessional reveals how Tracey gleefully fed their addictions in order to keep them as sex slaves, but also how the unwitting junkies fell in love and schemed to break away, resulting in catastrophic bloodshed. As the DVD takes on a hallucinogenic life of its own once Beth "signs off," Karla and clairvoyant girlfriend Zenna (also played by Booth) arrive at Dave's secluded place in the woods to learn the hard way that Tracey has infiltrated their lives as well!

With *CHINA WHITE SERPENTINE*, St. Louis underground filmmaker Eric Stanze has finally created his first true follow-up to *SCRAPBOOK*, gathering help from the talented Robin Garrels of *INSANIAC* (MF 6, p. 42) and several core players in Stanze's long-standing company, Wicked Pixel Cinema. Given its distinctive dream-world feel, *SERPENTINE* obviously received more post-production love than its Sub Rosa Extreme brethren, imbued with a shaded hopelessness and fleeting sparks of compassion that set it apart (excepting *INSANIAC*) from the other productions' rampant nastiness (including the insufferable *I SPIT ON YOUR CORPSE*, *I PISS ON YOUR GRAVE*). In fact, what an overall shift from Stanze's earlier WPC work like *ICE FROM THE SUN* and *SAVAGE HARVEST*, which often stalled while dense (if interesting) exposition gobbled up screen time. With its own ill-matched

(but *still* interesting) back story wisely relegated to trailing the end credits crawl, *SERPENTINE* is fueled by strong music-video mood swings and better-than-average acting from Wolfe, often resembling *TERROR FIRMER*'s Trent Haaga with a Pacino complex, and pouty-lipped brunette DeGeer, returning to the (unofficial) WPC camp after several years. Handing first-time film actress Booth dual roles shows guts on the co-directors' behalf; her awesome physical presence pays off (augmented by smart compositions from cameraman Jason Christ) although her atonal line readings often break the spell, especially as the demure Zenna. Elsewhere, Lewis' iffy turn is tempered somewhat by a fun performance from dependable Stanze regular Vivona.

I'm still not sure what to make of that ending, though. Once Dave inexplicably heads for the basement after weathering a sonic assault emitted by the evil video, *SERPENTINE* spirals catawampus into contemporary *grand guignol* that strangely hews it rather close to prior Wicked Pixel flicks. Why the filmmakers couldn't have sent this puppy into Lynchian overdrive instead of settling for the stylistically familiar beats me; Stanze confirms in his DVD commentary track with Garrels and Christ that the project sprung to life after a different Extreme show fell through, so one wonders if more script development and/or production time would have birthed a better climax. It's well-executed technically although it feels as tacked-on as the aforementioned back story, a creepy carnival tale recited by DeGeer. Regardless, it's ultimately the *rush* that makes *CHINA WHITE SERPENTINE* click.

Sub Rosa's disc features a healthy assortment of extras, including the crew commentary, a second commentary with actresses DeGeer and Booth, two making-of documentaries, outtakes, movie trailers, and a "music and soundscape" feature that will appeal mainly to audiophiles. I'm particularly fond of the weathered, sepia-toned packaging and menu design, several notches above the label's usual efforts. — *JaPan*

DEFIANCE

A Missouri Trails Productions film
2001, 16mm, Color, 75 minutes
Directed and written by Doveed Linder
Produced by Doveed Linder and Timothy J. Burke
Starring Jim Freivogel, Walker Deibel, Brandon Bollig, Evan Smith, Tony Twist, Gail Lopher, Daniel N. Linder
Reviewed on VHS

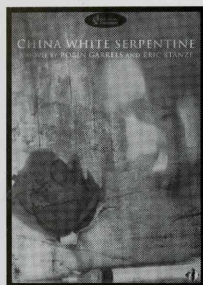
"Familiar" is perhaps the best word to describe *DEFIANCE*, a low-budget Western shot near St. Louis, Missouri, that echoes the clichés of the modern American with craftsmen-like aplomb but adds too little of its own voice to transcend its inherent weaknesses.

The early scenes of the movie draw on the oft-invoked trope of the reluctant gunfighter hiding from his dark past, a *la* *UNFORGIVEN*. Entrepreneur Nathan Cross (Tony Twist) moves to the small Missouri town of Defiance with a bed-ridden wife, two sons, and a hefty pile of cash. (Think Kurt Russell's Wyatt Earp in *TOMBSTONE*.) Looking to turn loose money into wealth, Cross opens a saloon, among other business ventures, thus drawing the ire of entrenched crime boss Clay Randall (Daniel N. Linder). Randall pushes Cross, rumored to actually be a Kansas City killer on the run, and the newcomer dusts off his gun belt and spills blood like a pro. Nonetheless, Randall's boys get the drop on Cross and cap him in front of his children, Tommy and Will.

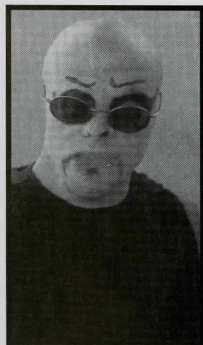
DEFIANCE then cuts ahead several years, taking a step sideways from the reluctant gunfighter tale into a revenge Western. Tommy (Walker Deibel) and Will (Jim Freivogel) have grown up to be the split halves of their father; Tommy is a vicious young gunslinger, and Will, a straight-laced wage earner and family man. Clay Randall, meanwhile, sits at the top of the Defiance dung heap. After Tommy shoots Randall's son in the back and earns a bounty on his head, Will leaves it all behind to escort his brother to a safe place. They hit the trail, bad things happen, and it all circles back to a final showdown with Randall.

Throughout this Western pastiche, it is to writer/director Doveed Linder's credit that the threads hold together as a whole. He instills a bit of psychological weight by matching kill-crazy Tommy, wielding his father's evil streak like a genetic trait, with level-headed Will, who doesn't turn violent until forced into it by this lawless land. The frontier in *DEFIANCE* is a stark setting, one that can force people into extreme action and invite investigations of grand philosophical themes like nature versus nurture. With this portrayal, Linder gets points for taking a stab at the sort of expressionistic oater one finds in films like Jim Jarmusch's *DEAD MAN* and avoiding the trappings of a generic cowboys-and-Indians rumble in the tumbleweeds.

But *DEFIANCE* *still* feels too derivative. Its characters are painfully uninteresting due in no small part to a uniformly wooden cast, while its droning narrator is prone to stating the obvious like it is sagebrush wisdom. (The trail was harsh, huh? Couldn't have guessed that from all the dead bodies.) Nice, scenic montage and Peckinpah-style gunfights edited to a *WILD BUNCH* rat-a-tat-tat scheme have been done before and done better. Arguably, Linder knows it; he's done his homework in putting together a fine *homage* to the genre with little cash, but has added nothing new under the high noon sun. — *Damian Duffy*



CHINA WHITE
SERPENTINE



I. ZOMBI

DELETERIOUS

A Kenosis Films production in association with Midnight Mind
2002, Digital Video, Color, 26 minutes
Directed and written by Jae Choe
Produced by Brett Van Emst and Jae Choe
Starring JB Ghuman, Kate Middleton, Jeff Sharp
Reviewed on VHS

Shot in New York City, this offbeat drama strings together the highs and lows of a doomed courtship between ruggedly cute twentysomethings Leo (JB Ghuman) and Macy (Kate Middleton). He sees their love as idyllic and fated, but she views things through more cynical eyes while dealing with the reappearance of ex-boyfriend Brad (Jeff Sharp) and an unexpected development inside of herself. With one eye on the local abortion clinic, Macy abruptly pushes Leo away to make sure he doesn't discover the truth. It all goes downhill quickly once poor Macy begins suffering through a post-operation depression, culminating in a heartbreaking phone message that sends Leo racing through the streets to be by her side ... if it's not too late when he gets there. As with many short subjects made by students, amateurs, and Sunday filmmakers, *DELETERIOUS* is a conceptually uneven affair that mixes experimental structure with conventional plot points. What elevates director Jae Choe's story from the pack are the compelling performances by lead actors Ghuman and Middleton, no mean feat given the script's base characterizations and lapses into big-idea musings that struggle for poignancy. An acute editing style manages to move the film along effectively enough to not draw much attention to these problems, but audiences will still have to contend with curious touches throughout, including a strange denouement that could be read as whimsical or superfluous. Even more eclectic is the music score by Peter Naizat, quite appropriate in some places while bordering on the mismatched in others. Nonetheless, as a starting point for a young filmmaker working with a tiny crew and a nothing budget, *DELETERIOUS* isn't bad. Co-producer Brett Van Emst also publishes the NYC/Chicago literary magazine *Midnight Mind*. — *JaPan*

DREAMERS

A Pathfinder Home Entertainment release of a Dark Lantern Pictures production
2000, 35mm, Color, 92 minutes
Directed and written by Ann Lu
Produced by Artie Glackin
Starring Jeremy Jordan, Mark Ballou, Courtney Gains, Portia Dawson, Camille Gaston, Ruth de Sosa
Reviewed on DVD

A Japanese man from behind a video camera talks about his love of film and how he would love to come to Hollywood, the land of movies and dreams. Then, some time in the past, two young boys in a place far from Hollywood talk about how they long to escape their dreary hometown to make movies. Fast forward several years and one of the grown-up boys, Dave, prepares for a bus trip to visit his friend Ethan in Hollywood. Once there, Dave finds movie-making not all it is cracked up to be, weathering a series of misadventures and misfires as he tries to help Ethan finish a movie several years in the making.

I'll admit that I was a tad nervous at the beginning of *DREAMERS*. After the somewhat confusing introduction with the Japanese man and his video camera, the scenes involving the younger Dave and Ethan feel stilted. Perhaps it is the quality of the child actors or the writing being just a tad off, but the early scenes didn't really click. My fears were assuaged once the film moves ahead several years to Dave and Ethan as young men.

Now, I know that the budding-filmmakers-in-Hollywood set-up is not the most original idea, but writer/director Ann Lu does what every good writer/director does—populates her movie with interesting characters. Original? Not really, but interesting nonetheless. Ethan, who has lived in Hollywood for several years now, is jaded and doesn't want to see his friend dragged down into the mire. Dave, the newcomer, is optimistic and fresh even though new developments smack him upside the head at every turn. Add a cast of characters ranging from the gay friend to the well-to-do, bored horny housewife willing to contribute money and we have the makings of ... well, of a Hollywood *THREE'S COMPANY* episode or a TV Movie-of-the-Week.

To her credit, Lu avoids the pitfalls and manages to come away with a story that I was interested to watch. While that isn't necessarily a ringing endorsement, I wasn't unhappy with the time spent. Overall, the parts were well-acted (save for certain minor roles including Dave's grandmother, either played badly or with genius), including notable cameos by the late Paul Bartel as a questionable distributor and Brian Krause as an actor struggling with the age-old conflict between money and passion. Some of the camera work seemed a tad blown out, making me wonder whether this originated on film or Digital Video. But, for the most part, I had a good time. I moderately recommend *DREAMERS*. The DVD contains standard extras like trailers, biographies, a making-of featurette, and deleted scenes wisely excised from the movie. — *Michael Hegg*

I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW

A New Millenium Pictures Ltd. production
2002, Digital Video, Color, 119 minutes
Directed and written by Alan Rowe Kelly
Produced by Tom Cadawas, Gary Malick, Alan Rowe Kelly
Starring Zoé Daelman Chlanda, Bill Corry, Katherine O'Sullivan, Jerry Murdock, Kristen Overdurf, Alan Rowe Kelly, René West, PJ Mehaffey
Reviewed on VHS

I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW (nifty title!) tells the charming story of Dolores Finley (Zoé Daelman Chlanda), a strange young woman who answers an ad for a mortuary assistant at a funeral home in a small town. Even before she leaves the train station, we know she's not wrapped too tightly. She ignores the porter's questions about her past, and his idle finger-drumming causes images of corpses and screaming faces to flash through her mind. She also freaks out when he gets a little careless with a large trunk she carries about.

However, the strange couple that runs the funeral home, the Beeches (Billy Corry and Katherine O'Sullivan), is stricken by her resemblance to their long-dead daughter. It's soon apparent that Mrs. Beech has a few bats loose in her belfry as well, especially on the subject of her "runaway" daughter. The mild-mannered woman is hesitant to hire Dolores due to her lack of references, but is most impressed with the newcomer's knowledge of funeral practices.

We soon learn that Dolores has rather special tastes in men. She can't stand to be touched, the result of vile abuse at the hands of her unspeakably sick parents, and so the man of her dreams has to be, well, a bit of a stiff. Her romantic pursuits bring her into conflict with Jake (Jerry Murdock) and Corey (Alan Rowe Kelly), a gravedigger and make-up artist working at the



funeral home who moonlight as body snatchers. When Jake blackmails Dolores into joining his evil scheme to acquire fresher bodies, the body parts really hit the fan.

While many horror films deal with depravity, *I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW* practically wallows in it. I felt rather queasy throughout, and even hardcore gore hounds might be worn down by its depressing parade of perversion, premature burial, mutilation, and abusive relationships. Its deadpan tone (ha ha) reminded me of Jörg Buttgerit's *NEKROMANTIK* and other films that are less interested in scaring viewers as in disturbing them by casting an unflinching eye on the horrors of which humans are capable.

Now, if that's the sort of thing you're looking for, then you'll get it in spades right here, but the tone of this sick little puppy will alienate most. It's too grim to be a comedy, too silly to be a pure scare-fest. Writer-director Kelly overloads *I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW* with grotesque imagery, often pointlessly, like a morgue nurse and a preacher who look like the living dead, or the painted doll mask that Dolores wears for no apparent reason. Only once do things come to life during the pursuit of one character, in a scene of sadistic brutality worthy of Wes Craven's *LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT*. However, frequent shock cuts of suddenly "living" corpses quickly become tedious.

What power the film does have is mostly due to the acting, which is much better than average for this kind of production. Chlanda is great as Dolores, bringing nuances to a stereotypical role. At first a sympathetic protagonist,

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A shrouded alien
in *LAST STOP
STATION*.
(Courtesy
Andy Kumpon)

Sniffin' (Glue)Sticks

by L. Rob Hubbard

The zine revolution isn't dead! It's just not big news anymore. At least for the mainstream, the novelty has worn off and those brave few who jumped in are now faced with the problem of longevity, the ultimate decider of public taste. As heady as the freedom of self-publishing is, one is also faced with the financial needs that sustaining a magazine entails.

Mike Plante's *Cinemat* has been one of the fresh zine finds in the past five years, with an emphasis on experimental filmmakers and those working in the deep end of the independent film pool, such as Craig Baldwin, Jem Cohen, and James Fotopoulos. Insightful reviews, profiles of character actors ("That Guy"), and interesting tangents like the occasional feature "Living in a Movie Theater" on the lives of projectionists, have made *Cinemat* a steal. Starting with issue #7, though, it has been made available as an Internet-only publication due to financial issues. The quality of the writing hasn't suffered in the least; it's just that the reader is now responsible for generating his or her own hard copy by printing out the PDF files using Adobe Acrobat Reader.

Cinemat #7 featured interviews with Bill Morrison (DECASIA), Kelly Reichardt (RIVER OF GRASS), Pittsburgh experimental filmmaker Peggy Ahwesh, a look at four films by Takashi Miike, additional interviews with world directors Babette Mangolte, Kenji Onishi, and Werner Herzog, and a panel discussion with filmmakers Scott MacDonald, James Benning, and Fotopoulos. Issue #8 went on-line last spring and features interviews with Martha Colburn, Sam Green (THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND), Jake Mahaffy (WAR), Giuseppe Andrews (TRAILER TOWN), and articles on video reconstructionists Animal Charm and two documentaries, FLYERMAN and A CERTAIN KIND OF DEATH.

It's wonderful that *Cinemat* still continues on the 'Net, but one drawback is that back issue information isn't easy to access on the main page. Leapfrog to www.cinematmag.com/whats_happenin.html for sample writing from previous issues as well as useful links. Plus, once a new issue is posted, that's pretty much it for the previous one.

From our saner neighbors to the north (specifically, Toronto, Canada) comes *The Eclectic Screening Room*, a quarterly film publication edited by Greg Woods that certainly lives up to its title. *ESR* #7 for Fall 2002 profiles Woody Allen's STARDUST MEMORIES, the late Seventies film BETWEEN THE LINES by Joan Micklin Silver (CROSSING DELANCEY), a Canadian effort called THE HARD PART BEGINS, the filmographies of Doris Wishman, Nick Zedd, and Ray Dennis Steckler, and Luis Buñuel in Mexico. That's a pretty packed line-up, and it doesn't even include the reviews and ephemera. Although the archives on the Web site claim that they're now up to issue #11, and the listings only give rock-solid info through issue #9 (honoring the late Stan Brakhage), Woods tells MICRO-FILM that *ESR* #15 is actually the most recent edition. Based on what I've seen so far, I'll be ordering other back issues regardless of the number available.

Moving on to our more established brethren, *Shock Cinema* and *Psychotronic Video* keep on spreading the good word of cinema to the washed and unwashed alike. Since this last column, SC has jumped from its traditional biannual publication rate to four times a year; recent editions feature



Brad Dourif, Ted Raimi, Roseanne Katon, Bob Clark, Michael Paré (in #25), William Atherton, Joe Cortese, William Sanderson, Eric Bogosian, and Eddie Romero (in #26). Meanwhile, *Psychotronic* has pumped out #39 (with Bruce Campbell, Billy Drago, and Yvette Vickers) and #40 (with John Saxon, Robert Downey, Sr., and Brett Halsey). What's left to say about these mags that hasn't already been said? Both feature good interviews with favorite character actors, reviews on just about anything interesting that exists in some form of media, and thorough helpings of international genre cinema. Web sites for both offer fairly up-to-date information and sample writing.

her mask gradually slips to reveal the ravenous beast within. (One of the scariest moments comes towards the end, when she picks up an axe and screams, "Now I'm going to kill you!") Murdock is equally remarkable in the dual roles of white trash scumbag Jake and his clean-cut brother, Sheriff Jake Gerald; it wasn't until the end credits that I realized it was the same actor. Corry is sympathetic as Mr. Beech, and Kelly gives an, ah, *unusual* performance as the nasty but pathetic Corey.

With Mrs. Beech, O'Sullivan is unfortunately saddled with a caricatured role of a one-dimensional religious fanatic. Kelly's script also undermines the actors by having them behave as complete ninnyes in order to advance the plot, a sin of which even great horror films are often guilty. And, Jake's body-snatching scheme doesn't make much sense if you look at it too closely. Still, despite its shortcomings, I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW left me with a lingering chill. — Jeff McCoy

HORRORTALES.666

A Falcon Video production in association with W.A.V.E. Productions, 4th Floor Pictures, Morbid Productions, and Wet Floor Productions

2002, Video, Color, 62 minutes

Directed by Phil Herman, Dusty Fleishman, Ryan Cavalline, G.W. Lawrence, Michael A. Hoffman

Produced by Phil Herman and Ryan Cavalline

Starring Joel D. Wynkoop, Julie Strain, Richard Cecere, Phil Herman, Nancy Feliciano, Kimberly Lynn Cole, David Keye, Andrew Jay, Pamela Sutch, G.W. Lawrence, Adam Berasi, Bill Cassinelli, Dotan Baer

Reviewed on VHS

Lordy, lordy, somebody please exorcise the demons plaguing HORRORTALES.666, for they are legion! More than anyone stationed at the Secret MICRO-FILM Headquarters, I've taken in my share of camcorder flicks and can at least appreciate honest effort when I see it on the screen. Yet, the lazy scripting and dreadful filmmaking craft on display in this anthology from producers Phil Herman (JACKER) and Ryan Cavalline (SERIAL KILLER) pretty much overwhelms what few shreds of decency I could pluck from the mire. You know where HORRORTALES is headed immediately as portly cat burglar Dan (Joel D. Wynkoop of DIRTY COP, NO DONUT infamy) breaks into a horror novelist's house, snooping around the guy's desktop computer long enough to unearth a text file filled with mesmerizing tales of the macabre. In "Woman in Shadows," a ghost (Nancy Feliciano) gets the best of the intruder (Herman) who murdered her. In "Luck of the Irish," an amateur news videographer (David Keye) finds himself hot on the trail of the "Midtown Mangler" (Andrew Jay). In "The Dark Woods," a distraught father (Adam Berasi) buries his daughter only to drive himself mad with guilt. In "Payback is Hell," a hooker (Pamela Sutch) falls into the hands of a modern Jack the Ripper-type (G.W. Lawrence). Finally, in "Stop It You're Killing Me," two friends (Bill Cassinelli, Dotan Baer) rub each other the wrong way in the quest for female companionship. This final story is the only palatable one in the bunch, but like the others it fails to build any sort of menace or provide a memorable climax. "Woman" and "Irish" also lack the necessary exposition to make heads or tails of their respective mysteries, while "Woods" huffs and puffs without resonance and "Payback" only serves to embarrass half-naked Sutch with its pointlessness. Maybe I'm just cranky tonight, but if HORRORTALES.666 is supposed to be a melting pot of terror from "today's top writers in the B field," per the packaging, then why did its makers settle for such a Z-grade potboiler? Viewers should go exhume some old-school Amicus or George Romero's CREEPSHOW for their omnibus thrills instead. — JaPan

I. ZOMBI

2003, Video, Color, 56 minutes

Directed by produced by Jeremy Newman

With Hayden Milligan

Reviewed on VHS

When I was a kid, I'd stay up late on the weekends to catch a local television show called CREATURE FEATURE. It was hosted by "Trebzor," a guy who held a flashlight under his chin and spoke in a "spooky" voice as he introduced us to THE MUMMY, THE WOLF MAN, or at least THE INCREDIBLE TWO-HEADED TRANSPLANT. This was before cable television, infomercials, and 24-hour news channels, when staying up late—especially to catch a horror movie—felt a little daring, almost like breaking a taboo. Occasionally a host might gain national recognition like Elvira, or appear in a famous horror movie like Vampira in PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE or "Chilly Billy" Cardille in NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, but mostly they remained local celebrities.

A few shows like these still exist here and there, mostly on public access stations, and this fading pop culture phenomenon is the backdrop of Jeremy Newman's documentary, I. ZOMBI. The film's true focus, however, is on a young man named Hayden Milligan who hosts a show called THE WITCHING HOUR in Lexington, Kentucky, under the name "I. Zombi." Whereas all the

other hosts interviewed for this film appear in full character make-up, including a wolf man with a mellifluous voice, Milligan needs no make-up to shock his viewers for he was horrifically burned in an accidental fire at age two (although he does favor KISS-inspired white grease paint and black eyeliner when hosting *THE WITCHING HOUR*).

Newman interviews Milligan's friends and family, who lovingly refer to him as "Boogie" while discussing the hardships he's overcome to achieve his dream of hosting his own horror show. We also meet his Filipino wife, Hazel, who acts as his cameraman while keeping him on track with some frank criticism, and his fellow horror hosts, who talk about the business while expressing their respect and fondness for Milligan. What ultimately emerges is a portrait of a man who is following his dream, however campy and low-budget it may be, fueled by boundless optimism, his profound faith in God, and oddly enough, his love of horror movies.

Like many documentaries, *I. ZOMBI* drags in spots, but this is a minor quibble. I never thought I'd find a film about hammy horror hosts to be inspirational, but it just shows that salvation can be discovered in the strangest of places. — Jeff McCoy

JAR JAR BINKS: THE F! TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY

A Film Threat DVD release of a Hannum Monkey Productions film

2000, Video, Color, 12 minutes

Directed by Leif Einarsson

Produced by Alok Mishra

Written by Dave Estes

Starring Danny White, Kim Kempfert, Dave Estes

Reviewed on DVD

JAR JAR BINKS: THE F! TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY is a short film that satirizes the infamous *STAR WARS* character from *THE PHANTOM MENACE* and *ATTACK OF THE CLONES* that many know but few love. In this spoof, Jar Jar follows the typical arc of the average "E! True Hollywood Story" star: a sweet kid grows up in a loving home in suburbia, has trouble fitting in with his peers until the day he "finds his calling," makes the trek to Hollywood, changes his name, weathers a few tough breaks while trying to achieve stardom, suddenly hits big overnight, enjoys success for a split second, and finally spirals downward into a toxic nadir of sex, booze, drugs, *et cetera*. The premise itself is amusing, but *JAR JAR BINKS* often slips into fits of sophomoric humor that are no more than mildly entertaining. However, it is obvious that the filmmakers made this short out of love for *STAR WARS*, and movies and pop culture in general. Some highlights include the interviews with Jar Jar's "anonymous" friends (one of the only parts that inspire a laugh-out-loud response), creative photo manipulation, and generally clear picture quality. On occasion, some of the jokes could be misinterpreted, such as references to Sonny Bono faking his own death, O.J. Simpson being framed, and a very effeminate Darth Maul; this is acknowledged in the commentary tracks, but it really doesn't make the jokes any funnier. Running roughly eight times the length of the short itself, the DVD bonus materials provide very few moments that shine, such as a deleted nod to Wes Anderson's *RUSHMORE*, the producer/writer commentary, and the "Smell My Ear" outtake. Although an alternate ending that is homage to *RETURN OF THE JEDI* should produce some giggles from the *STAR WARS* crowd, it's not likely to impress most audiences. Overall, *JAR JAR BINKS* is a silly, creative short that diehard fans might love, but the average viewer will probably find mildly entertaining if it doesn't leave said viewer scratching his head in bewilderment. — Danielle Cloutier

LAST STOP STATION

An AK Productions film

2001, S-VHS, Color, 16 minutes

Directed, produced, and written by Andy Kumpon

Starring Andy Kumpon, Wayne Spitzer, Eric Gollinger

Reviewed on VHS

SHADOWS IN THE GARDEN

A Shadows In Fog Production Group film

2002, S-VHS/Hi8, Color, 21 minutes

Directed, produced, and written by Wayne Spitzer

Starring Wayne Spitzer, Eric Gollinger, Diane Spitzer, Andy Kumpon

Reviewed on VHS

Made in Washington state by science fiction writer Wayne Spitzer and film enthusiasts Andy Kumpon and Eric Gollinger, these two short films are products of a true team effort. Fans of micro-budget sci-fi and horror would do well to seek them out in the recent Brimstone Productions anthology film, *MONSTERDOTCOM*.

LAST STOP STATION is a simple idea told with style. Kumpon plays a tabloid reporter who finds himself on a desert road with his car running on empty. Led by signs to an apparently vacated gas station, he honks his horn and waits.

A weird glow comes from under the garage door after a minute or so, followed by a swirling mist. Suddenly, he's surrounded by creatures in hooded robes that proceed to give him the full-service treatment! The reporter gleefully snaps photos as they check his tires and wash his windshield, each flash ringing like a cash register. However, when payment comes due, the opportunist is forced to turn over his camera, film and all. Not to be outdone, he drives to a nearby town and calls another reporter, played by Spitzer, telling his dubious partner to bring more cameras. Needless to say, things don't work out quite as expected upon their return to the gas station.

Kumpon and company overcome their miniscule budget through the use of atmospheric black-and-white photography and about a ton of dry ice. Ironically, the creatures' vague appearance only adds to their eerie nature and leaves much to the viewer's imagination. The interplay between Kumpon and Spitzer is fairly amusing, especially during the phone conversation where images of neon lights seemingly comment on Kumpon's words. And, at less than 20 minutes, *LAST STOP STATION* doesn't wear out its welcome.

SHADOWS IN THE GARDEN is another simple idea, told with even *more* style. Spitzer plays Sylkk, a murdered police officer that is reincarnated as a humanoid plant creature. He skulks through the rain-drenched night, drawn by memories of his past life and premonitions of impending violence to track down the killer terrorizing his community. In essence, Spitzer has crafted his own version of *Swamp Thing*, capturing more of that comic book's true spirit than either of the campy feature films directly based on it.

There's a streak of bittersweet tragedy in *Swamp Thing* that sets it apart from most other superhero stories, where a man reborn in an alien body chooses to defend humanity despite being separated from it. Because Sylkk has no dialogue, Spitzer communicates through unearthly body language,



vocal clicks, and expressive eyes that animate the character's stony countenance, proving his talent as an actor. The filmmakers also dare to tell this story in a non-traditional manner, providing exposition through dictionary definitions, newspaper clippings, talk radio voices, and even a motivational speaker that seems to mirror Sylkk's inner thoughts. Balancing the literate ideas are various intriguing images representing Sylkk's fantasies and psychic visions, often mated together in complex visual compositions such as a full moon reflecting in the sunglasses of a murder victim.

The editing is sharp and the videography quite beautiful, especially when capturing the city at night with its quaint statues and magnificent fountain. Kumpon and Gollinger's atmospheric music is reminiscent of John Carpenter's classic *HALLOWEEN* score without ripping it off, and gore-hounds should be satisfied with the grisly demise of serial killer Cutthroat Cthulhu. In my humble opinion, Eric Gollinger's budget monster make-up blows the hokey rubber suits in *SWAMP THING* and *THE RETURN OF SWAMP THING* right out of the bayou swamp water. It's obvious that a lot of love and effort went into this project.

Both *SHADOWS IN THE GARDEN* and *LAST STOP STATION* are brimming over with talent. Somebody get these guys some money for future projects! — Jeff McCoy

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Bob Gebert,
Therese Kotara,
and Bryan Lee
McGlothlin in
LAUGHING BOY.
(Courtesy
Brazil J. Grisaffi)

Filmmaking Primer Favors Breadth Over Depth

by F. Scott Ferguson

\$30 Film School author Michael W. Dean (of the upcoming Hubert Selby, Jr. documentary, *IT/LL BE BETTER TOMORROW*) bravely attempts to cover the entire gamut of topics for the ultra low-budget filmmaker, including how to "Write, Finance, Direct, Produce, Shoot, Edit, Distribute, Tour With, and Sell Your Own No-Budget Digital Movie." If you're picking up his book for the first time, you might wonder if the cover quote from Troma president Lloyd Kaufman is any indication of what you will find inside, and it is.

In which case, this book is certainly not for every aspiring filmmaker, particularly those looking for in-depth coverage of the latest tools and techniques. Those looking for a quick read on the process of no-budget filmmaking, or something akin to a riff on the subject, probably won't be disappointed; the writing is low-key and easy to digest thanks to its conversational tone. Personally, I found it distracting and self-aggrandizing, but some may prefer the more personable style.



\$30 Film School author Michael W. Dean. (Photo: Lydia Lunch)

The coverage of filmmaking tools and techniques suffers from a lack of focus, although useful bits of information are scattered throughout the book. A tighter structure would have functioned better and insured that the author spent more time on the craft of making films rather than the culture. In terms of layout, the illustrations felt underwhelming for such an exciting subject with more included than necessary; several pages are devoted to screenshots of importing or exporting files, for example.

The coverage of computer applications felt incomplete and already outdated—*\$30 Film School* was published in 2003—while general advice on computer usage, such as taking screen shots and avoiding e-mail viruses, deviated from the overall mission of the book. The chapter with filmmaker interviews featured the most interesting material to me, providing the best outlet for a unique perspective on the movie production process. Included here are ultra-independents such as Danny Plotnick (*I'M NOT FASCINATING*), Rusty Nails (*ACNE*), Jon Moritsugu (*SCUMROCK*), Joshua Leonard (*THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*), Esther Bell (*EXIST*), Scott Beibin (*KUNG FU JEW*), Becky Goldberg (*HOT AND BOTHERED*), and Jill Morley (*STRIPPED*).

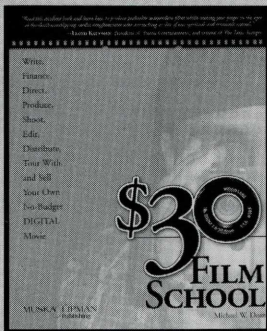
"The whole point of *\$30 Film School* is to get out there and do it, rather than reading about it. That's the only way to really learn," says Dean in a section on "Filming Techniques." Certainly, hands-on experience is crucial to the learning of any trade, but I sense that the majority of readers would purchase a book like this to address gaps in their knowledge. Inspiration to make a movie can be found in better sources, and in fact, most readers already know whether they want to make a movie. It's simply a matter of available means and know-how, areas that this book attempts to address, and if it had spent as much time discussing camera use and lighting as it does ideas for generating money and promoting a film, the reader would have been better served.

Overall, I believe that a more detailed, structured, and practical discussion of applied techniques is needed for a book like *\$30 Film School* to be truly useful for the serious filmmaker. The need for relevant information is perhaps even more important for the independent artist without a background in film than it is for the production assistant working their way through the studio system or the film school graduate assembling their first feature. Finding that reliable source of information and advice on an increasingly technical subject area is more necessary than ever if the D.I.Y. crowd is to gain the confidence to begin making films.

The bonus CD-Rom includes sample text forms, software demos, sound files, a promotional EPK used by the author for his documentary, *D.I.Y. OR DIE*, and a "training film," *I LEFT MY PANTS IN SAN DIEGO*.

\$30 Film School

2003, 528 pages + CD-Rom, softcover, \$30.00
Written by Michael W. Dean
Published by Muska & Lipman Publishing/Premier Press



LAUGHING BOY

A Laughing Boy/Toxic Monkey Productions film

2002, 16mm, Color, 83 minutes

Directed and produced by Brazil J. Grisaffi

Written by George Douglas Lee

Starring Brazil J. Grisaffi, Anne Quackenbush, Therese Kotara, Michael Gray, Bob Gebert,

Robin Craig, Tiffany Grant

Reviewed on DVD

Have you ever been dragged to some function attended by people that you generally despise, but you've been forced to hide your feelings behind a false smile as you desperately attempt to get through the evening without taking a bite out of the weasels surrounding you? Have you ever been accused of being a "smart ass," of "not being a team player," or heard the phrase, "some people just don't belong?" Then *LAUGHING BOY* is the movie you've been waiting for, and what a tasty slice of revenge it is!

The "laughing boy" is Cody MacKenzie (played by director Brazil J. Grisaffi), who with wife Judy (Anne Quackenbush) is going to a party honoring a friend's impending marriage. Unfortunately for Cody, this also means that most of his co-workers will be there, too. Cody is not well liked by most of them, with the exception of his boss whom he openly worships, Elizabeth Sheridan (Therese Kotara). Cody's a fun guy with a low tolerance for pretension, a sharp wit, and a sarcastic quip for almost everything, most of which goes right over the heads of his co-workers. Mix that inclination with lots of available alcohol and it's going to be quite a bumpy night.

LAUGHING BOY largely succeeds due to its script, direction, and performances. Grisaffi isn't a flashy director brandishing style for style's sake; there's enough confidence in the material and the actors here to not rely on such sleight-of-hand. Even the more outrageous bits—including animated segments by Houston company Stone Soup and a hilarious exchange between Elizabeth and other guests concerning Cody, indicative of Cody's imagination—add to the story rather than detracting from it. Letting the material slide into farce would've been taking the easy road, and it's to everyone's credit that *LAUGHING BOY* avoids this by allowing everyone to take his or her lumps. Not all Cody's co-workers are soulless materialists, and he is shown to have his share of faults as well.

The DVD includes commentary from Grisaffi and a good majority of cast and crew that gets a bit sloppy at points, but it's evident that everyone is having a good time. Also included are storyboards, extended scenes, selections from the cast's audition tapes, pencil tests for the animated segments, and bonus songs from bands that provided songs for the film. It's a pretty extensive presentation that *LAUGHING BOY* thoroughly deserves, for it is easily one of the best films that you haven't heard of—until now. I guarantee that Grisaffi will be making more rambunctious noise in the future. — L. Rob Hubbard

LOSERS LOUNGE

A DL Sites Productions film in association with Joliff Digital Production

2003, Digital Video, B&W, 86 minutes

Directed and written by Don Boner

Starring Brian Talbot, Autumnne Sorgius, Bob Charlock, Vickie Smith, Apollo Bacala,

Kevin Croak, Frank Kratoska, Laura Parish, Bob Williams

Reviewed on DVD

The first minute or so of *LOSERS LOUNGE* gives one the impression they're watching Cinemax at 11 p.m. The crude set, the stilted and insipid dialogue, the slapdash production quality, and a director named Don Boner all suggest a flick in the offing that only a pubescent boy and his bottle of Jurgens could love. But then, something strange happens. Just as a trophy wife with air-brush-applied mascara begins unbuttoning her blouse in the midst of seducing a private dick, the scene fades to black!

Turns out, *LOSERS LOUNGE* is intended as serious *film noir*, and that joke about the director's name is a cheap shot. But, it's a cheap movie, so that's staying in print. Never mind the low budget; the sparse sets, adorned with a few bits of furniture and the same three or four 1940s-era props, could've worked as a sort of stage production aesthetic, and the bad acting might be forgivable given that it's likely a cast of amateurs. What makes *LOSERS LOUNGE* shoddy movie merchandise is exemplified by a shot where a guy at a bar reads a 1948 issue of *Life* magazine while a 1985 Frigidaire looms behind him. Little details are taken care of, while the fridge-sized mistakes—a limping plot, dimensionless characters, overblown screenwriting—are completely ignored.

The requisite PI protagonist in this facsimile detective story is Joey Fernando, played with used-car salesman sincerity by Brian Talbot. An ex-con turned gumshoe, morally lax but with a heart of gold he keeps hidden under his crumpled trenchcoat, Fernando spends his days in a sleazy Midwestern burg sleeping around and drinking Jack Daniels, presumably to dull the pain of being a stock character. Relaxing at the eponymous lounge owned by the improbably named Lisa Losers (Vickie Smith), a matriarchal bartender and *noir* cliché #2, Fernando becomes involved with Mariana (Autumnne Sorgius), a young waitress/hooker with a dark past. (Three up, three down.)

Sorgius' attempts at emoting distinguish her as the most annoying cast member, so when Mariana manages to get killed halfway through the film, it mercifully ends her wince-worthy screen time. Fernando is framed for the murder and, a mere 45 minutes in, the plot begins! He has a brief time to find the real killer or else he's headed for prison or the chair, so naturally the first thing he does is take a nap before interrogating a few of the other broadly drawn, poorly realized characters. They say nothing useful, Fernando lets 'em walk, and as riveting detective fiction goes, the second half of *LOSERS LOUNGE* makes *Encyclopedia Brown* seem like Mike Hammer.

Sadly, this *laissez-faire* investigation gives Boner's script ample opportunity to vomit up streams of unbidden and unnecessary back story. Fernando mentions his former life as a cop several times, Mariana tells anyone within earshot about being molested by her father, and Ginger (Laura Parish), the older hooker with (surprise, surprise) her own heart of gold, speaks exposition like it's her native language. Eventually, in a police interrogation room suspiciously reminiscent of every other room in the film, the truth comes out, the killer's identity is revealed, and blah bliddy blah blah *blah*. *LOSERS LOUNGE* simply doesn't make strong enough a case for viewers to care about these characters. — *Damian Duffy*

MAD DOGS

A Vanguard Cinema video release of a Roaring Mice Films presentation
2002, 35mm/DV, Color, 91 minutes
Directed by Ahmed A. Jamal
Produced by Poonam Sharma and Carl Proctor
Written by Simon Louvish
Starring Iain Fraser, Indira Varma, Paul Barber, Jonathan Pryce
Previewed on DVD

It's the near future—well, sometime near the Millennium—and Rabbie Burns (Iain Fraser), a young man with a history of mental problems, has it licked ... until he starts hearing a voice in his head that tells him he has only 36 hours to prevent the End of the World. Naturally, Rabbie turns to his friends to help him out: luscious researcher Narendra (Indira Varma) and homeless saxophonist Jimmy Joyce (Paul Barber). In the course of the 36 hours, they discover various conspiracies, run from aliens masquerading as psychiatrists, dodge fanatically religious (and homicidal) American agents, and talk to God, all while London is in the throes of "Mad Dog Disease!" The title *MAD DOGS* not only refers to the plague besieging the United Kingdom's canine population, but quite possibly alludes to the old saying about Englishmen that Joe Cocker made famous as the title of a record album. It attempts to be a madcap comedy riding the Millennial Buzz of a few years ago, taking the route of British comedy along the lines of *THE COMIC STRIP* and *RED DWARF* while attempting to channel the spirit of films such as *REPO MAN*. It's not quite successful—the movie is a bit too frantic and muddled—but it's not without a few laughs for those who like their comedy smart and British. Look for veteran character actor Jonathan Pryce (*BRAZIL*) as the "Supreme Being," presumably a nod to that *other* irreverent UK mishmash, *TIME BANDITS*. — *L. Rob Hubbard*

MARYAM

A Wellspring Media video release of a Streetlight Films/Centre Street Production film
2002, 16mm, Color, 87 minutes
Directed and Written by Ramin Serry
Produced by Shauna Lyon
Starring Mariam Parris, David Ackert, Shaun Toub, Shohreh Aghdashloo, Mazyar Jobrani, Sabine Singh, Victor Jory, Michael Blieden, Jason Nash
Reviewed on DVD

Maryam is an everyday teenager living during the late Seventies, when roller rinks and sweatbands are still hip. It is also during this time that the Iran hostage crisis erupts, proving equally volatile for Iranian-Americans in the United States. The film *MARYAM* opens with an entertaining montage of cultural fusion, as The Cars' "Let the Good Times Roll" accompanies archival footage of the Ayatollah Khomeini coming to power, after which we get to know Maryam (attentively played by Mariam Parris) as intelligent and self-assured, more interested in attaining lead anchor at her school's television station than chasing after guys and smoking in the bathroom.

Chances are that Maryam would feel a little more normal if her family's conservative tradition didn't cause her father, Dr. Armin (played with nuance by Shaun Toub), to pull her out of her extracurricular activities and insist that she come home directly after school. While this leaves her to deal with a gum-popping blonde (Sabine Singh) potentially stealing both her anchor position and a boy (Victor Jory) she has a crush on, Maryam consequently learns that Ali (David Ackert), her cousin from Tehran, is coming to stay with them and pursue college studies in physics. Despite her initial griping, Maryam remains curious about this relative whom she's never met.

As it turns out, Ali couldn't be more different from Maryam; the newcomer's first instinct as a conservative Iranian is to frown upon even the chastest American behavior. Nevertheless, the more Maryam and Ali get to know one another, it is clear that they are linked by a family bond that allows them to better understand their heritage, as it exists in both Iran and America. However, as the Iran Hostage Crisis unfolds overseas, racial tensions threaten to crack Maryam and her family's quiet life in suburban New Jersey. Ali's ulterior motives for staying with the family also become apparent, bringing forth a conflict between blood relations and political strife.

At its core, *MARYAM* is a film about a teenager trying to find herself, although her story is more complex than most. Through challenges brought on by cultural conflict both inside and outside of America, Maryam comes to better know those closest to her. Chicago-born filmmaker Ramin Serry made his feature debut with this unique coming-of-age drama, bringing back a period reminiscent of his own childhood experiences as an Iranian-American and an event all but obliterated from societal memory. (Unfortunately, *MARYAM* is even more relevant today, post-Patriot Act; thanks again to John Ashcroft for perpetuating fear based on stereotypes.)

The ability of writer/director Serry to find the simplicity in heart of emotionally complex scenes is a strong point. In one scene, Maryam's mother (played beautifully by Shohreh Aghdashloo) holds a birthday party for Dr. Armin, though no invited guests attend outside of the closest of their group. Neighbors once thought to be friends fear association with the ostracized Armins, who make the most of the party and enjoy each other's company until Maryam notices something amiss in Ali's behavior. The discovery of her cousin's secret precedes an explosive upheaval of words and emotions; through this destruction of past notions of one another and their roles, what follows in its wake is an even greater truth to be learned by all. — *Erin Anadkat*

C-U Confidential footnote: Ramin Serry and producing partner Shauna Lyon met while attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; *MARYAM* subsequently screened at Roger Ebert's fourth Overlooked Film Festival in 2002 in downtown Champaign where the famous film critic claimed he didn't know Serry and Lyon were fellow alumni until well after selecting their film!



Jackie Buscarino in
MY LIFE WITH MORRISSEY.
(Courtesy
Overt Productions/
Twelve Angry Films)

MAU MAU SEX SEX

A 7" Planet Productions video release
2001, Video, Color, 80 minutes
Directed and produced by Ted Bonnitt
Written by Eddie Muller and Ted Bonnitt
With Dan Sonney, David F. Friedman, Frank Henenlotter, Mike Vraney, Carol Friedman, Margaret Sonney
Reviewed on DVD

This documentary quite elegantly weaves together the history of Dan Sonney, David F. Friedman, and the exploitation movies they helped create. Yet, the true allure of *MAU MAU SEX SEX* is this—take all of the cinematic references and history away from Friedman and Sonney, and they're *still* two of the most interesting and entertaining gentlemen ever

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Channeling Zapruder, Subverting Oliver Stone

Damian Duffy on **NOTHING SO STRANGE**

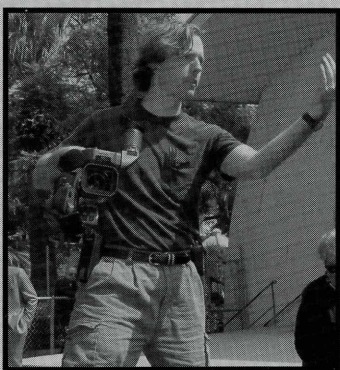
You'll always start a heated discussion when you bring up the Bill Gates assassination. "They never caught the real assassin." "The LAPD is lying." "There's no conspiracy, they got the right guy." "Bill Gates was never assassinated, you idiot!" But, whatever your opinion, one thing is certain—**NOTHING SO STRANGE** is the best movie ever made on the subject of the Microsoft mogul's murder.

That last sentence may read as faint praise, but that's not the intention. **NOTHING SO STRANGE** is truly an excellent film, in part because it successfully convinces us that Gates was capped during a charity event in Los Angeles' MacArthur Park. And then, when we remember that, *no*, Bill's still out there—powering our PCs, controlling the weather, swimming in money like Scrooge McDuck—the film convinces us again (and again, and again) with its inspired *faux* documentary style.

However, this is not a film for Media Player-haters who equate Gates with Satan for the Silicone Age. In fact, **NOTHING SO STRANGE** has nothing to do with Bill Gates personally, aside from opening with his chilling death scene, and diatribes about monopolies or operating systems never materialize. Instead, director Brian Flemming positions Mr. Gates as a symbol of underlying assertions that the politics of revolution in contemporary America have moved away from issues of race and ideology and into the trenches of class warfare.

This concept is primarily subtext, made explicit only in the director's Web log on www.nothingsostrange.com and in the quoted writings of Gates' alleged assassin, Alek Hidell, whose name Flemming cribbed from the list of Lee Harvey Oswald's known aliases. **NOTHING SO STRANGE** focuses primarily on a year in the life of Citizens for Truth, an activist group not so convinced that Hidell pulled the trigger. The hand-held camera follows along as the group recruits members, stages protests, and lobbies the LAPD to open its investigation to other possibilities. Among the activist leaders are an unemployed firebrand named David James (portrayed, not coincidentally, by actor David James) and a more staid organizer named Debra Meagher (played by real-life reporter Laurie Pike).

The personality clash between James and Meagher provides the sort of human drama that reality television strives for, and makes watching Citizens for Truth committee meetings an unexpectedly riveting experience. Indeed, the entire cast keeps the movie as entertaining as it is believable, comprised of professional actors and non-actors. At times, the mockumentary style works like the comedies that are Christopher Guest's stock-in-trade. At other times, the realism is creepy like an Oliver Stone flick. Conspiracy theories surrounding the Gates assassination (which, by the way, never happened) often call to mind the more shadowy aspects of actual history-making gunshot wounds (JFK, RFK, MLK, etc.).



NOTHING SO STRANGE director
Bruce Flemming in MacArthur Park.
(All photos: Unsharp Mask LLC)

Rodney King and the Rampart scandal (which unfolded concurrently to the production of **NOTHING SO STRANGE**), the scene raises important issues about the subjectivity of truth when those in power distort the information, a concept Flemming wryly comments upon with the documentary form.

Apart from the abundant entertainment value and clever socio-political undertones of **NOTHING SO STRANGE**, there is an extraordinary ingenuity at work here.



David James turns on the camera after
pissing off Debra Meagher (Laurie Pike)
at a tense Citizens for Truth conference.

Adding further to the film's unnerving believability is the passage where Meagher presents a historical survey of corruption and cover-ups among LA's finest. Beginning with the formation of the department under a registered KKK member, and moving up to

to grace the camera's lens. It's easy to see how they made good (if hard-earned and much-traveled) livings, selling movies based on one-sheets, basic ideas, and hype, hype, hype! Interestingly enough, since such emphasis always fell on the sizzle, sometimes the steak seemed an afterthought.

The fascinating history starts with Sonney's father, a turn-of-the-century showman and film huckster, working its way through the lenient Fifties and Sixties allowing for Sonney and Friedman's brand of "sexploitation," to the advent of the hardcore movies with which neither producer had any interest in competing. Bonnitt's present-day glimpse into their lives proves that, while longer in the tooth, the boys are certainly not any less enthusiastic in their appetite for life. In fact, Sonney and Friedman simply being themselves entertains a lot more than many prepared, scripted performances, while the addition of an animated Frank Henenlotter (**BASKET CASE**) as exploitation film historian is wonderful, colorfully placing their output in perspective.

Finally, the only really critical thing I can think to write is that, for some of the interview footage with Friedman and Sonney together in the back of a car, it would have been nice if the director had snapped a wide-angle converter on his camera. Aside from that, I'm happy to say that I am completely and utterly rapt by the antics and history of these pioneers (even on my second viewing), and chances are good that a guy or gal would still find **MAU MAU SEX SEX** a very entertaining movie without necessarily being a fan of their films. These include Sonney's **THE FLESH MERCHANT** (1956), Friedman's **BLOOD FEAST** (1963), **THE DEFILERS** (1965), and **SHE-FREAK** (1967), and the occasional team-up such as **SPACE-THING** (1968).

The self-distributed DVD (taking after Bonnitt's own theatrical DVD distribution in 2001, a feature-film first) contains a lot of extras, including trailers for **MAU MAU SEX SEX** and several of Sonney and Friedman's vintage productions, a film art gallery, soundtrack samples, filmographies, and more. The disc also sports two audio commentaries, one of which features the inimitable team of Friedman and Sonney (who passed away in 2002) with Bonnitt. — Michael Hegg

THE NEW CHAPTER

A Cerberus Films/Modern VideoFilm production

2003, MiniDV, Color, 80 minutes

Directed, produced, and written by Trent Shumway, Slava Siderman, and Tommy Watt

Starring Todd Crawford, Jason Fenton, Tommy Watt, Jeff McCullough, Patrick Crawford,

Leonard Clifton, Erich Troudt

Reviewed on VHS

Nearly five years ago—there's that number again!—I reviewed the vigorous little genre exercise **Y2K: SHUT DOWN DETECTED**, a millennial biohazard feature concept boiled down to a half-hour format and impressively expansive given its nothing budget. **Y2K** garnered considerable buzz amongst horror fans and genre scribes at the time thanks to its rock-em-sock-em energy, generated in no small part by sharp editing, a heart-pounding music score, and a visual scheme rich with secondary color palettes, top-notch make-up effects, and an extremely liberal application of computer-generated imagery. Now wreaking cinematic havoc under the shingle Cerberus Films, **Y2K** co-creators Slava Siderman and Trent Shumway have teamed with Tommy Watt and other dedicated film folks to devise **THE NEW CHAPTER**, a feature-length follow-up that shows considerable maturation in handling a storyline that craftily veers from one genre to another, unexpected one. I'm just apologetic to Cerberus that I let this film sit on our shelves for what's *felt* like five years.

Petty criminal Jacob Flannery (Todd Crawford) convinces ex-partner and priest-to-be Alex Stokley (Jason Fenton, **Y2K**'s white-collar hero) to help him pull off a job retrieving an unnamed object from a secluded warehouse for a powerful businessman known as Mr. Nick (Shumway). Being a well-connected thief, Flannery phones several sure-footed hoods to aid in the scheme: techie Ray Barns (Patrick Crawford), locksmith Morris Spivey (Leonard Clifton, another **Y2K** vet), driver Dutch Dalton (Erich Troudt), and armed wingmen Derrick (Tommy Watt) and Tucker (Jeff McCullough), the boorish Cassidy brothers. Scoping the target complex proves easy, but the septet encounters a very rude awakening when a vast hit-man army ambushes them in a parking garage. While hundreds of rounds ricochet between metal, concrete, and flesh, Dutch freaks and attempts a half-assed escape in their van before getting killed. Flannery eventually orchestrates a bullet-ridden exodus after which the team settles in a seedy motel to regroup for a second attempt the next evening. Strange incidents and revelations begin to test each man's individual composure, instilling their nerves with an all-too-apparent dread as they proceed with the break-in. Divulging any more story details would be criminal; let's just say that these men stumble upon a foe packing way more heat than the bunch of them could have ever imagined.

Much like what underground aficionados once thought about Ronnie Sorter's revenge thriller **RAVAGE** a decade ago, **THE NEW CHAPTER** escalates expectations about how well action can be rendered with a shot-on-video budget. The extended battle between Flannery's team and the goon squad is an impressively staged melee replete with CGI gun flashes, popping blood squibs, and mobile camera work that would doom lesser films incapable of

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capitalizing on its momentum. The Cerberus clan has more compelling aims than cinematic *machismo*, however, for what kept this viewer glued to the screen involved all the subsequent idiosyncrasies—a killer prostitute, an ominous Catholic confessional, a threatening bum—that mark the felons' path. **THE NEW CHAPTER** certainly has faults, chief among them single-note characterizations and a reliance on stereotypical tough-guy speak made bearable by entertaining turns from the ensemble, not to mention an ending that, while an undeniable zinger, feels as if it folds about 10 script pages too early. I'd also wonder if a quality film-look application would actually enhance the mood of this otherwise well-shot affair, muting the more obvious computer enhancements and bringing it up to par with the slick title sequence designed by Shelley Dutcher. Still, bully for Shumway, Watt, and Siderman for heading up an atypical drama like **THE NEW CHAPTER** and forcing me once again to wonder aloud what could be accomplished with resources and moneys worthy of their skills. —JaPan

MY LIFE WITH MORRISSEY

An Eclectic DVD video release of an Overt Pictures/Twelve Angry Films production 2003, 16mm, Color, 85 minutes
Directed and written by Andrew Overtom
Produced by Carolyn Y. Shaushkin, Tex Mootrevo, Lynn Hobson, and Karen Winters
Starring Jackie Buscarino, Eduardo Acosta, Carla Jimenez, Ben Watson, Jose Maldonado
Reviewed on DVD

This is a story about a girl who is completely obsessed with Morrissey, and where that obsession takes her. Jackie (Jackie Buscarino) spends her days working as a secretary and her evenings visiting various spots in LA that the former Smiths crooner has been spotted at. These include a house listed on a cheap "Map to the Stars" as Morrissey's, even though the real owner denies he's ever been there, and a record store that the singer once visited briefly to comb the stacks. At home, Jackie's bedroom is filled with every size and shape of Moz poster imaginable, where she sends herself off to sleep by using a vibrator and screaming her idol's name into the night.

After a chance encounter with the real Morrissey in a parking lot one evening, Jackie's world starts spinning out of control. She begins imagining that her quick ride home with the guy actually played out as a date culminating in sex, and tells all of her doubting co-workers about her apparent affair. ("Isn't he, you know, gay?" asks more than one person.) Jackie begins hanging out at the place where she met Morrissey, only to be accosted by a group of Catholic girls from the private school down the street. Again, she restructures the events in her head until it becomes yet another fling with her beloved Brit, and this time he attaches a wedding proposal to the deed.

MY LIFE WITH MORRISSEY is nicely made in the technical departments; the film quality is good, the sound is good, and the sets and locations work well for the storyline. However, the characters are just too extreme and over-acted to be remotely believable. When Jackie begins "going off the deep end," it's hard for the viewer to tell if she's lying to everyone around her to make herself feel important, or if she really believes what she's saying. When she suddenly begins consulting wedding planners and arranges to move out of her apartment to live with Morrissey—played by actor Jose Maldonado, FYI—then are we to understand that she is actually living this story and not just pretending? Maybe the outlandishness isn't surprising; director Andrew Overtom cut his teeth on kids' animation such as **SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS** and **THE ANGRY BEAVERS**. —Holly Day

PAINTED FIRE (CHI-HWA-SEON)

A Kino on Video release of a Taehung Pictures film
2002, 35mm, Color, 117 minutes
Directed by Im Kwon-taek
Produced by Lee Tae-won
Written by Kim Yong-oak and Im Kwon-taek
Starring Choi Min-sik, Yoo Ho-jung, Ahn Sung-ki, Kim Yeo-jin, Son Yae-jin,
Han Myung-goo
Reviewed on DVD

Im Kwon-taek won the 2002 Cannes Film Festival's Best Director award for this film, his 95th, and there's little doubt that he deserved it. **PAINTED FIRE** follows the life of the 19th century Korean painter Jang Seung-up, from living hand-to-mouth as a street urchin to faithfully copying the paintings of the masters as a promising young artist, then becoming one of the most sought-after talents in his country while supplanting the "cultured" and respected artists of the Japanese and Chinese courts. Called Ohwan by those close to him, Jang Seung-up is like a fish out of water in his surroundings—happy to just paint and be left alone, confused as to how he should act in the face of opportunity. He drinks too much, backs out of contracts that don't appeal to him, openly defies the militaristic Korean government, and eventually ends up a fugitive who fires and glazes simple pots for a living before disappearing into folk legend. Ohwan gives many of his paintings away to the people

around him for the simple fact that those he loves can't afford to pay him what his work is worth, essentially rewarding them with the means to leave their poverty and enter the same world where his skill as a painter once enabled him to exist.

Much like Ohwan's art, **PAINTED FIRE** is elegant and beautiful. The screen is filled with wonderful vistas of rounded mountains, wide poppy fields full of flowers and birds, rice fields and houses built into the landscape. Choi Min-sik plays Ohwan to perfection, subtly portraying the often drunk, lascivious, rough-mannered artist as a sympathetic character that deserves love and pity more than the mild disgust such characters usually arouse. In the end, Ohwan is regarded by the common people of Korea as a hero for his unrelenting stance against a corrupt government and for giving them a voice in the pureness of his art. —Holly Day

REVEREND BILLY & THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING

An Absolut Medien video release of a Play Loud! Productions film
2002, Video, Color, 58 minutes
Directed by Dietmar Post
Produced by Lucía Palacios
With Bill Talen
Reviewed on DVD

"Agitprop" and "Art" haven't necessarily made for the most comfortable bedfellows amidst the recent surge in grassroots political filmmaking, where slamming the message home often takes priority over creative use of the medium to do the same. German-born underground maverick Dietmar Post has found a way to avoid this arguable dilemma by profiling individuals who address corporate and governmental ills through performance and prank, thereby engaging his audience with built-in stimuli that makes palatable the preaching. Ironically, his first such excursion is **REVEREND BILLY & THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING**, a lively affair documenting four actions taken by a New York-based street theater "congregation," led by playwright/activist Bill Talen as the enigmatic Reverend Billy. This vociferous "man of the cloth" stages his sermons inside and outside the local storefronts of transnational businesses where he condemns their treatment of domestic and Third World wage earners as well as their intrusion into America's neighborhoods.

Here, the good Reverend leads his flock to a large Starbucks built in New York City's Astor Place and arranges a pilgrimage to the "High Church of Retail," a 42nd Street Disney Store in Times Square. Less amusing but more affecting is a double-dip of civil disobedience in Greenwich Village, where Billy and his entourage storm the rooftop of the legendary Poe House to dissuade New York University from tearing it down, returning a couple evenings later to recite *en masse* Poe's "The Raven" from across the street. This last excursion actually results in Talen's arrest by several testy officers, tacking an exclamation point onto comments made earlier in the film about breaching the "imaginary boxes" of others for what you believe in.

REVEREND BILLY the documentary is a moderate success, episodic by design and conventional enough in presentation to unobtrusively allow the Church of Stop Shopping plentiful room for singing, dancing, and ranting on-screen. The director combines his main footage with numerous behind-the-scenes snippets and battleground asides—African-American ladies in verbal disagreement with the *faux* gospel dressings, the billboard visage of a television actor made up as "rebel" James Dean looming over Talen in Reverend mode—to detail his documentary nicely, although some camera angles seem hastily chosen during the actions. "Reverend Billy" the persona is exciting to behold if not a particularly original "eccentric for the people," given the bar set *really* high by Nashville's Bruce Arntson in *EXISTO* (MF 4, p.14), but Talen telegraphs such a boyish exuberance in his marches through consumerist society that he easily holds our rapt attention. Hopefully, Post and producer Lucía Palacios will continue making smart choices with whomever they cover; next will be a portrait of Cold War-era American GIs engaging in ahead-of-its-time rock music, **THE MONKS: THE TRANSATLANTIC FEEDBACK**.

Don't miss the additional Talen interview included on the DVD, where the surprisingly low-key performer discusses his Dutch Calvinist upbringing, recalls his indoctrination into theater and activism, and recounts a telling anecdote about New York firefighters reacting to a Reverend Billy television appearance after battling the World Trade Center calamity all day long. —JaPan

C-U Confidential footnote: Dietmar Post's early 16mm effort *K.R.A.U.T.* was the first movie ever shown at the late *Freaky Film Festival*, on the night of November 1, 1997. Curiously, this parodic slice of SS super-cop action doesn't appear on the Play Loud! résumé, although the more notorious **BOWL OF OATMEAL** and **CLOVEN HOOVED** still do.

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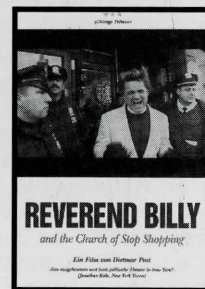
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PAINTED FIRE



REVEREND BILLY
& THE CHURCH OF
STOP SHOPPING

... A Tangled Web

by L. Rob Hubbard

In which we flail wildly around, searching for a venue.

Recently, I helped out a close relative, who is unaware of my writings for this publication and who has delusions of filmmaking grandeur. He did a decent job of filming a brilliantly written script, in my opinion, but it's not enough for him to merely have my praise in his efforts. My relative needs validation in the eyes of the world; to accomplish this goal, we prepare to conquer the film festival realm.

Most of my experience in festivals has been on the other side of the line, part of the ticket-buying public (and as press scammer, truth be told), which isn't really any preparation for when one attempts to actually have something screened at an event. Frankly, one wouldn't think that it would be that hard, since there appears to be any number of festivals nearby wherever one resides. Of course, there's a cottage industry in information on how to get picked for festivals or how to make a short that's perfect "festival bait."

After years of festival-going and of observing friends and associates putting their work up on the festival circuit, there's only one conclusion that I can come to: NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING.

Not original, I admit. I believe that screenwriter William Goldman famously coined the phrase in his summation of Hollywood, but it seems appropriate. One can read all the books and scan all the sites in trying to come up with some sort of scheme for getting one's film seen, but it merely seems to be a moveable goal whose standards change whenever the wind blows.

Frankly, the only thing to make sense is tailoring strategy according to the merits and strength of the film. Since we made a small film, we decided to start with "small" festivals (that wouldn't cost an arm and a leg to enter) just to get the film out there and seen by people who could get into it.

There is—or, was—MicroCineFest (www.microcinefest.org), held in Baltimore, Maryland, every fall; after a 2004 edition made up of the programmers' favorites, Skizz Cyzyk and friends might actually be taking a breather in 2005. So, we pay mind to two other festivals in the Midwest that sound interesting, the Fifth Annual Microcinema Fest and the Frankly Film Fest.

Microcinema Fest (www.microcinemafest.com) is a chance discovery; they've been active for years, and I'm only just hearing about them? Strange, I thought, until I saw that the festival had been held previously in Rapid City, South Dakota. This year, it will take place in Palatine, Illinois, just outside Chicago. According to the literature, Microcinema Fest is a week-long event running August 8-14—a two-day "film boot camp," then three nights of screenings—featuring tons of after-parties. Entry fees are cheap (in the \$5 and \$10 range), plus it's near the Windy City. It appears very promising, even if we don't get in.

The Frankly Film Fest is scheduled for September 23-25 in Middleton, Ohio, and is sponsored by Frankly Zoe Productions (www.franklyzoe.com). Founder R. "Zoe" Polley appears to be a filmmaker with links to the Middleton community who's grabbed the bull by the horns and is getting this microcinema festival off the ground. Entry fees are reasonable (\$20 short, \$40 feature) and deadline is July 15.

Having missed the deadline for the Inflatable Duck Film Festival (www.inflatableduck.org) in Denver—which just sounds great from the name alone, doesn't it?—I notice that all is not yet lost in Colorado. The Westcliffe Digital Film Festival (www.downtownwestcliffe.com/westcliffedigitalfilmfestival), August 26-28, is looking for entries that originate on DV: shorts, features, experimental, animation, you name it. They also state that "100% of profits from the Festival are given back to The Filmmakers as grants toward their next film." Hmmm.... The entry fee is reasonable; not as low as the others, but not out of bounds (\$35 for features, \$15 to \$25 for shorts), although the "late fee" of an extra \$20 is now in effect for the month of June.

That's just a small tip of the iceberg, so the odds are in our favor of getting seen someplace ... somewhere.

Until we tangle again...

REVOLUTION #9

An Exile Productions/cineBLAST! release of a Rockville Pictures film

2002, 16mm, Color, 91 minutes

Directed and written by Tim McCann

Produced by Shannon Goldman, Tim McCann, and Michael Risley

Starring Michael Risley, Adrienne Shelly, Spalding Gray, Callie Thorne, Michael Rodrick,

Sakina Jaffrey, Jase Blankfort

Reviewed on DVD

To those around him, James Jackson (Michael Risley) is changing. He begins accusing co-workers of secretly "moving his stuff," allows trash and maggots to pile up in his apartment, and tries to convince his fiancée Kim Kelly (Adrienne Shelly) that the commercial for the fragrance "Rev9" is sending him subliminal coded messages. In his desperation to understand them, James stalks commercial director Scooter McCrae (played by the late Spalding Gray, not the Scooter McCrae of SHATTER DEAD infamy) while mentally slipping further adrift, and Kim attempts to comprehend his developing schizophrenia and find him treatment and support.

Although the postmodern concept equating advertising and corporate commercialization with mental illness is intriguing, it never fully gels in REVOLUTION #9. It serves instead as a flimsy trigger for the beginnings of James' schizophrenia. The idea that increased commercialization leads to a break within the self has been well-addressed in too many science fiction tales to consider it seriously. This second feature from Tim McCann (DESOLATION ANGELS) functions best as an examination of a seemingly "normal" person's descent into schizophrenia, along with the struggles faced by those who surround him. As a family member or fiancée, how do you comprehend what is happening, and furthermore, how to you try to help them? As an outsider to the illness—such as a landlord or co-worker—how do you comprehend their newly strange behavior?

REVOLUTION #9 also serves as an indictment of the mental health care system of the United States, with its revolving door qualities. The film criticizes the willingness to impose psycho-pharmaceutical solutions, push the patient through the system as quickly as possible, and not follow through to discover the actual roots of the problem. Shot in a close, claustrophobic style that mirrors James' deteriorating mental state, the lead performances are believable and compelling, particularly Shelly (SUDDEN MANHATTAN) as the confused fiancée. Overall, the film is thought provoking if not as the intended anti-consumerist screed, but as a study of mental illness without any TV-Movie-of-the-Week drama, happy ending, or easy solutions. Look closely for CSI: MIAMI's Emily Procter as the "Rev9" girl in the commercial. — A.J. Michel

RUSSIAN ARK (RUSSKIY KOVCHEG)

A Wellspring Media video release of an Hermitage Bridge Studio/

Egoli Tossell Film AG production

2002, Hi-Definition Video, Color, 96 minutes

Directed by Alexander Sokurov

Produced by Andrey Deryabin, Jens Meurer, and Karsten Stöter

Written by Anatoly Nikiforov and Alexander Sokurov

Dialogue by Boris Khaimsky, Alexander Sokurov, and Svetlana Proskurina

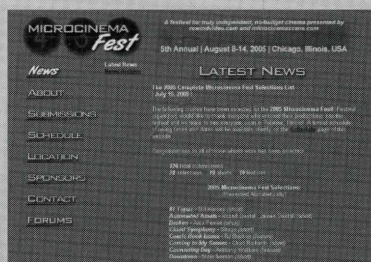
Starring Sergey Dreiden, Maria Kuznetsova, Leonid Mozgovoy, David Giorgobiani,

Alexander Chaban, Lev Yeliseyev, Oleg Khmelintsky, Alla Osipenko, Artem Strelnikov

Reviewed on DVD

"To make a film in one breath" is how director Alexander Sokurov describes RUSSIAN ARK, a film that explores 300 years of Russian history through the use of a single, uninterrupted Steadicam take supervised by cinematographer Tilman Büttner (RUN LOLA RUN). The "Ark" referred to in the title is the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Once a "Winter Palace" for the Tsars, and currently home to one of the largest art collections in the world, it's by way of this museum—with its massive halls and winding corridors—that we're led through a theatre of living history. Although the flow of events does not follow a strict chronology, even mixing anachronistic moments such as modern-day museum-goers interacting with the 19th century Marquis (Sergey Dreiden) who is our companion through much of the film, it's a feeling of reverie that ties us to the picture and an effortless sensation of gliding that heightens the dream-like state. In the words of one character, watching this film "feels like we're floating. It seems all this is but a dream."

The camera's extended "point of view" reflects our position as traveler and first-hand observer in the events we're experiencing, the sights and sounds of someone that's become "unstuck" in time. A special high-definition video system allowed the filmmakers to circumvent the changing of film reels, a technical limitation that (until recently) made it impossible for directors to accomplish a movie in a single take. Although others have experimented with this premise before, as Alfred Hitchcock did in ROPE (1948) by hiding reel changes with clever editing and camera tricks, none have succeeded so well. With only a day to shoot and several hundred performers to choreograph, the potential for error was great. The result is a truly unique film, which honors the revolutionary history and art that remains an important part of Russia's national identity. — Chad Fahs



SEAFARERS

2004, Video, Color, 78 minutes

Directed and produced by Jason Massot

With Lars Alfredsson, Timau Sapele, Bogo Skaricic, Emmanuel Topor

Reviewed on VHS

Within the empty, narrow corridors of a merchant ship docked in Rotterdam, the world's largest port city, *SEAFARERS* tells the lonely tale of four seamen from different nationalities and backgrounds as they wait to return back to the ocean. Lars, a Swede, is the film's masthead in that he has the most personal story to be told. At home, his wife has left him, taking the children and leaving him in a state somewhere between suicide and bewilderment. Despite this, Lars remains fascinated with and in awe of ships—even having met his wife aboard one—and although he admits never placing work before family, all that remains for him now as a constant is the seafaring. Timau, a Polynesian, hangs out with friends from his homeland, all of them looking vastly bored. They sing and play traditional songs on simple instruments in their downtime as well as watch videos of taped luaus, mailed to them from family members. Timau admits that they watch the tapes every day, sometimes twice. For them, the job is an adventure but also a necessity, as the money is sent home.

Bogot, perhaps the most colorful of the group, is the poster child for what will become of the other men (who are only in their thirties) if their lives remain the same. A grizzly, older Croat, Bogot swears constantly, drinks and smokes, and curses the Russians because they lowered the bar for all seamen by working for lesser pay. He lives the epitome of a wanderer's existence, signing the Holy Cross at the front door of casinos for luck and deducing the meaning of life in short outbursts. Bogot admits to being alone and claims not to be able to work elsewhere, forever bound to the sea, though he might just be too much of a drifter at heart. Emmanuel, a Nigerian, represents the men on the ship who are desperate for work and any money to send home, even as life in their homeland moves on without them. These men become miserable, overworked, and underpaid while the time drifts by, sharing none of Bogot's cynical resolution.

SEAFARERS succeeds in creating a portrait of these men, alike yet isolated from one another in their solitude. Throughout, they are allowed to segue into their own monologues, lending the film an honest voice but also threatening to lose focus and ship the director's original intent out to sea. Overall, it is an admirable effort by British documentary filmmaker Jason Massot, looking at the lives of men traveling boundless waters in search of meaning. In many ways, their transitory lives leave them free to see all corners of the world, yet they remain trapped in their memories of day-to-day life on land. The soundtrack by Will Oldham (a.k.a. Bonny "Prince" Billy) is available in the U.S. as *Seafarers Music* (Drag City). — *Erin Anadkat*

SLITCH

A Drag City video release

2000, 16mm, Color, 23 minutes

Directed and written by Dianne Bellino

Produced by Susan Littenberg

Starring Dina Cataldi, Kristen DeSanto, Sue Bellino, Lil Iacono, Will Oldham

Reviewed on DVD + CD

This is a cute film about a teenage girl who is a slut, but in the nicest possible meaning of the word; she's just interested in men's penises as men allegedly are of women's vaginas. Cartoon depictions of the male member as well as close-up shots of tennis players' crotches allude to this pubescent attraction in young Slitch (played by Dina Cataldi) without hitting the audience over the head with it.

Most of the movie is spent following Slitch's pursuit of the Surfer, played wonderfully by cult musician and occasional actor Will Oldham (MATEWAN). The Surfer is a skinny, pale character who dreams of someday leaving the Rhode Island shores to surf the big waves of Hawaii. Of course, anyone who's noted the contrast between Atlantic and Pacific swells will know how utterly ridiculous and suicidal this dream is. Anyway, Slitch sets her sights on the Surfer, despite his extremely introverted personality and apparent apathy towards her and, really, any other human being.

Director/writer Dianne Bellino manages to pack a lot of personality into this modest little short. Her attention to small details is what makes *SLITCH* work so beautifully, such as when Slitch's grandmother rambles to herself while drinking a beer in the family kitchen or when Slitch's older sisters pluck body hairs while yammering about their unattractive sibling. Hazy sunset scenes along the Rhode Island shoreline highlight the few lone surfers trying to make something of the three-foot swells calmly setting against the beach. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the excellent soundtrack written and performed by Oldham and David Pajo as the Continental OP, provided solo on the flip side of this DVD. — *Holly Day*

SPACE IS THE PLACE

A Plexifilm video release of a Warren Films/North American Star System production

1974, 16mm, Color, 82 minutes

Directed by John Coney

Produced by Jim Newman

Written by Joshua Smith

Starring Sun Ra and His Intergalactic Myth-Science Solar Arkestra, Ray Johnson,

Christopher Brooks

Reviewed on DVD

THE MAGIC SUN

A Music Video Distributors video release of an Atavistic Video presentation

1966, 16mm, B&W, 17 minutes

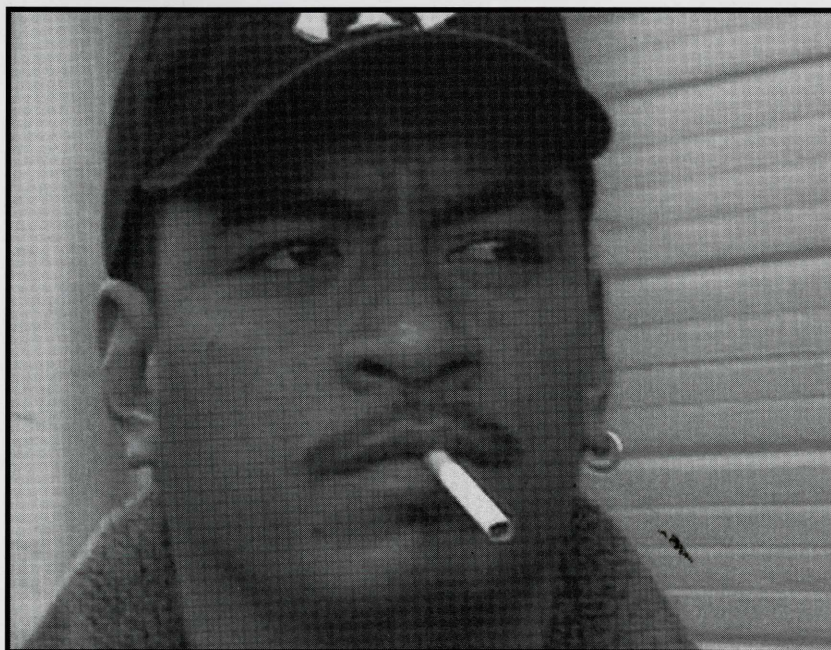
Directed by Phill Niblock

Produced by Robert Asen

Starring Sun Ra and His Solar Arkestra

Reviewed on DVD

SPACE IS THE PLACE is a cult movie made in the early 1970s, melding science fiction with Blaxploitation elements. The story, such as it is, involves the musician Sun Ra returning to Earth after having found a planet that could be a new home for African-Americans (or, for those of you in a retro frame of mind, "Blacks"). Landing in Oakland, he has to battle an old nemesis named The Overseer (Ray Johnson), a Luciferian entity whose main interest is in "keeping the race down," as well as FBI and NASA agents. All of them want to prevent Ra from spreading his word of an "alter-destiny" and leading volunteers into space.



Timau Sapele in
SEAFARERS.
(Courtesy
Jason Massot)

SPACE is a one-of-a-kind experience; it's very much a product of its time (as the fashions borne out) and the sci-fi elements are sort of intentionally low-tech. However, the performances by the Arkestra are timeless—one can see how much George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic was indebted to them, in look and stance—and the story is little more than a frame on which Sun Ra can illustrate his philosophies. Three decades later, they're still relevant as spoken by a man far ahead of the curve in more ways than one could imagine.

For many years, a cut version has been available on home video, but Plexifilm has gone all-out to present the director's intended edit (restoring 20 minutes of material) and more on the 30th anniversary DVD. *SPACE* is presented in an anamorphic transfer, and the bonus materials include interviews with director John Coney and producer Jim Newman as well as Sun Ra and His Arkestra performing in Egypt. The informative booklet has notes by Sun Ra biographer John Szwed (*Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra*), an introduction by Thurston Moore, and an essay on the making of the film by Coney. Highly recommended. — *Robert Hubbard*

On the other side of the Sun Ra universe, a near-abstract collaboration called *THE MAGIC SUN* sails along the intergalactic airwaves generated by the Arkestra's "space music" and its accompanying analog impressions, mated together by avant-garde filmmaker/photographer/musician Phill Niblock. Absent are the tropes of narrative storytelling or even the more archetypal

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experimental cinema; what elements Niblock sets forth on this Sun Ra journey escape summary in the formal sense, for its audio/visual pulse best resembles the organic mini-chaos one might find upon looking at a drop of seawater or smear of hot blood through a microscope lens.

In the opening seconds, a photo-negative "sun" rises into camera view accompanied by the alien wailing of a saxophone, then giving way to a rapid series of black-and-white, die-cut close-ups of the Arkestra performing, their percussion, flute, and wind instruments bewitching our consciousness. Very little becomes concrete to our eyes, save for the occasional fingertip depressing a note or the reversed-out effigy of Ra himself. These stark jazz-constructs become vigorously elastic about two-thirds of the way through, dashing in and out of frame like beating moth bodies in orbit around a street lamp. The Arkestra's Big Bang then comes to a close as modestly as it began, a soothing darkness reclaiming control over the clamor as the motion in Sun Ra's ocean settles, at least for now.

MVD/Atavistic's new DVD of *THE MAGIC SUN* is a rare commercial release from Soho artist Niblock, whose interest in multidisciplinary performance and creation spans the last several decades. Unlike *SPACE IS THE PLACE*, the contents of this disc—including a 15-minute long, scrolling photo gallery accompanied by four Sun Ra audio "proclamations"—harkens from an earlier Arkestra era in New York City circa 1963-67. Also unlike the subsequent sci-fi pastiche, *THE MAGIC SUN* will appeal to a very select audience, but at least they can rejoice over the pristine transfer and bell-clear soundtrack afforded this vintage communiqué, distinct evidence that another type of "space race" materialized while human beings regularly reached for the stars. —*JaPan*

SCIENCE BASTARD

An Exhilarated Despair production

2002, Video, Color, 27 minutes

Directed and written by Scott Phillips

Produced by Shannon Hale

Starring Devin O'Leary, Bob Vardeman, Samantha Phillips, Gregory Wright, Mike D'elia,

Stephanie Leighs, Scott Denning

Reviewed on VHS

Imagine Stan Lee and Sam Raimi getting together to collaborate on a low-budget superhero film. Now imagine slipping some LSD into their Kool-Aid. The results might look something like ... *SCIENCE BASTARD!* Of course, one man's legendary crime fighter is another's crazed vigilante, and the Bastard (Devin O'Leary) is crazier than most. Pushed around his entire life, he snaps one day and takes a power drill to his forehead, inspiring him to don black goggles and a jumpsuit in which he runs around attacking petty criminals with a wrist-mounted drill and other nasty devices. Similarly "inspired," one of his victims dons a pair of gigantic gorilla arms (?) as the evil Skunk Ape and runs around menacing people himself.

Skunk Ape (Mike D'elia) eventually captures the Bastard, taunting him and allowing his girlfriend, the aptly named Skunk Girl (Stephanie Leighs), to bite one of his nipples off (!). Left in the desert to die, the Bastard has a vision of Mr. Experiments (Gregory Wright), a dead television host with a catchphrase ("It's science!") who encourages the not-so-superhero to bash the apparition's head open with a rock and eat its "dead junkie" brains (!!) for strength. After recovering, the Bastard returns to his "epic" battle with Skunk Ape, which consists of them rolling around on the ground for a few seconds. The film then abruptly makes a segue into an alien invasion scenario, which culminates with the Bastard strangling said alien with its own intestines (!!!).

Writer/director Scott Phillips (*HORRORVISION*) and his clan have the enthusiasm of a group of kids with their first video camera, achieving slightly better results. O'Leary strives for a kind of Bruce Campbell vibe as the Bastard, but only occasionally reaches it. Still, his energy is infectious and they don't wear out their welcome. It might seem pretty stupid at face value, but *SCIENCE BASTARD* is perhaps best appreciated after imbibing in the mind-altering substance of your choice. After all, it's science! —*Jeff McCoy*

STACY

A Synapse Films video release of a GAGA Communications, Inc. production
2001, Digital Video, Color, 85 minutes

Directed by Naoyuki Tomomatsu

Produced by Hiromitsu Suzuki and Naokatsu Ito

Written by Chisato Ogawara, from the novel by Kenji Otsuki

Starring Natusuki Kato, Toshinori Omi, Chika Hayashi, Shungiku Uchida,

Yatsutaka Tsutsui

Reviewed on DVD

Part of Synapse Films' "Asian Cult Cinema Collection," *STACY* posits the good old apocalyptic tale of zombies run amuck in the world with a slight twist—teenage girls ages 15 to 17 have been perishing while experiencing a "Near Death Happiness" before keeling over and resurrecting as flesh-hungry zombies. This brings the world (and especially Japan) to the brink of collapse;

troops are deployed to execute and dispose of the barely-pubescent undead, referred to as a "Stacy," and home shopping networks market chainsaws to the public for the sole purpose of dismembering the poor things. In one storyline, a young girl named Eiko (Natusuki Kato) in the throes of Near Death Happiness spends her last few days with a puppeteer (Toshinori Omi). In another, the military establishes a facility in a women's art school for a leading scientist to develop a method for combating the disease, but the troops begin falling apart as the situation takes its toll.

STACY has no qualms about wearing its influences on its sleeve. The military divisions assigned to deal with the Stacies are the "Romero Repeat Kill Troops," the brand of chainsaw marketed on television is "Bruce Campbell's Right Hand 2," and one character wonders if they're in either *DAWN OF THE DEAD* or *DAY OF THE DEAD*. There's also a nod towards *THE HEROIC TRIO* and *CHARLIE'S ANGELS* with three Repeat Kill mercenaries-for-hire on the case. But the question is, what does it all add up to? There's gore aplenty, but it's not disturbing enough to be scary, and even though the tone is comedic there's something in the idea of young girls being killed by the people that they love the most—fathers, boyfriends, men in general—that gives the movie a queasy undercurrent. At least, looking at it from a Western cultural standpoint.

Synapse Films affords *STACY* a good DVD presentation, including valuable notes by author Patrick Macias (*TOKYOSCOPE: The Japanese Cult Film Companion*) that provides some perspective on the concept of *moe* and how it fits into the film. This helps considerably in interpreting a sequence where the puppeteer performs a wistful parable for Eiko, as well as the latter's role in the entire film and why exactly all of the Stacies are wearing sailor uniforms. Although, on figuring out why the chainsaw girl on the boob tube is wearing bunny ears, we're entirely on our own. —*Robert Hubbard*

(JAMES ELLROY'S) STAY CLEAN

A VL Bar Media/Cerberus Films production

2000, 16mm, B&W/Color, 10 minutes

Directed and written by Mitch Brian

Produced by Veronica Elliot and Mitch Brian

Starring Race Owen, Walter Coppage, Greg Kirsch, James Ellroy

Reviewed on VHS

James Ellroy (*L.A. Confidential*) is a hot writer, so it says a lot that he'd be nice enough to make a cameo appearance in a low-budget adaptation of one of his stories. The result, *STAY CLEAN*, also serves as a succinct showcase for the talents of director Mitch Brian and his cast and crew. Unfortunately, that's about all it does.

STAY CLEAN grabs our attention with its opening line—"I unclipped my self-sharpening, Teflon-coated, brushed steel ax and swung it at her neck...." We are then treated to a sharply edited montage of disturbing images as Plunkett (Race Owen), the deadpan narrator, slaughters a couple and their dog. He then steals a doggie treat, apparently as a souvenir, and cleans up the best he can. A couple of days later, a knock at the door heralds the arrival of the police, setting off a tense game of verbal cat-and-mouse between Plunkett and the lead detective (Walter Coppage). Unfortunately, after a shocking first act and a gripping second, Brian (who adapted this scenario from a segment of an Ellroy novel) doesn't provide a third! Even worse, when a motive for the massacre is revealed, it proves to be so twisted that it's impossible to sympathize with Plunkett, who apparently gets away with murder in an ending that comes off as incomplete and unsatisfying.

Still, Brian and director of photography Andrew Wegst shot most of *STAY CLEAN* in crisp black-and-white to capture the look of classic *film noir*, while the actors acquaint themselves quite well with Ellroy's sharp, hard-boiled dialogue. Owen has a strong Johnny Depp quality as Plunkett, making even this repulsive character compelling. Coppage is equally good as the detective, playing the kind of pit bull cop that's every crook's nightmare. If nothing else, the positives here might inspire a producer to back Brian's first feature, although it'll need to have a little more substance to it or, at the least, a better ending. —*Jeff McCoy*

TOKYO EYES

A Kino on Video release of a Tidepoint Pictures/VIZ presentation of a Lumen Films/
Euro Space production

1998, 35mm, Color, 94 minutes

Directed by Jean-Pierre Limosin

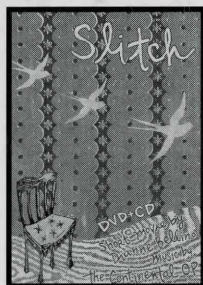
Produced by Hengamen Panahi and Kenzo Horikoshi

Written by Jean-Pierre Limosin, Santiago Amigorena, Philippe Madral, Yuji Sakamoto

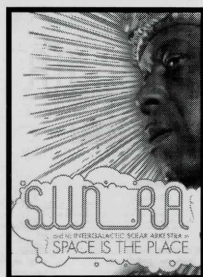
Starring Shinji Takeda, Hinano Yoshikawa, Kaori Mizushima, Tetta Sugimoto

Reviewed on DVD

TOKYO EYES is a film with a credit list that implies an odd aesthetic juxtaposition, as French critic and filmmaker Jean-Pierre Limosin directs a Japanese cast while working with European and Asian crew members.



SLITCH



SPACE IS
THE PLACE

Charles Band is an independent filmmaker whose career spans 30 years and more than 200 films. Born into the business through his father, the late director Albert Band, Charles has had a long-lasting and successful film career. His name might not be as recognizable as that of Steven Spielberg or George Lucas, but it is probably a safe bet you know his films from the video store shelves, late night cable, or even as pure guilty pleasures.

Titles like *PUPPET MASTER*, *DOLLMAN VS. DEMONIC TOYS*, *TRANCERS*, *METALSTORM*, and *SUBSPECIES* are hard to miss. It is because of titles like these, and the younger Band's unique take on low-budget genre fare, that he has lasted so long and has been able to build an empire (subsequent to his own Empire Pictures) and fan base under his Full Moon Productions banner. Yet, his latest effort does not contain any killer toys or time-traveling bounty hunters, but instead an interesting and sometimes insightful look at his craft.

CINEMAKER is a comprehensive kit filled with informative and entertaining secrets of the motion picture trade. Hosted by Band himself, CINEMAKER consists of six complete programs on six DVDs featuring expert advice and demonstrating straightforward technique on how to pull off one's film on time and within budget. Interviews with numerous veteran filmmakers such as Roger Corman, John Carpenter, Sandy King, Lloyd Kaufman, Fred Olen Ray, and Stuart Gordon give their personal takes on making and selling a movie.

Disk One starts with the conceptual aspects of pre-production on a film in "Planning It," making clear that anyone who wants to make a film has an idea of what film they want to make; however, just because that person *wants* to make a film does not mean he'll *get* to make the film he originally wanted. *Just because* your teacher in film school allowed you to explore your views of the world on film does not mean that a producer, production company, or financier are going to let you explore those views with their money.

Disk One teaches you to examine what is out in the marketplace and what is selling, and that movie-making is a business and not just about being a creative outlet, an important aspect that is not really taught in the film school environment. Band makes a concentrated effort to stress this, going into detail about how one should protect himself legally by setting up a company while detailing the different options for incorporation. By and far, this volume is one of the two most important and informative DVDs in the set.

Now that the filmmaker has his money, protection, and a saleable idea, it's time to make the film! Disks Two and Three cover Production ("Shooting It") and Post-Production ("Finishing It") in the CINEMAKER programs that are more textbook (and closest to film school) than the rest, which doesn't mean that they don't provide necessary information. Fascinating is listening to the ideals

and hands-on approach of a Carpenter or a Corman or a Gordon, or even Band himself; they avoid getting into the technical (how one loads a camera or reads an F-stop) and focus more on the aesthetic (remembering the 180° rule or avoiding dialogue bleeds in close-ups). These lessons might seem remedial, but it is very refreshing to hear the masters talk about the simplest aspects of the craft.

The fourth CINEMAKER disc, and probably the most valuable one aside from the first, is about marketing your movie. Just as the first volume makes appar-

ent all the precautions that must be endured to set up a film production, "Selling It" teaches the tips and angles on how to get the film seen by a large audience. Once again, it's refreshing to have a film lesson taught about getting your completed film *out there* rather than indulging on the artistic side of your film. Remember the source from which you are learning these tools when watching CINEMAKER—a filmmaker who makes 10 to 20 films a year in the business. He doesn't preach about landing one's film in a festival, but the importance of selling one's film to a distributor which hopefully facilitates a return and the means to make another movie. Band isn't quite passing along all of his secrets as to how you can accomplish what he does, but Disk Four still features plenty of insight on the matter.

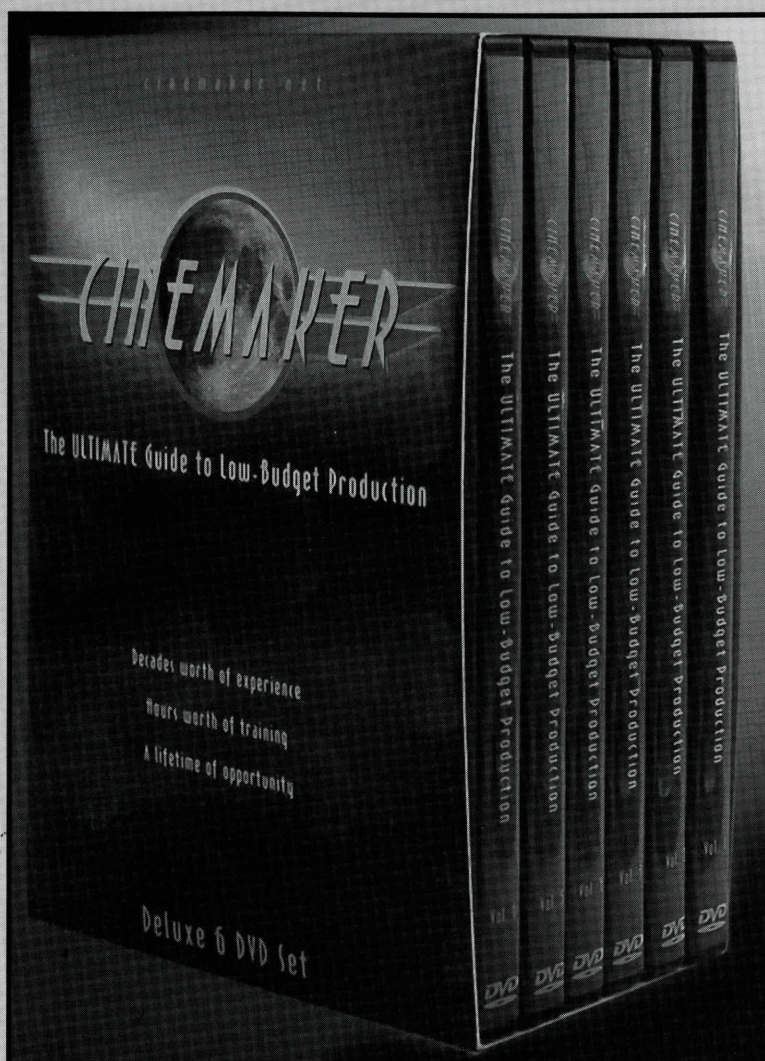
Disk Five provides examples of different companies that specialize in post-production, music scoring (including a nice plug for Gratis Music, sibling Richard Band's company), and delivering a final print to a distributor. This volume also includes promotional reels from various state film offices, reminding filmmakers that they don't have to be in Los Angeles to make a film. The best feature here is the CD-Rom element that allows you to download contracts, release, and budget demos onto your computer, incredibly valuable tools on any production level.

The sixth and final disk is almost superfluous, but enjoyable nonetheless. It features one of Band's Full Moon releases, *BLOOD DOLLS* (1999), a behind-the-scenes look at making the film, and a downloadable shooting script, echoing the sensibilities of a person who had been producing DVD supplements (with the old Full Moon VideoZones) long before consumers could buy or rent DVDs.

CINEMAKER is not for the casual viewer, but is a great tool for some-

one who is truly interested in making films, and it would not be a surprise to me if film teachers screen CINEMAKER as part of their lesson plans in the near future.

CINEMAKER. 2004, Video, Color, approx. 450 minutes (six volumes). A Cinemaker video release. Producer/Writer/Host: Charles Band. With: David Allen, John Carpenter, Roger Corman, Freddie Francis, Stuart Gordon, Courtney Joyner, Lloyd Kaufman, Sandy King, Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, William Lustig, Ted Newsom, Fred Olen Ray, Scott Spiegel. Reviewed on DVD.



(Photo: Cinemaker/Red Rooster Publicity)

Band of Filmmakers Inform Six-Part Lesson Plan

by Michael Wolinski

ZINES continued from page 48

Most of the above zines now occupy the uneasy limbo-land between "zine" and "magazine," having taken steps to establish a more professional-looking product. *Weirdness Before Midnight* (formerly *Camera In Your Foot*) is Dave Szurek's zine on film, and it is fairly "old school" with its paste-up layout and handwritten pages (due to some computer trouble). It may not be quite as slick as the other publications mentioned here, but WBM doesn't skimp on quality writing. Reading Szurek's prose is like hanging out with a friend for an afternoon, just talking about stuff. It mixes the personal with the film geekery, and it's pretty interesting.

That's it from my stacks right now!

Cinemad #7 & #8

2003/2004, downloadable PDFs (#8 only), free
Published and edited by Mike Plante

The Eclectic Screening Room #7

Fall 2002, 62 pages, digest, photocopied, \$4 ppd
Published by Dutch Angle Press
Edited by Greg Woods

Shock Cinema #25 & #26

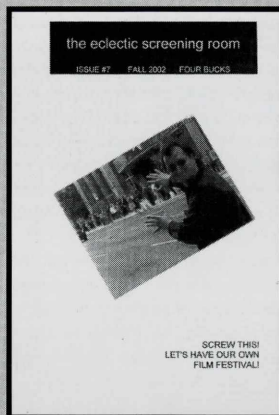
2004, 48 pages each, full-sized, offset, \$5 each ppd
Published and edited by Steve Puchalski

Psychotronic Video #39 & #40

2004, 88 pages each, full-sized, offset, \$8 each ppd
Published and edited by Michael Weldon

Weirdness Before Midnight #2

2003, 50 pages, full-sized, photocopied, In trade + letter or \$2.50 ppd
Published and edited by Dave Szurek



Want your film magazine/zine reviewed? Send it to
MICRO-FILM, P.O. Box 45, Champaign, IL 61824-0045.

All prices above include shipping for Unites States orders only. Contact information appears
at the end of the Reviews section for the publications reviewed in this column.

STRANGE continued from page 52

First thing of note is the filming scheme; Flemming and crew engaged in what has been termed "reality hacking," where the movie's characters interact with actual events. James appears twice behind a public microphone at a police commission meeting to censure the force and, in shades of Haskell Wexler's *MEDIUM COOL*, Citizens for Truth marches along with other protestors at the 2000 Democratic National Convention, all while the cameras roll! Some of the funniest and saddest moments in the movie appear here, as non-fictional onlookers join in rallying against the LAPD without knowing which scandal these "activists" protest. There are just that many scandals to choose from.

And then, there's the producers' groundbreaking use of the Internet. An entire universe of NOTHING SO STRANGE Web sites continues the film's fiction in cyberspace, developed in conjunction with their fellow high-concept non-documentarians at Haxan Films (THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT). These include home pages for Citizens for Truth (www.citizensfortruth.org), a splinter group called Citizens for Action (www.citizensforaction.org), and an on-line archive of the Los Angeles County district attorney's office report on the Gates assassination (www.garcettireport.org).

Finally, the special features that might normally be included on a second DVD have been made available for on-line purchase (cents, not dollars) through the micropayment system Bitpass. [This is in addition to the extra material already on the DVD, including a droll "where-are-they-now" commentary track with Flemming, Pike, and James. — ed.] NOTHING SO STRANGE is also the first "open source" feature, meaning that the 70 hours of raw footage collected by the filmmakers is also available for download to anyone wishing to edit together their own Gates assassination documentary.

One can only hope that such forward-thinking use of computer technology would have made the late Mr. Gates proud.

Oh, wait. Right. Sorry. Forgot.

NOTHING SO STRANGE. 2003, Digital Video, Color, 78 minutes. An Unsharp Mask, LLC video release of a GMD Studios presentation. Director/Producer: Bruce Flemming. Executive Producers: Brian Clark, Tammy J. Kearns. Music: Mary Rosh. Original Assassination Footage: Abraham Altgens. With: David James, Laurie Pike. Reviewed on DVD.

Reading the packaging, which proclaims an "expert combination" of "post-New Wave French filmmaking" and "contemporary Japanese vanguard cinema," one may catch a certain whiff of gimmickry, styles crushed together into a pretentious potpourri. The smell worsens when you see that the cover touts a special appearance by legendary writer/director/actor Takeshi "Beat" Kitano (*VIOLENT COP*, *BATTLE ROYALE*) because, well, what's a cameo if not another gimmick?

In this case, the cameo is just one more subtle turn in a film surprisingly full of well-formed, quiet moments. *TOKYO EYES* tells the story of Hinano (Hinano Yoshikawa), a 17-year-old hair dresser who, after a chance meeting on a train, discovers the true identity of an odd vigilante the papers call "Four Eyes," a bespectacled gunman whose bullet always seems to miss its target. Hinano follows the young man, maybe to help her policeman brother (Tetta Sugimoto) track down the criminal, maybe to satisfy her own curiosity.

Whatever her original intent, Hinano finds herself falling in love with "Four Eyes," an unguarded, languid hipster who calls himself "K." Played with a winning mixture of timidity and self-assuredness by Shinji Takeda, "K" reveals that the barrel of his gun is bent, the glasses he wears blurs his vision, and his attempted murders are intended to scare his victims into being better people. A racist bus driver tries to refuse a family of Iranians a ride? A sleazy bouncer won't let some poor guy follow his girl into the club? A bookstore owner is irretrievably rude? Fire a bullet past their ear to make them better people.

It's an absurd crusade, but the absurdity adds an edge to "K" and Hinano's courtship. Both the audience and Hinano are never quite sure how far to trust the guy with the gun; is he a romantic moralist or a killer pulling ever-so-close to pulling the trigger for real? Limosin's use of a kinetic camera that speeds up, slows down, and at one point leaves the principals to travel Tokyo's back alleys on its own does indeed feel "post-New Wave," but it blends well with the backdrop of electronic beats and hyperactive technophilia in Japanese urban youth culture. These stylistic flourishes still allow the oddly endearing love story to come to the fore, and even by the time "Beat" Takeshi appears as a bumbling Yakuza underling, it plays out less like an opportunistic cameo and more like a nod of approval from a master of international cinema. — Damian Duffy

TRIBUTARY

2001, Video, Color, 70 minutes
Directed by Russ Forster
Reviewed on DVD

Open any suburban or small town newspaper and you'll inevitably see advertisements for tribute bands playing in the local bars. Why do these musicians choose to play someone else's music instead of their own original material? Furthermore, why do they take these performances to extremes by styling themselves in the image of the band or individual they are paying tribute to? In *TRIBUTARY*, director Russ Forster (*SO WRONG THEY'RE RIGHT*, *8-Track Mind*) examines this phenomenon by providing a broad overview, illustrated by the musicians and fans that populate very small segments of this sizeable genre.

Forster divides tribute bands into four categories: Postmodern, Working, Social, and True Love. While "Working Tribute Bands"—those bands that make an actual living from their shows—operate on a completely different level, it can be argued that the other three categories are arbitrary and could be blended into one. However, through the bands selected for study in each division, Forster makes a compelling argument for his classifications.

The strength of *TRIBUTARY* is the range of tribute acts presented. Not only are the usual suspects interviewed, such as Sticky Fingers (Rolling Stones), Time of Dying (Led Zeppelin), Power Windows (Rush), and High Voltage (AC/DC), but also more unusual choices. For example, Futuristic Dragon (T. Rex) does not feature one specific "Marc Bolan," and they re-interpret the songs in reggae, country, and blues versions. Ace's High is composed of four Ace Frehley (of Kiss) imitators. Herb (Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass) has a dedicated following among a range of ages. The Brothers E is a team of "fat era" Elvis impersonators. The most obscure tribute band is Giant Bug Village, "dedicated to spreading the gospel of Guided by Voices and Bob Pollard."

Along with a "director's blabber," the DVD includes a nice bonus—full song performances by 20 of the tribute bands! The aural and visual quality of these live performances varies greatly, which is understandable; material taped in a church basement or an Elks' lodge is not going to register as well as that captured in a small club tricked up with spotlights and a professional sound system. And, while *TRIBUTARY* may not provide a definite answer to the question, "So, why T. Rex (or Rush, or the Who, or the Dead Boys, or...)," it's still a very enjoyable peek at the tribute band culture and those musicians who take the stage to honor their influences, have some fun, give the crowd what they want, and (occasionally) get paid well for the effort. — A.J. Michel

URBAN VISIONS

A Lowave video release

2002, Super8/16mm/MiniDV, B&W/Color, 80 minutes

Curated by Marc Horchler and Silke Schmickl

Reviewed on DVD

The massive success of the DVD format has been a boon for the short film. Usually included as extras on programs either as contextual complements or for fans who want to see every last frame of a specific director's work, shorts have become all the rage again with their newfound marketability. Specialized DVD labels are actively seizing the moment to place these works in the foreground and distribute them to a wider audience, such as the Parisian company Lowave. Their debut release, **URBAN VISIONS**, compiles 11 shorts from European and American filmmakers that all thematically relate to urban settings and interactions therein. Most works are experimental, such as Roger Beebe's **THE STRIP MALL TRILOGY** (2001), an attempt to "map urban sprawl," Gorka Aguado's **PUSH** (2001), a collage-ballet of colors and sounds of the push-button society, and Corrina Schnitt's **RAUS AUS SEINEN KLEIDERN** (**GET OUT OF YOUR CLOTHES**, 1998-9), a playful take on laundry, urban living, and spatial relations. Some are narrative, such as the Lombardi-Clan's **DER LETZTE FLUG** (**THE LAST FLIGHT**, 1999-2001) and Sean Baker's **HI-FI** (2001), both linked by the subject of drugs (specifically, heroin), and Rudolf Buitendach's **WHEN THE FLOOR BECAME THE CEILING** (2001). With its eclectic mixture of formats, styles, and approaches, **URBAN VISIONS** should satisfy the adventurous cinephile, artschool-damaged freek, or those just looking for something different. The disc also includes a biography and filmography of all the directors and teams whose work appears here, as well as short statements from most of them. More recent Lowave compilations include the self-explanatory **LUST: 12 SEXY SHORTS** and **METRONOMIC & CO: FRENCH ANIMATED SHORTS**. — Robert Hubbard

THE VAN

A Tri-Toad Films production

2003, Digital Video, Color, 88 minutes

Directed, produced, and written by Tyler Burk, Aaron Burk, and Brad Paulson

Starring Colin Malone, Jason Altman, Nick Daley, Ria Solova

Reviewed on DVD

Shot on digital with a (mostly) unknown cast, **THE VAN** is a glorious example of no-budget filmmaking at its finest. At first glance, the concept—an anthology film constructed around the history of an automobile—might sound a bit like Anthony Asquith's 1964 film **THE YELLOW ROLLS-ROYCE**. However, similarities between the two end right there. For better or worse, **THE VAN** is truly a one-of-a-kind proposition. The sheer audacity and ballsy verve of its creators makes this little gem a thoroughly entertaining oddity.

Perhaps the most commendable aspect of **THE VAN** is the fact that neither it nor the filmmakers attempt to offer any pretensions; its plot synopsis gleefully describes it as the story of a serial killer who "possesses a van with his demonic soul." Filmmakers Burk, Burk, and Paulson have intentionally crafted a B-movie filled with gore, marijuana smoke, over-the-top outrageousness, and blatant sensuality. The moment we see a mentally-challenged character (played by a mentally-challenged actor!) being exploited for cheap laughs, we know that all bets are officially off. These guys will do anything to entertain us, whether we damn well like it or not. And, try as he or she might to not like it, even the most politically-correct viewer will find themselves chuckling right along with the filmmakers when the handicapped dishwasher-turned-killer screams, "Hey, what about my hand-job?!"

THE VAN has downsides: the acting is frequently wooden, the first vignette wraps without any real payoff, nudity that is promised throughout the film is never delivered (hey, it's a B horror movie!), the final vignette wanders along aimlessly at times, and the picture occasionally pixilates due to low lighting. However, what the film lacks in technical proficiency, it more than makes up for in charm. During a time when virtually every other horror film looks exactly the same, **THE VAN** is a winner. One shudders to think what these boys might be able to accomplish with some real financing. Top-billed Colin Malone is best known for his music show **COLIN AFTER DARK** and the infamous **COLIN'S SLEAZY FRIENDS**. — Andrew J. Rausch

WASH DRY & SPIN OUT

A Running Entertainment production

2003, Video, Color, 85 minutes

Directed, produced, and written by Dan Patton

Starring Tyler Lindsay, Zoska Alece, Randy Thomas, Jason Morck

Reviewed on DVD

Imagine, if you will, seeing **PULP FICTION** for the first time. There's a great moment in the film where Vincent Vega (John Travolta) turns to Marvin (Phil LaMarr) in the back seat of the car. The car hits a bump, Vincent's gun dis-

charges, and poor Marvin takes an unintentional bullet between the eyes. "Oh, shit, Jules," Vincent says, "I just shot Marvin in the face." This scene, despite its horrible content, is one of the biggest laughs in recent cinema. Tell me you didn't laugh. I won't believe you.

PULP FICTION is actually full of such moments, and by "such moments" I mean the actions and scenes that are not inherently funny but make us laugh anyway. This sort of juxtaposition works here because Quentin Tarantino's screenplay makes us like these people and care about the things they do. I bring up **PULP FICTION** because Dan Patton could serve to learn a thing or two from Mr. Tarantino. **WASH DRY & SPIN OUT**, Patton's feature film debut, is full of moments that are supposed to be funny, but are not. Why? Because its characters are deplorable, despicable people that you wish could take a bullet in the face like dear old Marvin.

The alleged plot concerns three pretty boys who go on a drunken binge and then methodically terrorize the patrons of a 24-hour Laundromat. They behave in this manner because they can, because this is the sort of thing they do, and because their creator thinks they're funny. He should be reminded that there is very little funny about stealing social security money from old codgers, tricking paraplegics out of their wheelchairs, and listening to someone blaming his vendetta against society on the fact that he once couldn't get it up; all of these things happen and are worked for alleged laughs in **WASH DRY & SPIN OUT**.

Create characters an audience will care about and they'll play along with anything you write. Paint awkward stereotypes into uncomfortable positions and an audience probably won't finish watching your so-called "morality tale." Let's hope that Mr. Patton takes some writing classes before deciding to make another film. — Aaron Matthew Polk

THE WORK OF DIRECTOR SPIKE JONZE

A Palm Pictures/Directors Label video release of a Russia, Inc. production

2003, Film/Video, Color/B&W, approx. 240 minutes

Directed by Spike Jonze

Collection produced by Vincent Landay and Richard Brown

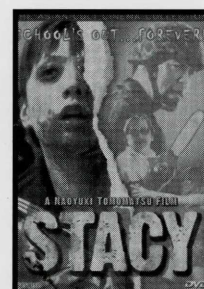
Reviewed on DVD

THE WORK OF DIRECTOR SPIKE JONZE is a collection of videos, commentary, rarities, and short films that illustrate the lauded filmmaker's creativity. Of the 16 featured videos on Side A of the DVD, there are notable standouts although each video showcases common themes and an evolution in technique. Jonze stays true to his roots with clips like "Sabotage" by the Beastie Boys, opting for irreverent treatment with an effectively minimalist style, while retaining his touch in more polished efforts like "Drop" by The Pharcyde. Throughout the selections, some themes recur—a love for choreography ("It's Oh So Quiet" by Björk), pop iconography ("Buddy Holly" by Weezer), and star cameos (Axl Rose exiting a bus in Wax's "California"). An evolution from organic, frenetic camerawork and editing to slick, controlled takes can be witnessed when viewing the videos back-to-back. Jonze's crown jewel is the sublime video for Fatboy Slim's "Weapon of Choice," featuring a running, jumping, tap-dancing, and soaring Christopher Walken.

On the commentary tracks of Side A, the artists often speak of Jonze as innovative, detail-oriented, and endlessly creative in his collaborations. Notable is the "Weapon of Choice" contribution from Norman Cook, a.k.a. Fatboy Slim, standing out from the pack with statements like, in reference to Walken's moment of flight, "[It's] the only time he stops looking like a psycho and starts looking like an angel." Not that Walken's own take is dull; while watching the same scene, the actor comments that he was "hanging around in the air like a frankfurter." The obvious brevity of these discussions is augmented by three interview pieces featuring many of the musicians on-camera as well as an additional Jonze interview in the DVD booklet.

Along with additional videos by Daft Punk, Fatlip, Dinosaur Jr., the Breeders, MC 900ft Jesus, the Notorious B.I.G., and the Chemical Brothers, Side A features four previews. Expectantly, two are for the other inaugural releases in the "Directors Label" series featuring Chris Cunningham (Björk's "All Is Full of Love") and Michel Gondry (**ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND**). A teaser for a skateboarding film is third, while the fourth is the real treat—a first-rate trailer for **ADAPTATION**, Jonze's second feature film.

Side B begins with "Rarities," short films and video treatments showcasing Jonze's sense of humor, of which "How They Got There" stands out. Intriguingly, an idea for an Oasis video that never happened (covered in a segment called "The Oasis Video that Never Happened") is nearly identical to a Cake video that later made the MTV rotation. Another hoot is the video that led to Fatboy Slim's "Praise You" clip. The selection concludes with three documentaries, each roughly a half-hour in length. **WHAT'S UP FATLIP?** covers the making of the like-named video, while **AMARILLO BY MORNING** chronicles an afternoon spent with two young cowboys in Texas and **TORRANCE RISES** details the road to the MTV Video Music Awards traveled by the *faux* dance troupe featured in "Praise You." The first side of this disc is more enjoyable, but overall **THE WORK OF DIRECTOR SPIKE JONZE** is a great collection. — Danielle Cloutier

Reviews
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STACY



TOKYO EYES

PANELS & FRAMMIES

by
Damian
Duffy

Brian Biggs graphic novel *DEAR JULIA* is a brilliantly haunting puzzle of a comic about a man named Boyd Solomon who's desire to fly is probably driving him insane.

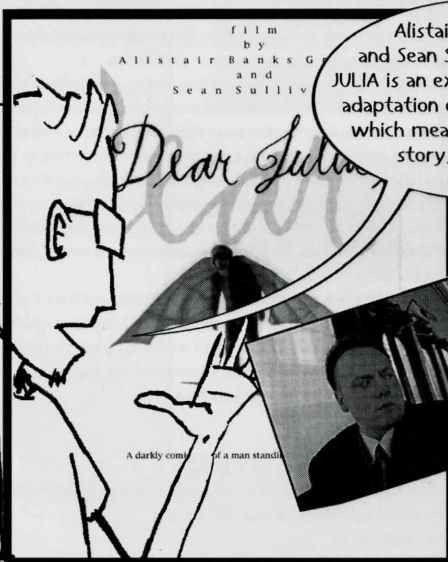
Dear Julia

BRIAN BIGGS



film
by
Alistair Banks Griffin
and
Sean Sullivan

Alistair Banks Griffin and Sean Sullivan's film *DEAR JULIA* is an extraordinarily faithful adaptation of the graphic novel, which means it tells the same story, but not quite as well.



A darkly comic of a man standing

This is nothing against the film. It's a quirky, ingenious short that skillfully uses clever camera work to overcome budgetary restrictions.



The actors are well cast and step into their roles admirably.

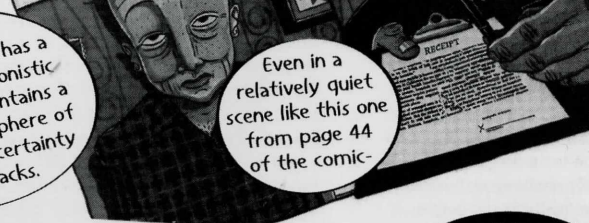
The main problem is the film...

...can't compare to this.

-Biggs' art and storytelling has a creepy expressionistic quality that maintains a constant atmosphere of tension and uncertainty the film lacks.

Even in a relatively quiet scene like this one from page 44 of the comic-

It was for my own good.



The opposite is true of Lev's comic/short film *TALES OF MERE EXISTENCE*; the movie is better than the comic.

The aptly titled semi-autobiographical work seeks to engage the mundane commonplace through the lens of cartooning.

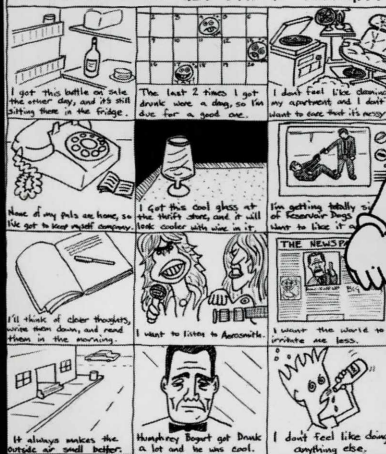
This is well tread indie comics ground, and, although mildly diverting, Lev's comic strips can't contend* with similar works by cartoonists with a more polished style.

The *TALES* movie, on the other hand, is brilliant in its comedy and biting wit, with an art style even cruder than is seen in the comic.

In the film, Lev narrates his comic strips while drawing them from behind a backlit piece of paper taped to glass.

The immediacy of the drawing, the charming vaudevillean nature of this low-fi "animation" and Lev's Steven Wright-esque deadpan delivery all make *TALES OF MERE EXISTENCE* a greater success in frames than it is in panels.

12 REASONS TO GET DRUNK TONIGHT



the
Pretty Good
Jim's
Journal
Treasury

the
Definitive
Collection
Every
Published
Comic
Strip
by
Jim

the
American
Elephant

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Please see p.62 for film credits.

Reviews Micro-Film Style

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Reviews Micro-Film Style

Fangoria's 101 Best Horror Movies You've Never Seen

2003, 288 pages, softcover, \$13.00

Written by Adam Lukeman

Edited by Anthony Timponi and Michael Gingold

Published by Three Rivers Press/Crown Publishing Group

When *Famous Monsters of Filmland* was originally sent packing to the periodical rack in the sky in the early Eighties, I inevitably refocused my reading energies on the more sophisticated genre film titles such as *Starlog*, *Cinefantastique*, and *Fantastic Films*. There's only one today that I still read cover-to-cover each issue, *Fangoria*. Call me creepy, consider me morbid, I don't care—*Fango* cracks me up consistently with the wild international menagerie it features, even if it still wastes more pages per outing than rival *Rue Morgue* on studio-produced shill. Despite the latter magazine's rise in popularity, *Fango* has held its dominance in covering horror media not only due to longevity—the 25th anniversary issue came out last summer—but also by the publishers' aggressive marketing scheme. No less than four video companies have licensed their name and/or picked up their film productions, not to mention all the tie-in books and goodies concocted over the years. This brings us to *Fangoria's 101 Best Horror Movies You've Never Seen*, a light and breezy blurb-a-thon assembled by writer and filmmaker Adam Lukeman championing flicks that were either walloped at the American box office, unduly scorned upon their first appearance, or dumped into the home-video graveyard with no fanfare. As long-time *Fango* editor Anthony Timponi says in his introduction, veteran readers of the book's namesake will recognize some or most of the movies written about here, and he's right. (Take my word for it; the entire run hogs floor space here at the Secret MICRO-FILM Headquarters.) However, as a primer for encouraging fright film fans to rediscover what they've missed, this hit list of non-hits isn't bad, given Lukeman's controlled rah-rah writing style and the interesting factoids dropped throughout. Readers looking for 1. serious analysis, 2. pre-1980 fare, or 3. underground and backyard cinema won't find much substance of worth in this book, but with the reasonable (and numerically foreboding) cover price it's certainly a decent gift idea for turning on young horror fans to bloody good cinema that has nothing to do with Michael, Freddy, Jason, Leatherface, Pinhead, or the SCREAM and SCARY MOVIE franchises. Features a "DVD source list" and an index. —JaPan

Japanese Giants #10

October 2004, 64 pages, magazine, offset, \$10 ppd

Published and edited by Ed Godziszewski

Speaking of *Fangoria*, let's harken back a ways—25-ish years, to be almost exact—when *Fango* #1 made its bow in late 1979, counter-programming in an era of THE AMITYVILLE HORROR and HALLOWEEN with a cover story on none other than Godzilla. (Make that GODZILLA, considering his stature.) Written by long-time G-journalist and collector Ed Godziszewski, the feature gave American fans a much-appreciated lowdown on the series with relatively accurate information and seldom-viewed stills. A quarter of a century later, Godziszewski has amassed numerous writing credits on all things Godzilla in magazines, Web sites, and a great self-published "illustrated encyclopedia" that shames other mid-Nineties, English-language tomes in a similar vein. Eking out a sporadic existence alongside all this activity, the writer's own *Japanese Giants* became a source for dependable behind-the-scenes stories on Japan's "special effects films" (of which only a nominal percentage star giant monsters, believe it or not) and rare, translated interviews with their makers.

Nowhere else is his love and respect for this often-derided genre more apparent than in *Japanese Giants* #10, a hearty issue-long tribute to the original GODZILLA, released 50-ish years ago on November 3, 1954. Enveloped in a beautiful, aquamarine cover painted by Bob Eggleton, JG #10 details the production of director Ishiro Honda's moody anti-bomb parable with a nicely orchestrated article by the editor, supplemented by more than a dozen sidebars from other writers. Half of these provide biographies for or interviews with the major personalities entrusted by Toho Studios to pull off this unorthodox venture—for 1954 Japan, anyway—while the other half delves into additional dimensions of GODZILLA such as the music score, publicity stunts, and scenes not filmed or deleted. The issue culminates with a lengthy nod to unheralded production designer Yasuyuki Inoue and a round-table dialogue featuring the recently retired 81-year-old and several proteges, talking earnestly about their challenges in a studio system that lacks Hollywood resources. While GODZILLA and its sequels, spin-offs, rip-offs, and bastard offspring with a thing for Matthew Broderick might seem outside the typical MICRO-FILM scope, I include *Japanese Giants* here in order to give Mr. Godziszewski and crew praise for creating this quality example of small-press movie discourse. And, well, um, to get my kaiju geek on. Aaaaaarrgh. —JaPan

Panels & Frames

Dear Julia,

2000, 112 pages, softcover, \$12.95

Written and drawn by Brian Biggs

Published by Top Shelf Productions

DEAR JULIA,

An Influence Machine production in association with Top Shelf Productions

2001, 16mm, Color, 20 minutes

Directed by Alistair Banks Griffin

Produced by Sean Sullivan and Alistair Banks Griffin

Starring Christian De Rezendes, John Los, Michael Grando

Reviewed on VHS

Tales of Mere Existence #1

Book: 2003, 12 pages, magazine, offset

+ DVD: 2003, Video, Color, 7 minutes, \$9.00

Written, drawn, and animated by Lev

Contact Information

AMONG US, CHINA WHITE SERPENTINE: Sub Rosa Studios, P.O. Box 2468, Liverpool, NY 13089, (315) 652.3868, fax (315) 622.2315; www.b-movie.com

THE BONESETTER: Tempe Video, 3727 W. Magnolia Blvd., #241, Burbank, CA 91510-7711, fax (818) 762.5707; dvd.tempevideo.com

BRAINWASH TV: The Brainwash Movie Festival, P.O. Box 23302, Oakland, CA 94623-0302, (415) 273.1545; www.brainwashm.com

BRIGHT FUTURE, THE WORK OF DIRECTOR SPIKE JONZE: Palm Pictures, 76 Ninth Ave., Suite 1110, New York, NY 10011, (212) 320.3600, fax (212) 320.3709; www.palmpictures.com

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY: Jeremiah Kipp, 114 President St., #3, Brooklyn, NY 11231; www.jeremiahkipp.com

Cinemad: Cinemad/Mike Plante, P.O. Box 360965, Los Angeles, CA 90036; www.cinemadmag.com or cinemadaz@yahoo.com

CINEMAFAKER: Cinemafaker, 1626 Wilcox Ave., Suite #474, Hollywood, CA 90028; www.cinemafaker.net

DEAR JULIA, Dear Julia: Chris Staros, Top Shelf Productions, PO Box 1282, Marietta, GA 30061-1282, fax (770) 427.6395; www.topshelfcomix.com

DEFIANCE: doveedlinder@hotmail.com or www.lionsgatefilms.com

DELETERIOUS: www.kenosisfilms.com/deleterious/index.htm

DREAMERS: www.pathfinderpictures.com

the eclectic screening room: Greg Woods, PO Box 92505, Carlton R.P.O., Toronto, Ontario, M5A 4N9, Canada; www.geocities.com/eclecticscreeningroom or dutchanglepress@yahoo.ca

The Encyclopedia of Underground Movies: Michael Wiese Productions, 11288 Ventura Blvd., Suite #621, Studio City, CA 91604, (800) 833.5738, fax (818) 986.3408; www.mwp.com

Fangoria's 101 Best Horror Movies You've Never Seen: Three Rivers Press/Crown Publishing Group, 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, (212) 572.2537, fax (212) 940.7868; www.randomhouse.com

H.H. HOLMES: Waterfront Productions, P.O. Box 461309, West Hollywood, CA 90046, (323) 623.9085; www.hhholmesthefilm.com or www.facets.org

HORRORTALES.666: Falcon Video, c/o Phil Herman, P.O. Box 940312, Rockaway Beach, NY 11694; www.geocities.com/pharmon/Falconvideo.html

I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW: Alan Rowe Kelly/New Millenium Pictures, Ltd., 24 Mill St., #326, Paterson, NJ 07501; www.illburyyoutomorrow.com

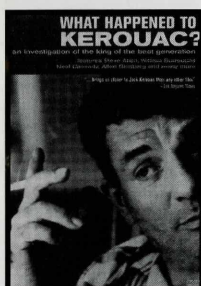
I. ZOMBI: Jeremy Newman, 915 Park Avenue, Elyria, OH 44035; jernew8@yahoo.com

Japanese Giants: Japanese Giants, P.O. Box 30078, Chicago, IL 60630; edgoji@yahoo.com

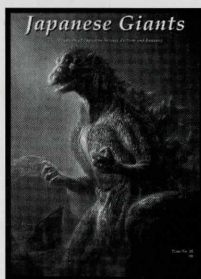
JAR JAR BINKS: THE F! TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY: Film Threat DVD, 5042 Wilshire Blvd., PMB 1500, Los Angeles, CA 90036, (818) 248.4549, fax (818) 248.4533; www.filmthreatdvd.com

LAST STOP STATION: Andy Kumpon, 3811 E. 15th Ave., Spokane, WA 99223, 509.838.2540; laststopstation@yahoo.com or www.lindenmuth.com

LAUGHING BOY: Laughing Boy Productions, attn: Joe Grisaffi, 9216 Westwood Village, Houston, TX 77036; www.grisaffi.com/laughingboy.html



WHAT HAPPENED TO KEROUAC?



Japanese Giants

LOSERS LOUNGE: DL Sites Productions, 516 E. 15th St., Indianapolis, IN 46202, (317) 445.5287, fax (928) 563.3666; www.dl-sites.com/losers_lounge.htm

MAD DOGS, POST-CONCUSSION: Vanguard Cinema, 7050 Village Drive Suite A, Buena Park, CA 90621, (714) 367.2020, fax (714) 367.2030; www.vanguardcinema.com

THE MAGIC SUN, MY LIFE WITH MORRISSEY: MVD/Eclectic DVD, P.O. Box 280, Oaks, PA 19456, (800) 888.0486; www.eclecticdvd.com. Also, MORRISSEY: www.mylifewithmorrisey.com

MARYAM, RUSSIAN ARK: Wellspring Media, 419 Park Avenue South, 20th floor, New York, NY 10016, (212) 686.6777, (212) 545.9931; www.wellspring.com. Also, MARYAM: www.streetlightfilms.com

MAU MAU SEX SEX: 7th Planet Productions, 1410 2nd Street, Suite 300, Santa Monica, CA 90401; www.mausexsex.com

THE NEW CHAPTER: www.blackrussianfilms.com

NOTHING SO STRANGE: www.nothingsostrange.com

PAINTED FIRE, TOKYO EYES: Kino International, 333 W. 39th Street, Suite 503, New York, NY 10018, (212) 629.6880, fax (212) 714.0871; www.kino.com

Psychotronic Video: Psychotronic Video, 4102 Main St., Chincoteague, VA 23336, fax (757) 336.0049; www.psychotronicvideo.com

REVEREND BILLY & THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING: Play Loud! Productions, Gubener Strasse 23, 10243 Berlin, Germany, +49 (30) 29 77 93 15, fax +49 (30) 29 77 93 16; www.playloud.org

REVOLUTION #9: Exile Productions, 51 Kinney St., Piermont, NY 10968, (845) 365.3751; exilepr@earthlink.net or www.rev9themovie.com

SCIENCE BASTARD: Exhilarated Despair/Scott Phillips, 1030 Truman SE #D, Albuquerque, NM 87108; www.exhilarateddespair.com/sciencebastard.php

SCUMROCK: Apathy Productions, P.O. Box 62015, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 96839-2015, (808) 988.0041; mgolonka@mindspring.com or www.jonmoritsu.com

SEAFARERS: Jason Massot, 103 Wellington Row, London E2 7BN, United Kingdom, +44 (0) 7949 009585; www.jasonmassot.com

SHADOWS IN THE GARDEN: Wayne Spitzer, 10410 E. Mission Ave., Spokane, WA 99206, (509) 218.8091; gardenghost@hotmail.com or www.lindenmuth.com

Shock Cinema: Shock Cinema c/o Steve Puchalski, P.O. Box 518, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009; <http://members.aol.com/shockcin/main.html>

SLITCH: Drag City, P.O. Box 476867, Chicago, IL 60647, (312) 455.1015, fax (312) 455.1057; www.dragcity.com

SPACE IS THE PLACE: Plexifilm, 45 Main St., Suite 504, Brooklyn, NY 11201, (718) 643-7300, fax (718) 643-7320; www.plexifilm.com

STACY: Synapse Films, P.O. Box 351, Novi, MI 48376, (248) 374-3254; www.synapse-films.com

STAY CLEAN: www.modestiarbor.com/stayclean.html

Tales of Mere Existence: Blackchair Label/Microcinema, attn: Joel Bachar, 531 Utah St., San Francisco, CA 94110, (415) 864.0660, fax (509) 351.1530; www.microcinema.com or www.ingredientx.com

\$30 Film School: Premier Press, 25 Thomson Place, Boston, MA 02210, (617) 757.7900; www.muskalipman.com or www.30dollarfilmschool.com

TRIBUTARY: Russel Forster, P.O. Box 479363, Chicago, IL 60647-9363; russelforster@earthlink.net or www.8trackheaven.com/doc.html

URBAN VISIONS: Lowave, 4 rue Galvani, 75838 Paris, Cedex 17, FRANCE, +33(0) 1 45 72 50 10, fax +33(0) 1 73 72 19 45; www.lowave.com

THE VAN: Brad Paulson, Tri-Toad Films, 220 E. Valencia Ave., #4, Burbank, CA 91502; www.tritoadfilms.com

WAMEGO: Imagemakers, Inc., P.O. Box 368, Wamego, KS 66547, (785) 458.6888; www.dikenga.com

WASH DRY & SPIN OUT: Running Entertainment, 1749 N. Edgemont St., #5, Los Angeles, CA 90027, (323) 664-7910; dan9m@1stnetusa.com

Weirdness Before Midnight: Dave Szurek, 505 N. F., #829, Aberdeen, WA 98520-2601; dszurek@iopener.net

WHAT HAPPENED TO KEROUAC?: www.shoutfactory.com

MICRO-FILM™

Close

Feature

Who's Laughing Now?

An interview with Joe Grisaffi of LAUGHING BOY

by L. Rob Hubbard



Bob Gebert, Therese Kotara, and Bryan Lee McGlothlin in LAUGHING BOY. (toxic monkey productions)

because I enjoyed doing many different things; I learned I was pretty good at writing and film editing as well."

Grisaffi soon parlayed that experience into a four-minute short, WE WANNA WORK FOR BEN AND JERRY, "a marketing tool for some friends to submit to Ben and Jerry's when the company was doing the publicity stunt of advertising for a new CEO," he says. DEATH AND A SALESMAN, a comedy short involving a used car salesman and the Grim Reaper, was "a fantastic experience," according to the filmmaker. "Lonnie Reeves (who plays the salesman, Jack Howard) and I wrote the script in about an hour at lunch one day." Using the contacts and knowledge gained at school and work, Grisaffi gathered a qualified crew for the two-day shoot, including the director of photography Jim Barham, whom he interned under. "Having worked on some pretty painful shoots just

LAUGHING BOY, Brazil (Joe) Grisaffi III's first feature, has garnered acclaim and awards from critics and festivals along with lots of laughter from appreciative audiences who've seen the film. A Houston, Texas native and a graduate of the University of Houston, Grisaffi directed the short film DEATH AND A SALESMAN (currently available on a DVD compilation from IndieClub.com) and has worked in various positions (production assistant, assistant director, extras casting director) on such films as STARSHIP TROOPERS, DANTE'S PEAK, PRIMARY COLORS, ARMAGEDDON, and FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS, along with voice work on anime such as ADV Films' CYBER TEAM IN AKIHABARA.

Grisaffi's interest in filmmaking initially began in college. "I decided to change my major to Television/Film," he recalls. "I took an internship at a local commercial production company and I also started acting in local community theater. I was interested in the business as an actor, but felt that I'd have a better understanding [of it] if I understood what every crew member does. I wasn't really focused enough to say 'I am an actor'."

Virtual MICRO-FILM

Something strange is afoot at www.micro-film-magazine.com, where we have been slowly instituting a new visual design that pairs the Web site up nicely with the print version of MICRO-FILM. By the time you read this, we also should be posting brand-new digital editorial "up there" for your reading pleasure. Look early and often for additional movie reviews that we don't have room for in print, as well as a preview of our massive "List of 5" critics' picks feature and bonus interviews with independent filmmakers like Joe "Brazil" Grisaffi (LAUGHING BOY), Brigid Maher (THE KING, THE LAWYERS, AND THE CHEESE), Charles Band (TRANCERS), and Matt Goldman (THE PERPETUAL LIFE OF JIM ALBERS). While visiting, sign up for the MICRO-FILM mailing list to make sure that you are always the first to know when new material and special sales have been added to the Web site! - JaPan

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cast & crew

THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS (DE FEM BENSPE/END) (p.18) – Directors: Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier; Producer: Carsten Holst; Executive Producers: Peter Aalbæk Jensen, Vibeke Windeløv; Executive Co-Producers: Marc-Henri Wajnberg, Gerald Morin, Nicole Mora; Director of Photography: Dan Holmberg; 2nd Unit Director: Asger Leth; Sound Design: Hans Møller; Line Producer: Marianne Christensen; Editors: Camilla Skousen, Morten Højbjerg; Idea: Lars von Trier, based on *THE PERFECT HUMAN* by Jørgen Leth, 1967. A Koch Lorber Films release of a Zentropa Real production.

Cast – Claus Nissen, Maiken Algren, Daniel Hernández Rodríguez, Jacqueline Arenal, Vivian Rosa, Jørgen Leth, Patrick Bauchau, Alexandra Vandernoot, Lars von Trier

Specs – 2003, 35mm/Digital Video, Color, 90 minutes

Contact Information – Web pages: www.zentropareal.com, www.kochlorberfilms.com.

FIVE YEARS (p.16) – Writer/Director: Brett Wagner; Producer: David Zellerford; Cinematographer: Chad Davidson; Production Designer: Suzanne Wang; Editor: Brett Wagner; Associate Producer: Charles Haine; Line Producer: Paulina Villarreal; Sound Recording: Mike Dickson, Booker T. Mattison; Make-up: Sean Lake; Wardrobe: Melissa Watson; Sound Designer: Joe Caterini; Sound Editor: Jamie Baker; Original Music: Deni. A Vanguard Cinema home video release of a D Train Moving Pictures production.

Cast – Kris Carr, Timothy Altmeyer, Todd Swenson, Michael Buscemi, Cathy Doe, Byron West

Specs – 2002, 16mm, Color, 90 minutes

Contact Information – Web page: www.fiveyears.com.

OUR LADY OF SORROW (p.11) – Writers/Directors: Dennis Widmyer, Kevin Kölsch. A Kinky Mule Films production.

Contact Information – Web page: www.ourladyofsorrow.com.

QUALITY OF LIFE (p.33) – Director: Benjamin Morgan; Producers: Brant Smith, Benjamin Morgan, Meika Rouda; Writers: Brian Burnam, Benjamin Morgan; Story: Benjamin Morgan, Brant Smith, Brian Burnam, Tom Mullowney, Clay Butler, Aron Coleite; Executive Producer: Brant Smith; Director of Photography: Kev Robertson; Casting Director: Belinda Gardea; Editor: Sharon Franklin; Director of Music: Count; Production Manager: Dan Ogawa; Sound: Brian Copenhagen. A Screen Gems release of a Summershines Productions film.

Cast – Lane Garrison, Brian Burnam, Luis Saguar, Mackenzie Firgens, Frederick Pitts, Bryna Weiss, Gerald Black, Tajai Massey

Specs – 2004, 16mm, Color, 85 minutes

Contact Information – Telephone: (415) 543.5504. Web page: www.qualityoflife-themovie.com.

RETURN IN RED (p.11) – Director/Producer/Writer/Editor: Tyler Tharpe; Co-producer: Director of Photography: Anthony P. Hettinger; Key Grip: Charles Staley; Production Crew: Troy Rushing, Steve Winslow, Greg Mosshummer; Original Score: M. Kadath, M. Maggot; Make-up Effects: Tom Colbert, Eric James, Michael Todd Schneider. An Innerworld Pictures production.

Cast – J.J. Huckin, Amy Paliganoff, Keelan Rushing, Linda Smith-McCormick, Becky Niccum, Michael Ray Reed, David Tess, Michael G. Young, Mary Atkins, Pete Davis, Kate Black

Specs – 2005, 16mm, Color, 117 minutes

Contact Information – Telephone: (317) 925.1638. E-mail: tylertarpe@yahoo.com. Web page: www.innerworldpictures.com.

THIS OLD CUB (p.8) – Director: Jeff Santo; Producers/Writers: Jeff Santo, Tim Comstock; Co-Producers: Joe Mantegna, Hollywood Heard; Executive Producers: Bill Pullano, Terry Athas; Editor: Chris Cibelli; Directors of Photography: Hollywood Heard, Garrett Griffin, Terry Pratt; Graphic Effects: Apex Station/Sean Stuart, Garrett Darland; Music Supervisor: John Bissell; Narrator: Joe Mantegna. An Emerging Pictures release of a Big Joe production.

With – Ron Santo, Jeff Santo, Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, Leo Durocher, Pat Hughes, Chip Carey, Steve Stone, Johnny Bench, Brooks Robinson, Tommy Lasorda, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Joe Morgan, Ferguson Jenkins, Glenn Beckert, Don Kessinger, Randy Hudley, Gene Oliver, Bill Murray, William Petersen, Dennis Franz, Gary Sinise

Specs – 2004, Digital Video, Color, 86 minutes

Contact Information – Emerging Pictures, 245 West 55th Street, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10019. Telephone: (212) 245.6767. Fax: (212) 202.4984. Web pages: www.thisoldcub.com, www.emergingpictures.com.



Model: Devin Atkins Photographer: JaPan

Erin Anadkat, an alumna of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in News-Editorial Journalism, also attended Columbia College in Chicago for video production and editing, with a focus in documentary. She currently lives in Los Angeles, working on personal documentary projects while assisting on post-production for *PROPERTY LADDER*, airing on TLC starting in June. She enjoys walking on the beach in year-round, summery weather, though riding the El and ambling through Chicago's city streets is a hefty comparison.

Danielle Cloutier hails from the Chicago suburbs, and after a brief stint tearing up the independent theatre boards at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, she packed up and moved west. Currently residing in Los Angeles, she champions her own acting career in the company of the 12 other normal people living there.

Holly Day lives in Minneapolis and is co-author with Sherman Wick and Todd R. Berger of *Insider's Guide to the Twin Cities, Fourth Edition*, from Globe Pequot Press.

Damian Duffy knows what you're thinking. And yes, it's true, he does write *Whisp*, the best psychic junky comic on the market. And, I don't know how you knew this, but you're correct,

you can find out more about wondrous independent comics like *Whisp* at <http://rehab25.net>, or by e-mailing him at duff@rehab25.net. However, he'll thank you to kindly stop picturing him naked.

Chad Fahs is an author, instructor, and editor whose work includes the upcoming *HDV Filmmaking* as well as *Final Cut Pro 4 for Dummies*, *MacWorld DVD Studio Pro Bible*, *Flash MX Design for TV and Video*, *Apple Pro Training Series: DVD Studio Pro 2*, and *Mac OS X in Ten Simple Steps or Less*. Currently, he is creating content for an all-High Definition visual arts channel called MOOV on the VOOM HD satellite network. You can visit him on-line at www.chadfahs.com.

The horror comedy collaboration from **Michael Hegg** and Joe Sherlock, *BLOODSUCKING REDNECK VAMPIRES*, hit home video last fall courtesy of Sub Rosa Studios. Information on his other projects can be located at www.rusted-angel.com.

L. Rob Hubbard continues his insidious plan for World Domination™, but in his spare time has also written for the recent issue of *Cashiers Du Cinemart* and completed the short-film *LENEXA: A JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF DARKNESS*. Worship him freely at www.geocities.com/lrobhubb/index.html.

A life-long film lover, **Diane Kung** graduated with a B.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She now lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, working with at-risk youth and dabbling in the independent film scene.

TALES FROM THE GRAVE, the Stephanie Beaton anthology film featuring a script by **Jeff McCoy**, reaches home video in September from Razor Digital.

A.J. Michel returned to the Philadelphia area and has two new projects in the works, *Things We Left Behind* and *Syndicate Product*. More information can be found at www.lowhug.blogspot.com.

Jason Pankoke has revealed way too much about himself in this issue. Therefore, please pay well-deserved mind to all the other outstanding folks mentioned on this page. They saved you from having to shell out five bucks for "The JaPan Issue" instead of the MICRO-FILM 7 you know and love. We now return you to your regularly scheduled author biographies. Thank you.

Aaron Matthew Polk reads a lot of books and watches a lot of movies. He does this to keep from writing. He writes because he honestly can't do anything else. He has a wicked sense of humor and a razor-sharp wit. E-mail him with an offer if you are interested in purchasing either of these.

Andrew J. Rausch is a freelance journalist and microfilm producer. He is also the author of several books, including *The 100 Greatest American Films*, *Hollywood's All-Time Greatest Stars*, *The Greatest War Movies of All Time*, and *Turning Points in Film History*.

Jeff Sartain is a freelance writer living in Bloomington, Indiana. His article "Professor Palahniuk? Not Quite" was published in the March/April 2004 issue of *Poets & Writers* magazine. He is still working towards his Ph.D. at Indiana University and can be reached at nuclearjello@hotmail.com.

Jason Watt earned an MFA in Fiction Writing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is now living and writing in Brooklyn, New York.

A recent graduate in Media Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, **Nichole Wleklinski** spends her time writing for MICRO-FILM, working as an production assistant at Dreamscape Cinema in Champaign, perfecting her role as barista at local coffee houses, and fine-tuning her position as resident film aficionado (a.k.a. clerk) at the best independent video store in central Illinois, That's Rentertainment.

Michael Wolinski is the filmmaker responsible for such comedy films as *THE AFTER SCHOOL SPECIAL*, *MY BROTHER'S LIGHT*, and *THE DIRTY IMMIGRANTS: ALL FOR ONE*. All of his films have played at countless domestic and international film festivals and have garnished numerous awards. His latest feature is *DRAWING BLOOD*, a horror film starring Robert Z'Dar, Joe Estevez, and Bryan Irzyk, which he recently completed with Jeffrey Wolinski and Shaun Fox through their production company Tripod Films.

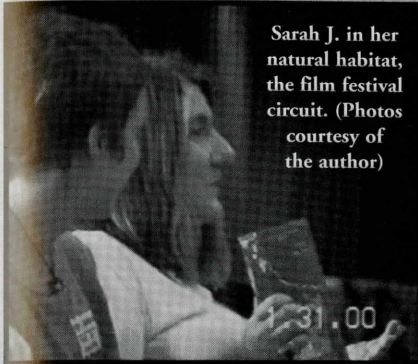
Anthony Zoubek recently published his collection of film essays and interviews, *P.O.V.: Reaction Shots From the Brew and View Balcony Seats*, through AuthorHouse.

inner cinema

visions and ruminations from the filmmaker inside you

This is long overdue....

Like quite a few in the independent film scene, I had my own Sarah Jacobson encounters. The first was while I was living in San Francisco and had just gotten my foot in the door, as far as



Sarah J. in her natural habitat, the film festival circuit. (Photos courtesy of the author)

crewing. I had given up my spot in a flat on the Haight and relocated to the Fremont area for a year and a half of temp work interspersed with working on films. I spent a few minutes on the phone talking with Sarah, who was in the process of shooting a film. As it turned out, I wasn't able to work on that project, *MARY JANE'S NOT A VIRGIN ANYMORE*.

The next time I saw her was in Austin at South by Southwest '98 when she appeared on a filmmaker panel. The Dobie Theater had scheduled a run of *MARY JANE*, but it didn't start until later in the week after we had left Austin. I'd been tracking *MARY JANE*'s progress as word spread, but had been resigned to not seeing it once I returned to the Midwest in an area that didn't get a lot of indie film.

That changed when Sarah made an appearance at a zine conference in Kansas City the next year with a print of *MARY JANE*. I volunteered to run the projector, and the film was about two minutes in when the projector chewed it up badly. Sarah had brought a backup copy on video, luckily, so the audience watched that while she and I spent the time picking out bits of celluloid from the projector teeth.

Thankfully for me, she didn't hold it against me as far as I know. The last time I saw Sarah was at the Chicago Underground Film Festival in summer 1999, after which she moved to New York City to work for the Oxygen Channel, and I lost touch with her.

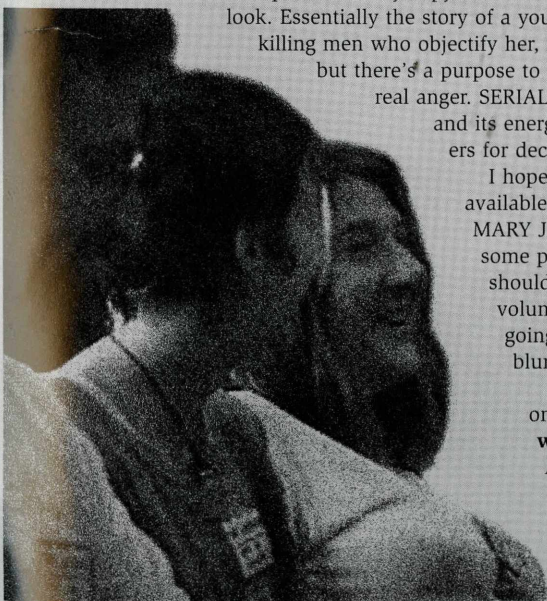
Unlike most of the people who wrote accolades to her shortly after her death last February from cancer, I didn't know her very well. I've only seen her short film, *I WAS A TEENAGE SERIAL KILLER*, and the piece she did about *LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE FABULOUS STAINS!* for the television show *SPLIT SCREEN*. Most of my Sarah knowledge comes from her own writings, which were pretty invaluable—her column in *Punk Planet*, pieces for *indieWIRE.com*, numerous zines.

It might be harder for the DV Generation to realize how important Sarah was to indie film, the real indie film and not the Indiewood scene that has evolved from it. She always encouraged fledgling filmmakers and, to my knowledge, never lost touch with that core desire to tell stories. You look at her work and it's very human, flaws and all. It's not just some clever calling card for Hollywood, like a good portion of the short films produced today.

I pulled out my copy of her first film, *SERIAL KILLER*, and took another look. Essentially the story of a young woman's road to empowerment by killing men who objectify her, it's certainly blunt, crude, and in-your-face, but there's a purpose to the tongue-in-cheek mayhem and some very real anger. *SERIAL KILLER* still holds up well a decade later, and its energy will continue to galvanize young filmmakers for decades to come, I'm certain.

I hope that Sarah's work will be made widely available for the appreciation; I've still not seen *MARY JANE* in its entirety and would like to at some point. In addition to the films, her writings should be collected and published in a single volume, maybe two. I have a feeling that they're going to be needed badly by future artists as we blunder into this New American Age.

The main Web page where information on Sarah and her work can be found is www.sarahjacobson.com. A blog entry dated August 25, 2004 by Eugene Hernandez on <http://blogs.indiewire.com/eug/> has more links, and his obituary for Sarah can still be found at www.indiewire.com/people/people_040218sarah.html.



"Sarah Jacobson's Not Around Anymore"
by Robert Hubbard

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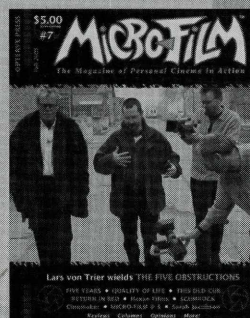
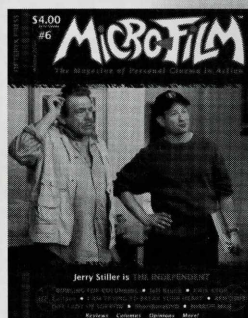
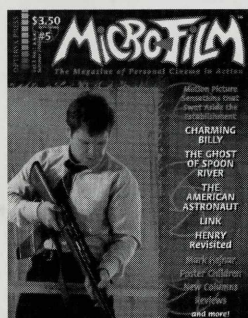
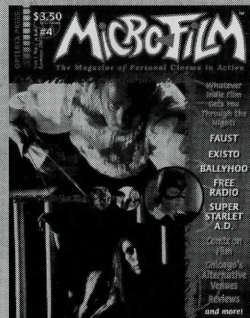
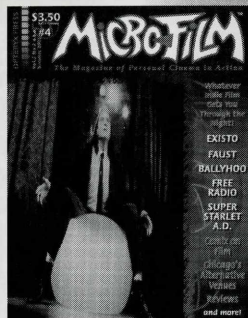
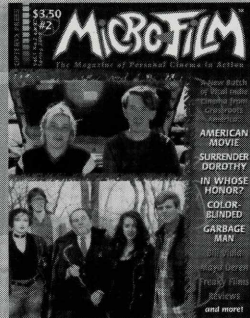
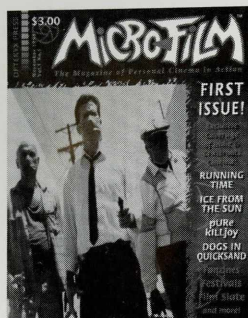
Time is a funny little beast; it brandishes that magic allowing wonderful things to unfold at their own natural pace, and it also holds hostage the past as data and memories. If not for the passage of time, film and videotape would be all form and no function, and in storage these man-made elements preserve at least a modicum of images, concepts, feelings, juxtapositions, and unimaginable phenomena that would otherwise vanish. Funny how we, the beings who shape this vast micro-cosmos called Earth, rely so heavily on such fleeting impressions for meaning. Other marks with similar purpose exist in all different forms, such as the ratty notebooks I kept in 1998 and 1999 where I combed over the conceptual and financial logistics of self-producing a newsletter/journal/magazine about all the crazy, unorthodox movies I started discovering. Somewhere in those scrawls, I had a plan—produce a lucky seven issues in a two-year span. If it didn't take, I'd cut my losses and move on. And so, seven it was.

And now, seven it is. Time has shown again how humorous it thinks it is, for those volumes have taken more than twice as long to see fruition; time obviously studied my plan book with indifference. I didn't write or re-read it particularly well, either, considering how I've botched the pacing, overhauled the characters, and misconstrued many, many details along the way. At least I kept the story arc intact.

But the quandary remains—where does *MICRO-FILM* go from here? Someone once told me that the time to stop doing something is at the point you're not having fun anymore. Someone else has told me several times that no one else is going to care more about your projects than you will. Several more believe I should go electronic and alleviate much hassle. I ultimately have to follow the beat of my own drum, and I know it. Fucking intense, folks.

Fear not for the immediate future, however, as *MICRO-FILM 8* will run wild in the streets with great indie features like *FIRECRACKER* in hand, not to mention that rascally *Backyard Cinema* kicking up its heels! I haven't started drafting the epilogue to this grand adventure yet. It's another chapter for another day. —JaPan

back issues



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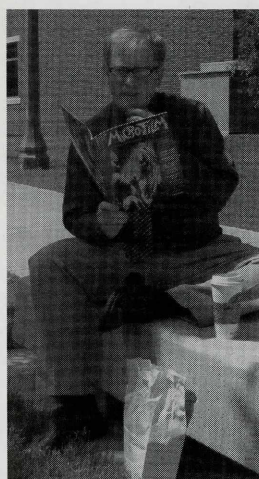
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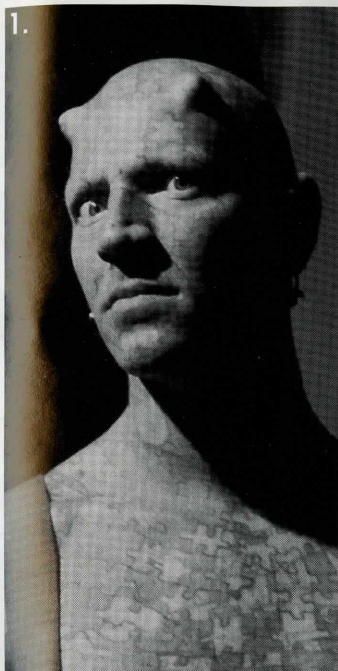
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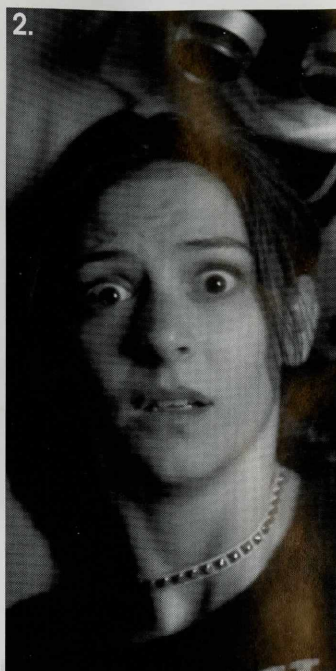
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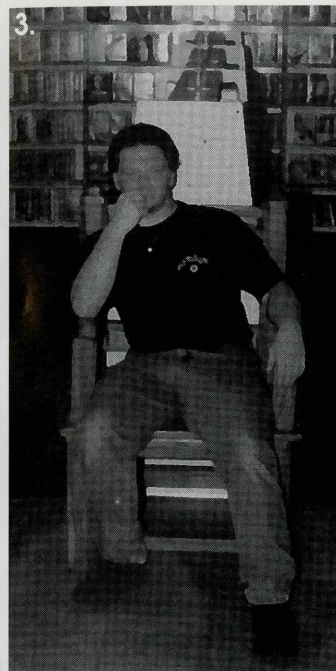


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