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CASHIERS du CINEMART

Issue No. ELEVEN

TRUE
CONFESSION:

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Teenage
Dominatrix***

CHARLES WILLEFORD:
WRITING AND OTHER
BLOOD SPORTS

MCF 99:
ZOMBIES ARE BAD
AND THE COLLEGIANS
ARE GENIUS!!

A PERVERSE NIGHTMARE OF
OFF-KILTER INDIE FILMMAKING!



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ROX CAR CHASES

HASIL ADKINS

MONKEYS + BANANAS



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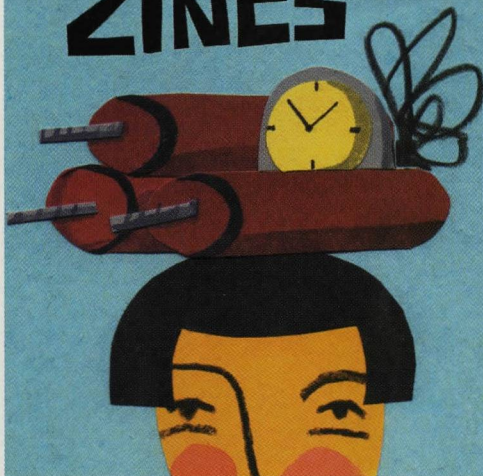
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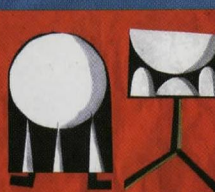
ZINES



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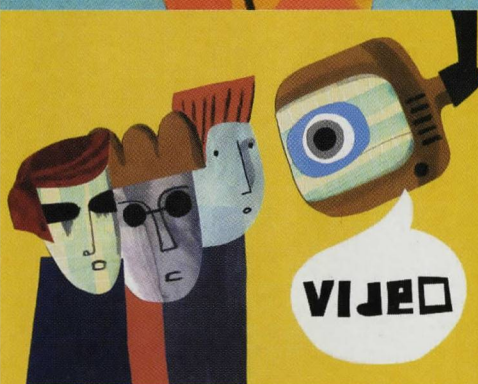
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contents

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focus



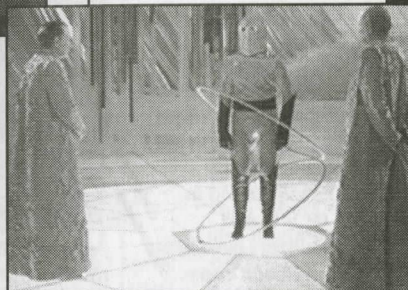
MicroCineFest '99. 7
Is It Real?. 14
Who Owns the Airwaves?. 16
Now It Can Be Told. 20
A Labor of Love. 22
3 1/2 Worlds of Parker. 27
Madness in the 20th Century. 56
The Chase Is On. 76
Running Time. 80
Evil Roy Slade. 82
Notes from the Underground. 88
Film Fests of the Great Lakes State. 90
Sundance on Sunset. 92



view

read

Existo. 13
The Secret of Nikola Tesla. . . 19
Summer of Sam. 67
You've Got Mail. 69
Office Space. 70
Where is Memory. 71
Architecture of Doom. 71
A Night of Marchenfilme. . . 72
Doomed Planet. 72
The Target Shoots First. . . . 72
N.Y.H.C. 73
The Wild World of Hasil Adkins. 73



Some Novel Ideas. 50
It Was the Time of Preacher. 53
I Was a Teenage Dominatrix. 55
The Gremlins That Could Have Been. . . 74

misc



Who's News. 2
Getting in H*A*R*M's Way. . . 24
Tribute Albums. 42
Eye on America. 48
The Banana Republic. 49
The Eyes Have It. 52
Q&A with Svengoolie. 85

regular features

Editorial. 3
Letters. 5
Record Reviews. 38
Zine Reviews. 46
Book Reviews. 47
Teenage Rampage. 68
Zines of the Airwaves. 86
907 Memories. 96

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Who's News

To ask a question, e-mail whosnews@impossiblefunky.com

Q: I love the writing in CdC, where else can I read articles by the writers of your zine?

Until recently, Terry Gilmer was a frequent contributor to Eye Magazine. Unfortunately, Eye has ceased publication. Luckily, Terry is still writing for Crimewave USA. Skizz Cyzyk has recently contributed the lead story in Monozine. Meanwhile, editor Mike White is set to have a piece about the CRIPPLED MASTERS series in Crimewave USA as well as an account of fall visit to Washington D.C. in the new magazine, Clamor. White is also a contributor to websites such as Zinos.com and the "SoundOff" section of Insound.com. Copies of Crimewave U.S.A. are available for \$3 from P.O. Box 980301, Ypsilanti MI 48198. For Monozine, send \$3 to PO Box 598, Reisterstown MD 21136. Clamor is \$4. Send your cold hard cash to PO Box 1225, Bowling Green OH 43402.

Q: I've been wanting to send along a video copy of CLIFFHANGER to you, as I know it's one of your favorite films. However, I only own it on DVD and any video dubs I make have no picture, only audio! What can I do?

Aren't DVD's wonderful? The picture and sound quality, the availability of many titles in letterboxed format with audio commentary tracks and countless extras, they really put videocassettes to shame. However, Digital Video Discs suffer from one highly annoying drawback; Macrovision. Also known as "copy protect," Macrovision effectively disrupts the video signal when trying to record from one's DVD player to a VCR. True, some VHS cassettes are encoded with Macrovision but it's standard issue with DVD. As recordable DVD's are limited in existence, there's no way to duplicate them. Or, is there?

Often called "black boxes," Digital Video Stabilizers have been around just about as long as video cassettes have been copy-protected. But now, more than ever, they have become a necessary accessory for anyone with a DVD player. These devices subvert the Macrovision encryption and allow picture-perfect VHS copies to be made.

The set-up is easy enough. Most "black boxes" come with a 9-volt battery already inside and the option of running off of a DC power source. They look innocuous enough and, luckily, they're simple to use. One merely puts the DVS in the middle of the video "chain" between one's DVD player's Video Out and the VCR's Video In. This isn't rocket science.

Available at well-stocked electronics stores and online through various sites, Digital Video Stabilizers run about sixty dollars (though www.directsalesinc.com reports a model for \$32). It's worth it, if only for the knowledge that The Man and his Macrovision aren't going to stop you from making a dub of CLIFFHANGER for your buddy.

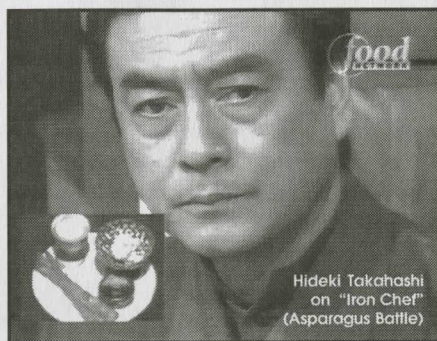
Q: After reading the article about the LONE WOLF & CUB films in Cashiers du Cinemart #10, I rented FUGITIVE SAMURAI. I fell in love with little Kazutaka Nishikawa! What has he done since then?

After retiring from acting, Nishikawa—who played Daigoro in the popular 1970s TV drama "Kozure Okami," about a wandering samurai accompanied on his journeys throughout the country by his young son—was elected to the Shirone Municipal Assembly in 1995.

The 32 year-old was arrested 12/26/99 while on a Japan Airlines flight from Bangkok for the illegal disposal of a body.

Nishikawa is alleged to have dumped the body of Yukio Sato, 56, a moneylender, in Asahi, Niigata Prefecture, on 11/30/99. Fleeing the country on 12/1/99, Nishikawa flew to Hong Kong and traveled to Macao before INTERPOL officials notified Japanese police on 12/22/99 that the former child actor had been apprehended in Thailand.

Nishikawa was arrested for conspiring with Yuichi Kawahara, 30, manager of a mah-jongg parlor that Nishikawa owned, to wrap Sato's body in a blanket, shove it into the trunk of his car, then dispose of the body in a forest in Asahi. Kawahara has already been charged with illegally dumping Sato's body.



Hideki Takahashi
on "Iron Chef"
(Asparagus Bottle)

On a related note, if memory serves me right, Hideki Takahashi—the man who played swordsman Ogami Itto in LONE WOLF IN CUB: BABY CART IN PURGATORY—has recently been spotted on the cult TV cooking show, "Iron Chef."

Also, look for re-releases of all the "Lone Wolf & Cub" comic books by Dark Horse comics (www.darkhorse.com) in 2000.

Q: I have a big pile of zines building up on my desk, under my bed, and boxed up in the garage. I feel guilty as hell throwing them out since I know so much effort has gone into making them. But they're cluttering up my house! What can I do?

Send your zines to Seattle! Victoria Howe, a sophomore at Nova Alternative High School in Seattle does her own zine, Bangs Fanzine. She asked the administrators at Nova if she could start a zine library. They agreed, and gave her a budget of \$50. She has 30 or 40 zines so far, and is down to \$39. If you have something you could donate, Victoria would appreciate hearing from you. She's even teaching a class called "Zines, Comics, and Small Press!" Write to her at: Nova Project c/o Victoria Howe (student), 2410 E Cherry, Seattle WA 98122. If you have any questions, feel free to email her at BitRoyale@aol.com.

Q: I just realized that this column is a parody of the "Who's News" section of the USA Weekend supplemental in my local paper's weekend section. Are you implying that these questions and answers are fake excuses to write promotional soft news blurbs?

Oh, no! Never!

SPECIAL THANKS TO: Andrea Walter, Alvin Ecarma, Trent Reynolds, Chris Poggiali, Jeff Dunlap, Colin Geddes, Mark Peranson, Larry Yoshida, Jason Pankoke, Mike Plante, Toni Thordarson, Celeste Cleary, Shawna Keeney, Gabe Wardell, Genevieve McGillicuddy, Jen Talbert, Erik Boring, Monroe Bardot, Joel Bachar, Ed Halter, Susan Woods, Jennifer White, Vicki Honeyman, Christina Hamilton, Robert Rodriguez, Pat Bishow, Tina Lee, Rich Koz, Geoff Marslett, James Kochalka, The Collegians, Danny Plotnik, Allison Levy, Don Hertzfeld, Jonathan Bekemeier, Andrew Betzer, Todd Rohal, Jay Edwards, Andrew Wardlaw, Karl Slovin, Carl Wiedemann, Jeff Krulik, Mark Hejnar, Michael Galinski, Sukie Hawley, Huck Botko, Steve Woods, Mike Z, Craig Baldwin, William Terbo, Dave Crider, Lisa Gottheil, Eric Speck, Scott Giampino, Sarah Feuquay, Girlie Action!, John Pierson, Jeff White, Brian Horowitz, Cat Tyc, Christopher Gallagher, Alex Mayer, Lisa Hammer, Christopher Wicha, Julien Nitzberg, Frank Provitch, Andrew Leavold, Tina Booker, Tom Lupoff, Mike Adams, Miranda Lange, Bryan Wendorf, Josh Becker, Ed Halter, Laris Kreslins, Mike Branum, Joseph Gervasi, Jason Kucsma, Jen Angel, Carl Cephas, Scott Beibin, P. Kimé Le, Jacqueline Gares, Dan Krovich, Scott Brown, Frank Orser, Andrea Freeman, Doug Holland, Andrew Gallix, Hilary Hart, all of our subscribers, advertisers and anyone who's sent stuff in for review (if we didn't get to it this time, don't sweat it! We'll try for CdC #12)!



Maxine

In all but the first few issues of *Cashiers du Cinemart* I've included a dedication. I don't know why I began this practice except perhaps in order to give a nod to the passing of artists whose work has touched me in some way. Other than a brief mention, I've never been prompted to venture a retrospective of the fondly remembered people who have shuffled off this mortal coil while I toiled on an issue. I suppose I've been leaving the task of writing proper obituaries to Michael Weldon of *Psychotronic Video*. He often fills pages upon pages of his magazine with well-researched obits.

I had planned to dedicate this issue to a few entertainers such as Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Jim Varney and Richard B. Shull. However, a few weeks before going to press I lost someone very dear to me—someone who won't be mentioned in any obituary column.

I met Andrea shortly after I was separated from my ex-wife. Not only did Andrea let me into her heart but so did her animals: Misha, Hobie, Wally, and especially Max. Short for Maxine, Max had an uncanny ability to know when folks were feeling bad. She had given Andrea good company for the first nine years of her canine life. However, when we met, Max not only befriended me; she adopted me.

Those first few months after my separation were difficult, to say the least. Max was always there for me—not only when I was giving my lachrymal glands a workout but whenever I was just feeling a little blue. She'd be at my side, nudging my arm, trying to give me solace.

I never really had a dog when I was growing up. There were a few failed experiments that were given away rather quickly and with whom I never formed any real bond. By the age of eight, I was living in a two-cat household. My parents were pleased by the independence of cats, especially in the elimination arena. Cats offered little messy clean-up and no nighttime trips to the back door to let them in and out.

My parents were given a dog when I was in my teens. She was an orphaned Bouvier named Dama. She was one hell of a dog; trained, smart, and relatively friendly. She quickly became my Dad's dog. It's not that Dama didn't like me—she was rather indifferent to me. I was a poor

daytime substitute to my dad's presence. After all, I wasn't the one who took her to the park or gave her Kit Kats on evening rides to the Liquor Store.

Despite her years of loyalty to Andrea, Max became "my dog" when I met her. I can't quite express the overwhelming joy I felt every night that I came home from work to find Max at the door waiting for me. With eighty-five pounds of force behind her, the Rottweiler had been trained to not jump up on anyone. So, instead, when she was excited she bounced. It looked like she had hydraulics installed in her front paws, as she'd bounce up and down upon my arrival. At the same time she'd be furiously wagging the stump she had for a tail—wildly wagging her rear end, waiting for me to give her recognition.

Max was always good company. She loved to go out for walks, play fetch, be petted, and cuddle. When I was ill she'd come to visit me; laying next to the bed or coming in to check on my condition. Over X-mas of '99 I was frightfully sick. Max wasn't content to keep a vigilant watch—she crawled onto my bed (despite the effort involved) and helped keep me warm as I slept through the day.

Maxine blew out her knee last summer. Andrea and I imagine that she probably twisted it on the rocks we laid down on the side of the house. We noticed her limping and took her into the vet's office a few days later. After some probing and prodding, the doctor diagnosed that the ligaments around her knee were torn.

There was a cure but it would involve keeping Maxine calm for *two years* after the operation. Even at ten years old, Maxine still wanted to play like a puppy. We couldn't imagine trying to keep her placid for such a long period of time. Not only would it be nearly impossible (without some major drugs), it'd be unfair to her. As some days were better than others, we let Max's condition go. Yes, we knew that she might worsen but by giving her the occasional pain pill and taking good care of her, we put that out of our minds as much as we could. We just tried to enjoy her company and let Max enjoy herself.

Despite giving Max the occasional baby aspirin or dose of Motrin, her condition started to worsen in the early months of '00. In March we noticed her hobbling despite how many pain-killers we gave her. Our Golden Retriever puppy, Abby, of whom Max had been wonderfully tolerant, began to wear on the old girl's nerves. When Max protested the puppy's playfulness and Wally started avoiding her, Andrea and I knew that it was time. The quality of Max's life was starting to fade and we owed her as much to let her go with some dignity instead of being selfish and ignoring her pain.

Even to the bitter end—after the Vet (a Saint if I ever met one) had given Max a strong sedative to help make the final shot easier—Max was still trying to make Andrea and me feel better. That huge Rottweiler had her entire front half on my lap and kept looking up at me as if to tell me that everything was going to be fine and that I shouldn't be upset. She died the way she lived, cuddling and comforting.

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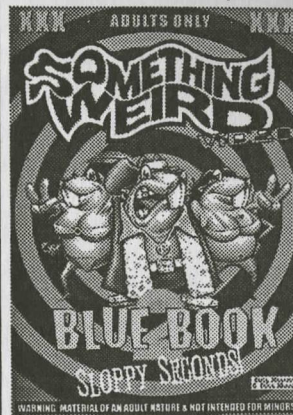
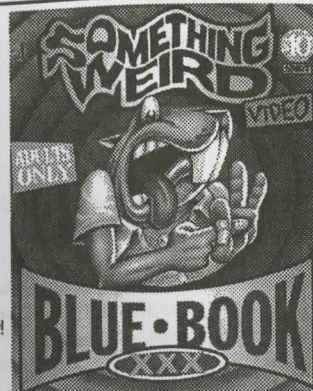
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letters

Mike

Enjoyed the article on Lone Wolf & Cub, but one thing stuck in my craw—the comment about the level of profanity in AnimEigo's translation of the films.

We took extreme care to properly match the Japanese expletives with their English equivalents, the same kind of totally anal obsessiveness we employ in all aspects of our translations. Keep in mind that these films were pop-culture action films, not period dramas, and thus the language isn't nearly as courtly as a non-Japanese speaker might imagine.

Also, it is common practice when translating films to tone down the language. We particularly don't do this. Our goal is to present to the English viewer the exact same emotional experience as the Japanese viewer got. If this means that Mifune Toshiro has to say "fuck," then so be it!

Best,
Robert Woodhead
CEO (Chief Expletive Officer)
AnimEigo

Mike,

I think you are guilty of a grievous error in judgment when you bash SHOGUN ASSASSIN in your otherwise excellent article on the Lone Wolf and Cub films. Yes, under ideal circumstances, foreign films should not be edited together, dubbed, or re-scored. However, this was 1980. VCRs had barely begun to catch on. New World wanted to release a terrific Japanese film to the American theatrical market. Unfortunately, it is eight years old, a sequel, and the general American public is not very receptive to subtitled films. What to do? A few things:

- Edit in some of the previous film to explain what's going on
- Add narration to further explain the confusing proceedings
- Dub it
- Re-score it so it will feel more like a new film rather than one nearly a decade old

All of these things were done with great care and reverence for the material. Adding narration from the child's point of view was an excellent idea. It is very touching hearing a child talk sadly about the killing that surrounds him. The new score is very effective. The dubbing is also quite good—I was quite astonished to see you say that it was bad. Anyone who has seen more than a handful of dubbed Asian action movies should know better.

The result—in 1980, and on video a few years later, many Americans were treated to a work of art that they otherwise may never have gotten a chance to see. SHOGUN ASSASSIN may offend purists, but it is a well-crafted companion piece to the Lone Wolf and Cub series that served the general public (and this viewer) as a terrific introduction to foreign film in general and Japanese samurai cinema in particular. It is a beautiful and admirable effort that does not deserve to be forgotten or gratuitously bashed.

Not only that, but purists had to wait an extra eighteen years or so to see the film.

Keep up the good work,
Trent Reynolds
Austin, TX

Mike,

Regarding Terry Gilmer's article about a Film Threat... I recall that some fourteen years ago a *certain publisher* told me that back when he was in high school, he printed his first issue and never paid the printer. He was finally compelled (against his will) to sell off his entire record collection so he could pay the bill. Coming from such auspicious beginnings, it's a shame to hear that the magazine is having money trouble. And I saw the premiere of the publisher's awful film, "Guy from Planet Z" (or whatever it was) at the Majestic Theater in Detroit. The crowd hated the film so much that they

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started throwing beer bottles at the screen. As the film ended, I found the filmmaker collapsed by the side of the projector, completely drunk. I asked him what he thought of his film. "It's crap," he mumbled, "total crap."

Best wishes,
Michael Jackman
New York, NY

Mike,

Each and every time I open the mailbox and find a fresh issue of CdC I am newly amazed at how good it looks. The content hasn't changed much. It's still the same insightful, entertaining, and illuminating commentary I've come to expect from your publication. But now there's more of it arranged attractively.

I was particularly moved by Terry Gilmer's account of the Film Threat subscription scandal in the most recent issue. Once again, you've crystalized my thoughts eloquently. It occurred to me after reading the article that CdC was sort of the karmic antidote for that other rag. They disappeared without a trace, taking our money in the process. Yet, CdC keeps on coming, even though I can't recall sending any money to renew since I paid \$5 so many years back.

Therefore, please find enclosed a check for \$20. \$8 for one of those boss new t-shirts and \$12 to assure the continuance of my subscription. I would say, "keep up the good work," but I am sure that such a cliché is needless as nothing but good work has come to me from Riverview. Thank you for the good times, best of luck in the future and God bless Mike White, Cashiers du Cinemart, and America.

Sincerely yours,
Kevin Christopher
Winooski, VT

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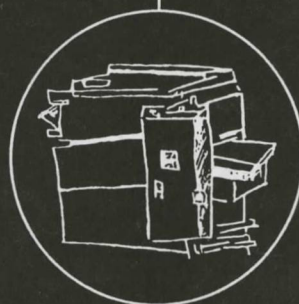
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In June of 1999, the small town of Bowling Green, Ohio played host to a nationwide zine conference. Zine readers and writers came together to talk about the culture of independent publishing. Participants proposed and conducted panel discussions, workshops and mini-lectures covering the politics, economics, ethics and aesthetics of the zine world. Insights were shared. Friendships were forged.

We are planning to do the same thing in June, 2000, and the scope of the conference has been expanded to include an even wider range of underground publishing projects. Whether you're into zines, comics, independent newspapers, pamphlets, tracts, or books, there will be something of interest to you at the UPC. UPC is also taking suggestions for proposed panel discussions, workshops and speakers, so let us know what you would like to see at your conference. There will be a large hall reserved for tabling and just hanging out, so get in touch soon to reserve a space! Hope to hear from you soon and see you in June!



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Illustration by Bradley Wind

COMING OUT SWINGING like Clubber Lang, the third annual MicroCineFest hit Baltimore with monster truck force. Festival Director Skizz Cyzyk and his illustrious MCF staff had the eye of the tiger when picking out their selections for this big little festival of underground and unusual movie mania.

Bookending the fest at the Charles Theater in downtown Baltimore (former HQ of B-more's favorite son, John Waters) was an opening night featuring Suki Hawley & Michael Galinsky's stunning **RADIATION**, and Mike J. Roush's questionable **HOT WAX ZOMBIES ON WHEELS**. The long weekend closed with Coke Sams's outrageous musical **EXISTO**. The nights in between were spent just off Hamden's hip avenue at The G-Spot—a former mill-turned-loft space. The industrial-themed venue proved ideal for the MCF events.

Motifs of the festival included monkeys, underwear, bread, and an odd practice best described as "swinging the bishop."

Asked to judge the fest again (see CdC #9), my job was particularly difficult this time around due to the tremendous crop of flicks. Luckily, my fellow judges Gabe Wardell (Maryland Film Festival), Genevieve McGillicuddy (Atlanta Film & Video Festival), and I didn't shy away from devising awards for movies that deserved special recognition. Sure, a few films that I really dug were left out in the cold, but the same goes for a couple of Gabe and Genevieve's choices as well. Avoiding broken hearts and broken noses, we diligently deliberated and delivered a list of winners that suited all of our tastes to near perfection. Those (along with some other notable titles) follow...

MICROCINEFEST

a swinging good time

MONKEY VS. ROBOT (dir. Geoff Marslett)

I don't know better how to describe this fine animated music video than to say that it's something I'd like to start my mornings with every day for the rest of my life. It is hilarious. Set to a song by comic artist/musician/jack-of-all-trades James Kochalka Superstar (see page 40), Geoff Marslett's **MONKEY VS. ROBOT** presents its audience with an eternal struggle between primitivism and modernism. Or, simply stated, "Monkey hate technology! Robot hate the monkey!"

Ironically, the video itself was a mix of old school hand drawings (scanned in, cleaned up, and colored in Photoshop) and computer animation. Director Marslett didn't marry the visuals to the music until everything was laid to tape, counting out frames in order to time them with the events depicted in the song. The end result is a damn catchy tune with terrific visuals. **MONKEY VS. ROBOT** swung away with the Best Animation award.

It should be noted that there's also a live action adaptation of Kochalka's song by filmmaker Nathan Pommer. This opened the 2000 New York Underground Film Festival. For a peek, check out www.insound.com.

THE COLLEGIANS ARE GO!! (dir. Dean Collegian, PhD & Chuck Collegian, MA) I caught **THE COLLEGIANS ARE GO!!** early in the week and phrases from it quickly found their way into my vernacular. Frequently I was heard to say, "Zombies are bullshit!" By the time I caught **TCAG** a second time, I was roaring with laughter at the Super-8 spectacular. Set in Texas in the '60s, **THE COLLEGIANS ARE GO!!** is the story of a Scientist (Chuck Collegian, MA), Educator (Dean Collegian, PHD), and a trouble-maker (Tad Collegian, BA) who face off against John F. Kennedy's undead corpse.

Filmed in Gerald Ford-o-vision, the low-budget black & white lunacy ("Just as I suspected; that's not beer, that's molecular acid!") is occasionally interrupted with damn catchy rock & roll tunes by the Collegians and their archrivals, the sinister Los Tigres Guapos.

Knowing that a pox would be upon us if we didn't do something special for **The Collegians**, this film was the recipient of a Special Super-8 recognition award. Go to www.flojo.com for more information (or see the film on www.ifilm.com)

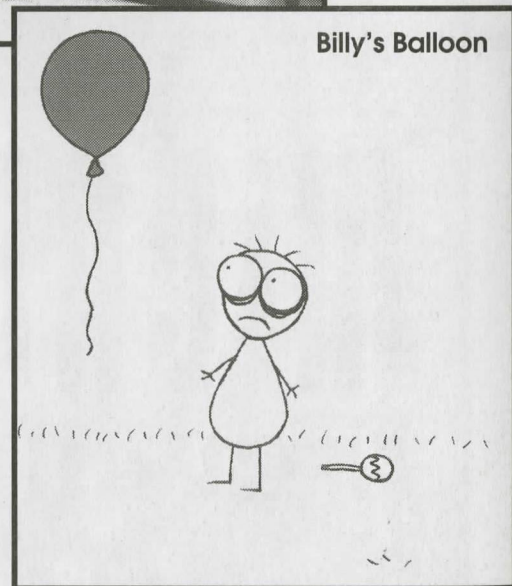
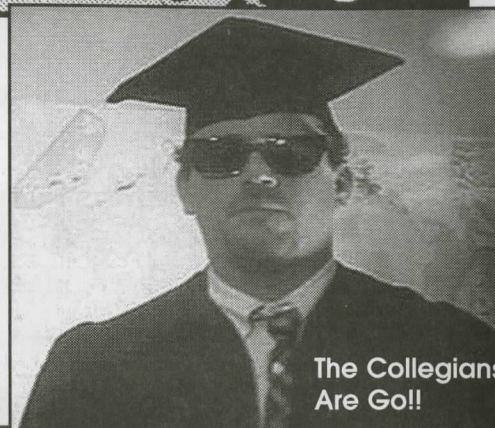
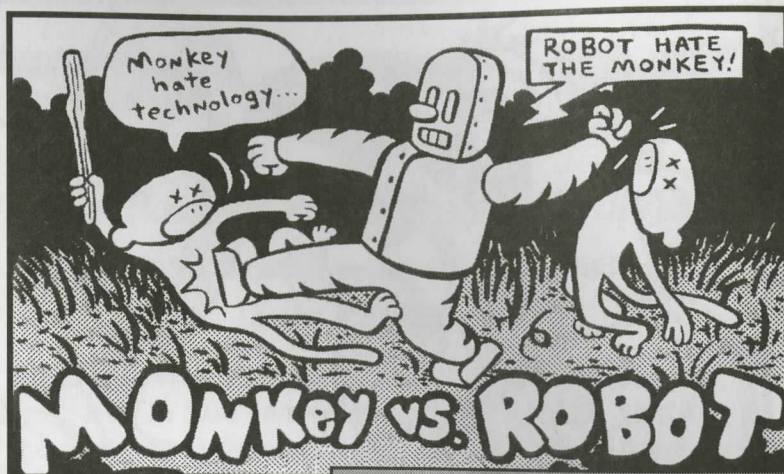
SWINGER'S SERENADE (dir. Danny Plotnik)

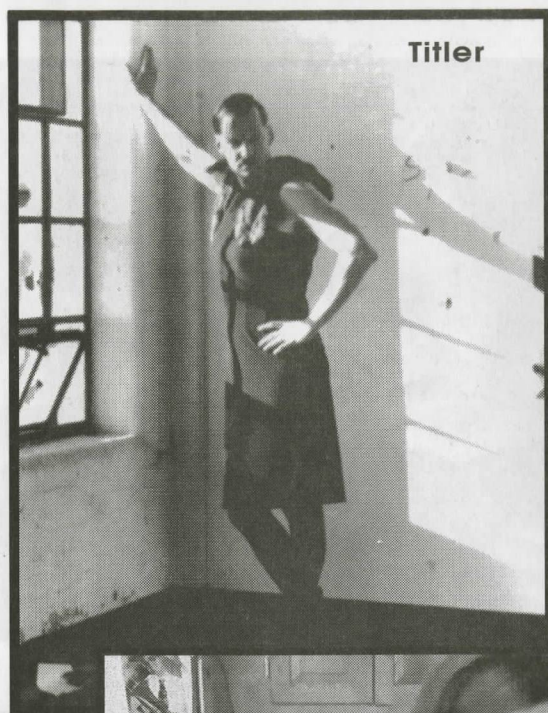
Super-8 maestro Danny Plotnik (**I'M NOT FASCINATING: THE MOVIE**) switches gears and gauges with the beautifully shot, deliciously titillating, and *educational* short 16mm film **SWINGER'S SERENADE**. The premise (explained by the painfully/playfully pedantic narrator) is that in the 1950s, amateur movie-makers whose creative wells ran dry would turn to magazines tailored to their hobby. These often provided sin-sational scripts to, um, *inspire* at-home auteurs. Director Plotnik and his co-creator/wife/lead actress, Alison Levy (who also helped provide the terrifically lurid go-go soundtrack) use one such script as a blueprint and the result is a hilarious soft core tale of domestic duplicity and paddling pulchritude. Mixing self-reflexive absurdity with lascivious visuals, **SWINGER'S SERENADE** sauced our sensibilities and easily won the Randiest Film award. This and other Plotnik films are available at www.insound.com. For information about the terrific score, surf over to www.loudfamily.com

BILLY'S BALLOON (dir. Don Hertzfeldt)

Not every film at the MicroCineFest was as great as those I'm attempting to highlight here. In fact, it was difficult to sit through a few pieces (such as Eric Cheevers' **THE JENNY JAMES STORY**) but, of any film, I think **BILLY'S BALLOON** was the oddest to have a walk-out. The patron reportedly claimed that Don Hertzfeldt's short animated piece about an insidious balloon was "too disturbing." Granted, seeing a beloved childhood object portrayed as a malicious bully of little kids might make one verklempt but, along with that uneasiness should come the raucous bout of laughter from the incredibly dark humour of the situation!

As with all of the work I've seen by Hertzfeldt, his comic timing is perfect and his seemingly simple animation style makes the situations which he depicts even funnier. **BILLY'S BALLOON** floated off with the Way Cool Animation award. For more info check www.bitterfilms.com





Titler

TITLER (dir. Jonathan Bekemeier)

Okay, what the hell was going on here? Witness a guy with a strong resemblance to Adolph Hitler, singing off-colour showtunes a cappella, dressed to the nines in an evening gown! Beautifully shot in 35mm, Titler is introspective, moody, dynamic and toe-tappingly catchy as he wanders the grounds of an industrial complex going through his various emotions and singing his little Teutonic heart out all the while. Agreeing that Titler's legs looked damn good in that dress, Jonathan Bekemeier's short sashayed away with the Way Cool Wardrobe award.

THE SWINGER (dir. Jason Affolder)

Just as I'd like to start off each day with MONKEY VS. ROBOT in order to remind myself of the eternal struggle to attain harmony with one's environment, THE SWINGER is the perfect way to relax after a long stressful day. What a better way to relieve tension than listening to a snappy tune while watching guys dance around without a care in the world and without the constricting presence of pants. Yes, it's tighty-whitey time as these fellows bop to the beat on this seemingly simple, joyously uplifting three-minute Super-8 outing. Jason Affolder doffing of his drawers earned him the Way Cool Low Budget Film award.



Knuckleface Jones

DIET PINK LEMONADE (dir. Andrew Betzer)

Reminiscent of JOHN CARPENTER'S ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13, Andrew Betzer's single-take film is a shocking and cathartic portrayal of consumer frustration. The seemingly simplistic storyline of a young entrepreneur and her discontented patron embodies the anxiety we all face in the workaday world of materialism where the rights of the purchaser are violated for the sole purpose of easing production costs. Betzer's cinematography is brutally frank and in fifty-eight seconds, he manages to say more about the struggle of the proletariat than a thousand so-called Marxist scholars. Our comrade triumphed with the award for Best Low-Budget Film.

KNUCKLEFACE JONES (dir. Todd Rohal)

Playing with the messianic myths found in most cultures, director Todd Rohal pits the protagonist of KNUCKLEFACE JONES—an aggrieved trombone player—against incarnations of evil (Boy Scouts working at a merit badge in "whup ass," white rappers in underwear, and a psychotic ex-girlfriend). If he can overcome these bizarre forms of adversity he might grasp the mantle of manhood and live in the world as the reincarnation of the virile and legendary KNUCKLEFACE JONES.

Shot in 16mm, the world of KNUCKLEFACE JONES is filled with unnaturally sharp primary colours that emphasize the surreal subtext of the story. Filled with wonderful performances and music, KNUCKLEFACE JONES sauntered off with the award for Best Short Film. For more information contact Todd at littlefatgirl@yahoo.com.

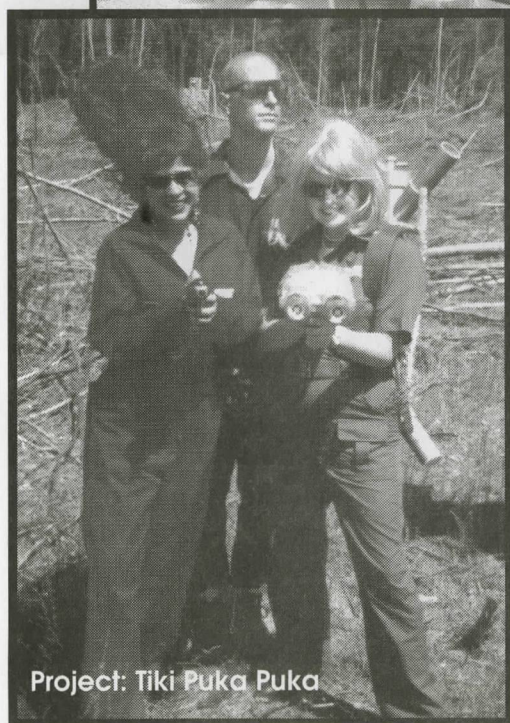
PROJECT: TIKI PUKA PUKA (dir. Jay Edwards)

Utilizing low budget video, creative props and intentional cheesiness, PROJECT: TIKI PUKA PUKA is a highly self-aware (but not egocentric) homage to works as disparate as APOCALYPSE NOW and ROBOT MONSTER. With a immense cast retrofitted to 1950's garb and sensibilities, director Jay Edwards creates a twenty minute hedonistic hullabaloo with a fluid, all-too-familiar narrative.

After seeing PROJECT: TIKI PUKA PUKA, I want to move to Atlanta, befriend Jay Edwards and get cast in one of his videos because if being in one is half as fun as watching one, it'd be a hoot! P:TPP made off with the Way Cool Short Video award.

FIRE ANT AD (dir. Andrew Wardlaw)

A simple idea pulled off beautifully. FIRE ANT AD combines footage from Paul Verhoven's STARSHIP TROOPERS with the audio of a commercial promoting a product to rid one's household of pesky fire ants. Director/editor Wardlaw admits that the project was the result of trying his hand at his school's editing equipment. In other words, he wasn't trying too hard to make some sort of overt politically-motivated statement but, instead, cleverly marrying disparate audio and video sources to make a quick and fun video.



Project: Tiki Puka Puka

WHAT'S UP (dir. Chris Clements, Julie Goldman, Mich Giancola & Maria Bowen)
Not a documentary about the Budweiser commercial, WHAT'S UP taps into an undeniable, albeit unpleasant, part of our collective unconscious. The creative team at Central Films have successfully created a tasteful (and not too tasty) documentary about the experience of vomiting. Just like "drinking stories," most folks have a least one good "puke story" in their personal repertoire and WHAT'S UP is a fine sampling of several such tales.

While the stories may be inherently gross, nevertheless, they're entertaining. This Way Cool Documentary is well edited, fun to watch, and sure to spark conversation at your next group gathering!

PARTING WORDS (dir. Karl Slovin)

When the words "Low Budget" preface most of the awards at the MicroCineFest, that tends to eliminate at least a few films from competition just on the basis of their production values. There were at least three films at MCF '99 that were wonderful but too darn "big" for any low budget recognition. Competition, then, was fierce between Jay Lowi's 12 STOPS ON THE ROAD TO NOWHERE, Mike Mitchell's HERD and Karl Slovin's PARTING WORDS. Without a doubt, however, Slovin's work was the most subversive.

Set as a shot-on-video suicide note, we get to witness a poor slob pouring his heart out with a loaded pistol in his hand while, unbeknownst to him, his roommate demonstrates some ill-timed creativity. PARTING WORDS shuffled off with a Way Cool Short Film award.

A PRIMER FOR DENTAL EXTRACTION (dir. Carl Wiedemann)

Bizarre and beautiful, Wiedemann's work answers the question, "What would I do if I had a steady-cam and a stillsuit?" Stunning black & white visuals, accompanied by a throbbing music track make PRIMER a fascinating viewing experience. Wonderfully composed and executed, Wiedemann's striking film was a shoo-in for the Way Cool Experimental award. For more info check out www.carl.wiedemann.com.

I CREATED LANCELOT LINK (dir. Jeff Krulik & Diane Bernard)

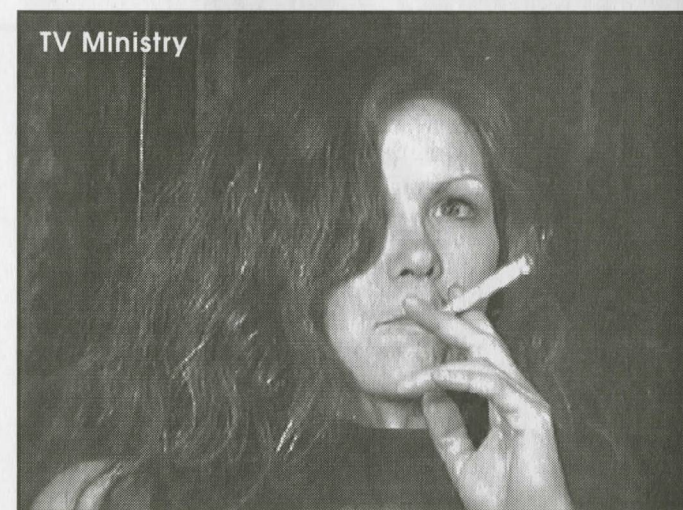
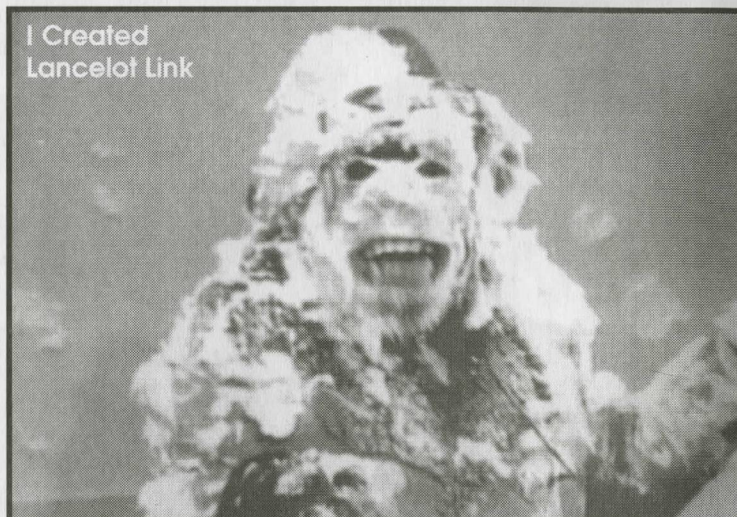
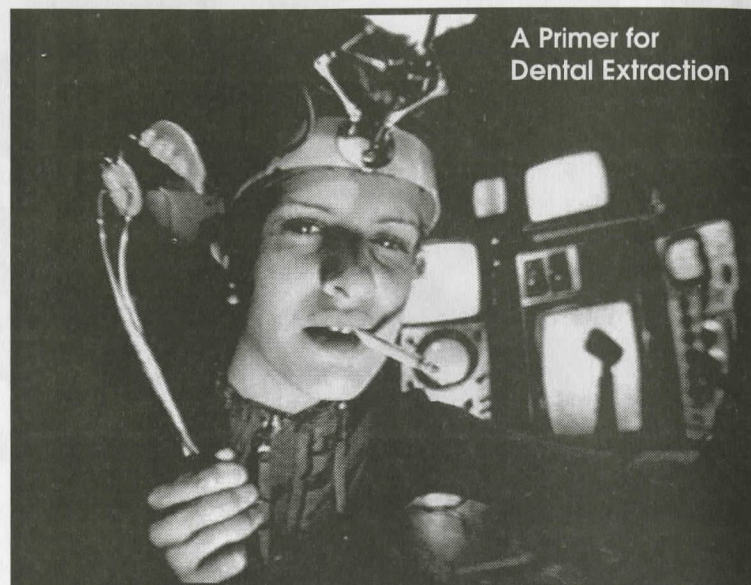
In all of my years of television viewing I never caught an episode of Lancelot Link but yet this simian supersleuth and his band, The Evolution Revolution, have definitely been ingrained in my pop culture collective unconscious. Jeff Krulik, the documentarian that has brought the world works like HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT and ERNEST BORGNINE ON THE BUS (see CdC #8) has returned with a wonderful look at the creators of "Lancelot Link". Using the reunion of Stan Burns and Mike Marmer (who haven't seen each other in a decade) as the impetus of the video, Krulik captures the delight expressed by these two classic TV men who don't hesitate to give detailed accounts of the behind the scenes antics of a show completely cast with chimpanzees. For more information, visit www.planetkrulik.com.

TV MINISTRY (dir. Mark Hejnar)

Yes, I have a useless degree. Along with Film/Video, I completed my double major with a study of Communications. The major of champions. Studying television programs and commercials can be as fun and/or insightful as one chooses to make it, I suppose, and something tells me that I managed to get more bang for my buck than some of the folks in my low-level Comm. classes. While a lot of them were tickled pink to be watching TV in class, I tried to pay attention to the study of my mental teat.

I was raised in the pale glow of the cathode ray. When time came to fill out our standardized tests in elementary school, I always had to admit that my television viewing habits exceeded those numbers associated with the last empty dot. As I filled in that question's answer with my sharp number two pencil, I felt an odd sense of pride; as if I were getting away with something. My parents weren't denying me of my precious television! If I wanted, I could go home and watch TV from the time I arrived until I went to bed. If I wasn't getting enough TV, I could fake a stomach-ache and feast my eyes on precious daytime programming like "The Beverly Hillbillies" or "3-2-1 Contact." How could school be so irresponsible as to deny students those valuable learning experiences found in "The Lucy Show"?

By the time I reached the age of majority, I had just about broken the





stranglehold that TV seemed to have on my mind. In college, I just about went cold turkey. Certainly, I found pleasure in "The Price Is Right" and "Twin Peaks" but, otherwise, I couldn't subject myself to my roommate's tiny black and white TV for too long. After all, what fun is it seeing Rod Roddy's outfits in monochrome?

I suppose that communications was a natural choice for me as I could put all those years of TV "experience" to use. For, more than contemporary shows, I was a fan of older television shows like "The Jackie Gleason Show" and "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis."

Yet, for all my former allegiance and love of television, I could only find the folks of the TV Ministry—an organization for Calumet City, Illinois—to be complete losers and crackpots. It may not take a village to raise a child, but it takes more than television to provide proper parenting or spiritual fulfillment.

Luckily, Mark Hejnar doesn't miss this opportunity for irony. Hejnar shows the Ministry's slack-jawed burn-outs rambling about the merits of long-term television viewing (with some endorsements for viewing aids such as pot and booze along the way). These interviews are an argument *against* the messages that have been absorbed by TV viewers. Interspersed with these talking chowderheads are concise and wonderfully-edited found footage segments. Using everything from hygiene films from the '50s to footage of Hillary Clinton getting the shit scared out of her courtesy of a falling light fixture, Hejnar employs seconds and frames of footage to create a lyrical assessment of the insidious nature of the "boob tube."

Upon winning the award for Best Low-Budget Video, Hejnar revealed that the members of the TV Ministry have completely missed the irony of his work. This, more than anything, is a testament to the success of his work!

BIG HAND, BIG HEAD (dir. Bradley Wind & Eric Prykowski)

More than "odd" or "surreal," GUBBI GUBBI surpasses "off beat." I don't use this word too liberally- but GUBBI GUBBI is down-right "twisted." A shot-on-video voyage into the minds of its creators, Bradley Wind and Eric Prykowski, GUBBI GUBBI is a ten-chapter exploration of the weird. Along the way, intrepid viewers are introduced to a host of fully-realized characters like Bannana Boy—a lad a little too fond of potassium-rich fruit and in dire need of a new pair of underwear.

Audiences at the MicroCineFest were treated to four chapters of luncacy. My favorite had to be "Big Head, Big Hand," a morality play involving gigantism. A man with a big head (my boy doesn't have a *fore*head, he's got a *sixteen*head) inadvertently eats a big cricket belonging to a fisherman with a big hand. A huge battle ensues.

With GUBBI GUBBI, Wind and Prykowski show an amazing knack for creating terrifically strange characters perfectly matched for the world around them. Catch chapters of GUBBI GUBBI on www.ifilms.com.

THE WORKS OF HUCK BOTKO

Documentarian Huck Botko has managed to carve out quite a unique niche in today's cinema. Huck has become a specialist in the "revenge film." Though none of the five videos shown at MicroCineFest '99 had a running time of more than thirteen minutes, each contains fleshed-out narratives that are excruciating to bear despite their brevity. In his work, Botko makes the audience privy to his vindictive intentions. How, though, will Botko have his vengeance? Will he succeed? And, will there be any consequences?

In his early work, Botko sugar-coats his retribution, implementing items such as fruitcake, baked Alaska, cheesecake, and graham cracker cream pie against a family he feels didn't love him enough. By introducing foreign and oftentimes disgusting elements into foodstuffs, Botko feels his family is finally getting their just desserts. Watching well-documented preparation of these disgusting (if not potentially dangerous) aliments is a painful experience. Many an audience member (especially myself) were heard groaning not only as Botko cooked up his plot but, moreover, while his family unsuspectingly digested the fruits of his nefarious labor.

Botko's latest work, JULIE, seems to be the straw that broke the camel's back. Instead of Botko playing foul against his kin, he has turned his camera to two chaps who feel they've been wronged by a woman. In order to defend the "Brotherhood of Men," two losers devise a plan where one will try to bed the title character in order to give her a venereal disease. Yet, the odds are against them as the infected guy has less sex appeal than a eunuch. He's Cashiers du Cinemart's old friend, Andrew Gurland, formerly one of the directors of the New York Underground Film Festival (see CdC #3). Knowing that Gurland is a consummate

liar and that he's starred in the mock-you-mentary, FRAT HOUSE, his presence in the film not only undermines the credibility of this Botko piece but all of the documentarian's prior work. The jig appears to be up. For his culinary chaos, Botko garnered the MCF's Martha Stewart Award.

Other Kewl Flix

% (PERCENT) (dir. Steve Stein)

I recently caught Nicholas Goodman's film SWING BLADE on www.mediatrip.com. Finding it hilarious, I sent the URL to a good number of my friends only to find that quite a few of them didn't understand what I found so humorous. The main reason for this turned out to be that folks had either seen SWINGERS or SLING BLADE but not both. I would propose that in order to be a successful parody, one must be at least passingly familiar with its subject matter. I mean, I know the general gist of SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE and am intimate with STAR WARS so GEORGE LUCAS IN LOVE was no big stretch of the imagination (this short is also viewable at MediaTrip).

However, % (PERCENT) works as a short film but fails as a parody. Not enough people have seen Π (PI) in order to "get the joke" of %. Being a big fan of Π (see CdC #9), though, I was rolling with laughter at this story of a working stiff working desperately to solve the problem of how much money to invest from his weekly wages. Complete with a half-pedantic, half-incomprehensible voice-over narration, an overzealous religious sect, uncomfortably extreme close-ups, and rhythmic editing patterns, director Stein captures the essence of Π and does a terrific job of poking fun at it!

CONSPIRACY J (dir. Steve Wood)

Amazing editing to an effective electronic music track, Steve Wood's CONSPIRACY J is a monumental mixed-media montage. With lightning-fast cuts, Wood articulately weaves a wacky, wordless tale of trench-coated agents and Atari joysticks.

Low points of the festival...

MCF '99 wasn't without a hitch. There were some altercations over parking spaces at The G-Spot and some overly loud audience members (namely me). But, when it came to films, there were only a few rocks among the rubies. More than being technically inept or philosophically repulsive, the following film seemed to be the biggest disappointment of the fest:

THE LAST BROADCAST (dir. Stefan Avalos & Lance Weiler)

I think that fellow judge Gabe Wardell really nailed it when he bemoaned the fact that THE LAST BROADCAST will not be remembered for being the first film to be digitally broadcast to movie theaters, but as the movie that was "eerily similar" to THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT. Yes, there are quite a few parallels between the two films but I won't comment yet as I hear that Ruggero Deodato's CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST with its "film crew lost in the woods" plot predates both films by twenty years. Regardless of comparisons, THE LAST BROADCAST is a disappointment.

THE LAST BROADCAST is the story of a fictional public access show's last hurrah—a live broadcast from the Pine Barrens in New Jersey as the show's hosts and a guest psychic search for the legendary Jersey Devil. I've heard of the Jersey Devil, courtesy of "The X-Files" but one of the movie's first self-imposed stumbling blocks is that there is little-to-no history of the Devil. One would hope for some "In Search Of"-style to increase the spookiness and give the uneducated viewer some much-needed backstory.

The story is placed in the context of a documentarian doing a story about the last fateful broadcast that left the public access hosts dead and an O.J. Simpson-sized pile of evidence pointing to the psycho psychic as the killer. Yes, the narrative shows some promise but reaches a high level of tedium rather quickly. Worse than that, however, the film takes a twist at the end of the second act that not only tests the boundaries of the suspension of disbelief but also radically shift the style of the narrative from first person to third. This frustrating change is so disconcerting that THE LAST BROADCAST cannot recover and ultimately fails. - MW

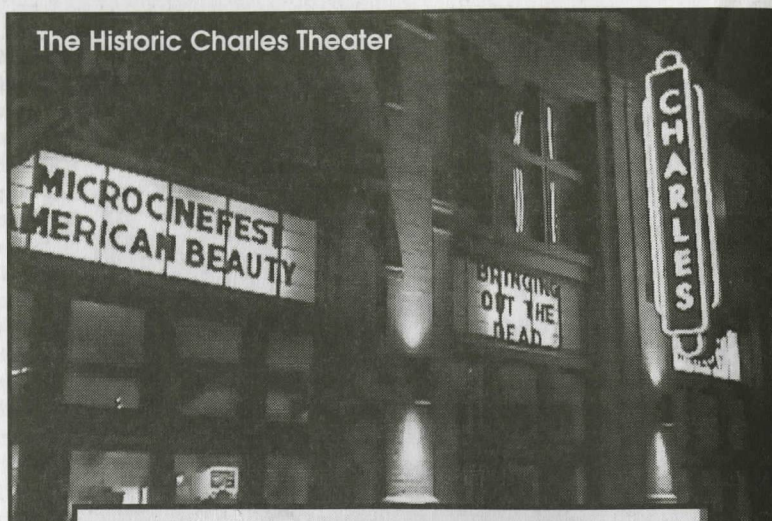


PHOTO © 1999 SKIZZ CYZYK

The G Spot

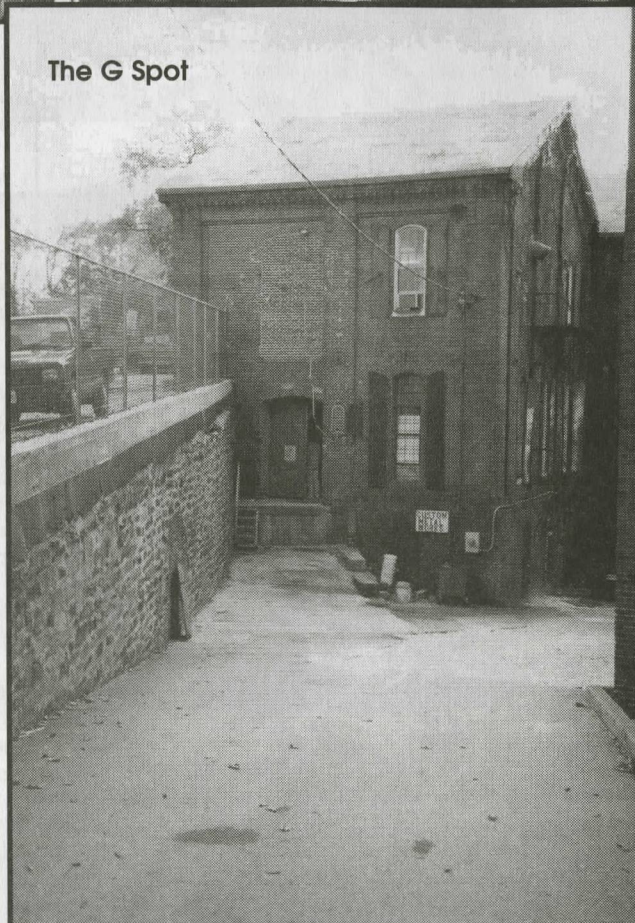


PHOTO © 1999 DAN KROVICH

MCF Judges WSG John Malkovich (Left)

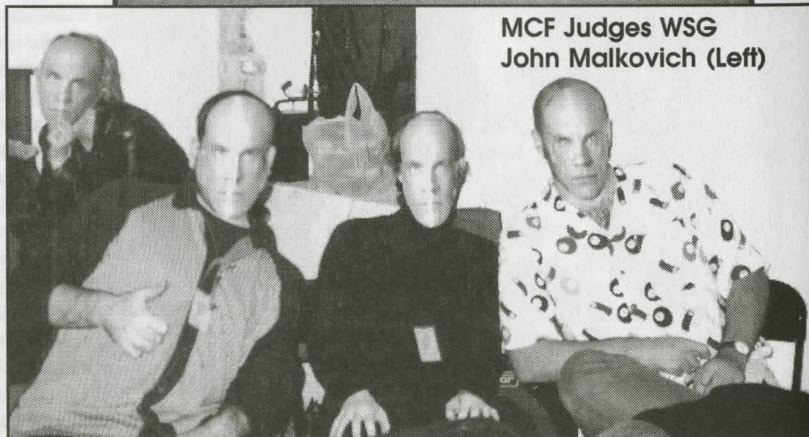


PHOTO © 1999 DAN KROVICH

EXISTO

What was the last subversive musical comedy you saw that made you laugh, think, and tap your toes all at the same time?

by Skizz Cyzyk

In EXISTO (pronounced "Ig-zees'-toe"), director Coke Sams taps the creative wellspring of actor/singer/composer Bruce Arnston. Better known as being the creative force behind the majority of the ERNEST films (as in Ernest P.Worrel), EXISTO is a wonderfully irreverent send-up of political extremists.

The film is set in land where art is a four letter word (maybe they're spelling it wrong) and creativity has to remain underground. The only safe haven for artists and free-thinkers in this land of mandated morality is The Sewer, an underground cabaret run by den mother/drag queen Colette Whachawill (Gailard Sartain). Fortunately, The Sewer is about to witness the long-awaited return of mind-blowing (and mind-blown) performance artist, Existo (Arnston), and his partner, Maxine (Jackie Welch). The two quickly decide to do battle against the televangelist-led government and its laws against subversive activities such as art, perversion, and self-determinism. As a means to this end, they rally the culturati of The Sewer to form bands of roving guerilla performance artists. Who knows where they might strike next?

The demented demagogue Existo is not without his weakness, however. Frequent Sewer-dweller, the slimy Ruben Dupree (Mark Cabus), was once a friend to Existo but now spends his days at the right hand of televangelist Dr. Armond Glasscock (Mike Montgomery). Dupree's lascivious mind devises a scheme to use vapid pop-tart singing sensation, Penelope (Jenny Littleton), to distract Existo from his crusade. It's Penelope's mission to sway the unstable artistic savior to the side of the scrupulous in time for the Apocalypse. It's up to Maxine and the others to convince Existo that right is wrong and save him from drowning in his soup.

Along with songs penned by Arnston and direction by Coke Sams, EXISTO shares the wacky creativity and inventiveness of the ERNEST film series. Certainly, not all of the ERNEST movies are of the same quality. However, of the films at least ERNEST GOESTO JAIL belongs next to RAISING ARIZONA in terms of its quirky and clever comedy. I'm not about to try to re-evaluate the career of Jim Varney, who has a minor role in EXISTO, after his untimely passing. I wrote the first draft of this review the day of his death—unbeknownst to me at the time. I have always maintained that Varney got a bad rap from folks sick of his TV commercials and a handful of his movies which where seemingly aimed at children. However, his defunct Saturday morning TV show, "Hey Vern, It's Ernest", should have been lauded by those who championed ground-breaking television such as "Pee Wee's Playhouse," "The Ed Grimley Show," "Bump In The Night," and Ralph Bakshi's "Mighty Mouse."

That said, EXISTO is certainly aimed at a different audience than the ERNEST movies: a more mature, artistically motivated crowd as opposed to suburban families looking for cheap, safe entertainment. EXISTO boasts a handful of fun musical numbers and some unique characters centered around timely subject matter. Moreover, EXISTO is most subversive in its portrayal of the fatuous right wing, self-righteous left wing, and the mentally ill messiah, Existo, as being equally silly!

Winner of the Audience Choice Award for Best Feature at MicroCineFest '99 and the Audience Award at San Francisco's IndieFest, EXISTO is the clarion call that the United States is in desperate need of reviving the concept of "midnight movies." If any film has begged to be shown on the silver screen in the wee hours while suburbia slumbers and the hip lumber about looking for challenging entertainment, this is it! To see if EXISTO is playing in your town any time soon check out www.existo.com.



"Is it real? Where did they find this footage?" Those are the questions asked by the audience. At least, those are the questions the filmmaker hopes that the audience is asking. Of course, the filmmaker knows it's not real and that the footage was faked, but if the audience is unsure, the filmmaker has done a good job.

The popularity of the "Is it real?" genre of independent film has grown considerably in recent years. The reasons are simple. So many people have decided to become filmmakers. Not all of these filmmakers have the resources to make a "traditional film," therefore many of them choose to make documentaries, while many more choose to make fake documentaries (fiction presented in a documentary style) or mockumentaries (parodies of reality). After all, neither the documentary nor the mockumentary has to have good lighting, camerawork, sound, or acting so anyone with access to a camera can make one.

Reality is rarely shot on 35mm film, or even on 16mm. It is, however, shot all the time on videotape, and audiences are hungry for it - otherwise shows like AMERICA'S FUNNIEST HOME VIDEOS, "COPS" or "Scariest Police Chases" would never last several seasons. One thing to consider, though, is that as long as those shows edit all that 'real' footage down to fit the time constraints of a weekly TV show, they aren't exactly showing the audience 'reality'.

Home video cameras capture reality. Average people with average video equipment shoot other average people in settings that look familiar to the average person. Millions of hours of unremarkable reality are captured on videotape each year. What if something remarkable were to happen during reality while a video camera was rolling? What if that tape made it's way to the public for viewing? The public would love it.

Not everyone is lucky enough to capture remarkable moments on his or her home video camera. So the resource challenged filmmaker desiring to be original takes plays on an audience's voyeuristic interests by making something that looks as realistic as possible.

Enter THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, a film shot mostly on videotape, that convinced moviegoers in 1999 that three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods, leaving behind only the footage they shot. The idea of making a film that appears to be found footage when it is not, is in no way a new idea. (In fact, even the storyline of TBWP has been used similarly in the past.) Nor is the idea of making a film that gives the impression it was never meant to be seen by audiences a new idea. A good example is the short film, NO LIES (1973, 18 minutes) by Mitchell W. Block, in which a cameraman burning off a roll of film for the heck of it, follows his female friend around her apartment while she gets ready to go out for the evening. During the conversation, she casually describes her recent rape, which prompts concern from the cameraman. Eventually she faces up to the severity of the incident. The audience is completely unaware until the closing credits, that the cameraman and the woman are both actors playing parts, and what looked like a test roll of film never meant for the public's eyes, was actually a prank being played on whoever sees it.

But NO LIES is a short film and not the sort of thing audiences see in movie theaters. Thanks to THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, the concept of video footage of questionable origin has reached the mainstream, opening up the minds of audiences to suspend their disbelief and adjust their eyes to watching low-quality, handheld home video on the same screens they're used to seeing big-budget Hollywood movies on.

While THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT showed filmmakers how easy it is to pull one over on audiences, the recent renewed interest in "fooled you" funnyman, Andy Kaufman (brought on by the release of bio-pic MAN ON THE MOON), showed them how much fun it can be. Hoaxes & pranks aimed at mainstream audiences have come into fashion to some extent, and home video technology paired with the internet are helping to pave the way for any filmmaker anxious to exploit the idea.

In DON'T WATCH THIS UNTIL I'M DEAD (23 minutes, 1998), was the abusive treatment of the camera. At first, he considered making that a trademark of his work, until he busted up his Hi-8 camera and reconsidered. However, he kept another trademark element: "snuff" death.

In DON'T WATCH THIS, the cameraman gets in front of the camera this time, to deliver a farewell before committing suicide, like a serious version of Karl Slovin's PARTING WORDS (see page **). Again, the lengths of the takes and the lack of editing make the video seem more like a real incident captured on videotape versus entertainment made for an audience's amusement. In fact, it looked real enough to attract

Though
f i l m
festivals have
seen their
share of fake
found footage films
at this point, few of
those films live up to the
work of Mike Z. Mike Z is
a master of the current "Is it
real?" genre of independent
filmmaking. Z's work is filled with
harsh realities that moviegoers may
be familiar with, but most would be
unaccustomed to the degree of reality
Z incorporates.

"I call what I do 'Experiential
Filmmaking,'" he says, "because I am trying to
allow the audience the opportunity to go
through an experience that they can participate
in without the distancing effects of self-referential
irony or passive detachment. That in itself can be
threatening to people that are used to being in control
of their relationship to the viewing experience." To achieve
that, Z always makes the cameraman an important character
within the piece - often times the only character. He thus puts
the viewer in the shoes of the cameraman, seeing and hearing
what the cameraman sees or hears, and most of all, experiencing
what the cameraman experiences and eliminating control over the
situation. "I only enjoy art that confronts the audience by breaking the
fourth wall, because of the thrill of feeling like a participant in the work
that I am viewing."

Just as reality isn't neatly edited into a compact piece of entertainment,
neither are Z's works. His
projects have running
times between 6 minutes
to 2 hours. He often
includes long, imperfect,
sometimes boring
moments that take away
from the entertainment
value of the work, but
make it all the more "real."

"IS IT REAL?"

by Skizz Cyzyk

"I think most people have lost the ability to surrender to the experience of watching a movie. We've been taught that it's not cool to give in to the willing suspension of disbelief that is necessary to lose yourself in a story. Most of the audience is alienated from this media culture. Some filmmakers think that the audience will only enjoy new films as they relate to films that they've already seen or experienced. I'm just not interested in paying homage or goofing on old formats. I'm interested in making something new."

In his 1998, two hour video, HOMELESS GUY STEALS A CAMERA AND KILLS SOMEONE, the first half-hour-or-so is comprised of an Asian family on vacation; the father videotaping his wife and child. The shots go on for what seem like an eternity, as does the sequence. Finally, during one shot, the camera begins shaking violently as you hear the cameraman struggling with an off-camera attacker intent on stealing the camera. Most of the rest of the piece consists of an unseen cameraman ranting and raving while running around highway underpasses. At one point, he attacks and kills somebody. Eventually the tape runs out. That's it: no beginning or ending credits, no editing, nothing but a tape that any person could pop into their VCR and wonder where it came from and whether or not it's real.

"I wanted to use the camera in ways that it had never been used before. I wanted to subvert the way that the medium is used by avoiding the usual visual framing and narrative conventions." One element that Z incorporated into HOMELESS GUY and his next video, DON'T WATCH THIS UNTIL I'M DEAD (23 minutes, 1998), was the abusive treatment of the camera. At first, he considered making that a trademark of his work, until he busted up his Hi-8 camera and reconsidered. However, he kept another trademark element: "snuff" death.

the attention of San Diego authorities. "I gave a friend a dub, and on his way home from work he mistakenly dropped it in the return box at [a video store]. When he got home and realized his mistake, he called the store to tell them what had happened. By the time he got there, the store clerks had watched the tape, believed it to be real, and had shown it to the police. My friend got to the store, asked for the tape, and the cops swooped in the door." After hours of questioning, the friend led the police to Z's home to have a look around. Though the police were skeptical, Z was eventually able to convince them the video was fake by offering proof that he had entered it in MicroCineFest. "At the time, I thought it was a great moment for me, and proof that I was on the right track," he says despite the video being rejected by MicroCineFest for being "too creepy."

Z was on the right track though. A year later, MicroCineFest screened his next video, HOW TO START A REVOLUTION IN AMERICA (1999, 30 minutes), marking Z's first festival screening, and the beginning of festivals approaching him with inquiries about his work.

REVOLUTION is an instructional how-to video work-in-progress being made in front of our eyes by three revolutionaries (or so Z would have us believe), complete with a manifesto, instructions on how to kill someone with your bare hands, simple ways to screw up "the system", and instructions on how to build bombs with household materials (Z says, "During the production I was worrying about whether or not the pipe bomb recipes were actually dangerous. The Navy Seal that had told me how to make the bombs was pretty convincing. After all, what if some kid watched my tape?!"). The idea of REVOLUTION in itself is interesting enough, but on top of it, Z adds in conflicts between the three characters, an unexpected murder, an attempted rape, and plenty of racist, sexist, and generally frightening & offensive rants from one of the characters, all of which make asking, "Is this for real?" all the more uncomfortable. "The three actors that I chose [from those that responded to an ad] all revealed that they were initially afraid I was actually planning on killing them in the course of filming, and the lead actress had to call her boyfriend every three hours on the first day of filming." All three actors give such exceptional, realistic performances that for the first time Z includes credits at the end of the piece. "None of my other tapes carry credits because I don't like the letdown when you find out 'it's only a movie.'"

"It's only a movie" was certainly *not* on the minds of the Federal Bureau of Investigations when they stumbled upon Z's next work, MILITARY TAKEOVER OF NEW YORK CITY (1999, 6 minutes). In the midst of 1999's Y2K hysteria, Z was experiencing a moment of fame thanks to various media outlets sending visitors to his website (www.crowdedtheater.com) to view TAKEOVER. On the site, visitors were greeted by the heading, "Is there going to be a Military Takeover of New York City on New Years Eve 1999?" followed by the explanation, "I don't know too much about this tape you are about to see. I got it from my cousin Steve who's in the army. He said that copies of this tape are floating around the base, and nobody knows who made it. If it's fake, then there's nothing to worry about. If it's real, then we're in really big trouble." The video consists of an unseen cameraman, supposedly a military authority, showing locations in Times Square while explaining a plan to start a race riot during the New Years Eve celebration so that the military can move in and wreak havoc. He shows a location and gives the orders of who will be in that spot at what time and what they should be doing.

TAKEOVER is, of course, a fake, and anyone who bothered to click on "is this real?" link on the website would have seen Z's explanation. "The video that you see on this site was created by Mike Z. It is presented to the viewer without the usual disclaimers of conventional fiction so that the viewer can experience the information directly." It encourages the discussion of, among other things, the distrust that many Americans feel about their Government and the use of racial hatred to manipulate the American people. Z goes on to explain, "As a filmmaker, I was concerned that these issues were not being addressed in the mainstream culture. I made the tape so that the situation could

be looked at and discussed. I have no specific political agenda, though I do hope that the New Year brings us closer to a better future." Despite Z's disclaimer, the FBI showed up on his doorstep wanting to discuss the content of his website and how they could keep people from seeing it. Z told them to talk to his lawyer. Instead, they talked to his web host, who promptly pulled the site. By this time, enough mirror sites had popped up that the FBI would not be able to extinguish TAKEOVER from public accessibility. Z's web host, swamped with complaints over the decision to pull Z's website, reconsidered and put the website back up when he realized the FBI could not legally make him take it down. After news of Z's FBI run-in made the national news, the American Civil Liberties Union stepped in to represent him in a case against Janet Reno, the Justice Department and the FBI. (The suit is still pending as of this writing.) In the meantime, more than 225,000 people accessed Z's website to watch TAKEOVER. Only 10,500 bothered to read the disclaimer, and not only that, New Year's Eve came and went without a military takeover of New York. Nevertheless, Z's fifteen minutes of notoriety brought him closer to success. He attracted the interest of a CEO from an internet start-up company. The two met and discussed creating short web movies, which Z would introduce, similar to Rod Serling from "The Twilight Zone." Z was skeptical about the arrangement but was excited about the possibility of stepping away from making self-financed work for a change. Unfortunately, when the company finally saw some of Z's work, they realized he might be a little too cutting edge for what they had in mind, and they began to lose interest. In an effort to keep the deal on the table, Z quickly made a new video to send to them. MY LEFT NUT (2000, 10 minutes) stars Z as himself, sitting in a chair next to a VCR draped with a plastic drop cloth and speaking directly into the camera. He is personally addressing the internet company, explaining to them how anxious he is to work for them. "I am willing to give my left nut to show you how serious I am," he says in the video, "I've had it on ice for a few hours and I've wrapped a rubber band around it to cut off the circulation." He goes on to explain that between the time he calls 911 and the paramedics arrive, he has two minutes to remove his testicle and place it in the pre-addressed mailer along with the videotape from the VCR his camera is connected to, recording the entire incident. Then it's just a matter of dropping the mailer in the mailbox as he's being carried out. He calls 911 and says he's castrated himself. Then he proceeds to sterilize a pair of scissors and begins operating on himself. Despite his wincing from pain, things are going as planned until he accidentally drops his freshly removed testicle and the paramedics arrive early. With extreme agony on his face and blood all over his hands, the piece ends with Z reaching under the plastic drop cloth to push the stop button on the VCR. The screen goes blue. Z mailed them a copy of MY LEFT NUT in a blood stained envelope. "They passed on the deal," he says. NUT went on to be the main event at Park City, Utah's inaugural Sundress Film Festival, garnering a small cult following and plenty of word-of-mouth on the underground film circuit. Besides NUT being his most painfully disgusting work of dark humour, it turns out to be one of his most entertaining too. It is the sort of video that is likely to be bootlegged and circulated, becoming the source of an urban legend about the guy who cut off his testicle on camera in order to get a job. Self-mutilation, race riots, murder, suicide, destruction, etc. When asked how far is too far, Z replies, "I'm interested in all aspects of human behavior. I'm mostly interested in sex and death, although sex with the dead doesn't do a thing for me. Since I'm not trying to shock people, I don't need to create new ways to expand the range of human perversity. I just read the Times, or any interesting non-fiction book." He continues, "I think I enjoy reading about people that behave badly, because it makes me feel like I'm doing okay."

For more information, be sure to visit Mike Z's website www.crowdedtheater.com.

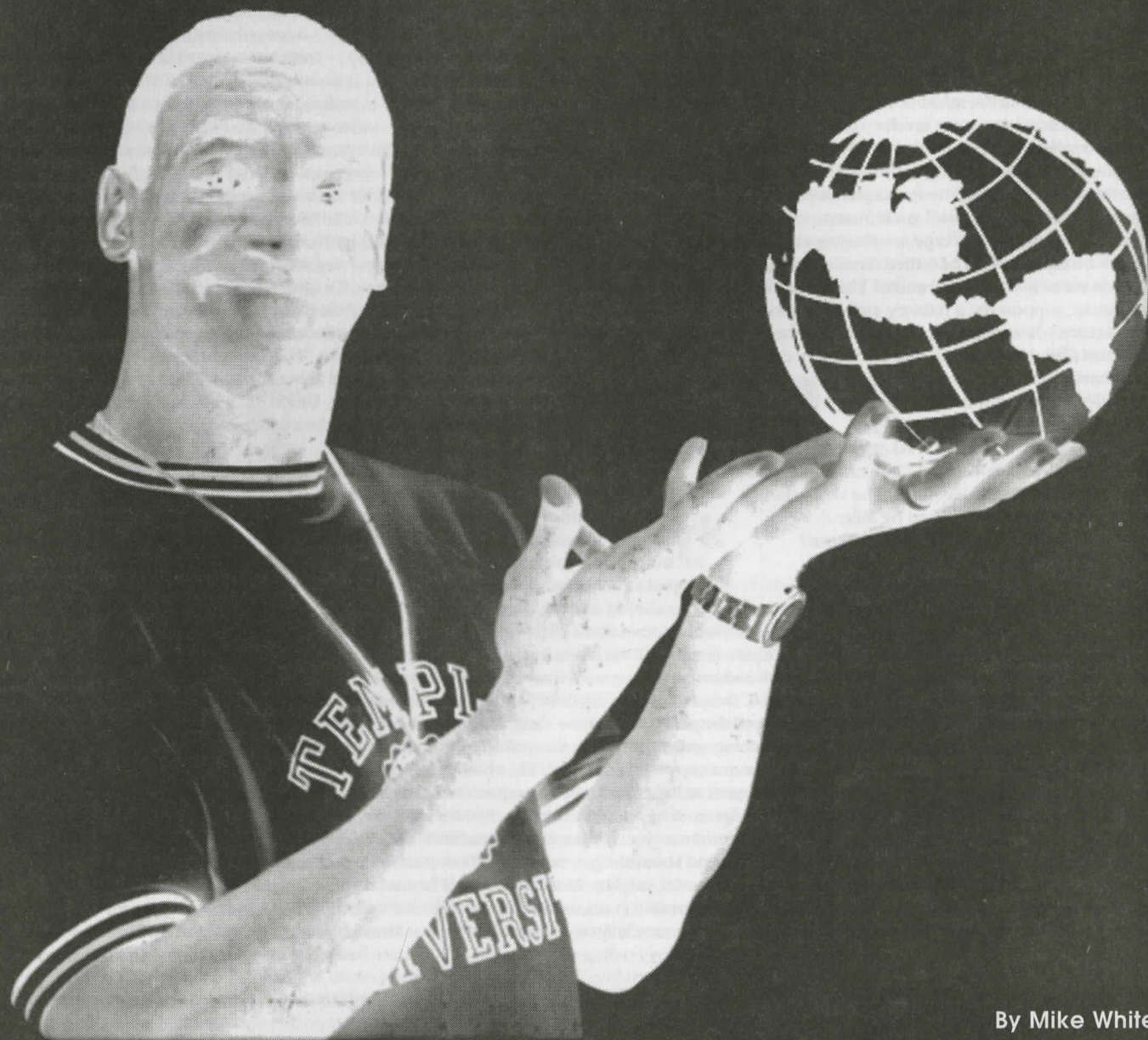
CRAIG BALDWIN/WHO OWNS THE AIRWAVES?

*Said Conrad Cornelius o'Donald o'Dell,
My very young friend who is learning to spell:
"The A is for Ape. And the B is for Bear.
"The C is for Camel. The H is for Hare.
"The M is for Mouse. And the R is for Rat.
"I know all the twenty-six letters like that...*

*"...through to Z is for Zebra. I know them all well."
Said Conrad Cornelius o'Donald o'Dell.
"So now I know everything anyone knows
"From beginning to end. From the start to the close.
"Because Z is as far as the alphabet goes."*

*Then he almost fell flat on his face on the floor
When I picked up the chalk and drew one letter more!
A letter he had never dreamed of before!
And I said "You can stop, if you want, with the Z
"Because most people stop with the Z
"But not me!*

*"In the places I go there are things that I see
"That I never could spell if I stopped with the Z.
"I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends.
"My alphabet starts where your alphabet ends!*



By Mike White

Visible light occupies a thin bandwidth of only a few hertz. On either side are worlds of wonderful waves; ultraviolet, infrared, gamma rays, x-rays, radio waves, et al. Likewise, looking back at history, the majority of people look at a sliver of the events that have gone on in the world and accept them without question. Point A leads to point B, which leads to point C.

On occasion, there are people who take furtive glances outside the realm of "accepted fact" and might form a different opinion about the path taken between A and C. Perhaps there are other forces at work. Those who question the validity of the status quo are often labeled as heretics or, if they're lucky, they might be viewed as innovators. Like Martin Luther questioning the dogma of the Catholic Church or Robert Koch questing for the cholera bacillus, eyes that stray past the mental barriers of conventional wisdom can behold wonders.

Filmmaker Craig Baldwin has been staring into the apparent void for over a decade, following the patterns of light and sound past the visual spectrum until the wavelengths have become mountainous. From his journeys he's returned with remarkable visions. Fortunately, Baldwin has been able to translate these sights into perspicuous works of celluloid art. Using the images of the past as a foundation, Baldwin pieces together his films with frames from disparate sources. Mexican sci-fi films, DEATHRACE 2000, VALLEY OF THE GIANTS, and a million other odds and ends lend themselves to the *cinema povera* of Craig Baldwin.

*You'll be sort of surprised what there is to be found
Once you go beyond Z and start poking around!
So, on beyond Z! It's high time you were shown
That you really don't know all there is to be known.*

A protégé of filmmaker Bruce Conner (and an apparent study of Czech visionary Dusan Makavejev), Baldwin's work is a hypnotic experiment in editing rhythm and the recontextualization of film images. Baldwin's first major work, TRIBULATION 99: ALIEN ANOMALIES UNDER AMERICA is an intense pastiche of found footage. The film is packed so tightly with images that it takes several viewings to begin to appreciate the wonderful use of match form cutting and visual rhymes.

Divided into ninety-nine chapters (reminiscent of Martin Luther's thesis, or the year of "The End Times"), the narrative is "the ultimate conspiracy film." The audience is told a clandestine tale by a guileless narrator (Sean Kiloyne) of the gradual, systematic takeover of the world by aliens from Quetzalcoatl, a planet which orbits the sun directly opposite of earth. The aliens live inside of our hollow earth (a theory found within The Big Book of Conspiracies—see page 48) and have had several dealings with the U.S. government.

Initially appearing to be a farcical conglomeration of nutty conspiracy theories, TRIBULATION 99 contains more truth than fiction and succeeds in disseminating facts in the guise of the fantastic. "It's all true, it's all documented," Baldwin says about his re-telling of popular history. "Instead of documenting it with a talking head, I document it with an image."



Encapsulating the dirty deeds of the CIA and the military done at the behest of the Military-Industrial complex, Baldwin primarily documents the political turmoil in Central and South American. Of course, living in our "global village," the staged coups, training and funding policies of the U.S. government have since found use the world over.

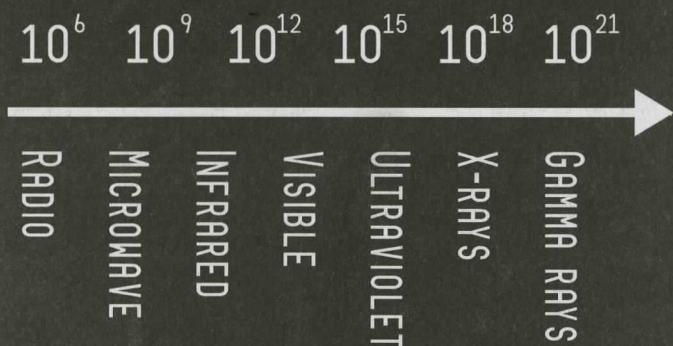
Moving from the U.S. involvement across its southern border in the twentieth century, Baldwin would return to the ideas of "outside forces" asserting their power in these areas in his subsequent film, O NO CORONADO!—an account of the colonization of the Americas by Europe, focusing on Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's mad quest for the Seven Cities of Gold.

O NO CORONADO! would find Baldwin shooting original footage to accompany his montage work; employing actors to stand in for major "players" in the colonization and killing of the Americas native population. Baldwin creates a narrative with what's available stating that his ingenuity is beholden to his budget and the need to implement apparently outrageous images. Items such as an "odd reel" – a leftover from a film with no commercial value becomes an inestimable source of inspiration.

While TRIBULATION 99 and O NO CORONADO! garnered abundant critical praise, both works remained not only out of the "mainstream" but a good number of cinephiles were unaware of them as well. Personally, I had always taken it for granted that at least TRIBULATION 99 was a cult favorite. Released in 1991, I suppose that the film might have been lost in the cracks during the awkward transition from cult films shown at art/revival houses to the stocking of cult videos at one's neighborhood rental shop. While POOR WHITETRASH and SHE-DEVILS ON WHEELS managed to infiltrate even Blockbuster Video, TRIBULATION 99 wasn't as widely available. Add to this the film's "not long enough for a feature and too long to be a short" fifty-minute running time and the demand it places on the viewer to actually pay attention, it's easy to see where TRIBULATION 99 didn't gain the underground popularity of something like THETOXICAVENGER.

Baldwin's popularity would soar, however, with the release of his next feature, SONIC OUTLAWS (see CdC #5). A boon to the notoriety of the film was its story of the band Negative Land struggling against musical giant U2 and their label, Island Records over the release of an album called U2. Not only was Negative Land sued by Island Records but their own record label, SST, as well. SONIC OUTLAWS centered on the legalities of copyright, limits of "fair use" and boundaries of the public domain, Baldwin's use of found footage was a perfect ironic complement to the film's subject. It's in SONIC OUTLAWS that Baldwin pointedly begins to question the legislation of bandwidth. One of the strongest moments in the film comes

FREQUENCY (Hz)



when a member of Negative Land gives a demonstration of the ease to tune in on a cellular phone conversation. "We broke the law right now at this very instant, didn't we?" he says with a shy smile as the audience is made privy to what could be considered a private conversation.

*So you see!
There's no end
To the things you might know,
Depending how far beyond Zebra you go!*

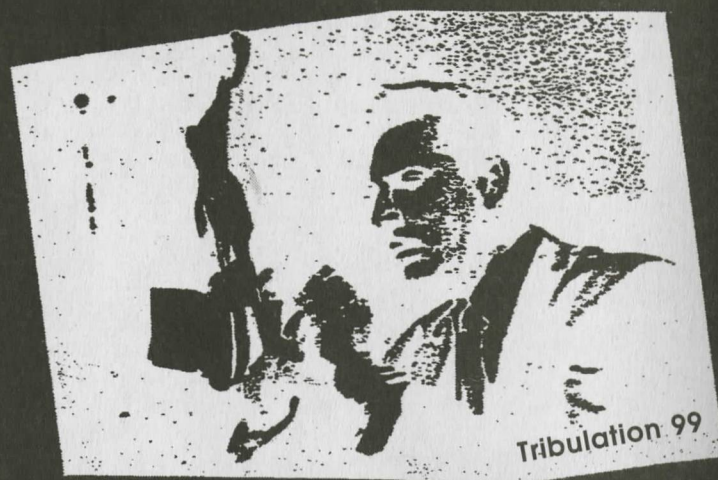
"Nothing in this film is science fiction," is the tagline of Baldwin's latest work, *SPECTRES OF THE SPECTRUM*. Continuing to explore the ownership of the airwaves, Baldwin considers *SPECTRES* to be a quasi-sequel to *TRIBULATION 99* with updates to the same themes of the earlier film starring the same actor, Sean Kiloooyne.

Winner of the Way Cool Feature award at MicroCineFest 99, *SPECTRES* stars Kiloooyne as Yogi, a holdout from the age before the New Electromagnetic Order (NEO)—a vertically integrated company that sounds eerily familiar in the wake of the AOL/Time Warner merger. Yogi is one of the few free thinkers left and, holed up in his radioactive wasteland, he broadcasts his views and news to other members of "TV Tesla." With Yogi is his mutant daughter, Boo Boo (Caroline Koebel as voiced by Beth Lisick), an obstreperous telepath with little love of the world that NEO's helped to create.

"All my films are about history, autonomy, assimilation and these David and Goliath kind of power abuse things." In *SPECTRES* the audience witnesses an escalated battle of "the little guy versus the corporation" that was explored in *SONIC OUTLAWS*. Dealing this time with the topic of the transference of energy, most notably through broadcasting, Baldwin demonstrates that there have been countless fringe dwellers that history has cast aside or relegated to footnotes.

Nikola Tesla, Philo T. Farnsworth, and Edwin Armstrong are a handful of inventors who have been forgotten or overshadowed by fabricated tales of greatness about innovators such as Thomas Edison, David Sarnoff or Alexander Graham Bell. In essence, *SPECTRES OF THE SPECTRUM* can be viewed as a much-needed documentary about broadcast history. As Baldwin sees it, his film is a "pre-history of telepathy." In time, he speculates that there won't be a need for rudimentary forms of communication such as the telephone or television but, instead, there might be direct point-to-point communication via brainwaves.

Along with presenting an alternate history about the pioneers of spectral exploration, Baldwin's work serves as a critique of the history of military experiments in the Van Allen Belts, tracing it through the control of electronic manufacturing, telecommunication networks and, finally, programming. "It's understanding the Earth as a magnet and it's a critique of military-industrial incursion into the electronic sphere."



As these ideas intertwine, Baldwin's inspiration for *SPECTRES* came from a desire to denounce the High-Frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP), an aspect of the "Star Wars" project operating under the guise of an energy transference process. Feeling that this would be too topical and leave the film feeling dated in a few years, Baldwin was also inspired by the "dead tech" of kinescopes. These devices were once commonly used to transfer television signals to film that gives the image an odd, out of phase look. Objects on screen are surrounded by haloes of brightness. "They give everything a weird sense of time," says Baldwin, who admits he gets a giddy sense attained through the primordial days of live performance television.

Baldwin describes the intersection of these ideas with a "cosmic metaphor" wherein "you have dust and gas and then at a certain point you get a planet if you've got enough gravity." The center of gravity for Baldwin was the television series "Science in Action." He wrote the story out of the kinescope footage (which one can see a glimpse of in *TRIBULATION 99*). He created a family for a seemingly innocuous member of the "Science in Action" staff, Amy Hacker (whose real name was shortened from Hackert courtesy of clever sound editing).

The narrative of Boo Boo travelling back in time at speeds faster than light in order to view her grandmother's appearance on "Science in Action" is often detrimental to the pacing and enjoyment of the film. Boo Boo's voice-over is often grating but it's not enough to detract from the overall strength and importance of the film, which is solidly based in alternative history.

*The places I took him!
I tried hard to tell
Young Conrad Cornelius o'Donald o'Dell
A few brand-new wonderful words he might spell.
I led him around and I tried hard to show
There are things beyond Z that most people don't know.
I took him past Zebra. As far as I could.
And I think, perhaps, maybe I did him some good...*

*Because, finally, he said:
"This is really great stuff!"
"And I guess the old alphabet
"ISN'T enough!"*

*NOW the letters he uses are something to see!
Most people still stop at the Z...
But not HE!*

For more information or to order the films of Craig Baldwin, visit www.othercinema.com. On *Beyond Zebra* arrogated from Dr. Seuss.

"You know, some people are sure that you're crazy. Others think you're a faker. Now, both of those things could be true and you still could be some kind of a genius." – Orson Welles as J.P. Morgan

At the turn of the last century, the world was aflutter with invention. As it was before the explosion of the atom bomb, scientists were glorified as prophets of modernity. They were portrayed as taming electricity and venturing into hitherto unknown realms. Countless names have been etched into the history books while hundreds more remain anonymous. They are the explorers that sailed away in search of far off lands or trade routes, never to be heard from again.

School kids still learn about Guglielmo Marconi being the "father of radio" and Thomas Edison being the father of just about everything else—from phonographs to movie cameras to the light bulb. Meanwhile, the life and work of Nikola Tesla remains enshrouded in mystery. Yet, Tesla had laid enough groundwork for wireless transmissions that the Supreme Court decided in 1943 that he had anticipated all subsequent patents for radio. Likewise, it was his system of alternating current that replaced Edison's and is still in use today.

The reason for Tesla's lack of prominence could be that along with the representations of scientist as savior came fearful portraits of the "mad scientist." These visions were fueled by yellow journalists of the day. Headlines decried the fate of the common man in the face of these new discoveries, pondering if the implementation of electricity was an abomination. Moreover, while Tesla was quite a showman, he wasn't necessarily media savvy, doing little to sway the perceptions of him not being entirely stable. If anything, Tesla was tailor made for the "mad scientist" role (he was even the model for Superman's frequent nemesis in Max Fletcher's cartoons of the 1940's).

In his series of autobiographical articles published by *Electrical Experimenter* magazine (Feb–Oct of 1919), Tesla often writes of his undiagnosed obsessive-compulsive disorder. "I contracted many strange likes, dislikes and habits, some of which I can trace to external impressions while others are unaccountable. I had a violent aversion against earrings of women but other ornaments, as bracelets, please me more or less according to design. I would not touch the hair of other people except, perhaps, at the point of a revolver. I would get a fever looking at a peach and if a piece of camphor was anywhere in the house, it caused me the keenest discomfort. Even now, I am not insensible to some of these upsetting impulses. I counted the steps in my walks and calculated the cubical contents of soup plates, coffee cups and pieces of food – otherwise my meal was unenjoyable. All repeated acts or operations I performed had to be divisible by three and if I [missed] I felt impelled to do it all over again, even if it took hours."

Another reason for Tesla's anonymity could be that for all of his visionary ideas surrounding wireless technology and electricity, he had little to no fiscal reasoning. In fact, his plans for a world where energy flowed freely and was as free as the air threatened enough financial powers-that-be that Tesla's test transmitters were dismantled by the U.S. government.

Unfortunately, Tesla's teachings and ideas have been de-legitimized due to their adoption by cultists and/or conspiracy theorists. In a recent hodgepodge collection of works by and about the inventor, *The Fantastic Inventions of Nikola Tesla*, there are pieces tying Tesla to UFOs and the so-called "Pyramids of Mars." True, several of Tesla's ideas may still seem preternatural, especially his use of the ionosphere and the earth's natural magnetism in order to "girdle the globe." Yet, several of theories have since manifested into reality and experiments with the ionosphere continue.

Kristo Papic's film *THE SECRET OF NIKOLA TESLA*, is a Serbian-funded fictionalized account of Tesla's fruitful years at the turn of the century. The film begins with a foreign-language voice-over and some documentary footage, including interviews with various scientific talking heads and some spooky spiritualists. Stalling the narrative even more is an odd bookend scene of an older Tesla being interviewed. This ineffectual device appears to place the inventor in a modern context despite his passing away in 1943.

Those points aside, at the core of *THE SECRET OF NIKOLA TESLA* is a fairly well crafted recounting of the debate surrounding Tesla's Alternating Current system and the established Direct Current method of Thomas Edison. Played by Dennis Patrick, Edison's motivation behind rejecting Alternating Current is shown to be purely financial—it would mean having to rebuild his power plants at a considerable cost. Also at stake was the prestige and the financial

TESLA: The Modern Prometheus

gains of harnessing the natural power of Niagara Falls. Edison is shown playing the popular press by decrying Alternating Current as inherently dangerous—"If I had my way, I'd have the damn thing prohibited by law." He goes so far as stage a press conference where he electrocutes a dog to prove his point (in real life Edison didn't stop with dogs).

Toying with these inventors is the powerful J.P. Morgan. The role of a puppet-master, remotely pulling the strings from his office and bed was highly suitable to Orson Welles. The rotund actor was a few years from his death and most likely unable to get around as well as he once was. Morgan is portrayed as ruthless and conniving while Tesla's other financier, George Westinghouse (Strother Martin), acts like a philanthropical nitwit.

Starring Petar Bozovic, the young actor appears to do a fine job as Tesla despite his dubbed voice. The film does well to not sanctify Tesla. His shortcomings and oddities aren't ignored. He stares off into space blankly during financial discussions. In a meeting with Westinghouse, Tesla requests twelve napkins to clean his silverware and nearly faints when peaches are brought to his table.

While the film is a good primer for information about the man once dubbed "The Modern Prometheus," Papic's work suffers from its attempt to summarize so many events in such a short period. The destruction of Tesla's laboratory passes without note or a guess at the cause. There are several unexplained flashbacks that may have had voice-overs at one time along with at least one scene that is not translated.

For more information about Tesla, Papic's footage is re-used and expanded upon to some degree in Craig Baldwin's *SPECTRES OF THE SPECTRUM*. There are also several books about the inventor available, including *My Inventions*, an autobiographical collection of magazine stories that is limited by Tesla's narrow vision of self and overextended hope for the future. *The Fantastic Inventions of Nikola Tesla* is boring in its countless pages of schematics and his long-winded address to the American Institute of Electrical Engineers (5/20/1891). It isn't until the fifth chapter that things begin to get interesting with a reprint of Tesla's article, "Transmission of Electrical Energy without Wires" from *Electrical World and Engineer* (3/5/04). However, apart from that, and some writing on a "death

ray," Tesla was said to be working on in 1934, the book is junk. The most authoritative look at Tesla's life is *Tesla: Man Out of Time* (ISBN: 044039077X) by Margaret Cheney. Well-researched and comprehensive, Cheney's book is currently out of print but widely available on sites like www.AbeBooks.com.

For copies of *THE SECRET OF NIKOLA TESLA* check out www.Infinite-Energy.com and for more information about Tesla, write to the Tesla Memorial Society at 21 Maddaket Southwyck Village, Scotch Plains NJ 07076. Tell 'em CdC sent you!



This is cautionary tale of one young filmmaker who became intoxicated by the idea of seeing his work on the big screen and drunk with the power of being an auteur. Names have been omitted to protect the innocent.

It was an indie filmmaker's dream. In the right hands, it might have been glorious; it turned out to be a recipe for disaster.

The director had developed a screenplay, written by his former co-worker. True, it was a typical RESERVOIR DOGS derivative: lots of guns, swearing, and *nouvelle* violence, but it was a script nonetheless. The screenwriter was a theater major and arranged to rehearse and perform his work at the community college he attended. After each performance he, the rest of the cast, and the director sought input from the audience in regards to plot and pacing.

The director pulled strings and made promises to secure free locations. A stroke of luck provided a restaurant that was closed on Sundays with a manager who trustingly gave up the keys to the film's crew, providing the major location for this talky crime drama.

He acquired a used 16mm news camera with battery, changing bag, and extra spool. With some haggling, he purchased 16mm color film stock at near wholesale prices. An agreement to have all of the film processed at once clinched a bargain basement development and video transfer rate.

The prospect of working on a "for real" motion picture bagged the crew, remaining equipment, and time in an edit suite.

Herr Direktor changed his name to that of his maternal grandfather's. Some thought it was grand gesture to the great German auteurs of old like Lang or Freund. Instead, it was one in a series of clever ploys; this one geared to aid in his self-incorporation and subsequent business loan to provide the budget.

It looked as if he had done everything perfectly up to the day he called, "Action."

But then it all turned to shit.

Taking a closer look at the situation, we find that the director was actually a *producer* who aspired to direct. All of the aforementioned finagling brought the project to a point where a competent director could have taken the reins...

The director had never shot a foot of film—not even a test reel with his pre-owned camera (opting instead to save the money, raw stock, and time). He had done some video work—shooting a promo piece for a local cable channel—but he had never shot a narrative.

Despite coiling cables on a cornball horror film and gaffing on an overly-artsy student film, he hadn't learned anything of camera angles, positioning, framing, depth of focus, lighting, editing, et cetera. He knew he wanted to make a movie, and that's about all.

In the later stages of preparation, the director was inspired by the writings of another indie filmmaker who had made a film with a tiny budget and pared down crew. I'm referring to the enjoyable diary of the making of *EL MARIACHI* by Robert Rodriguez, *Rebel without a Crew*.

How influential and informative is Rodriguez's do-it-yourself book? It has been suggested that between it, Joe Queenan's *The Unkindest Cut*, Roger Corman's *How I Made 100 Movies in Hollywood And Never Lost A Dime* and Chris-

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

by Mike White

tine Vanchon's *Shooting To Kill*, that attendance at film school is useless except to learn film theory and history (and that's not in vogue anymore anyway).

Unfortunately, the inspirational tome seems to have inspired all the wrong people. It continues to drive out the no-talents in droves. For every one genius motivated to finally get off their bum, there are thousands of jerkoffs who pick up the mantle of indie filmmaking and churn out pure crap.

Before parents, teachers, and ministers gather up copies of *Rebel Without a Crew* and set them ablaze in a public square, I have to make it clear that saying Rodriguez's book caused me undue pain would be like blaming the music of KMFDM for the shootings in Columbine, Colorado.

These amateur auteurs may have been motivated by Rodriguez's wonderful cry to arms for indie filmmakers just as easily as by an episode of "Saved by the Bell." Something was bound to come along and dislodge these unstable hacks. No book is to blame.

Robert Rodriguez may have suggested that a *competent* director need not employ the services of a cinematographer, but he has been making films since he was a kid. He still does.

"I make at least a movie a week, short ones, experimental ones. On DV mostly, sometimes 16mm," says Rodriguez. Obviously, he had learned a few things during his twenty-some year-long filmmaking past that allowed him to continue being his own cinematographer; things to which a novice would be (and was) clueless. Rodriguez had undoubtedly learned by trial and error.

There had been a cinematographer in the initial game plan—an amateur capable of brilliant work and hungry to lens a 16mm production. At the outset of filming, however, the cinematographer fell victim to the ego and inflated self-opinion that eventually took the entire production hostage. The cinematographer didn't know that principal photography had even begun until he received a call inviting him to come watch the proceedings some Sunday afternoon. (What a way to find out!)

I tagged along with the cinematographer to check out the situation. Upon entering the "set" I was immediately struck with the realization that everything was being bathed in natural light, coming in through the large picture windows, but no color correction gel was being used for the key light.

"I hope he knows what he's doing," the now ex-

cinematographer quipped as we departed.

Would a competent cinematographer have made a difference on this film? Certainly it couldn't have hurt. While the performances may have still reeked of theatrical over-indulgence, at least the scenes would have been well lit and in focus. Yet, ultimately, the shooting "style" and inadequacy of technical preparation would have proved an issue.

For a few months, neither the ex-cinematographer nor I heard from the erring director. Suddenly, without warning, we were both inundated with a deluge of voicemail messages urging us to call him. There was panic in his voice.

We set up a meeting to talk to him on the weekend; apparently shooting had halted. At his apartment he had a VHS tape cued up and waiting for us. As he played it, he asked us, hopefully, "Do you think you can fix this?"

It was footage from his film. It was numinous in its sheer *wrongness*. I tried to grasp the *one* thing he hoped us to fix. Was it the flat, harsh lighting? The lack of focus? Or, was he referring to the canted angle that left everything tilted forty-five degrees clockwise? I cocked my head and stayed silent, waiting for him to narrow the field.

He was referring to the focus. Apparently, his lens hadn't been mounted correctly, causing the first ten of twenty-four 400-foot reels to be blurry. The other fourteen? They were spared due to a happy accident: some on-set shenanigans resulted in the camera being sent in for repairs. Of course, no second test reel was shot after the camera returned to determine if it was working correctly. Luckily, the lens had been remounted in the process of fixing the focus problem.

(Why the persistent Dutch angle? The director was under the impression that his camera was set up in such a way that it had to be turned forty-five degrees before images were centered on the film.)

I suppose I was in a state of mild shock. I didn't want to take the five minutes of video footage as a representation of what waited for me in the other ten hours I was going to slough through. Yes, I had agreed to edit this mess. Now I hoped that I would share the fate of the ex-cinematographer and be "fired" before my work could begin, but luck wasn't with me. Sitting in the edit suite, watching the silent footage, getting a crick in my neck until I finally propped the monitor with some tape cases, I knew things were bad but I didn't yet know how bad it could get.

After a week of logging videotapes, seeing images that set my hair on end ("What is that? Does he know the camera's running?" "Is it supposed to be that dark?" and conversely "Is it supposed to be this bright?"), it came time to listen to and log the audio.

When turning over his DAT player, the director boasted to me about the microphone he bought for the shoot. Having never seen it, I don't know if it was cardioid, omnidirectional, or shotgun—but I don't think he knew that either. Listening to the tapes, it seemed that the microphone was adept at picking up every noise around it, except for the actors' dialogue. I'd hear the whirring of the camera, crickets chirping in a distant field, and somewhere—barely within audible range—I could make out muffled sounds

of young thespians emoting.

Listening to the tapes, I got a good sense of what it was like to be on the film's set. (The "sound engineer" often forgot to turn the recorder off, leaving great spans of time occupied by off-screen banter.) Typical scenes played thusly: After the clap of the slate, the director called "Action!" and the scene began. An inevitably flubbed line was followed by a curse. From there, chaos ensued.

As the actor rehearsed his line, people chatted, and arguments broke out. After a few minutes of this, the director attempted to regain control of his set. "Let's pick it up from, 'Fuck you, Charley,'" he'd say. And, sure enough—after all momentum had been lost—I'd hear the clap of the slate, call of "Action!" and "Fuck you, Charley."

The problems began to become apparent in a way they couldn't while watching the raw footage. Synching up the sound and image revealed that as the actors picked up from a line; the director hadn't asked for the lines preceding the misspoken dialogue, nor had he change the camera angle. Thus, without shooting any coverage or cutaways, a scene would end up as a montage of uneven tone pieced together with jump cuts.

In other words, I was fucked. There was no way I could begin to salvage this mess. Even if the footage had capable audio, competent lighting, and the correct axis, the bizarre shooting style precluded any chance of making this movie the slightest bit watchable.

And yet, I couldn't even begin to explain these things when I received a call about the progress of the editing.

He had started so right but as things had progressed, his fate was sealed. On one hand there was ten thousand dollars, a 16mm camera, a sweet deal on film and developing, a pre-rehearsed cast, secured locations. On the other hand there was this tilted, blurry, over and under-exposed, inaudible, static, jumbled mess.

Obviously, the concepts I discussed above were completely foreign to my friend's ears. He didn't want to hear or understand that he had just gotten a ten thousand-dollar education.

Just as I have an image in my mind of Quentin Tarantino taking crib notes from Hong Kong gangster films back in the early nineties to make RESERVOIR DOGS, I can imagine the legions of filmmakers who've stayed up late at night watching Tarantino's work and thinking, "Hey, I can do this." And, unfortunately, they do. Young or old, experienced or not, the ironic ripping-off of Quentin Tarantino has indeed fostered a full-fledged cinematic movement. For some, Rodriguez's book proved to be a catalyst to make that blind head-first leap into the cinematic void. But, instead of making the next EL MARIACHI, they more often create another MY BEST FRIEND'S BIRTHDAY; the unreleased experiment that served as an expensive film education to high school dropout Quentin Tarantino.

We are coming to the end of an age where those RESERVOIR DOG rip-off artists have just about weeded themselves out and moved on. Alas, I foresee something new on the horizon and a cold chill runs down my spine whenever the thought occurs to me. The new Horatio Alger tale of the cinema is THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT. I can already envision years of aspiring directors running around the woods with cameras. Certainly, some may be geniuses lying in wait—there's nothing wrong with forest-bound horror films in and of themselves; just take a look at THE EVIL DEAD—but the others...The great mass of shaky, blurry film that awaits is more terrifying than anything in those woods.

I was lecturing the other day in a film class, and I gave the somewhat sane advice: "Get a job where you can use the facilities for free. If you need film transfers, find a transfer house and talk them into hiring you, then quit when you're done with your own work and move on to the next stage. Once, I needed free video editing to finish my feature so..." I then proceeded to tell them how I answered an ad for a video editor in a company that turned out to be...well...

A of LABOR of LOVE

by Miss Myrtle

It was the summer after college graduation, and I was living away from parents and school for the first time. My entire cast and crew moved with me to "the big city" so we could finish filming our feature. I ended up spending every penny I made on an obscenely over priced but available apartment; living with my two leading men, one had the bedroom, the other (whom I was dating) and I shared the exposed living room. For some privacy, we slowly built a "fort" to sleep in (made out of the building supplies and furniture we found). We were excited to finish our film, but broke.

I was desperate to get free video editing, and lots of it. I also needed to make huge bucks to support my out-of-control rent habit. Miraculously, I found an ad in the paper for a "Technical Director" at a video production company. I knew I had to implement my evil plan once again. Here appeared a sitting duck, ripe for the plucking and perched on my doorstep. I called this seemingly innocent video production company and secured an interview.

The train ride there was long, but the walk through the ghetto down to the deserted waterfront under the bridge was just about enough to drive anyone else away. But not me: I got a strange thrill from putting myself in bizarre and dangerous circumstances. The long, frightening trek, complete with a pelting of light bulbs and bottles from ghetto kids, ended at a foreboding, heavily fortified warehouse. Feeling like Dorothy, in my green gingham vintage dress, I rang the buzzer and expected a dwarf to poke his head out and chase me away. No dwarf, unfortunately. Once in, I followed a long corridor and walked up a long, dark stairway. I noted small surveillance cameras in every corner, hanging from the ceiling.

The creepy surroundings were getting creepier by the second. After being buzzed into another small fortress by the gatekeeper, I was finally in.

"There's no fucking way I'm coming here every day," I thought, wandering in to the front office.

"I'm here to be interviewed for the video job," I stated, weakly.

I was informed that the manager was busy auditioning a new actress, and that I'd have to wait. And wait I did... I looked around the waiting room and on the walls were all sorts of pornographic

video posters. These were not the decorations of an over-sexed receptionist. It finally dawned on me that I had stumbled into the viper's nest. This job was definitely in the *porn industry*! As I got up to turn tail and run, the manager stepped out and waved me in. A tall, glamorous, fur-coated, obvious she-male left as I entered. In visible discomfort, I went through with my interview.

The job description seemed legit: duties included editing videos and trailers, helping assemble and maintain the VHS dubbing room. My interviewer asked me how much I wanted to make. I was so surprised that threw out a figure I felt outrageous but was far lower than he was expecting (I later found out that he would have paid me triple that amount). After I lied about being comfortable with the porn industry (even though I was sitting there in my customary petticoats and girly dress), I was hired on the spot.

I actually accepted this hideous job...

I should have realized on my first day when a pile of over three hundred video tapes were laid at my feet to edit "by Friday" that these people were on something. I was left in a dark dusty warehouse room with no instructions except to "remove the penetration shots" from these videos and "label the duplicate videos."

Suddenly, fear and confusion overcame me. I was an orphan in a Dickensian workhouse, soot from the furnace lining my lungs and burning my eyes. I sat there comatose until I was pulled from the ether by a tiny, screaming voice. Was it my conscience speaking to me after all these years? Why was it being so rude? The voice instructed me to get off my ass and start working.

Still slightly stunned, I looked to the heavens where my eyes focused on (not one, but) *two* surveillance cameras aimed at my head. I then looked around to discover the source of the voice: a speaker even with my ears. The "little screaming voice" was the "big boss" on my intercom: he was watching me just sit there and having a heart attack over it!

"Get the fuck to work!" he screamed.

My stomach lurched and I jumped out of my seat, tackling the video pile. I so wanted to know to whom this crazy voice belonged, but he was perpetually unavailable (like Mr. Shotz on

Laverne & Shirley).

Weeks turned into months. I heard tales of the "big boss," his mob ties, and about his partner's mysterious disappearance. I kidded myself; telling myself it was all the stuff of legend. Still, one tale remained that contained more than a kernel of truth. Our company *was* being monitored by the FBI for illegal video content. And "Little Miss Muffet" over here was the one hired to edit every single video to meet the legal standards! (Which, by the way, I did to *perfection*.)

To comply with federal standards there can be no penetration shots of any kind in a fetish S/M video. The US government, in its infinitesimal wisdom, deems any such penetration as "rape." Of course, Congress knows the difference between consensual and non-consensual sex from first hand experience, as so many have found themselves embroiled in litigation over their improper conduct. How could they help but know the laws by heart? In a classic case of "do what I say, not what I do," the government is going to make damn sure that we citizens stay within the proper moral boundaries. "Never mind the enema and diaper-party videos, just get the tip of that dildo as far away from her crotch as possible!"

Anyway, the fate of dozens of people was laid in my hands! If I slipped up even once, we could be raided and all end up in prison. Maybe the directors of these videos should have been made aware of these rules as in most of these crappy videos there were so many penetration scenes that I had to re-edit the entire video. I was forced to use stock fetish footage from the 70's to keep the videos at their standard 60-minute length. Most of the tapes I worked with had huge glitches through entire scenes. As you can imagine, the job was futile.

The condition of the tapes wasn't surprising, really, when it came time for me to tackle the second aspect of my job: managing the video dub room. The dub room was as far away from the editing room as could be. To get to it I had to run across the entire warehouse floor, through the room where illegal immigrants got paid 25 cents an hour to stuff dildos into dildo boxes.

The dub room was the most incredible story of all...

It started when the outside dubbing house my bosses were using to crank out their lovely films started delivering faulty tapes to us. Apparently, the heads on all of their cheap VCRs had started to wear out. Dubs were coming back with enough tracking problems that they were unwatchable. Sure, both our company and the dub company still accepted money for them: who cares about quality?

Yet, when we started to get so many complaints, the "big boss" decided to get mad at the dubbing house and demand a full refund (thousands of dollars, which were already spent, I'm sure). The dubbing house was broke, so instead of demanding money, my brilliant boss demanded all of the VCRs! What that means is now I had to make dubs on the same crappy machines that had screwed up our tapes to begin with! But the "Big Boss" wanted perfect tapes; he didn't want to understand that he had just made the biggest business blunder since the "sale" of the Eiffel Tower...

The miraculous dubs were expected immediately. First we had to assemble and wire a 100-deck dubbing room, so the "Big Boss" hired the Three Stooges to build it for us. They brought in lots of space-age testing equipment, oscillators, Tesla coils and silly looking tubes, all done for an outrageous fee. Of course nothing worked and I had to spend nights and weekends troubleshooting the wiring of over 100 decks, not to mention running tests to find the decks with bad heads. All the while cranking out 800 dubs a day, and editing five movies a day, back and forth. All the while my boss

berating me via the intercom.

Four months later, the Three Stooges were fired, I had an ulcer, and we had weeded out and replaced most of the broken VCRs with even cheaper ones from The Wiz. But my beautiful dubbing room was still a disaster waiting to happen. Somehow, dubs were made, sold and passed off as good, but it was just a matter of time. To top it off, I had to start 100 VCRs recording at once without a remote. That meant hitting "play/rec" button on 100 decks, stacked up from the ground. I had to do hundreds of deep-knee-bends every day to start the machines. Needless to say I still have major knee problems, which, of course I never reported for fear of ending up either at the bottom of the river or like the poor sucker they found all chopped up in the garbage cans outside the warehouse the week before I started.

Weeks passed and creepy shit happened every day. I was threatened by a secretary there, who I later learned was a dominatrix trying to challenge and then dominate me. On another occasion I overheard that the "Big Boss" was holding "auditions" for his next "movie" in his office (which served as his living quarters, complete with mirrored walls and tacky furniture, and the lucky she-males got to blow him or my manager to get into the film). In every garbage can there was always something disgusting, like an empty enema bag. And all of them were constantly screaming at me and piling more work on.

Eventually, they actually wanted me to start writing and directing these video monstrosities. My co-workers were the kind of trashy drug-addicts who would not get their work done, not show up to work, or come in late and then lecture me about slacking off.

By then I was done editing my own film, (using their facilities) and done with the rotten job, but my rent was so damned steep that I couldn't quit.

One rare day I actually got to see the "Big Boss" in the flesh, he stood about two inches from me and began to scream into my face, spraying me with his spit, which sprang forth abundantly from his almost toothless mouth. His eyes bugging out: his face pock-marked and grotesque. With a Hitler-esque, frenzied voice he proceeded to bombard me with insults and threats, until I was so shaken I had to bite my lip to keep from crying out loud. Suddenly, one of the receptionists had a call for me to take. I ran to grab the phone, and my life changed forever.

On the phone was a landlord who offered me an apartment with such a low rent that I didn't need my stinking job! After taking the apartment, I lifted my head to the heavens, started to cry and said, "I quit!" I walked right out the front door, never to return to that hellhole again. As I left, my lazy, wasted manager sprang out of his office and tried to beg me to stay, tears welling up in his eyes.

"What are we going to do without you? You can't leave!"

Calmly I explained, "Well, maybe you'll have to stop smoking crack and actually *do some work*!"

It was the worst job I've ever had. Both the work and the co-workers were equally as hideous. Hey, I can't complain, at least I got out of there with my life and with my finished film. But sometimes I wonder what poor chump ended up inheriting my nightmare.

Miss Myrtle is now running her own production company and playing bass in a band in her hometown of Seattle, while raising two small children.

GETTING IN H*A*R*M's WAY

by Norman Cherubino

I've been a fan of B-movies from the time I saw Adam West in ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS. However, the last ten years have been disheartening. Every new no-budget production coming out claims to be the next big underground hit. Hey, who died and made you a cult classic? With the influx of Digital Video there's a new breed of filmmaker out there who make Ed Wood look like Orson Welles.

No-budget producer/director Pat Bishow is one of the few filmmakers today making both watchable and enjoyable DV movies. (I know "watchable" doesn't sound like much praise but in this field it's a top compliment.) Creator of many episodes of THE ADVENTURES OF EL FRENETICO & GO-GIRL has returned with a new work, THE GIRLS FROM H*A*R*M. True, his production values and cinematic technique leave something to be desired, but his films are fun and filled with sincere enthusiasm; something very much lacking with his peers. I caught up with Pat and one of his stars Tina Lee and asked them a few questions about this new type of filmmaking.

Norman Cherubino: *What kind of equipment do you use to shoot your movies?*

Pat Bishow: In the early '80s I shot on 16mm film. When we did EL FRENETICO that was shot on Hi-8 then later on a format called DVC-Pro. H*A*R*M was filmed on Digital Video.

NC: *How and where do you sell your movies?*

PB: We have a small distributor, Provisional. It's run by one of the guys who used to run SST records, Joe Carducci. He's a great guy! We're working together to get this thing out. We have a homemade web site (www.amusementfilms.web.com) and since August of '99 we've gotten over 36,000 hits.

NC: *Tell me about THE GIRLS FROM H*A*R*M!*

PB: We joke that it's the sequel to Gerd Oswald's AGENT FROM H.A.R.M., but really we just stole the title. It's sort of a spy spoof *nothing* like Austin Powers. More like a cross between THE AVENGERS and ORGY OF THE DEAD.

NC: *How is it like ORGY OF THE DEAD?*

PB: It's not really. I guess it's like what if you shot THE AVENGERS on a budget like ORGY OF THE DEAD (or half that budget). It's sort of a high tech/low tech kind of film. We knew we couldn't make it look like James Bond with all the gadgets, so we thought we'd have fun with it. Let's make the computers and beebies big and clunky. Let's make the remotes look like they're from the '70s. We wanted to have a real '70s exploitation feel to the film. It takes place in the present but the cars are old, the fashions are mod-ish and the music has a real '70s feel to it.

NC: *The acting in your films is terrific. How do you get your actors?*

PB: Thank you! Yes, my actors are great! Usually, I use friends but this time we used a lot of new talent. The story goes that we were going to shoot another EL FRENETICO but Frances [Lee, who plays Go-Girl - Ed.] couldn't film this fall. We auditioned a lot of actress to see if we could find a new Go-Girl but I just saw Frances as Go-Girl. We were all very depressed. Then our writer, Jon Sanborne, had the idea of doing an old script he had. I read it, loved it, and then we all got excited. Producer Owen Cooper, Jon, and myself each liked a different woman who had tried out for Go-Girl, so we cast our favorites and made THE GIRLS FROM H*A*R*M!

NC: *What was it like working in the no-budget film?*

Tina Lee: I had a great time! On bigger budget flicks, you end up waiting around all day for a half-hour amount of work. For GIRLS FROM H*A*R*M we were doing something almost every minute, so it was never boring. There were shoots where I delivered lines for the actor and had to hold up the mic or light reflector shield (I have no idea what it's called).

NC: *What was it like working with Pat Bishow? How did you get involved?*

TL: I love Pat! He and I totally clicked. He's very task-oriented, but also open-minded, which I dig. We always get stuff done, and you can always count on him to do what he says he will. And, he's extremely inventive and creative — I'm so impressed with his stuff, especially knowing what he had to work with.



L to R: Tina Lee, CC Wong, and Ary Nunez

NC: *How did you prepare for the role? What did you think of the costume?*

TL: Um, I tried to work out. But I didn't really get into shape until after the movie finished, so that didn't really happen. I started to get the hang of the tone of the script after a while. It's not quite camp, but it's not like playing a real life scenario either. I spent a lot of energy trying not to laugh, which was *very hard*, because the writing is so funny and everyone is always cracking jokes. We had to retake a lot of scenes, because I'd start laughing in the middle of a fight scene or something. I was a little frightened of the costume initially. For one shoot, we had to get changed in a McDonald's on Long Island on an early Sunday morning—that was a little weird. There were all these people coming from church, and we just looked like these Cure concert freaks. By the end of the movie, I got used to it. Now I think I could go to the deli in it. Actually, I take that back. I still feel like a freak in it.

NC: *What is your view of this whole no-budget arena?*

TL: I don't know — this is my first experience. It was tons of fun, and so different from anything else I've worked on. No-budget films seem like good training ground — you hone your skills to improvise and think on your feet, because there are constantly unforeseen obstacles coming up. I have a lot of respect for people who pull their act together to make a film; it's a lot of hard work.

NC: *Did you do your own stunts? There's a scene when you're jumping around fire. What was that like?*

TL: Yeah, we all did our own stunts and fight scenes. As for the fire scene, I didn't know I was doing that until I got outside and saw everyone lighting wood on fire. It's kind of like, "Okay Tina, just land around here, and we'll throw these at you." "Oh, okay." I was getting over a breakup at the time, so actually, somersaulting past flames was a welcome distraction.

NC: *In closing, Pat, what would you like to say about the production?*

PB: It's a labor of love! It's a lot of shooting with no money and trying to get it out. I'm *very* happy with the result! Louise Millmann usually plays the villains in my movies and Soomi Kim plays the hero, so for this one we switched it around. It worked *great*! I hope folks will want to see it.

*Do you want to see THE GIRLS OF H*A*R*M? Visit Provisional Film's website www.rockboss.com/provisional.html*

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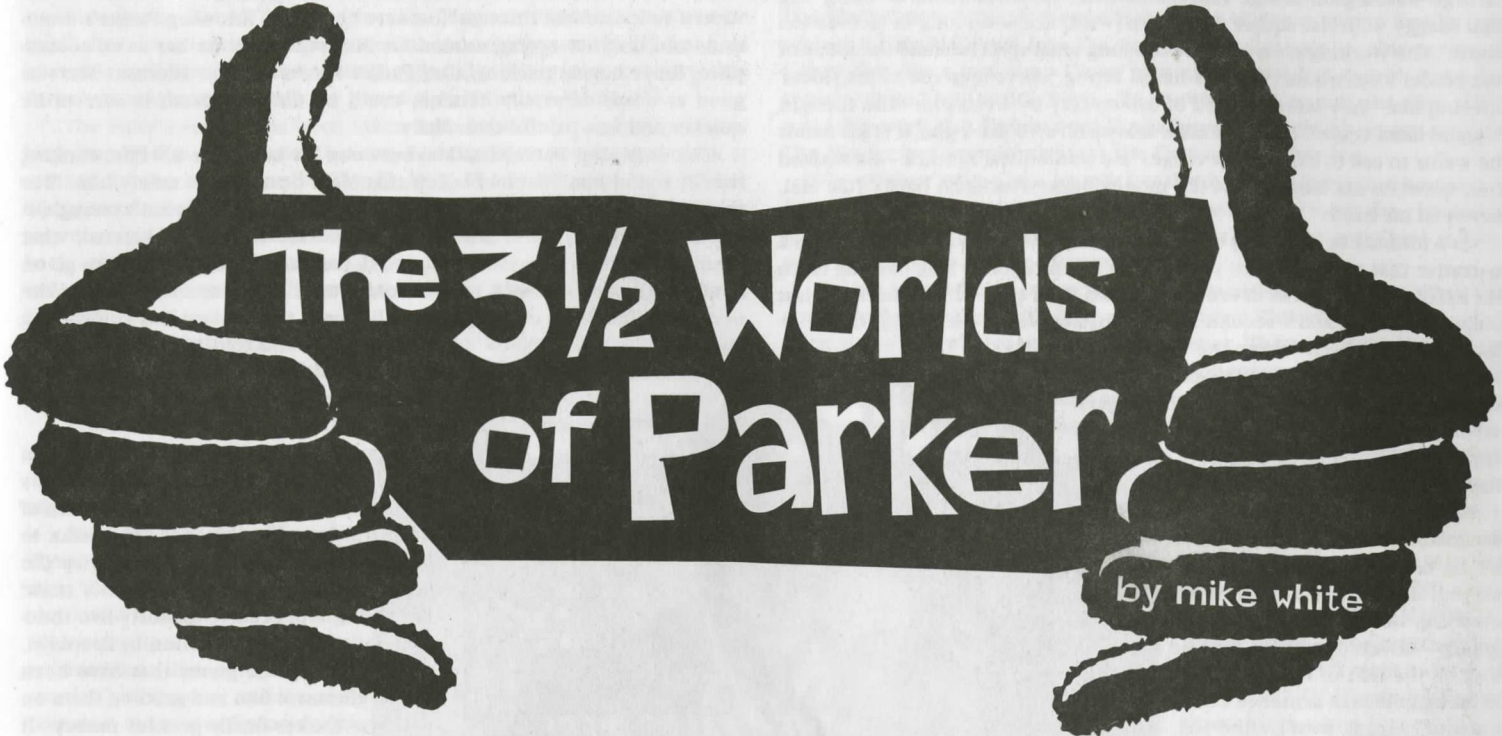
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The 3 1/2 Worlds of Parker

by mike white

"Why do you keep calling that movie 'PARKER'?" Andrea asked me. She had seen PAYBACK before I did and knew that Mel Gibson's character's name was Porter, so where was I getting this 'Parker' thing from?

Huh. I could have sworn that that movie was called "PARKER" at one point. I seemed to remember an annoying teaser from ages ago. The tagline "Get Mad, Get Tough, Get Even" had left a bad taste in my mouth. I dreaded seeing another Mel Gibson flick, as the memory of CONSPIRACY THEORY was fresh in my mind. What was he going to do; act like a tortured goof again? Was it going to be his famous LE-THAL WEAPON mix of Three Stooges violence with a wink towards the camera followed by a quick quip? No, this time Mel was going to "break the mold."

Little did I know at the time but PAYBACK was the bastard kin of one of my favorite films, POINT BLANK (see CdC #4). Parker is the name of the ruthless anti-hero (or *non-hero*) of Richard Stark's book The Hunter, which was the first in a series of novels to feature the character. Stark is a *nom de plume* of prolific author Donald Westlake as well as an adjective for the stripped-down prose Westlake employs in his Parker series.

Parker has appeared in various guises in, to date, over twenty novels and seven films. Parker became "Walker" in John Boorman's 1967 POINT BLANK, tenaciously played by Lee Marvin. Meanwhile, Parker was to become "Porter" in Brian Helgeland's 1999 PAYBACK.

Regardless, before reading The Hunter, I unconsciously insisted on calling Helgeland's film "PARKER." Why this was remained a mystery

to me until I finally realized that, despite the main character's name, the film had once incongruously been called PARKER and not PAYBACK. This was one of myriad changes the film was to undergo between the time I saw the aforementioned teaser trailer and PAYBACK's delayed release.

A second look at a film's trailer while the movie is fresh in one's mine can often reveal a wealth of lost shots or scenes. This has never been more true than when one takes a second glance at the early trailer for PAYBACK, which is fortuitously included on Paramount's DVD release of the film. Roughly, half of the shots in this ninety-second preview do not appear in the finished film! Even a look at the longer preview that was released just prior to the film's opening reveals a shot or two that remained unseen in PAYBACK. More than different inflections of line readings or camera angles, entire characters and scenes appeared to have disappeared between the time those trailers were released.

Apparently, Mel Gibson knew that Porter was not a nice guy. Apparently he decided during filming that he didn't want to taint his public image by being the hardboiled robber who's come back from the brink of death for vengeance. After completion of Brian Helgeland's PARKER (as his version of the film will be known for the rest of this article), Mel flexed his Hollywood muscles and shot scenes penned by Terry Hayes (ROAD WARRIOR, MAD MAX BEYOND THUNDERDOME, et cetera) for the film that would become PAYBACK. It was Gibson's film that audiences saw and it was worlds apart from Brian Helgeland's, John Boorman's or Richard Stark's vision of Parker.

THE HUNTER

Richard Stark's novel, *The Hunter*, begins with Parker crossing the George Washington Bridge into Manhattan. He's described as being "big and shaggy with flat square shoulders [with] arms too long in sleeves too short." The working ends of those too-long arms soon become the focus of the reader's attention. Parker's hands swing "curve-fingered at his sides," looking like "they were molded of brown clay by a sculptor who thought big and liked veins." Though Parker knows how to use a gun, it is his hands he wants to use to exact his revenge. "He wanted Mal Resnick—he wanted him between his hands. Not the money back. Not Lynn back. Just Mal, between his hands."

In a formula he'd employ in future Parker novels, Stark skillfully crafts a narrative that changes focus from Parker to his nemesis Mal, pausing often for extended flashbacks in order to explain their past. It isn't until the last chapter of the novel's second section that we learn the details of the island arms-deal heist where the tables were turned on Parker. Mal double-crossed him, took his wife, and killed the three other guys involved in the robbery. Mal and Lynn left Parker for dead, and, by all rights, he should have stayed dead.

Crawling wounded from the building Mal set ablaze, Parker used those powerful hands to dig himself a makeshift grave where he stayed, like Christ, for three days before crawling out and being picked up for vagrancy—covered in blood, bruised and barefoot on the side of the road. He did six out of an eight-month sentence before breaking out and heading west to find Mal. He came into New York silently, like a ghost. "He didn't want Mal to know he was alive. He didn't want Mal spooked and on the run. He wanted him easy and content, a fat cat. He wanted him just sitting there, grinning, waiting for Parker's hands."

After following a trail from his wife, Lynn (who subsequently overdoses on sleeping pills), to a cab stand operator, Stegman, he hits a dead end. At this point, Parker tries to get a bead on Mal from a former associate, Jimmy Delgado (remember this name), and a whore, Rosie. After some convincing, she gives him a lead to Mal's room at The Outfit's hotel.

Until getting word through Stegman, Mal had been relatively content. The money he took from Parker had let him buy his way back in The Outfit (often called "the organization," "the corporation" or "the syndicate" but never referred to as "the mob"). Now he was a mid-level executive whose only real complaint (before learning that Parker has returned for retribution) is that his girlfriend, a junkie named Pearl, just isn't a high-class enough piece of ass. Mal is ambitious, after all.

The news of Parker's resurrection startles Mal so much that he tries to get help from The Outfit. Doing this demonstrates Mal's weakness. His "manager," Mr. Carter, tells Mal that his problem has three possible solutions: 1) Assist him, which would be protecting The Outfit's investment in Mal; 2) Let Mal handle it himself, which would show The Outfit that he's self-reliant; Or 3) Replace him, thus removing the "external danger" Mal has brought with him.

Carter chooses the second option and boots Mal out of The Outfit's hotel. Left in the cold and more vulnerable to Parker and his eager, meaty hands, Mal rents a high-class hotel suite and orders a hundred-dollar blonde to spend the night with him. Little does he know what a favor he's doing

for himself by springing for these luxuries. He's going out in style.

After finding Mal's Outfit hotel room empty, Parker returns to Rosie. It takes a few harsh words and some serious hair-pulling before Rosie is motivated to locate Mal through alternate channels. Knowing Parker's intentions and that her nosing around for Mal will implicate her as an accomplice, Rosie begins packing after Parker leaves with an address. She's as good as dead. Her only comfort could be that her death is sure to be quicker and less painful than Mal's.

It's only after Parker has Mal between his hands for a while, choking the life out of him, that he realizes that Mal's death won't satisfy him. "For the first time he thought about the money. Killing Mal wasn't enough, it left a hole in the world afterward. Once he'd killed that bastard, what then? He had less than two thousand dollars to his name. He had to go on living, he had to get back into his old groove. The resort hotels and the occasional job, the easy comfortable life until this bastard had come along

in his taxicab and told him about the job on the island. And to get back to that life, he needed money. Forty-five thousand dollars."

Thus begins the fourth and final section of the novel—Parker getting his money from The Outfit; going through the chain of command from Mr. Carter to Mr. Fairfax to Mr. Bronson, until Bronson agrees to pay "the mosquito" Parker. An agreement is made that Parker will receive his forty-five thousand dollars at a train station in Brooklyn. After disarming the goons that have been sent to eliminate him and sending them on their way, Parker finally gets his money. It takes some fancy footwork to make his way to safety back in his Manhattan hotel room.

Checking out with two suitcases—one holding his clothes and shaving kit, the other stuffed with cash—Parker is stopped by two police detectives wishing to question his relationship with Jimmy Delgado. Suspicion had fallen on Parker after he had been asking around about Delgado days before as Delgado had just been picked up for drug-running. Using his wits and brutal hands again, Parker escapes.

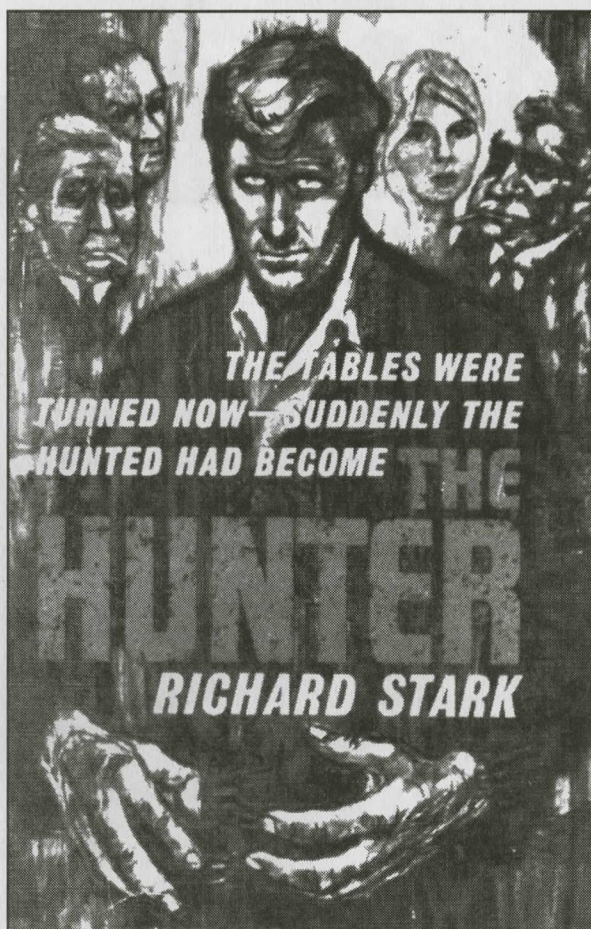
It isn't until he's inside a cab speeding to Grand Central Station that Parker realizes that he's made a forty-five thousand dollar mistake—he grabbed the wrong suitcase as he made his way out the door. A marked man without a dime to his name, Parker knows that it'll take some doing before he can get back to a life of luxury. Naturally, the best target for getting some quick cash is the organization that wants him dead.

It wasn't until an editor at Pocket Books asked Richard Stark/Donald Westlake for a change in the ending and three Parker books a year that the unrepentant Parker managed to escape from the police. Until that point, when Parker was caught that was the end of him and, for all Westlake knew, the end of his writing career as Richard Stark. It appears that even from his earliest days in 1962 that Parker exhibited his adaptability.

POINT BLANK

Parker first appeared on screen in Jean-Luc Godard's 1966 film *MADE IN U.S.A.*—based on the 6th film in the Parker series, *The Juggler*. However, not only did Parker change names but also his sex!

It wasn't until a year later that Parker's first adventure was brought to the big screen. John Boorman's *POINT BLANK* is often described as being an art film or a last gasp of the classic film noir genre. Certainly, Boorman's



use of flashbacks, cutting, and sound is often avant-garde and quite unusual for what could be a typical robber/revenge genre film.

In it, Parker's name has been changed to "Walker," which could best be explained as a clue to the idea that Lee Marvin's character may not be quite alive. That is, he might very well be the *walking* dead. (Stark would later acknowledge this name in his *The Black Ice Score* by mentioning that Parker once operated under the pseudonym "Matthew Walker.")

The story's setting has been taken from New York to another classic backdrop of film noir stories, Los Angeles. Up the coast a bit, Alcatraz is utilized for the island drop of *The Hunter*. The film begins with Walker taking two bullets to the gut. Immediately we're shown how he found his way onto his back, bleeding, in a jail cell during a small, pre-credits flashback sequence. We see Mal Reese (John Vernon) talking Walker and his wife, Lynne (Sharon Acker), into helping out on a heist and the subsequent betrayal.

Yes, along with Parker's name change to Walker, Mal's last name has been Anglicized a bit. Why Lynne has an "e" on the end of her name is lost to me, except perhaps to tie her to the three vowels of Mal's new name.

Sometime after Walker performed the amazing feat of escaping from Alcatraz (if the bullet wounds don't get you, the swim just might), he returns for a tour and is confronted by Yost (Keenan Wynn). Yost is intimately familiar with Walker's plight and forces him into an uneasy partnership. "You want Reese, and I want the organization. I'm going to help you and you're going to help me." Yost then turns over Lynne's new address in Los Angeles.

The scene of Walker coming to see Lynne is amazing. Walker is shown traveling through a long corridor—his feet echoing—intercut with Lynne going about her day. The sound of his feet never ceases, even when he's shown driving to her apartment and waiting for her. On and on they go, marching back from the grave and into Lynne's nightmare world.

"Walker, I'm glad you're not dead," Lynne admits after he breaks into her apartment and shoots her mattress (expecting Mal to be there). Lynne soliloquizes as Walker sits silently on her couch, spent shells emptied across her plush pay-off apartment's coffee table. Lynne narrates the story of their meeting, along with the introduction of Mal into their relationship. She paints a long, idyllic past between the three of them; the scene is reminiscent of the "We'll always have Paris" flashback in *CASABLANCA*.

That night, Lynne overdoses on sleeping pills and Parker begins his long wait for Stegman's pay-off man to arrive. In *POINT BLANK*, we don't have a scene in which Walker disposes of Lynne's body as we do in *The Hunter*. Instead, her body and even her sheets spookily disappear after Walker leaves the room and sees Yost staked out across the street.

In *POINT BLANK* "Big John" Stegman (Michael Strong) is the personification of the stereotypical slimy used car salesman. Walker takes Stegman for a test drive he won't soon forget and finds out that Mal has moved from sleeping with Lynne to courting her sister, Chris (Angie Dickinson).

Stegman reports his encounter with Walker directly to Mal, showing him the wrecked remains of Walker's test car. Mal assigns Stegman to find Walker and, amazingly, he does. Two goons try their best to get a piece of Walker in the back of Chris' nightclub. Amid the colored lights, screeching

music and slides of women, Walker pounds the hell out of them before taking leave of their company and searching out his sister-in-law.

Reese comes to the fast-talking Mr. Carter (Lloyd Bochner) for help. The film's Carter is much more disapproving of Reese, saying that he was against taking Mal back into the organization because trouble seems to follow him like a lost dog. Carter admonishes Mal but doesn't force his removal from The Outfit's hotel. By allowing him to stay, the film eliminates the work that Parker went through to get into Mal's empty room in *The Hunter* and, instead, tightens the flow of the narrative.

When Walker visits Chris, he tells her that he wants Reese and his money. Already inflation has driven up the stakes that Walker's out for—he wants his *ninety-three thousand dollars*. Walker decides to use Chris as bait, sending her up to Mal's penthouse room.

Walker brandishes a gun; not using his hands on Mal except when the cowardly Reese faints at the sight of him, forcing Walker to slap him around a few times to revive him. More than revenge, Walker is immediately concerned with his money and gets the chain of command of The Outfit from Reese before the poor sap falls over the side of a building. Thus, Walker has been robbed of the satisfaction of killing his betrayers (Lynne and Mal).

After Walker finds him at a business conference, Mr. Carter sends Stegman to drop off Walker's cash. While Stegman drives to one of Los Angeles's famous storm drains (as seen in *GREASE*, *THE JUNKMAN*, and *TERMINATOR 2*), Walker breaks in to Carter's office, informing him, "I want to be paid personally." Of course, Walker realizes that the drop is a set-up and, by sending Carter out to Stegman, that these two will both be eliminated (by sharpshooter James B. Sicking in an early role).

With Carter out of the way, Walker moves up the chain of command to Brewster. Oddly, there is no Bronson in *POINT BLANK*. Instead, Brewster is *The Hunter*'s Fairfax while Fairfax is a mere moneyman for the organization: an accountant.

Walker consorts with Yost regarding the whereabouts of Brewster. As in *The Hunter*, this middleman is out of town, forced to return after the elimination of Carter. As Brewster, Carroll

O'Connor is hilarious. After Walker knocks out his luggage-carrying bodyguard, Brewster admonishes him saying, "You're a very bad man, Walker! A very destructive man! Why do you run around doing things like this? What do you want?"

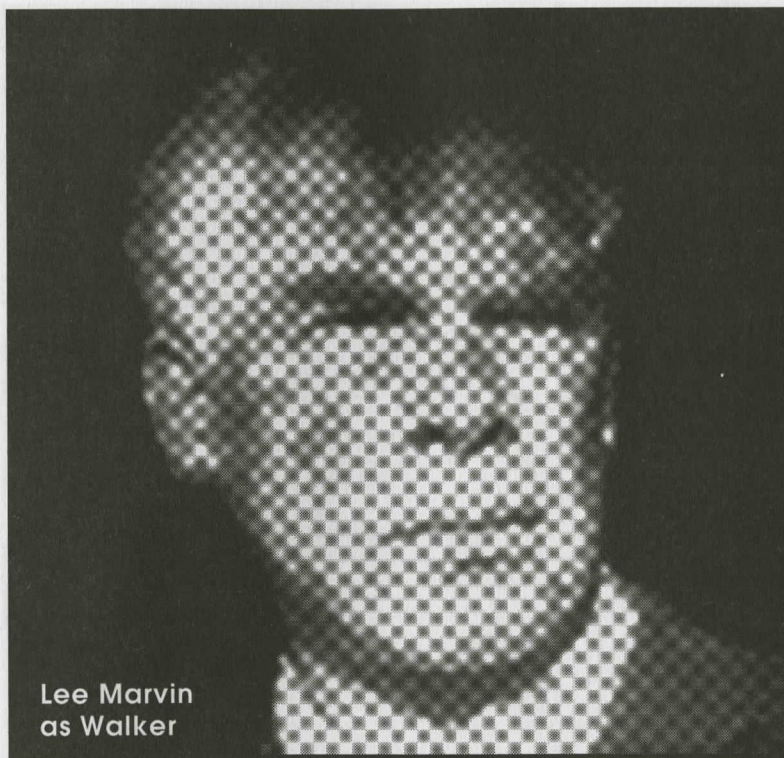
Startled, Walker says, "I want my money."

"Ninety-three thousand dollars? You'd threaten a financial structure like this for ninety-three thousand dollars? No, Walker, I don't believe you. What do you really want?"

As if to convince himself, Walker has to repeat, "I want my money."

Confused and distraught by Brewster's assurances that no one is going to pay him, Walker shrugs and mutters, "Somebody's gotta pay."

When calling Fairfax, Brewster informs him that Walker has a gun pointed his way. Walker does not. Brewster is merely trying to prove that Fairfax isn't about to agree to extortion. The dialogue is similar to what Parker says to Bronson while he holds a gun on Carter in *The Hunter*, except that instead of shooting Brewster, Walker shoots the phone. Brewster appears to feel Walker's frustration and informs him that there's still one set-up where large sums of money change hands, the Alcatraz run.



Lee Marvin
as Walker

Walker returns to the scene of his "demise" with Brewster. He waits in the shadows while Brewster retrieves the money and is promptly shot (hired gun Sikking strikes again). As he collapses, Brewster sees Yost entering the compound and shouts, "This is Fairfax, Walker! Kill him!" Walker remains hidden while Yost/Fairfax tells him, "Our deal's done." Yost/Fairfax tries to convince Walker to join him, as Fairfax has moved from being an accountant to the top spot in the organization.

Walker fades into darkness as Fairfax and his sharpshooter walk away, leaving Brewster and a wrapped bundle of paper (disguised as money) laying in the dim rays of the morning sun.

The sharp-witted Parker would never have allowed himself to be played the fool by Fairfax as Walker had been. Though Walker is a brute (shoving around Lynne, putting a nail through Stegman's delivery boy, pistol-whipping some goons and using others' testicles as a punching bag), he's not nearly as malevolent as Parker is. His vengeance is more financially than personally or professionally motivated. When Brewster flatly refuses to pay Walker, he's defeated and without any real way of making The Outfit pay. Walker doesn't appear to belong to Parker's underworld of professional thieves. In contrast, his only ally is Chris...and Yost.

It's important to note that Walker never kills anyone. After his resurrection he becomes more of a catalyst—as if his presence alone were setting events in motion. Walker can be thought of as Yost's golem—being created and laid to rest on Alcatraz—and doing Yost's bidding. Remember that the two met on Walker's boat ride back to the island prison; why Walker would choose to return to the spot of his "demise" is never explained.

The name change to "Walker" makes sense when taking Lee Marvin's direct approach and unstoppable march through the film into account. Why Brian Helgeland changed Parker's name to "Porter" is a bigger mystery. Could this be a reference to William Sydney Porter, another author, like Donald Westlake, famous for his pen name, O. Henry? At one point in *The Hunter*, Stark describes Parker's trip from the prison farm where he spent six months to New York as "coming across the country like an O. Henry tramp." It's possible. Stranger things have happened. More likely, however, "Porter" came from a line in Stark's *The Green Eagle Score*, "Lynch was not of course the man's real name. One time when he had come with another man, the other had called him by a different name, which Berridge could no longer be sure he remembered. Porter, Walker, Archer...something like that"

PARKER & PAYBACK

Certainly, Brian Helgeland's film took an odd journey from the time principal photography began in September of 1997 until its release in the commercial dead zone of February 1999.

For all of the liberties Brian Helgeland took in adapting *The Hunter*, it remained faithful in the overall tone of the book. First off, Porter is an enigmatic character—there is no voice-over in PARKER in order to get inside Porter's head. True, the voice-over in PAYBACK introduces a film noir convention but without a voice-over, the tone of the film is closer to the third-person omniscient point-of-view of Stark's novel. By hearing Porter, the audience is forced into identifying with him. Moreover, unfortu-

nately, the voice-over immediately sets Porter's goal at merely getting his paltry seventy thousand dollars. "Not many men know what their life's worth, but I do. Seventy grand. That's what they took from me, and that's what I was gonna get back."

Seventy thousand? Certainly it's more than forty-five but it's less than the ninety-three that Walker wanted thirty-two years before! Porter would threaten a financial structure like The Outfit for seventy thousand dollars? No, I don't believe it. Such a laughably small amount does make Porter's quest to take on The Outfit look more like an act of stupidity or blind bravado than a matter of honor. Even PARKER/PAYBACK's Fairfax (James Coburn) cracks that his suits cost more than seventy thousand! In fact, to undertake such a foolhardy quest for seventy thousand dollars could prevent an audience from sympathizing with Porter. Thus, by not presenting Porter's desire for his money as his primary goal, keeping it a matter of principle and not amount, Helgeland better captures the spirit of Stark's novel.

The first acts of both PARKER and PAYBACK are quite similar. PARKER begins with Porter crossing a bridge on his way back into the city. The audience is never shown moments in-between his betrayal and his return.

Porter takes what he wants—when he sees a panhandler with a hat full of money, the green is fair game.

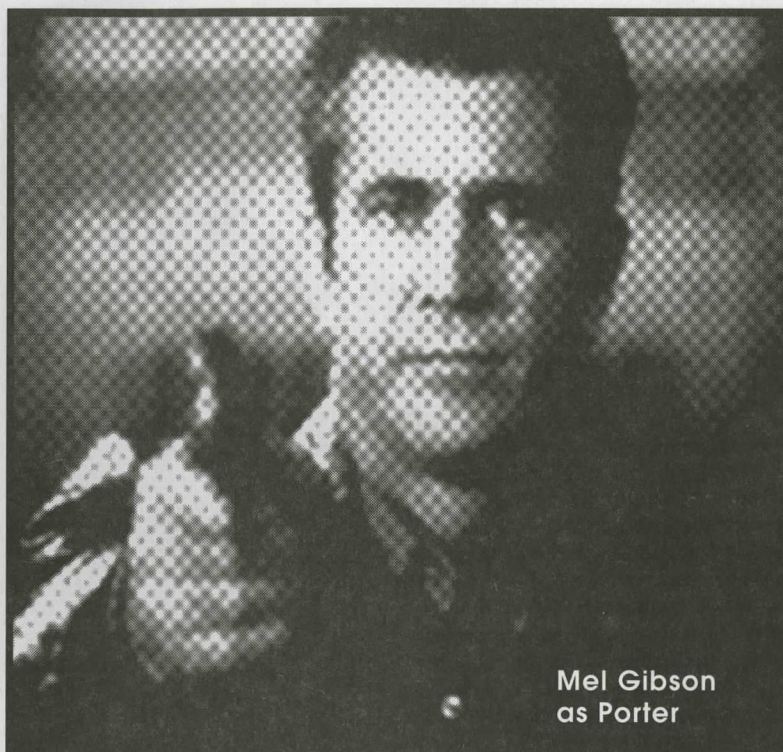
Helgeland updates the method by which Porter gets an initial bankroll by pickpocketing an easy mark on the street and charging up his Visa card instead of getting cash out of checking accounts by pretending he's Edward Johnson as Parker did in *The Hunter*. In the nineties, credit card fraud is the way to go—banks are entirely overprotective of their account holder's information and cash. However, that is not to say that PARKER is set in any particular age—I imagine the anachronistic rotary phones are supposed to place the film in more of a "timeless era" along with the references to President Nixon and cars which Porter and Val drive. If Porter was stuck in a different era then seventy thousand might seem like a good deal of money. Or maybe not...

Likewise, the setting is a bit

vague. Porter could be crossing the George Washington Bridge on his way into Manhattan or he could be crossing some bridge around the Chicago metro area. In several of the new shots in PAYBACK, (though the ending doesn't take place at a train station), we see elevated trains traveling through the city—giving us much more of a sense of Chicago than New York.

When Porter confronts Lynn (Deborah Kara Unger), she asks if he's going to kill her. Porter doesn't react to this question, making the silence of his unresponsive visage even more menacing and keeping the audience on their toes. At this point we still don't know what Porter's story is or even the identity of this staggering bimbo. It isn't until Porter takes a shower while this woman overdoses on heroin that we're shown the two bullet holes in Porter's back.

Apart from the addition of a voice-over, Porter's character is softened and the narrative's impact is lessened in Mel Gibson's PAYBACK. The film begins with Porter lying prone, two bullet holes in his back, while a less-than-reputable surgeon goes to work on him. Cut from that scene (Porter narrating all along) to him crossing the aforementioned bridge. Back in the city, Porter spies a panhandler begging for change. Now instead of just



Mel Gibson
as Porter

begging for change, the bum is heard saying, "Help a Viet Nam Vet walk again! Help a cripple!" Porter grabs the cash and the mendicant ruins his ruse by standing up to confront the thieving Porter. Gibson's Porter has become an enforcer of social justice, as the panhandler is a liar who deserves to be punished.

"You're cured," Porter glibly snarls and pushes the beggar to the street. Thus, our first obvious grinning laugh-line has been introduced.

When Lynn asks Porter if he's going to kill her his reaction is quite different in *PAYBACK*. Instead of being a minacious blank slate upon which the audience can project their own fears of this silent figure, Porter now gives a sheepish look that indicates a bit of surprise and, gosh darn it, some bruised feelings.

Parker doesn't get bruised feelings, Mel. He bruises people, and that's the extent of it if they're lucky. More often, he mashes people. He pounds people. He gives folks two quick jabs to the gut that leave them gasping for air. In contrast, Mel's showing us the kinder, gentler Parker/Porter. This Parker/Porter gets flustered when people misunderstand his want of a scant seventy grand. This Parker/Porter sports a grin or even a smile at times. This Parker/Porter can crack jokes after he's been tortured. In addition, this Parker/Porter makes apologies.

In order to see all of the differences, great and small, between *PARKER* and *PAYBACK*, I played the DVD of *PAYBACK* on my television set and the grainy bootleg *PARKER* on the little portable VCR/monitor I liberated from Comcast years ago. Often they synched up rather nicely, just being a second off from one another, making my living room echo like a drive-in. Some of the changes between the two films aren't all that significant, such as the longer introduction of Pearl (Lucy Alexis Liu) walking to Outfit hotel or extended pawnshop gun-trickery in *PARKER*. Nevertheless, later, the two films take completely different paths.

PARKER and *PAYBACK* have Porter find his dead wife and dissolve to the flashback in which we see the unfolding of the events that had come to pass. Like *POINT BLANK*, the heist that Porter commits is done in collaboration with only his wife and Val Resnick (Gregg Henry). In order to return to *The Outfit*, Val is in need of both his and Porter's share of the profits of waylaying some Chinese Mafia bagmen.

As with *The Hunter*, (but not *POINT BLANK*), Lynn pulls the trigger on Porter. Instead of threatening her life, though, Val has convinced her by showing Lynn a picture of Porter and a chick. The photo shows nothing more than the couple smiling and acting goofy, but apparently, Lynn is not to be scorned.

After Lynn's demise, Porter leaves her body on the bed and waits for the delivery boy to arrive. He doesn't carry just money, though. Rather, he also has some heroin for Mrs. Porter. Again, quite a nineties touch. Porter convinces the lad to reveal that he's been sent to Casa de Porter by Stegman (David Paymer), a cab operator in Brooklyn.

In *The Hunter*, when Parker visits Stegman for the first time he interrupts a card game in the back office of the cabstand. Two of the card players are police officers who flash their badges and act tough. In *PARKER* and *PAYBACK*, it's craps that the boys in the back room are playing and the two cops at the table, Detectives Hicks (Bill Duke) and Leary (Jack Conley)

are given their own subplot in which they learn of Porter's quest for cash and try to blackmail him out of his seventy thousand dollars.

Val is much more psychotic and brutal than either Mal Reese or Mal Resnick. His sadism is in perfect harmony with his girlfriend, the lovely Pearl. Her character has been changed from a junkie with no dialogue and a scant few mentions in *The Hunter* to an Asian Dominatrix with a significant role. Pearl is in love with pain, both giving it and receiving it—an odd combination for a Dominant, but no one said that Hollywood knows anything about BDSM (Bondage/Discipline Sado-Masochism).

After Val learns of Porter's appearance at Stegman's cabstand, *The Outfit's* local sadist breaks bread with the cabbie. In *PARKER*, this scene is extended past their exit from the restaurant. Here we see two of Val's goons taking Stegman down the street and placing him, teeth first, on a curb while Val steps on the back of his head and gives him the assignment to find Porter.

From outside the restaurant, *PAYBACK* cuts directly to Porter trying to find a woman named Rosie (Maria Bello)—the woman from the photograph that Val showed to Lynn to help her pull the trigger on her own husband. It turns out that these two have quite a history together. Instead

of Porter having lived a life of a professional thief, at some time he was employed as Rosie's driver—taking the expensive call girl from john to john—quite an emasculating position. (Note that Parker is not a big fan of prostitutes in Stark's work. In *The Handle* he says that "whores are for people without resources.")

As in *The Hunter*, Porter goes to Rosie to find out where his nemesis is staying. In an extended scene, *PARKER* has Rosie going off to make a call in her bedroom to find the exact suite in which Val is living while Porter checks out her bric-a-brac. Rosie's dog, also named Porter, begins growling and whimpering at him. "Be careful boy, he might bite you back," she says, returning to the room. If this line sounds familiar, that's due to it being left in the film's preview despite being cut prior to the release of *PAYBACK*.

She gives Porter the suite number and informs him, "All

this time and you didn't even think to ask how I've been."

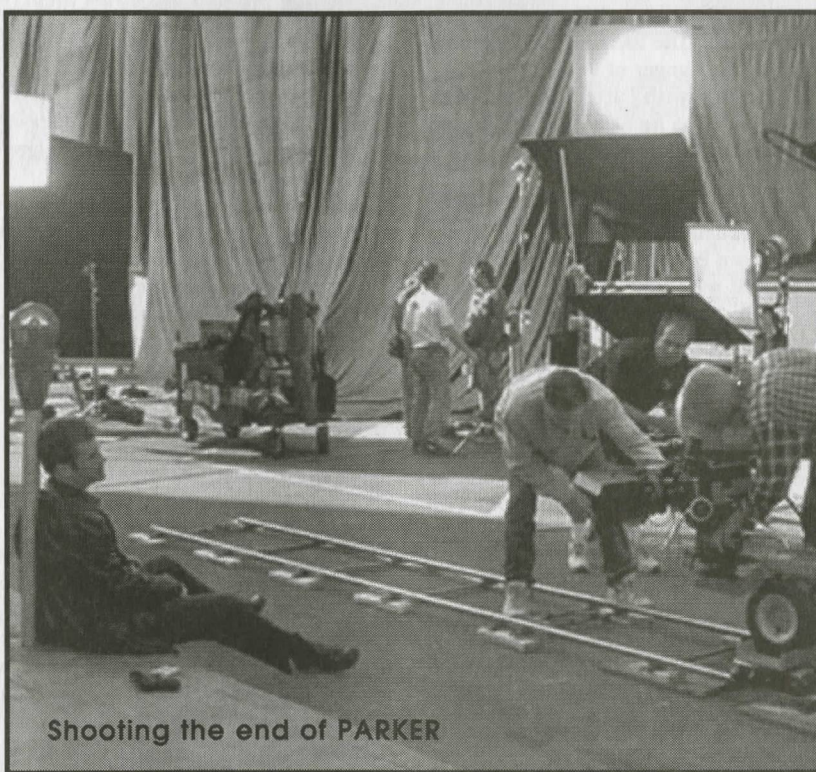
To this, Porter doesn't know what to say. He's incapable of politeness. He asks, deadpan, "You need any cash or anything?"

Rosie throws a knickknack at him and yells, "Get yourself killed, prick! I ought to tell them you're coming."

PARKER continues on to the next scene of Porter casing *The Outfit* hotel. After sneaking in, Porter dispatches a goon during the elevator ride to Val's room. When Mal wakes up to find Parker in his room, he doesn't have a whore next to him or Porter's non-existent sister-in-law, but Pearl whom instantly is aroused by Porter's power.

In both *PARKER* and *PAYBACK*, when Porter goes to hit Val, Pearl stops him, insisting that she be allowed the honor of decking her partner. Val doesn't fall over a balcony, nor does Porter choke the life out of him (or allow Pearl to do it for him). Instead, he lets Val live, demanding his money.

Val goes to see his boss, Mr. Carter (William Devane). This is the scene wherein *PARKER* and *PAYBACK* begin to diverge significantly. In *PARKER*, the scene is extended in the beginning. We see Val getting frisked by Mr. Carter's bodyguard. Chickenshit, Val carries three guns. Entering Mr. Carter's



office, Val meets up with Phil (John Glover) who has pulled Val's file. It's huge!

"Good read," Phil tells him, "Nice art too."

Mr. Carter is much more menacing in *PARKER* than *PAYBACK*. He tells Val that, "When you go Outfit, you go Outfit all the way. You do not farm your work out to scavengers (meaning Stegman)." Later Mr. Carter asks, "Phillip tells me you have a problem. Is it your problem that poked a man's eye out last night at the Oakwood?"

In *PAYBACK*, the scene begins approximately at this point, with the line changed to, "Is it your problem that breached security last night at the Oakwood?" In *PAYBACK*, Phil isn't introduced properly until the end of the scene with a close-up. After Val leaves, Phillip and Mr. Carter exchange words. Phil suggests that it might just be easier if Val disappeared.

Carter counters, "I thought about that. I'm not worried about Resnick. He wouldn't last two minutes out on the street without us. It's that other mutt I'm thinking about. It takes a lot of moxie to walk into The Outfit and start whacking our guys around. Either that or he's shit nuts. Frankly, I don't understand it. I don't want Mr. Bronson hearing about this. He'll think I'm getting soft."

In *PARKER*, this entire exchange does not exist with the aforementioned scene ending when Val leaves Carter's office. The *PAYBACK* dialogue introduces Mr. Bronson while downplaying the danger of Val.

In *PARKER*, Val calls Pearl after his meeting with Carter. The conversation is one-sided, the camera remaining on Val as he talks to Pearl, getting flustered when he has to call her *Mistress* Pearl. He asks if her friends have made it to town.

BDSM is often played for laughs in films and *PAYBACK* is no exception. When Val calls Pearl, we can hear what sounds like a baby crying in the background. We cut back and forth between Pearl in bondage gear and Val on the street: flustered that he has to wait while she disciplines the submissive she's got hanging from her ceiling. Here Pearl reveals the identity of the "friends" Val would only allude to in *PARKER*. Being Asian, it seems that Pearl must have connections to the Chows, the gang that Parker and Mal ripped off earlier.

The next scene in which the Chows attack Porter is much more leisurely paced in *PARKER*. Even the two detectives who look on as Porter's testicles are threatened with a butterfly knife take their time breaking up the fight. "Let's save a soul," one of them says before pulling up to scare off the Chows. Departing much slower in *PARKER*, Pearl gives Porter a big smooch before joining her compadres.

Porter returns to Rosie's apartment for her to tend his wounds. In *PARKER*, the scene is a little longer at the beginning and we see that she's still pretty ticked off from the last time we saw her, but her attitude changes once she sees the photo of her and Porter. In fact, as the scene wears on, she becomes *very* affectionate with him but Porter's obsession with Val prevents him from conjoining with her: his phallic gun limp at his side as he leaves.

As Porter leaves, Val gets off the elevator, unseen by one another. Val proves what a nasty guy he is by putting a bullet in Rosie's dog and push-

ing her around a bit. Just as Val threatens to relieve Rosie of her sexual frustration, Porter returns and immediately shoots his betrayer. This quick, brutal act is reminiscent of Stark's no-nonsense Parker. Remarkably, Gibson doesn't tone down the violence of this scene, leaving his point blank shooting of Val intact.

The sexuality of Porter and Val is definitely in question in *PARKER* and *PAYBACK*. Both men act overly aggressive as if to make up for their lack- ing. The cuckolded Porter has worked for Rosie, watching her interact with other men in the reflection of his rear-view mirror, pining for her. How he went from working for her to being married to Lynn is not explained. Needless to say, their marriage was not ideal or without infidelity.

Porter and Val's "elevator switch" juxtaposes their ability to interact with Rosie. While Porter has left her high and not necessarily dry, Val assures her that he's going to fuck her "six ways from Sunday." Val is impotent when not indulging in his propensity for violence. Thus, Pearl is an ideal mate for him.

The need for such a vampy, campy femme fatale as Pearl is obvious once we're introduced to Rosie, the blonde-haired hooker with the obligatory heart of gold. Pearl welcomes Val's sadism, but her aggression, coupled with the feminization of his name, throws his sexuality into doubt.

In *PARKER*, we never see Rosie's dog again and we should assume that he's dead. Now, that just won't do in the idealized *PAYBACK* where the scene subsequent to Val's demise begins with Porter carrying the wounded dog into his fleabag apartment hideaway with Rosie close behind.

Almost immediately, his phone begins to ring. "Nobody knows I'm here," Porter says, confused.

He discovers that his phone has been rigged to a bomb and that the men calling him (including Phil) are outside waiting in their car. Why they took such pains as opposed to sneaking up and simply putting a few bullets in him is beyond me. Porter dispatches them and leaves the telephone-activated bomb undetonated. (Can you say, "foreshadowing"?)

In *PARKER*, the film cuts from Val's death to Porter paying a visit to Mr. Carter. Carter is not as ready to talk as he is in *PAYBACK*. After a while he makes the offer to call his boss, *Mrs.* Bronson, played by the disembodied voice of Angie Dickinson.

In *PAYBACK*, Carter's boss is *Mr.* Bronson, played by the very corporeal Kris Kristofferson. Mr. Bronson painfully takes some time out of his conversation to dish some heavy exposition with his son, Johnny. With no sight of Bronson or Johnny and a heck of a lot less Rosie, the third act of *PARKER* is completely different from *PAYBACK*.

Between the earlier introduction of a bomb and the exorbitant amount of information gathered by Porter's telephone call to Bronson, *PAYBACK*'s course of events is fairly obvious. Porter uses Rosie (somewhat like Walker used Chris) to lure Johnny into a trap where they kidnap him in order to try and gain some leverage against Bronson.

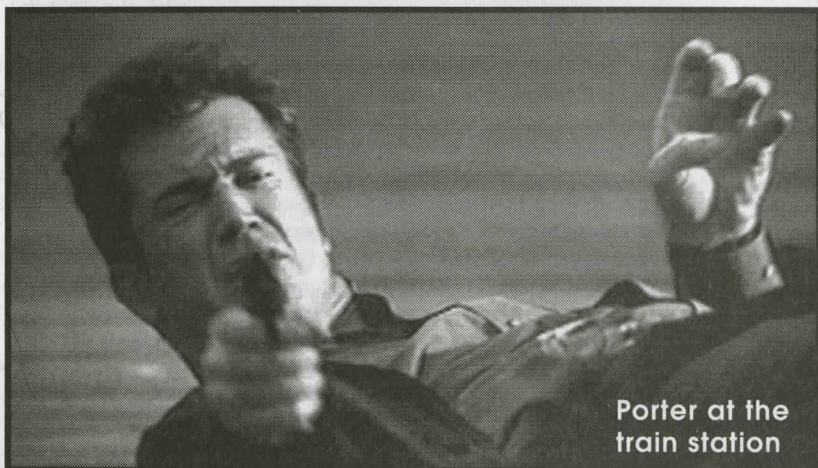
Porter's visit to Fairfax is more in line with *The Hunter* than Walker meeting Brewster in *POINT BLANK*. The majority of Porter and Fairfax's conversation remains the same between *PARKER* and *PAYBACK* but the scene had to be re-shot after Bronson's gender reassignment. *PAYBACK* also includes additional moments of levity such as Porter getting flustered by the constant error in sums—he only wants *seventy thousand*, darn it, not the full one hundred thirty that Val paid The Outfit. Also, Fairfax asks why Porter's going through such trouble for the small sum: "What is it, the principle of the matter?"

"Stop it, I'm getting misty," quips Porter in *PAYBACK*.

"No, I just want my money," states Porter in *PARKER*.

In *PAYBACK*, after talking to Mr. Fairfax, Porter is involved in yet another confrontation with the Chows and, inexplicably captured afterwards by Bronson's goons who engage in the traditional torturing a Mel Gibson character. Though not as gruesome as *BRAVEHEART*, the hammering of Porter's toes surpasses *LETHAL WEAPON*'s torture scene in terms of the wince factor but at least has more substance than his dunking scene in *CONSPIRACY THEORY*.

Porter finally gives up the location of Johnny. Bronson, Fairfax, and the hammer-wielding thug throw Porter in the trunk of their car and make their way to Porter's apartment wherein we begin



Porter at the train station

the now classic SILENCE OF THE LAMBS cross-cutting between Porter trying to escape the trunk with the film's antagonists making their way to the apartment door and with Rosie and her dog watching over Johnny. Of course, Rosie and Johnny are nowhere near the apartment when Porter calls his old place, setting off the bomb under his bed when Bronson picks up the phone. In fact, I really don't know where Rosie is located when Porter pulls up to retrieve her.

Porter, though a little worse for wear, gets the money (plus 50K above his 70K asking price) and the girl. "Just drive, baby," he says to her as they pull off. In contrast, PARKER offers up an ending that is not only bleaker than the saccharine conclusion of PAYBACK, but also far less hopeful than *The Hunter* and its exciting dénouement.

After his third, and final, interaction with the Chows, Porter is not kidnapped by Mrs. Bronson. Rather, he runs off and gets in a panel truck that serves as a cold storage compartment for some of the goons that he dispatches at the train station while awaiting the arrival of a man with a blue, cash-laden backpack. Rosie (sans canine) helps Porter out a bit by watching over Mrs. Bronson's henchmen while they wait in the truck as Porter locates the rest of the gun-toting group who stand between him and his money.

The operation doesn't go nearly as smooth as it does in *The Hunter* for Porter doesn't take notice of a very obvious assassin. The reason for this misjudgment appears to derive solely from the fact that the person who manages to plug Porter is a woman. As with his wife, he doesn't see this woman as a threat and again pays dearly for this mistake.

After taking a slug to the chest, a gunfight breaks out and Porter narrowly escapes. Oddly, it's this scene of Porter stumbling down the steps from the platform that became the image used in all of PAYBACK's promotional material. A look at the poster or video box reveals a flight of stairs behind Porter who's squaring off to put a few bullets through the car that holds the very-much-still-alive Phil (who met his demise earlier in PAYBACK).

Porter slumps to the ground, his back against a parking meter as a bum wheels down the sidewalk and asks for the blue backpack which may or may not hold seventy or more thousand dollars. Bleeding and semi-conscious, Porter begins thinking back on the events that have brought him to this point.

The camera tracks from left to right while simultaneously panning from right to left, creating an odd spatial effect. We cut from this single shot to images from earlier in the film, juxtaposed with sound bytes. Done with such a steady rhythm, it's not entirely obvious when these older shots become replaced with current action as Rosie pulls up and tries to wake Porter from his daze. This is a wonderful bit of filmmaking.

To the sound of sirens, Rosie gets Porter into her car and they drive off. Cut to Rosie driving while the wounded Porter sits next to her on the front seat of her car. "I've got to get you to a hospital," she says.

"No, I know a guy," Porter croaks.

"Is he a doctor?"

"No."

"Tell me where. Tell me where to go," she pleads.

This brings us back to the last spoken line in PAYBACK, "Just drive, baby," he says and, despite his wounds, grins. Worse for wear, he doesn't have the money, but he's got the girl. The camera pulls back and we see that Rosie's driving Porter across the bridge he walked in on. Cue Dean Martin's "Ain't that a kick in the head" and fade in the end credits.

Having three disparate takes on Stark's *The Hunter* begs the question; which one is better? Not to take the easy way out, but each of them has their merits. POINT BLANK is a highly enjoyable watch—the acting from Lee Marvin, John Vernon, Carroll O'Connor, and even Angie Dickinson is second-to-none. Boorman's mod, experimental filmmaking is appropriate for Stark's offbeat narrative and unusual protagonist. Though Walker's unflinching devotion to his money keeps his character at a distance from the audience, we still sympathize with him and revel in his violence towards those he sees as having wronged him. Crossing the best parts of his brutal thug from WHITE HEAT and his money-hungry gangster from THE KILL-

Porter's assassin



ERS, Marvin's Walker stands as one of his best roles.

While Porter may share Walker's drive to regain his lost cash in PAYBACK, he manages to snag much more. He is a winner. He's got the Rosie (who is said to be giving up her life as a prostitute), the money, and has rid himself of the immediate threat of retribution by killing Fairfax and Bronson. He's in the clear. Yet, Porter's intense search for monetary restitution overshadows any other need for retribution—personal or professional.

While seventy thousand dollars is a fair amount of money, it becomes a punchline for PAYBACK. Everyone is incredulous of his desire for what is seen as a paltry sum—including the audience. Though I wouldn't mind an extra seventy grand, I'd not risk my neck taking on the mob for it, nor would I encourage anyone else to do so. Thus, identification with the rakish Porter is only gained through his glib retorts ("I got hammered") and winks to the camera, as if he were assuring the audience, "It's okay, it's really me, ole lovable Mel!" Gibson certainly never got lost in his role. Or, if he did, he wanted to find his way out of it and throw an affable lacquer over Porter.

Looking at Helgeland's Porter and Gibson's cleaned-up Porter is like comparing the Mad Max he played in ROAD WARRIOR to what he became in MAD MAX BEYOND THUNDERDOME. From a "burnt out shell of a man" to a guy who's going out on a limb for a bunch of kooky kids, the chasm between the two is so vast that he's nearly unrecognizable.

That is not to say that PARKER is not without its flaws. Instead of being merely businesslike, Angie Dickinson's line readings are flat and emotional. When the story departs from Stark's original work, the film falters. The use of Asian characters as villains and sexual deviants is inappropriate and offensive. While Helgeland may be indulging in a time held film noir tradition of using Asians as "the other"—assigning characteristics of mystery and veiled perversity to this ethnic group—recalling such films as THE BIG SLEEP, CHINATOWN, THE PHANTOM MENACE, and LETHAL WEAPON 4, it's time that this stereotype be laid to rest.

Yet, in Helgeland's PARKER, the audience can better identify with Porter for being a man betrayed by his wife and partner and not for his blind ambition of collecting what he's due. As he lies in Rosie's car, bleeding, we realize that he's better off than if he had gotten his money. He's regained a bit of his humanity and, whether he was aware of it or not, that is what Val and Lynn took from him—they made him a dead man in a figurative sense. His wounds and his interaction with the world have helped resurrect his spirit, allowing him to go on with his life and, perhaps, to reinvent himself as a better thief with a better understanding of himself.

For more detail about all of Parker's film incarnations, I recommend Chris Poggiali's well-researched article "Stark Views" in *BadAzz Mofos* #4. That, and a whole lot more Parker information, is available at www.geocities.com/SoHo/Nook/5171/

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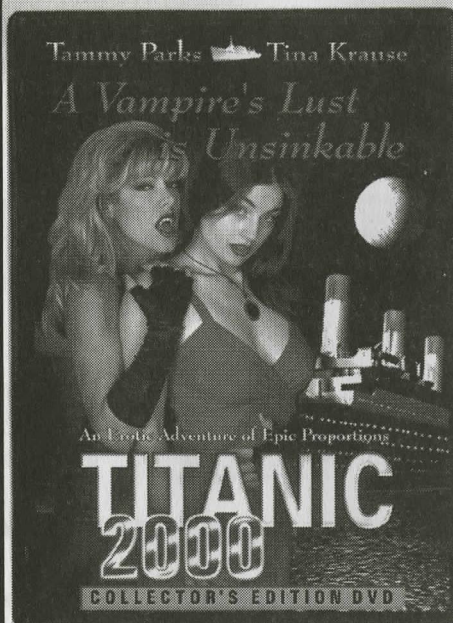
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	THE HUNTER	POINT BLANK	PARKER	PAYBACK
Written By	Donald Westlake (writing as Richard Stark)	Alexander Jacobs and David Newhouse & Rafe Newhouse	Brian Helgeland	Brian Helgeland and Terry Hayes
Directed By	N/A	John Boorman	Brian Helgeland	Brian Helgeland and Mel Gibson
Main Character	Parker	Walker (Lee Marvin)	Porter (Mel Gibson)	Porter (Mel Gibson)
Previous Occupation	Professional Thief	Longshoreman?	?	Driver for Rosie (Maria Bello)
The Heist	Robbing arms dealers	Robbing a mob exchange point on Alcatraz	Robbing the Chinese mafia	Robbing the Chinese mafia
Primary Setting	New York	Los Angeles	Unknown	Unknown (but looks like Chicago)
After our hero is shot...	He's picked up for vagrancy, sentenced to eight months, kills a guard after six and makes his way east	He apparently manages to swim off of Alcatraz only to return sometime later and meet Yost (Keenan Wynn) along the way	He comes back to the city, looking for revenge	He visits an unlicensed physician before coming back to the city, looking for revenge and, more importantly, his money
Our hero wants...	Revenge and 45K	Revenge and...90K?	Revenge and 70K	70K
His foe is...	Mal Resnick	Mal Reese (John Vernon)	Val Resnick (Gregg Henry)	Val Resnick (Gregg Henry)
His wife...	Lynn, overdoses on sleeping pills, leaving him with a problem of needing to dump her corpse	Spells her name "Lynne" (Sharon Acker) and apparently overdoses on pills	Lynn (Deborah Kara Unger) overdoses on heroin	Lynn (Deborah Kara Unger) overdoses on heroin
When our hero finds his foe he's...	In bed with a high price call-girl,	In bed with Walker's sister-in-law, Chris (Angie Dickinson)	In bed with Pearl (Lucy Liu), an Asian Dominatrix	In bed with Pearl (Lucy Liu), an Asian Dominatrix
The villain meets his demise by...	Being strangled by Parker	Falling off a building	Being shot by Porter	Being shot by Porter
The Outfit's Power Structure	Mr. Carter Mr. Fairfax Mr. Bronson	Mr. Carter (Lloyd Bochner) Mr. Brewster (Carroll O'Connor) Mr. Fairfax (Keenan Wynn)	Mr. Carter (William Devane) Mr. Fairfax (James Coburn) Mrs. Bronson (Angie Dickinson)	Mr. Carter (William Devane) Mr. Fairfax (James Coburn) Mr. Bronson (Kris Kristofferson)
Our hero's main squeeze is...	Claire - introduced nine books later in <u>The Rare Coin Score</u>	Chris (Angie Dickinson)	Maybe Rosie (Maria Bello)	Rosie (Maria Bello)
Rosie	Is a whore named Wanda that Parker intimidates into giving him information	Isn't in this film	Is barely in this film. She gives Porter information and then isn't seen again until he goes to the train station	Quickly becomes Porter's main squeeze and confidant, helping him to kidnap Bronson's son
Stegman	Is a cab stand operator. Parker pays a special visit to him...	Is a used car salesman (Michael Strong) that helps Reese out	Is a slimy cab stand operator (David Paymer) who helps crooked cops, Hicks & Leary, out	Is a slimy cab stand operator (David Paymer) who helps crooked cops, Hicks & Leary, out
Our hero's fate	Loses his dough but begins making it back in a final chapter robbery	Doesn't get the dough, fades back into the shadows	Mortally wounded, he loses the dough (if he ever had it) and gets Rosie (Maria Bello)	Gets his toes crunched but gets 130K, a dog, and Rosie (Maria Bello)
The story climaxes...	At a Brooklyn train station where Parker escapes unscathed	On Alcatraz where Walker finds he's been used by Yost	At a train station where Porter is shot by a female assassin	When Bronson, Fairfax, and an Outfit goon go to retrieve Bronson's kidnapped son
Line that summarizes the plot:	"He wanted Mal Resnick...Not the money back. Not Lynn back. Just Mal, between his hands."	"You want Reese, and I want the organization. I'm going to help you and you're going to help me." - Yost (Keenan Wynn)	"I just want my money." Porter (Mel Gibson)	"Seventy grand. That's what they took from me, and that's what I was gonna get back." Porter (Mel Gibson)

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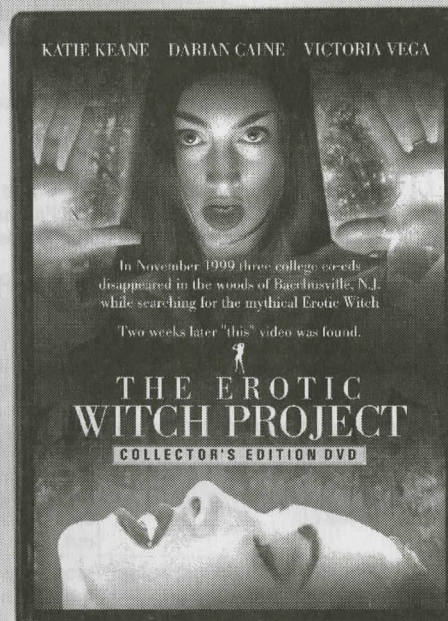
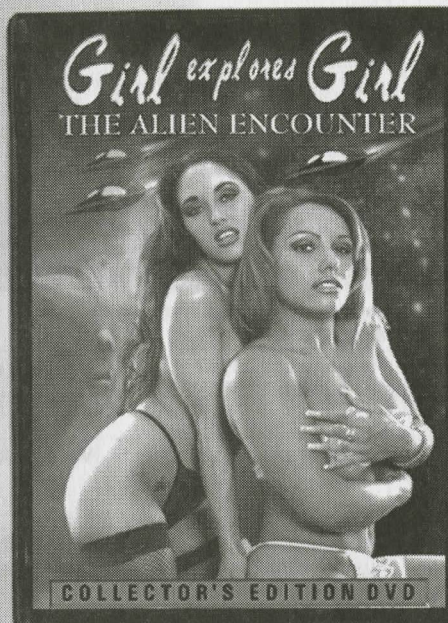
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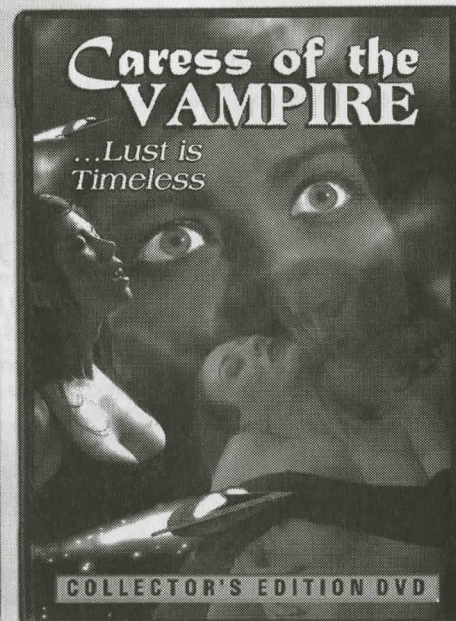
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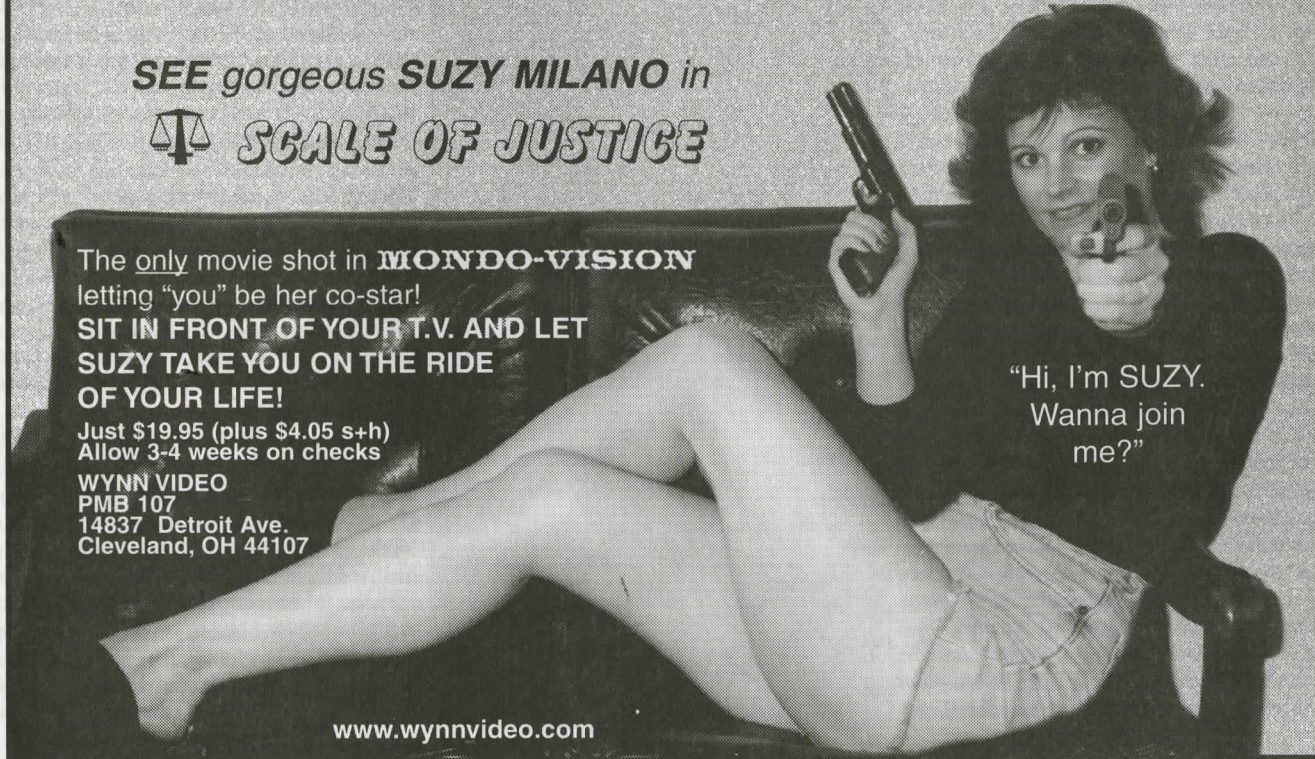
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MilkCan - *Make It Sweet*

I'm a sucker for goofy two-dimensional animated characters rapping or jamming on guitar. I suppose that's why I'm such a big fan of the Sony Playstation games, "Parappa The Rapper" and its quasi-sequel, "Um Jammer Lammy." Even before playing a round of "Um Jammer Lammy", I found (and subsequently purchased) *Make It Sweet* at Wizzywig Collectibles—a Japanese tchotchke store in Ann Arbor (www.wizzywig.com).

Make It Sweet is something of a soundtrack for the "Um Jammer Lammy" Sony Playstation game but with all of the eleven songs on the disc being performed by the characters of MilkCan (which consist of the Lammy herself on her heavy-duty guitar, Ma-San on drums and Katy Kat—making a triumphant reappearance after "Parappa The Rapper"—on bass and vocals). Guest vocals include some of the "Masters" that Lammy finds herself in competition with in the game but songs are arranged to put more of an emphasis on Katy Kat's voice. The disc is something of an odd blurring of reality as it presents the band as if they weren't two-dimensional cartoon characters. But, hey, if The Archies can do it...

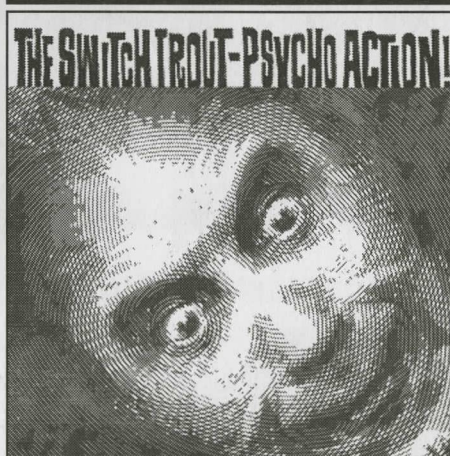
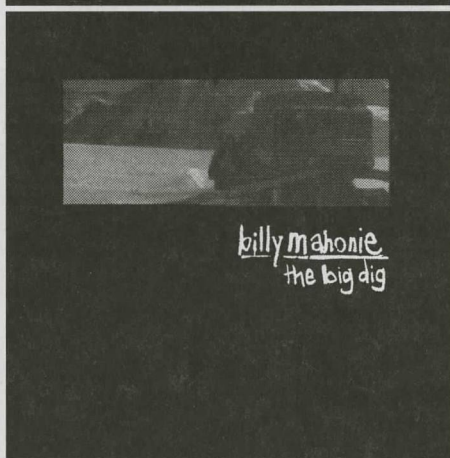
Like "Parappa The Rapper," Masaya Matsuura penned by music while Ryu provided the lyrics. The songs derive from the various challenges that Lammy faces on her way to her big rock show and each is wildly different in tone from the effervescent, tinny piano of "Birth Song" to the mad thrashing of "Keep Your Head Up!!" to the twangy country ditty "Casino In My Hair." What keeps the album from being a schizophrenic mess is the consistent lunacy of the lyrics, fantastic production values, and contagious melodies. Even if you never play a game of "Um Jammer Lammy" or own a Playstation, *Make It Sweet* is delightful (albeit bizarre) listen.

A word of warning, released around the same time as MilkCan's album was an EP, *I Scream*, by PJ & Parappa. It's a real waste of time. The music consists of recycled tunes from *Make It Sweet* and the rhymes are more whack than Slick Rick's. This one is to be avoided.

Friends of Dean Martinez - *Atardecer*

Travelling down a lonely Texas highway at night. If you dug out the map in the glove box you'd see that there's not a town around for over two folds. The only lights are the stars above and your headlights, which seem to cut through the dark like a silver spoon stirring strong coffee. You feel the resentful eyes of countless roadside animals on you as your car drives past. They almost thought that they had reclaimed this land as their own until you interrupted their party. Your only comforts on this night are that the cool, dry breeze coming up from your rusted out floorboards; the sliver of moon on the horizon providing a little more light than you had the night before; and playing on your radio is the perfect song for this moment.

It's the Friends of Dean Martinez playing one of their wistful instrumentals. Whisked away by the melancholy melodies woven by a coarse, muted guitar and highlighted by a mournful, vibrato organ played to a flamenco rhythm, you let time wash over you as the miles tick by on your odometer. *Atardecer* is the third release by the Friends of Dean Martinez and each one seems to do the impossible by surpassing the last. Each is a collection of instrumental tunes that seem to have



gestated south of the border for the past forty years to be born triumphant and enjoyed today. Simple, land-locked Mexi-Cali surf music melodies are enhanced with enticing instrumentation such as on the song "Casa Mila," which introduces the main elements of the song with an acoustic guitar. As the tune progresses, an other-worldly, wailing sound springs aloft, following the strains of the strings. And, as things reach their full stride, we're introduced to a harpsi-chord.

Few artists can create compositions where a theremin, moog, and harmonium complement one another and don't provide distraction or subtract from the overall impact from their works by the inherent oddness of the instruments. It never fails, though, that before you can puzzle out how the Friends of Dean Martinez utilize the modern to compliment and concatenate deceptively simple songs, you've arrived at your destination. It's time to turn off the blacktop for the night and dream of dusty images fueled by *Atardecer*.

(Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St, New York NY 10013)

Billy Mahonie - *The Big Dig*

This was an impulse buy. As soon as I saw the name of the band I wanted to hear what they sounded like. Though they spell their name a bit differently and might not even have anything to do with the film, I was immediately reminded of the character of Billy Mahoney (Joshua Rudoy) in Joel Schumacher's *FLATLINERS*. Mahoney was my favorite character in that wretched flick. He's the sum of Kiefer Sutherland's fears and, despite being about ten years old, he kicks the living shit out of Kiefer repeatedly. Being so annoyed at the film, I vociferously cheered Mahoney on as he beat Kiefer to a pulp.

I guess one should not judge a band by its name, though, as the thought of little Billy Mahoney brought to mind "music to kick Kiefer Sutherland's butt by." Instead, this is a surprising instrumental album. Most of the tunes have a slight southern-fried feel to them, despite the band's U.K. origins. The music is mellow but has enough energy to still merit some good head bobbing. *The Big Dig* is a nice companion piece to the Friends of Dean Martinez's *Atardecer*.

(Beggars Banquet, 580 Broadway Ste 1004, New York NY 10012)

The Switch Trout - *Psycho Action!*

Putting to rest the notion that the only music going on in Japan is syrupy pop or mind-numbing noise, The Switch Trout absolutely rock the house with *Psycho Action*. This will put the ants in your pants and make your backbone slip—it's hard rocking instrumentals straight out of Yokkaichi. With enough reverb to collapse Link Wray's lonely lung, when *Psycho Action* begins, The Switch Trout show no mercy!

(Estrus Records, PO Box 2125, Bellingham WA 98227)

Man Or Astroman? - *Eeviac*

Over the years, several people have told me that I'd like Man Or Astroman? For some reason, I had never invested the time or the energy to pick up any of their albums. When a copy of *Eeviac* fell into my lap and tickled my ears, I had to admit that I had been denying myself for too long!

Sounding like a beam of psychosurf garage music that was intercepted by some NASA egghead with a

four-track, *Eeviac* exemplifies all that is right with three-chord 4/4 rock. Mixing the better parts of the Ventures and the Sonics, Man or Astroman? play with nuclear-powered amplifiers and have had metronomes implanted at the base of their craniums: there's no other, better explanation for their awesome ability to rock. They succeed in keeping what could be a tired genre alive and well by putting it on a slab and sending fifty million volts through it. The fully animated and twisting spirit of psychosurf garage music walks the earth (and beyond) thanks to Man or Astroman? It's official; I'm a convert.

(Touch & Go Records, PO Box 25520, Chicago IL 60625)

DJ Cheb I Shabbah - *Shri Durga*

I don't know if it's art, but I like it. In the past I've heard songs where drumbeats have been added to Gregorian and Buddhist chants and have enjoyed them. Taking a rhythm track to another part of the world, DJ Cheb I Shabbah adds a pinch of hip-hop to the soft song of the Sufi. Instead of sounding like a desecration, the songs on *Shri Durga* maintain a façade of spiritualism coupled with meditative, plodding percussion.

The seven songs begin slowly; often they begin with little more than a simple sitar that seems to not want a melody coaxed from its strings. The song then builds one or two elements at a time. With the average length being eight minutes, there's time to grow and shift several times in one track. It's a pleasure to experience their progression, to relax and let the cry of the muezzin transport you to the East.

(Six Degrees, PO Box 411347, San Francisco CA 94141)

Gene Page - *Blacula Soundtrack*

Mmm...smooth...I was positive that the soundtrack for *BLACULA* would be a freaky-deaky collection of warped out music appropriate for the horrific aspects of the film but, instead, it's a soulful collection steeped in laid back rhythms and sinuous melodies.

Mixing tunes vocal tracks by The Hues Corporation and Gene Page's instrumental tracks, the *Blacula Soundtrack* is a successful, enjoyable listen.

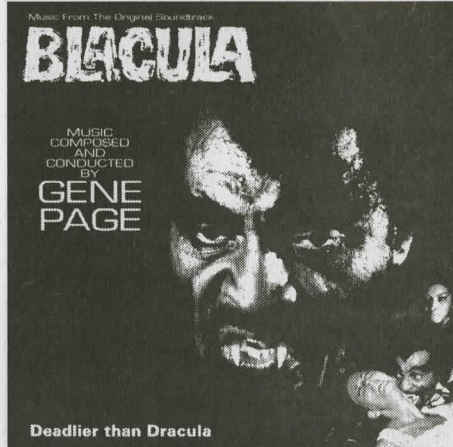
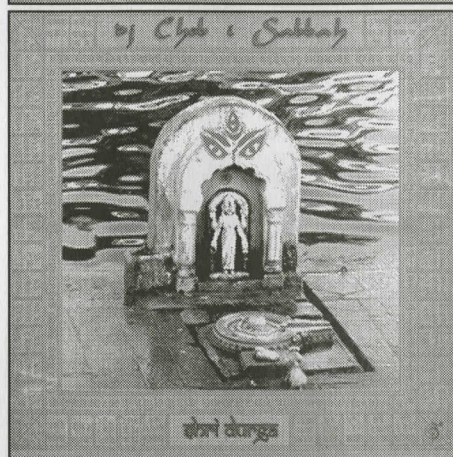
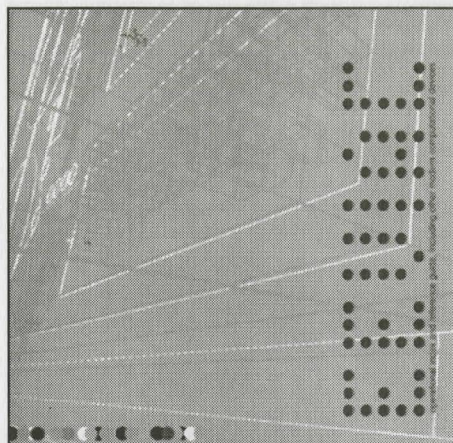
(Razor & Tie, PO Box 585, Cooper Stn, New York NY 10276)

John Linnell - *State Songs*

This album had all the ingredients to be a gimmicky throw-away side project. Here we have one of the two Johns of They Might Be Giants presenting a collection of fifteen songs named after (and presumably about) states in the U.S. Instead, *State Songs* is a wonderful album that demonstrates Linnell's incredible talent. Each track is an experience in a different musical genre with the use of state names in the chorus used to bind the disparate tunes together into a cohesive work of a master craftsman. *State Songs* demonstrates Linnell's terrific songwriting ability. Not only are the lyrics catchy (I often find myself singing bits of "South Carolina" and "West Virginia") but the music is fresh and exciting.

After listening to *State Songs*, I'm left to puzzle Linnell's role in They Might Be Giants. Compared to the rock-cliché work of Mono Puff, I think the solemn man who stands behind the accordion might be the true giant of the band. It's not necessary to be a TMGB fan or even an American to enjoy *State Songs*.

(Rounder Records, 1 Camp Street, Cambridge MA 02140)



The Lovemasters - *Hot Pants Zone*

The Lovemasters - *Pusherman of Love*

Bootsey X, lead singer of The Lovemasters is a local legend of sorts around Metro Detroit. I can't even begin to count the number of hip record stores that Bootsey's worked at over the years (currently he's upstairs at Desirable Discs II in Dearborn). Having him as an employee is merit enough to give a store indelible indie cred.

Released in 1995, I finally got my hands on *Hot Pants Zone*, a wonderful sampling of The Lovemasters' work. The six powerful tracks include long-time Lovemasters favorites such as "(Annie's Got) Hot Pants Power," "Pony Down," and my personal favorite, "Genius From The Waist Down." With clever, hip lyrics and fast, loose guitars, The Lovemasters are undoubtedly one of the great real rock bands in Detroit.

On a hunch I did a little online research and found a second album of The Lovemasters available over at www.mp3.com. Boasting a different version of "Genius From The Waist Down," *Pusherman of Love* also sports the classic title track and six other rockin' tunes. Oddly, though there are two more songs on this collection, it's a few bucks cheaper to order (even with shipping). I guess it's that disparity between indie record labels having to charge a little more to cover costs and soulless corporate behemoths undercutting them. Uh, regardless, *Pusherman of Love* is available online via the URL below.

I'm afraid that Detroit could easily get a bum rap by music fans not familiar with what's really going on in the Motor City. Between the moronic Insane Clown Posse and flavor-of-the-week Kid Rock, folks could easily think that the only acts in Motown are white boys trying too hard. Between acts like The Lovemasters and the more rockabilly-oriented 3-D Invisibles, I can still have faith that all is not lost in Metro Detroit.

(Total Energy Records, PO Box 7112, Burbank CA 91510) (www.mp3.com/lovmasters)

Kids of Widney High - *Let's Get Busy*

Yes, those rockin' kids of Widney High have returned for a second go in the recording studio! If you're not familiar with the Kids, they're kind of like a Californian version of Menudo as their members are often rotating. To qualify for the group, they must meet residential requirements, be under 21 years of age, and be financially eligible and diagnosed with a disease or physical limitation covered by California Children Services. At Widney High, the kids get diagnostic evaluations, ongoing medical treatment, therapy services, and the chance to cut a hit album!

Yes, depending on your frame of mind, this album could be seen as incredibly exploitative, uproariously hilarious, heartwarming, or a mix of the three. I'll admit (as politically incorrect as it may sound) that I tend to favor the former two aspects of The Kids of Widney High. I find a lot of humour in songs like "Insects" from The Kids' first album *Special Music from Special Kids* with its off-key singing and off-kilter lyrics like, "If you accidentally fall in the water, you're in trouble, spiders will come after you!"

All songs on the new album (except for a semi-cover of "Respect") are written by The Kids with help from their back-up band of professional, cheesy musicians. While *Let's Get Busy* doesn't quite have the surprise (and paranoia) of their first album, there are some

amazing tunes present.

If you want to see The Kids perform, check out Mr. Bungle's shows in California—The Kids of Widney High have been an opening act on more than one occasion. Or, watch The Kids in the comfort of your own home courtesy of a video available through Blackest Heart media (see page 51 for mailing information).

(Ipecac Recordings, PO Box 1197, Alameda CA 94501)

The Chicken Hawks - *Siouxicide City*

Sweaty bodies pressed together, the taste of beer, the stench of cigarette smoke and busty gals in animal-printed bikini tops; that's rock and roll to me. That's a Friday night in the heart of some dangerous area where you know your shitty car's going to be okay but you wonder about your stereo. You hold your arms close to your body; practically running to the door in an effort to stay warm as you left your bulky coat in your back seat. It's a night where you evade the cold in a hothouse of loud sounds and dollar drafts.

When you get inside, your senses are assaulted and, if you're lucky, your musical sensibilities aren't *insulted* by some poseurs trying hard to be the next big thing. They're practicing their strutting and theatrics on your dime when, dammit, you just want to rock. Well, lemme tell ya, the night you walk into that bar and The Chicken Hawks are on stage, you're gonna get your money's worth—even if you've arrived late and have to pay the stinkin' cover price.

With *Siouxicide City*, The Chicken Hawks demonstrate the beauty of a loud guitar, pounding drums, thumping bass and loud, profanity-laden vocals. When singer Betsy Phillips demands "Stick it in! Pull it out! Shake around! Get down!" you'd better do it or else she might jump off the stage and pummel you! When she proclaims in "Fuck Minneapolis" that she's a "rock 'n roll bitch," you don't doubt her for a second!

Wonderfully produced to capture all of the raw energy and excitement of a bottle-breaking live show, *Siouxicide City* is pure rock for the brave.

(PRB, 580 Broadway Ste 1005, New York NY 10012)

The Eycliners - *Here Comes Trouble*

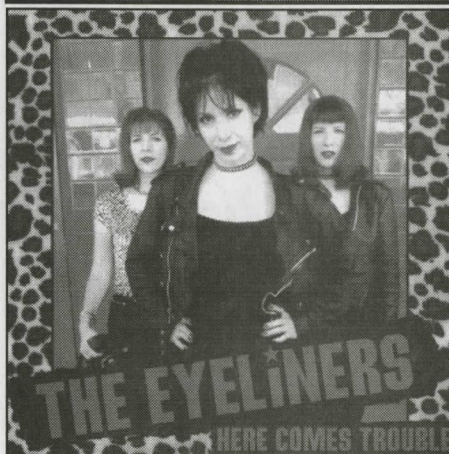
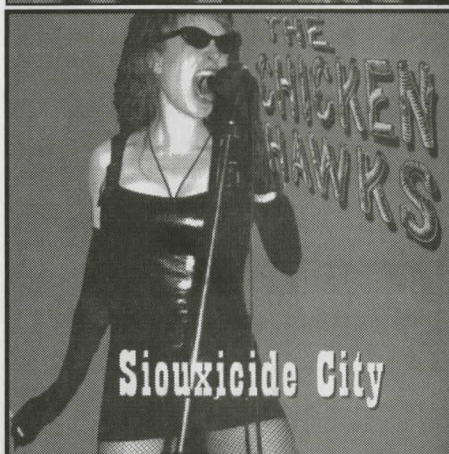
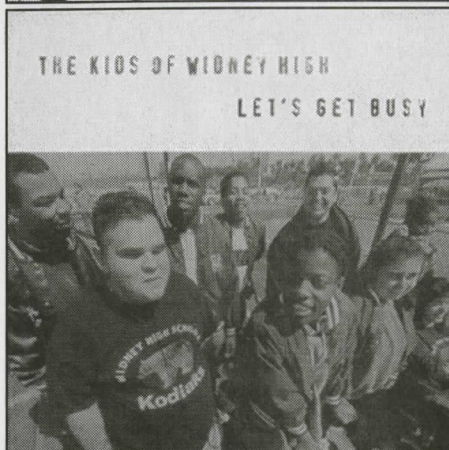
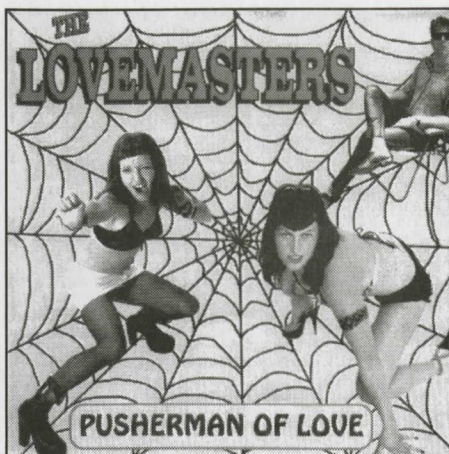
I know one shouldn't judge a book or CD by its cover but just looking at The Eycliner's *Here Comes Trouble*, something told me that I wasn't going to be disappointed. I think it might have been the leopard-skin pattern surrounding the picture of Gel, Lisa and Laura, the three gals that make up the group. The back cover photo of a leopard-skin shoe crushing a cigarette didn't dissuade my opinion either.

Luckily, sliding *Here Comes Trouble* into my CD player didn't result in disappointment. In fact, The Eycliners surpassed all expectations. *Here Comes Trouble* is an absolutely rockin' album filled with thick guitars, fast tempos, and great vocals. The Eycliners have been around for over four years and have a slew of singles available. Check out www.theeycliners.com for more info.

(Panic Button, PO Box 148010, Chicago IL 60614-8010)

James Kochalka Superstar - *Monkey Vs. Robot*

The prodigious, sophomoric talent of James Kochalka is awe-inspiring. The title song, "Monkey Vs. Robot" (see page 8), is indicative of the primary themes of the album—monkeys ("Hockey Monkey," "Hot Rod Monkey")



and science fiction ("Bad Astronaut," "Pizza Rocket").

Boasting thirty tracks, *Monkey Vs. Robot* is also has heartfelt anthems to Kochalka's penis ("Fifteen Teenage Girls," "Pony The Penis," "Punch The Clock"), Michael Jackson ("Show Respect To Michael Jackson"), and Kurt Cobain ("Put Down The Gun"), all sung the fervent, well-intentioned, slightly strained vocals of Kochalka. While Kochalka's singing voice and lyrics might not be for everyone ("Twinkle, twinkle Ringo Starr, George and John and Paul / I could be more famous than redwoods are tall / The Beatles came down in their spaceship / And the world went apeshit") but I dig this loony, irreverent, overflowing album.

(145 Old Mill Road, Greenwich CT 06831)

Beck - *Midnight Vultures*

When a record gets as much hype and critical praise as this one, I immediately become suspect. Most mainstream music critics wouldn't know a good record if it came up and severed their eardrums with an ice pick. When a new album by a radio regular comes out it's a race to jump on one of two bandwagons; the "This Album Is The Second Coming of God" or "They Finally Screwed Up... Big Time!"

I've long held to the Public Enemy maxim of not believing the hype. And, when it comes to Beck, I've always had to believe my own ears. I never had the patience to get into *Mellow Gold* and only seemed to pick up on the songs that later became singles when I bought *Odelay* ("Devil's Haircut," "New Pollution," and "Where It's At"). I never bothered to hook up with *Mutations* and was going to skip *Midnight Vultures*. But one morning on the way to work I suddenly knew the new album as "all good."

Listening to one of WCBN's morning DJ's I heard a tune that was so good that I had to plug in the car phone, endanger the lives of countless pedestrians and make a call to find out what I was listening to. "This is the new Beck; isn't it cool?" the disc jockey asked excitedly (I remember how happy I used to get whenever that phone would ring back in my 'CBN days). Indeed, it *was* cool.

I continued to sit in my car and listen to the rest of "Get Real Paid," grooving to the hypnotic female singer crooning, "We like to ride on executive planes / We like to sit around and get real paid." The music behind her voice wasn't some faux-seventies wannabe music or some over-sampled pastiche of junk; instead it sounded *original* and *funny*. Wow, what a concept! Instead of a crappy carbon copy of old school Prince or P-Funk, Beck manages to surpass these earlier artists and do his own thang.

And what a good thang it is! The rest of the album is just as groovy (or moreso) than the song that turned me on to *Midnight Vultures*. I've got to admit, though, that I don't think of *Midnight Vultures* in terms of songs as I seem to always take it in as the entire listening experience—putting that baby on "play" and just letting it go.

(DGC, 10900 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 1230, Los Angeles CA 90024)

Various Artists - Nick Bougas Presents *Celebrities... At Their Worst Volume One*

"It's gettin' to be ri-goddam-diculous." I hear that line just about every morning that I tune in to the Howard Stern show. There's nothing I enjoy more about Stern's

radio show than Eric "Fred" Norris's incredible sound library. He's always quick to "chime in" with an appropriate sound bite to compliment the topic at hand. On occasion, Fred will delve into his massive sound library for a longer quote or speech, usually of some embarrassing moment like Casey Kasem ranting about "god damn death dedications" (as heard, also, in *SONIC OUTLAWS* — see page 17)

I had always wondered who was saying, "It's getting to be ri-goddam-diculous" (John Wayne!) or where I could find William Shatner defending his pronunciation of the word "sabotage." The answers to both of those questions can be found on the first volume of *Nick Bougas Presents Celebrities... At Their Worst*, a 2-CD collection of vulgar, crude, and wildly funny moments from celebrities known or forgotten.

From Colonel Saunders badly flubbing a commercial (as heard on Mr. Bungle's eponymous first album) to a vitriolic Paul Anka, this collection boasts over two hours of famous and infamous sound clips all at the cheap price of under \$17 from www.essentialmedia.com. I'm saving my pennies for Bougas's second CD set along with his *two-video collections*! I can only imagine what goodies those will have in store for someone like me who finds such shenanigans highly scrumptious.

(PO Box 420464, San Francisco CA 94142)

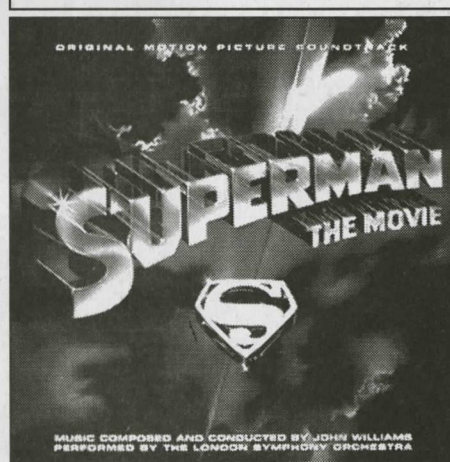
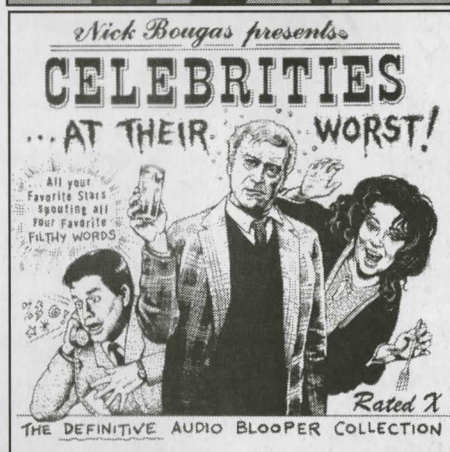
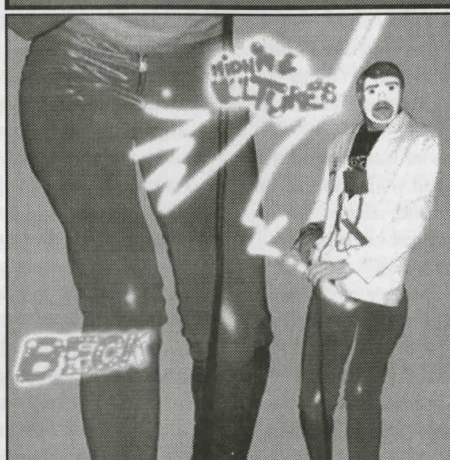
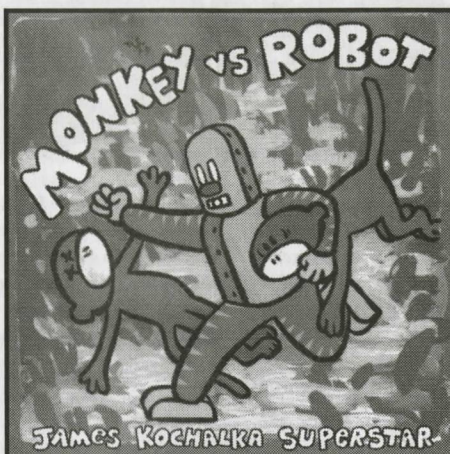
John Williams - *Superman Soundtrack*

The guy was on a roll. Basically, great film soundtracks of the late-seventies/early-eighties *belonged* to John Williams. Despite not being a Lucas/Spielberg film, Williams didn't skimp on his work for *SUPERMAN*. The score is amazing. For proof of that I'd recommend watching the first two *SUPERMAN* films back to back. While the second film uses Williams' theme, its interpretation by composer Ken Thorne is an insult to Williams' prior work, especially in its limited orchestration. Listening to the scores of both films could be likened to comparing a live full orchestra performance compared to an wax recording of the same music made at the Edison Laboratories.

"You will believe a man can fly," was the tagline for 1978's big screen adaptation of the story of Superman. Indeed, a lot of the effects in *SUPERMAN* still hold up after over twenty years, at least on my video monitor. I guess I won't know how they appear on the big screen as 1998 came and went without a sign of *SUPERMAN* being re-released to theaters for a gala reprise a la *THE GODFATHER*, *THE GRADUATE* or even *GREASE*. Hell, there wasn't even a "special edition" videocassette to commemorate the film's twentieth anniversary.

There is a myriad of reasons for this opportunity to pass with neither a bang nor a whimper. The production was mired in conflict. There were at least four writers on the project and three versions of the film are known to be floating around. If it's not a matter of rights for the film being tied up between the Salkind or Siegel estates and Warner Brothers, I think that one major reason why the film hasn't been re-released in any new form comes from an odd social awkwardness surrounding Christopher Reeve.

"You will believe a man who can't walk can fly," might be the new advertising campaign. Yes, wouldn't it be strange to have the paraplegic Reeve up and flying again. Apparently, however, Reeve doesn't feel too



weird about his condition. I say this after seeing his head grafted on to a walking body courtesy of modern-day effects in a Nuveen commercial. (It was such an ineffective bit of advertising that I just had to look up the company name because all I can remember is Reeve's scene.)

Hopefully, the release by Rhino Records in conjunction with Warner Brothers Music of a fully restored *SUPERMAN* soundtrack CD is a sign of things to come. In years past, it was impossible to even obtain a compact disc of the soundtrack as it was released on double album and cassette versions. The old CD carried an annoying caveat stating that two tracks were omitted "so as to facilitate a single, specially-priced compact disc." So, yeah, the older version is cheaper but it's also half as long. True, it only has *one* version of the overly annoying "Can You Read My Mind" where the new set has *three* (that's three too many) but the extended versions of other tunes plus alternate takes of the main title theme make it well worth the price.

(Rhino Records, 10635 Santa Monica Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90025-4900)

Various Artists - *The Matrix Soundtrack*

It seems that nowadays any film dealing with computers/technology is expected to play host to a score of techno tunes. The soundtrack of the Wachowski Brothers' *THE MATRIX* is no exception. Yet, instead of being a one-note joke, the tonality of these tunes is as eclectic as the film's many influences; from be-bopping along with The Propellerheads' "Spybreak" to the moody "Clubbed to Death" by Rob D to the wonderfully hardcore "Ultrasonic Sound" by Hive (which does a great job with a sample from "Re-ignition" by Bad Brains).

However, the real standout of the soundtrack is that it includes tunes by a few bands that, in other contexts, I can't usually stand! The limp and greasy retro rock of Monster Magnet plays perfectly on this album, as does the overzealous political posturing of Rage Against the Machine! After hearing their work on the *LOST HIGHWAY* soundtrack, I thought that there was no hope for reconciliation between the music of Marilyn Manson and my taste but with "Rock Is Dead," I actually find myself rocking out to a band I normally find completely bland.

The selection of work by all of the aforementioned artists along with Rammstein, The Deftones, Rob Zombie, Prodigy and Lunatic Calm work together to create one of the most entertaining and hip albums I bought last year. The only weak link among the songs comes from a group who I used to find mildly entertaining: the once new wavers-turned-bad asses, Ministry. After not checking in with the group since their *A Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Taste* album, I found them doing the same schtick ten years later—Al Jourgensen's screaming garbled lyrics over monotone pounding guitars. Bor-ring! With the exception of Ministry's "Bad Blood," *THE MATRIX* soundtrack is a fine, consistent collection of modern music. - MW

(Warner Brothers, 3300 Warner Blvd, Burbank CA 91505-4694)

A good number of these artists are available to listen to at the Impossible Funky Jukebox (www.cashiersducinemart.com)

AIN'T THE BEST GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU?

I'm hard pressed to decide if there's some sort of postulate that can be applied to cover versions of songs. Are they a litmus test that determines whether the songs themselves are entertaining or if credit is solely due to the original artist? Or, do they serve as catalysts; allowing a listener to hear the merits of one artist's interpretation of the song over another? So far, neither idea appears fully satisfying.

When it comes to cover songs, I'm invariably reminded of Bauhaus' take on David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust." While the original is competent and catchy, Bauhaus takes the song to new levels. The jangly acoustic guitar of Bowie is replaced by a crunchy electric guitar that often threatens to overcome Peter Murphy's howling vocals. Now *that* is a successful experiment! On the other end of the scale, though, is something like Lenny Kravitz's "American Woman." Somehow Kravitz manages to take a Guess Who song and rob it of any kind of soul it may have once had; as if running it through a juicer and trying to infuse the pulp with life.

"American Woman" wasn't the first song to which Kravitz has applied his patented nouveau retro sound. Years prior he was involved with an entry in one of the more alarming trends in music, the complete cover album. Dedicated to one artist or another, complete cover albums are coming out far too often nowadays. While some are inventive, others are glib. Instead of showing a reverence for the original material, a good number of cover albums are experiments in performing older songs in such a wide variety of genres that they border on ridiculous. Take, for example, the two KISS cover compilation albums: *Hard To Believe* and *Kiss My Ass*. The former is a rocking collection of cover songs coming out of Seattle before Seattle was big. The latter is yesterday's hits by 1994's hit artists (Kravitz, Toad The Wet Sprocket, Extreme, The Lemonheads, et al.).

Judging by the pick of songs alone, one can see that the artists involved in *Hard To Believe* have a real love of KISS. Smelly Tongues' version of "Parasite" alone is proof of that. Few folks would choose to revere such an overlooked Ace Frehley-voiced tune. Conversely, *Kiss My Ass* feels gimmicky and thrown together. The Mighty Mighty Bosstones succeed in choking the life out of "Detroit Rock City" with their tired ska™ sound while Gin Blossoms provide a dismaying rendition of "Christine Sixteen." Ironically, while I'm a big Nirvana fan, I find their whiny take on "Do You Love Me?" to be the weakest spot on *Hard To Believe*, while the odd stand-out of *Kiss My Ass* proves to be Garth Brooks and his demonstration of what a *real* singer can do with "Hard Luck Woman."

Hard To Believe is exceptional, especially when comparing it to other recent cover albums. Most of my experience with these collections has been negative. Instead of finding new life in old songs I'm often reminded of just how good the originals are and doubt the creative ability of the cover artists. A prime example of this is the Black Sabbath tribute album, *Nativity In Black*. When listening to a track like "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath," I realize that one of the things I enjoy about the work of Black Sabbath is the vocal styling of Ozzy Osbourne. To hear a classic Sabbath song performed by such a pat '70s metal dude as Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson exemplifies the distinctive place of Black Sabbath not only in my heart but as a heavy metal icon. Dickinson's operatic trills are in line with the overwrought antics of Rob Halford (Judas Priest), Geddy Lee (Rush), Ronnie James Dio (who fronted Black Sabbath in their darker days) and Corey Glover (Living Colour). Meanwhile, the only singer that begins to hold a candle to Ozzy is Faith No More's Mike Patton as evidenced by the ages-old cover of "War Pigs."

Oddly, Ozzy makes an appearance on the album doing "Iron Man" while backed by Therapy. This track adds merely aids in driving in the final nail in *Nativity In Black*'s coffin—demonstrating why the original Black Sabbath was so much better than the lame-ass covers by jokers like Megadeth and Biohazard. I must concede that *Nativity In Black* does contain what could be initially perceived as a contrived experiment in hard-edged industrial

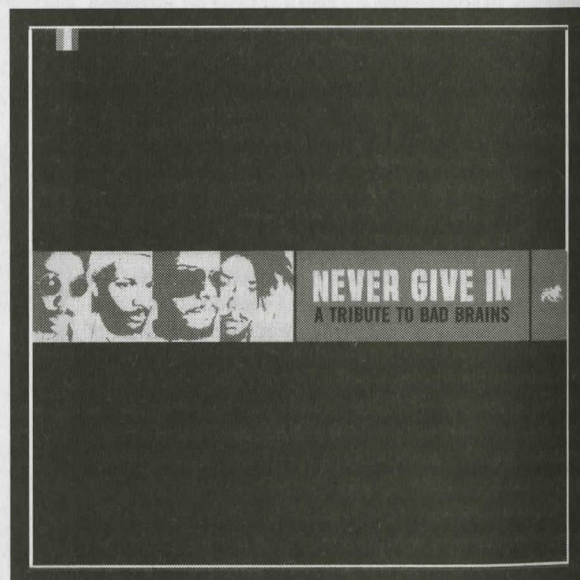
with 1,000 Homo DJs' mechanized version of "Supernaut." Instead of being artifice, this cover shows an understanding of the material and a desire to express it in a contemporary and toe-tapping way. It stands out not only as the most successful experiment on the album but also as the smartest. Ironically, 1,000 Homo DJs is led by Al Jourgensen of Ministry (doing his best Trent Reznor impersonation). Perhaps performing under a different name allows Jourgensen to stretch his creative abilities and avoid producing the same cookie-cutter Ministry-ish music that he's been doing for the last decade.

Nativity In Black hosts a few other competent covers such as White Zombie's "Children of the Grave" but Columbia Records missed the boat (and the point) by including flash-in-the-pan acts like Ugly Kid Joe over Alice Donut's horn-heavy "War Pigs," the Butthole Surfer's "Sweet Loaf," or Soundgarden's "Into The Void/Stealth" from their "Rusty Cage" single. (C'mon, if anyone were to be proclaimed heir to Black Sabbath's throne, it would have to be Soundgarden.)

Poor Black Sabbath has been the subject of at least three other cover albums: *Hell Rules*, *Eternal Masters*, and the appropriately named *Masters of Misery*. All three boast cuts by metal bands of various ilk—speed, death, etc.—and, again, they only show the phenomenal success of the original Black Sabbath tunes. I'd be hard pressed to determine which of these additional Black Sabbath cover albums is the worst of the three between the lead singer of Cannibal Corpse growling his way through "Zero the Hero" on *Eternal Masters* and Agent Steel's "Sweet Leaf" sounding like a track off an Adam Sandler album on *Hell Rules*. However, boasting Sleep plodding through "Snowblind" and Confessor's completely off-tune performance "Hole in the Sky," *Masters of Misery* is probably the most grating.

This brings me to the latest cover album I've rued to give listen. As *Never Give In: A Tribute To Bad Brains* began, I thought that my record player was on 16 rpm instead of 33 1/3. As quickly as that idea passed through my mind I realized that I was listening to a compact disc where controlling the rotations per minute is not an option. How then could this plodding song be on a cover album of one of the most raucous and assaultive bands of the eighties?

Little did I know in those first few seconds that I was about to experience the highlight of the album. I was hearing the introduction to a splendid execution of Bad Brains' "Sailin' On." By slowing the pace and stripping the instrumentation to a bare minimum, techno wizard Moby is



not showing any disrespect to the source material. Instead, his treatment of "Sailin' On" as a melancholy ballad of redemption demonstrates the beauty of Bad Brains' lyrics and melody. Ah, if only everyone on *Never Give In* could have ventured so far.

The second song on *Never Give In* is a fun cover of "Pay To Cum" by Ignite. In listening to this, I was reminded of yet another great punk band from the '80s, Naked Raygun. Let's hope no one ever decides to do a tribute album to them (or is it too late?). However, from there it all goes down hill... In watching N.Y.H.C. (see page 73), one of the bands mentioned to influence the hard core hooligans of the '90s is Bad Brains. Unfortunately, it's hardcore bands who've wheedled their way onto *Never Give In* and dominate the rest of the album.

The original Bad Brains had a terrific dynamic of thick drum and guitar music with the wailing-yet-melodic vocals soaring above them. Not only would albums drift from an onslaught of fast-paced punk tunes to sincere, plaintive reggae but the songs themselves were unpredictable; shifting gears one or more times even while their running times often clocked in shy of two minutes. Bad Brains' original lead singer H.R. (Paul Hudson) had used his voice as an instrument and a weapon. He could growl, shout, and moan all in the course of a word. On a song like "We Will Not," he implemented his voice as a percussive force. There was a craftsmanship present in his vocal abilities not found in many singers and definitely absent from this so-called "tribute album."

The majority of the bands on *Never Give In* pale in comparison musically and, especially, vocally. Granted, H.R. wasn't always the best at enunciating his lyrics but he was more comprehensible than not. On *Never Give In*, however, too many bands present adhere to the "Cookie Monster" singing style - grumbling and shouting until their over-modulated voices become a misshapen blur. In reviewing this album I'm tempted to set up some sort of continuum of obnoxiousness with bands ranging from intolerable to mind-numbingly awful (it'd look something like this: Adamantium, Skinlab, 16, Haste, Shai Halud, Turmoil, Will Haven, Boy Sets

Fire, Downset, Sepultura, Entombed - note that there are only sixteen tracks on this compilation and eleven of them are listed here!).

While I wouldn't try to deny artists the right to cover anyone they chose, I feel compelled to report that Bad Brains deserves better than what is present on *Never Give In*. Instead of investing in this album, one's money would be much better spent on investing in the original works of Bad Brains. Adding *Rock For Light* and/or *I Against I* to your record collection would be a good first move—and it'll let you hear what all the fuss is about. - MW

A Few of the Best Cover Songs:

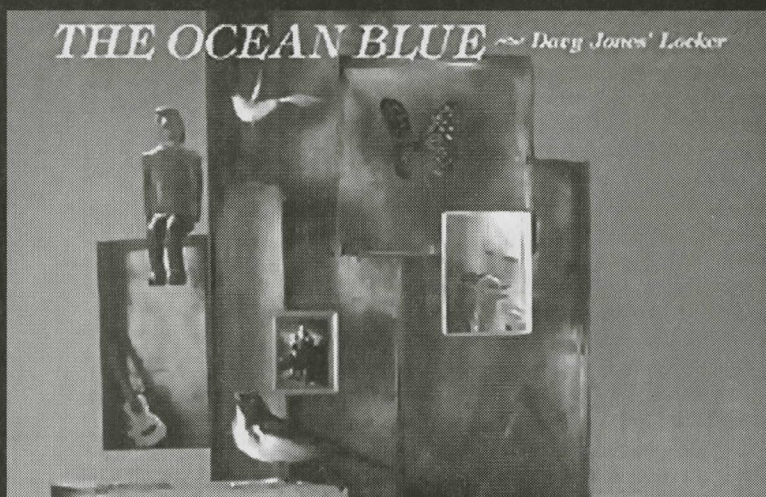
- "God of Thunder" by White Zombie (OA: KISS)
- "Head On" by The Pixies (OA: The Jesus & Mary Chain)
- "Ziggy Stardust" by Bauhaus (OA: David Bowie)
- "Black Dog" by Dread Zeppelin (OA: Elvis/Led Zeppelin)
- "Hazy Shade of Winter" by The Bangles (OA: Simon & Garfunkle)
- "Kashmir" by The Ordinaires (OA: Led Zeppelin)
- "Sweet Jane" by The Cowboy Junkies (OA: The Velvet Underground)
- "Rusty Cage" by Johnny Cash (OA: Soundgarden)
- "Easy" by Faith No More (OA: The Commodores)
- "Rocket Man" by William Shatner (OA: Elton John)
- "Rockin' Bones" by The Cramps (OA: Ronnie Dawson)

And some of the worst...

- "Bizarre Love Triangle" by Frente (OA: New Order)
- "I Put A Spell On You" by Marilyn Manson (OA: Screamin' Jay Hawkins)
- "American Woman" by Lenny Kravitz (OA: The Guess Who)
- "Route 66" by Depeche Mode (OA: Bobby Troupe)
- "Live & Let Die" by Guns N Roses (OA: Wings)
- "Mrs. Robinson" by The Lemonheads (OA: Simon & Garfunkel)
- "American Pie" by Madonna (OA: Don McLean)

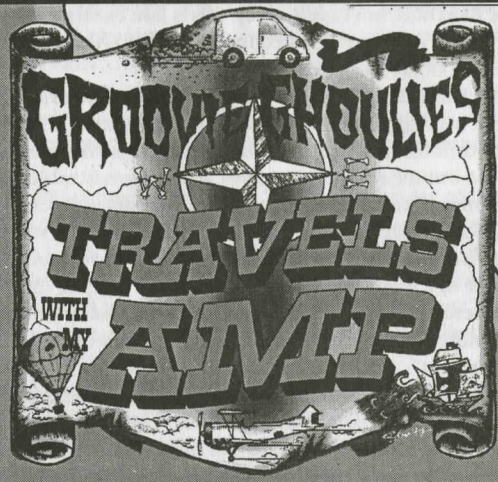
The Ocean Blue - Davy Jones Locker (P.O. Box 363, Hershey PA 17033)

Hershey, Pennsylvania is best known for its chocolate, however, the fifth album by The Ocean Blue is a much sweeter export than any candy confection. In a period of about 40 minutes, the band manages to traverse many musical styles as well as improve upon its fantastic jangle pop sound. The album opens with "Ayn," a song that is reminiscent of the best work of The Smiths. Wanderlust is discussed on "Denmark" - "Like mist or a daydream made of substance can you feel it? / Denmark came and Denmark marked my soul," sings lead vocalist David Schelzel in his ethereal vocal style. This album is a departure from previous work in that the band members have given themselves more to do. Guitar/keyboard player Oed Ronne wrote two tracks- the surf rock influenced "Cukaloris" as well as "Consolation Prize" on which he also sings lead vocals. Drummer Rob Minnig wrote and performs "Been Down A Lot Lately," which is a sad lament on a failed relationship, but the warm melody of the song keeps the listener feeling buoyant. The band was previously on Mercury Records, but dropped along with many other artists (including Morrissey, one of their biggest influences), due to business problems with the label. It is surprising then how polished this independently-produced venture sounds. The freedom from label pressures seems to enhance the creativity of the band, and they seem to be having a lot of fun. This is especially evident on the nonsensical "Cake" - which offers the advice "Don't batter your own when you bake your cake, don't shatter your bone when you bake your cake." The honest stripped down sound of the album incorporates rippling guitars, thoughtful lyrics, and sublime melodies into songs that manage to stay with you long after the disc has ended. - Chris Cummins



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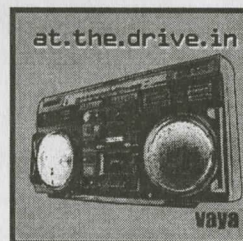
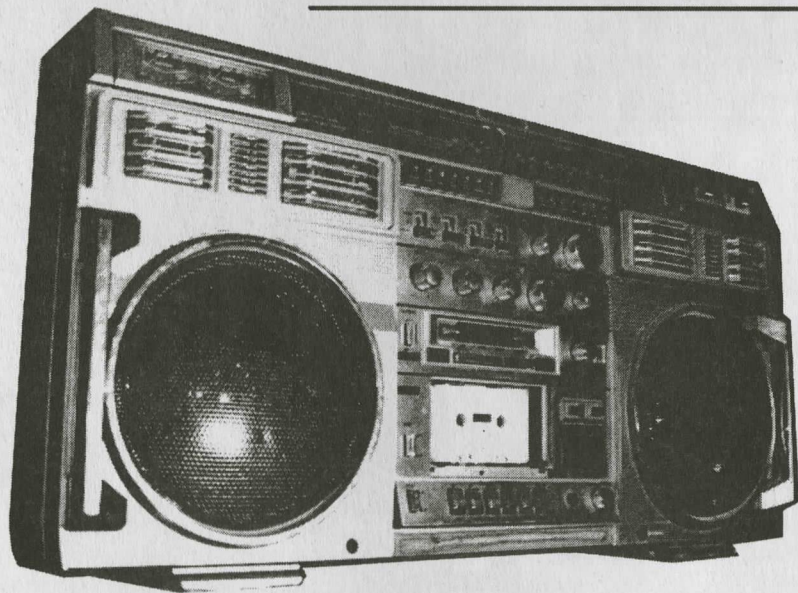
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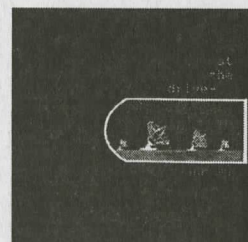
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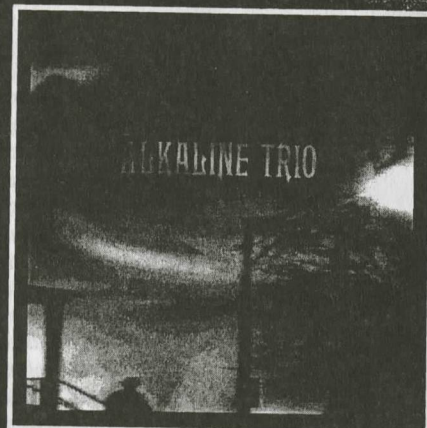
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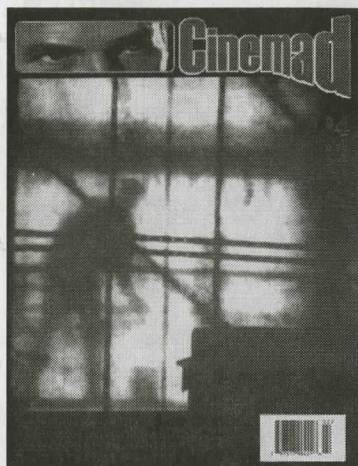
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Shemp # 29 - \$2 (593 Waikala St., Kahului HI 96732-1736)

Larry Yoshida's been creating "Shemp" for at least as long as I've been into zines. Each issue is consistently great. Written from a first-person point-of-view, Larry reviews records, movies, zines, and whatever else catches his eye while occasionally bitching about his job; clerking at a video store. I feel your pain, Larry, and I love your zine.

Issues consist of three or four pieces of paper folded in half, stapled together with clip art and hand-written blurbs around the neatly typewritten reviews. Shemp is zinedom in its raw, original form. No sell out!



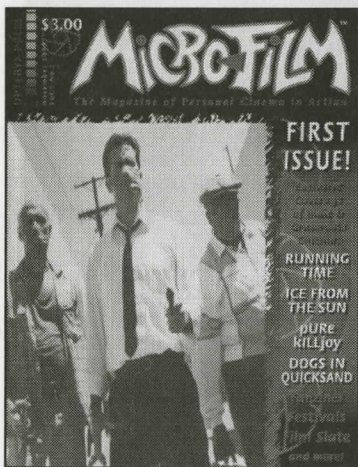
Cinemad #2 - \$4 US (PO Box 43909, Tuscon AZ 85733-3909 www.premierzone.com/cinemad.html) Now this is the stuff, here. Cinemad's approach to film as an institution and as entertainment feels very familiar. Writes editor Mike Plante in his editorial, "I think all of these people/topics [in Cinemad] are barely covered by other media. I wanted to learn more about them so when I couldn't find any articles I went out and made some." Material covered in Cinemad is "interesting movies that we like" with the main goal being "getting others to check 'em out."

It isn't too difficult to see that Cinemad and Cashiers du Cinemart

are following quite a similar path. Cinemad's second issue features an article about existential car flicks wherein both *VANISHING POINT* and *TWO LANE BLACKTOP* are discussed (see page 76). There are interviews with Chris Wilcha, director of *THE TARGET SHOOTS FIRST* (see page 72) and Conrad Hall, who's been director of photography on films such as *ELECTRA GLIDE IN BLUE* (see CdC #10) and *AMERICAN BEAUTY*. Luckily, there are more differences between Cinemad and CdC than similarities! Cinemad does a terrific job in spotlighting overlooked character actors such as Thelma Ritter and Tracey Walter as well as covering other lost gems of the cinema like *THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS* and *CHAMELEON STREET*.

Cinemad is providing a valuable voice in film criticism and coverage. If I have one complaint about the mag it's the look—so large that it's often difficult to concentrate on the words. But, knowing that this is only the second issue, I imagine that'll improve by issue three. I look

forward to Cinemad having a long, prosperous life!



Micro-Film #1 - \$5 US - (PO Box 45, Champaign IL 61824-0045 www.artisticunderground.com/mf_unbound)

For as raw as Cinemad appears, Micro-Film is slick. Out of the box, Micro-Film is a polished and serious look at independent film and video. I almost feel like a plebian like myself shouldn't be looking at such a highfalutin disquisition. Covering film fests, the state of indie film zines, and grassroots filmmaking, Micro-Film also boasts a good number of reviews; jam-packing thirty-two pages full of information.

The second issue of Micro-Film will carry interviews with Kevin (SURRENDER DOROTHY) DiNovis along with Chris (AMERICAN MOVIE) Smith - good stuff to be sure!

Cinema Scope #2 - \$5 US - (465 Lytton Blvd, Toronto ON M5N 1S5 CANADA)

Damn, this sucker is huge! Clocking in at 124 pages, Cinema Scope apparently has a lot to say!

Before getting too much farther into this review I have to admit up front that I know the editor, Mark Peranson, and have even contributed to Cinema Scope. Issue #2 even contains my list of the top ten films of the '90s. I think I'm the only person with FREAKED on their list. Actually, my list doesn't jibe with most of the other folks whose lists are included—what does that say?

I met Peranson when I was in Toronto earlier in 1999. I was up there seeing Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Phantom of the Opera" as it was on its last legs at the "fabulous Pantages Theatre." More than that, starring as the Phantom was none other than Paul Stanley of KISS! All made up, singing, strutting around stage with big pyrotechnic effects, playing the Phantom wasn't much of a stretch for "Star Child." And, finally, Stanley's lispy speech impediment came in handy as it helped add to the strangeness of the misshapen musical pariah. Up on stage screaming "Christine!" (with no "Sixteen" following it), I was in stitches throughout performance. Not to say that Paul did a bad job. Quite the contrary; his rock theatrics and strong voice fit perfectly with the play and I can't imagine anyone else doing it.

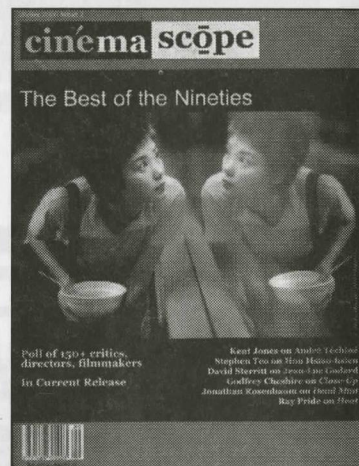
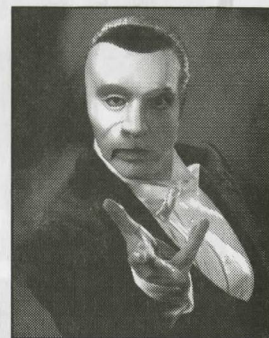
But I digress. It was the next night that Andrea and I met up with my buddy Colin Geddes for a few drinks at the bar next to the Markham Street Suspect Video. We were joined by a few other Suspect staff members and their friends, including Peranson. We shot the shit a bit as I got nice and toasty on a local brew. It turned out that Peranson had recently done a major article on John Paizs, one of CdC's favourite filmmakers.

A few weeks later found Peranson and me exchanging e-mails. He helped hook me up with my press credentials for the Toronto International Film Festival (see CdC #10) and told me that he was thinking about starting up a magazine—any suggestions? In the middle of a financial crisis, I told him that my best suggestion was not to do it and just freelance instead.

Luckily, Peranson wasn't swayed by my moment of negativity and proceeded to produce one hell of a first issue. Completely pro, baby. It boasted reviews of nearly all of the entries to the Toronto International Film Festival and proved to be among the most valuable possessions of folks attending the fest that were lucky enough to score a copy. Thinking that Cinema Scope was a one-shot deal, I was surprised when Peranson announced plans for a second issue. And, damn, if that one isn't a knock-out as well!

As I said, Cinema Scope is big. Really big. There is no shortage of well-written articles that span anywhere from a few columns to a few pages. Keeping to a '90s theme, Cinema Scope has a plethora of pieces concerning the latest and "greatest" films of the last decade. While I tend to disagree with some of the choices of the writers about which films they consider to redefine cinema, there's no doubt that Cinema Scope is a very serious film magazine. While the lack of popular and/or trashy films might be considered a weakness by some readers, Cinema Scope uses this as a strength. The magazine covers a bevy of arty, foreign flicks that usually get overlooked as "snooze movies" by other film magazines. Cinema Scope is definitely not a lark. Instead, I can see it becoming a powerhouse of film criticism. - MW

Cinemad, Micro-Film, and Cinema Scope are all available from www.insound.com.



It could have been brutal. Fall in my first year in the dorms was an awkward time. Away from my friends and family; surrounded by a plethora of strangers. It was time to find some common ground. As luck would have it, one evening as a bunch of us did the Gen-X thing and started talking television. Having a conversation that would have made TV Land programmers proud, we skipped from one program to another. It was when we got to M*A*S*H however, that the discussion became heated. Like those losers in REALITY BITES, we started rattling off reminiscences about one episode or another.

"Remember the one where Hawkeye and Trapper sold Henry's desk to get some penicillin?"

"How about when Trapper ordered the pinstripe suit and the stripes ran the wrong way?"

"Or then there was the one all shot from the soldier's point of view - the one without a laugh track?"

"Wasn't that the black and white one with the reporter?"

And on it went... That is, until one of the guys volunteered the information that back in his room he had a copy of the final episode of the series, "Goodbye, Farewell and Amen."

Within minutes his room was occupied with a dozen or more eighteen year-old college freshmen paying rapt attention to the two and a half hour special that ended the eleven year run of one of television's most popular series. Sure, we talked and kidded around, continuing our earlier jawing on about favorite episodes but, believe me, you could have heard a pin drop when things started getting serious. Each one of Hawkeye's flashbacks to that bus hushed the room with proper gravity.

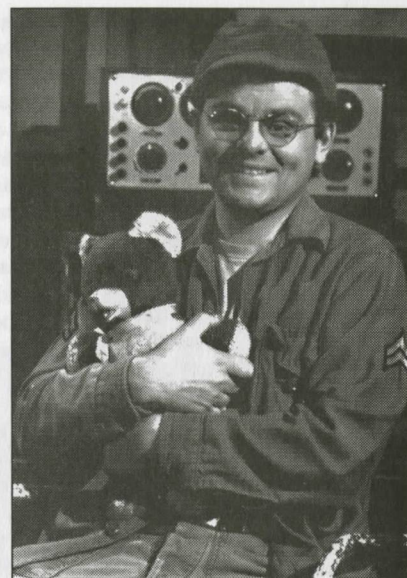
Most of us were born in the year that M*A*S*H began and grew up with the program in first-run episodes (until we were eleven) and syndicated re-runs (which continue today). To say that M*A*S*H shaped my childhood is a bit of an overstatement but I would not hesitate to state that the show holds a place in my heart unrivaled by the majority of its contemporaries. In retrospect, I would concede that television played a major role in my development, though, until reading James H. Wittebols' *Watching M*A*S*H, Watching America* (ISBN: 0786404574), I hadn't given much thought to what was going on in the "real world" during those years to influence M*A*S*H!

In his work, Wittebols' uses the extended run of M*A*S*H (beginning in the war-torn throes of Viet Nam and ending under the choke-hold of Reganomics), to demonstrate the life of a popular prime time show, and how the "world of the show" (that is, Korea in the '50s) metamorphosed in accordance with the United States in the '70s and '80s. Certainly, I had been aware of modifications in the show, such as the departures of Frank Burns, Trapper, Henry Blake, and Radar but I never felt cognizant of the thematic shifts that occurred over its eleven-year run.

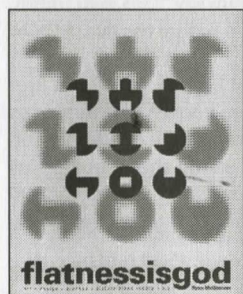
In support of his arguments regarding how M*A*S*H reflected the sociopolitical upheaval occurring in the ages of Vietnam, Watergate, Disco, Moonies, and Iran-Contra deals, Wittebols describes the topics covered in M*A*S*H a few seasons at a time; comparing and contrasting the attitudes of the show with ongoing events. Luckily, Wittebols states in no uncertain terms that television follows societal changes; it doesn't create them. In this way, he doesn't empower the boob tube with a force it does not have. In other words, the decline of Hawkeye's rampant womanizing did not bring about the attitudes of the women's liberation movement but vice versa.

More than a detailed analysis of one of my favorite television shows, Wittebols' book is an invaluable document of history and the general public's reaction to news of the day. "The public" is represented by the show in Wittebols' book as the author contends that a program contradictory to mainstream mores would not be able to garner the ratings M*A*S*H consistently scored. Little humour would be found in a character like Colonel Flagg, the ultramilitaristic CIA spook, if Americans weren't tired of being exposed to the odd (and often fanciful) exploits of the CIA from sources like Phillip Agee's *Inside the Conspiracy: A CIA Diary* (ISBN: 0883730286). This logic would also help explain the reversal of a character like Max Klinger from an ardent opponent of the military, constantly bucking for a section eight discharge, to the stand-up military man he becomes late in the series, when the U.S. was ready to re-embrace militarism via the skirmishes supported by Ronald Reagan.

Wittebols' recounting of American history feels well encapsulated and thoroughly researched. Likewise, it's obvious that Wittebols is more than passingly familiar with M*A*S*H. His knowledge of the show is especially apparent in the wonderful episode guide that completes the book. Wittebols wins praise from me in his detailed accounts including notations of discrepancies that crept into the show over the years such as Hawkeye's missing mother and sister (to whom he sends greetings in the first season but who are dead or never existed in later seasons). Wittebols succeeds in what could have been a disastrous undertaking—he enriches M*A*S*H and America in his examination of a show that, obviously, has had long-standing effects. For ordering information visit www.mcfarlandpub.com.



*Radar (Gary Burghoff) went from a womanizing drinker to an infantilized wuss over the duration of M*A*S*H*



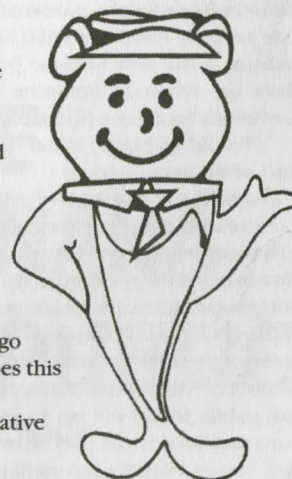
I don't think of myself as a very creative person. I try my best to come up with designs in CdC or on the web that are bold and exciting but usually end up sacrificing style for substance—making sure items are more legible than they are beautiful. That said, I think that I have a real appreciation for creative people if only out of envy for their talent!

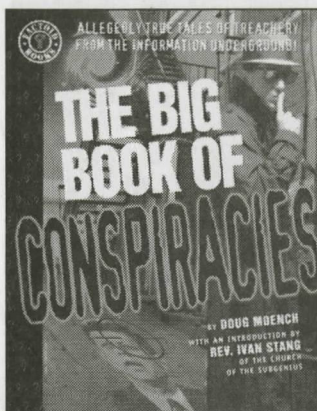
Initially appearing Dadaist in its approach, Ryan McGinness' *flatnessisgod* is an eye-opening and inspirational tome. Subtitled "art + design + process + picture plane theory + x, y," *flatnessisgod* (ISBN: 1-887128-34-4) is a hefty study of not only the creative process but also the method by which images are interpreted. Often images are presented in order to provoke a visceral response for the reader to reflect upon. *flatnessisgod* is light on text and heavy on images that build upon one another; studies of line, shape, contrast, (and all the other buzzwords to be found in design manuals) are present but the reader is forced to examine items in practice more than theory. Laid out more as a puzzle than a textbook, McGinness frequently instructs the reader to refer to other pages for expansion on a current idea, as if to invite different interpretations of the material

depending on the order in which it is read.

After demonstrating the basic concepts of design, McGinness begins to give the reader a privileged look into techniques of invention. McGinness delineates his appropriation of images around him (like graffiti) into his work. He also traces the evolution of logos or layouts that he's done in the past, showing the multitude of variations that a theme can take. Tying into the greater theme of the book of the power of symbols (such as letters), the reader can ponder what an investment a logo has to be. The various incarnations of each logo can be judged by the emotional and mental response of the reader; what does this symbol mean to me (if anything) and do I relate it to a product?

Of course, looking at this book often makes me want to bang my head against the wall in hopes of jarring loose some creative juices but more than making me jealous or frustrated, *flatnessisgod* makes me appreciative of the fluidity of thought and its relationship to design. For ordering information visit www.softskull.com





While I don't adhere to every conspiracy theory, I've always been fascinated by both their existence and their contents. For as long as there has been an accepted history, voices of dissent have presented alternate versions of "the truth." Often, seemingly too-strange-to-be-true tales have borne the test of time and made their way into the formal written accounts of world events. Yet, there are still a myriad of "offbeat" and "way out" stories that remain *historia non grata*.

Most of the tales told in this book concern the last fifty-odd years of United States politics. I used to think I had an open mind about the various postulates surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy but *The Big Book of Conspiracies* contains a boatload of suppositions and reports that I've never heard before. Moreover, the murder of JFK is woven into the greater scheme of things—from the stocking of the Central Intelligence Agency with Nazis to the repercussions of the CIA's "MK-Ultra" program to today. In other words, the passing of the eternal torch of collusion that's older than Masonry, Christianity, and perhaps even history itself.

Yes, the events in Dealey Plaza play a major role in Moench's tome, spilling over the confines of the one chapter wholly dedicated to Kennedy's death. However, there are six other chapters in the book that deal with everything from theories surrounding alien influence on human development, the dirty deeds of William Randolph Hearst, and the startling ties behind other government-backed hits. The most thought-provoking area of the book has to be the stories dealing with CIA-funded mass hypnosis experiments (a la *THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE* and *TELEFON*). Not only is

it said that Guyana's Jonestown was the location for mind-control testing, but that the early versions of the techniques perfected there may have explained the glassy-eyed, calm demeanors of Sirhan Sirhan, Arthur Herman Bremer, and Lee Harvey Oswald (along with post-Jonestown "lone nuts" like Mark David Chapman, John Hinkley Jr., et al.).

All of the stories are presented in easy-to-read, stunning to behold comic book form which does little to add to their credibility but much to provide a more dynamic impact for their inherent insidiousness. Published in 1995, a few of the tales presented have already been "proven" as true, such as the connivance surrounding James Earl Ray and his role in the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the incendiary role played by law enforcement officials in the storming of the Branch Davidian Compound in Waco, Texas.

The Big Book of Conspiracies is a wonderful primer for folks interested in broadening their horizons and an invaluable appendix to candy-coated mainstream history books. This and other entries in "The Big Book" series are available via Essential Media (www.essentialmedia.com).

Eye on America (Adapted from a story by The J Man)

In 1963 Dan Rather was a 32 year-old CBS news reporter covering the Kennedy visit to Dallas on November 22. At the time, Rather was widely praised for his coverage of the assassination. However, over the years, as elements of the truth have been discovered, Rather's reporting has been revealed to be less than truthful. Consider this: Rather was the only newsman present at a private screening of the Zapruder film the day after the assassination. He described what was in the film over nationwide radio and was accurate until he described the fatal headshot. Rather stated Kennedy's head "went forward with considerable violence," exactly *opposite* of what is in the film. Several months later, Rather was promoted to White House correspondent and by the 1980s, he served as the chief news anchorman of CBS. With the film withheld from public viewing by Time-Life until 1975, Rather's bogus account of the fatal headshot was taken as the gospel truth.

Another questionable statement by Rather involves his location at the time of the assassination. In his book, *The Camera Never Blinks: Adventures of a TV Journalist* (ISBN: 0345353633), Rather writes that he was waiting to pick up news film from CBS cameramen in the Presidential motorcade on the west side of the Triple Underpass. He claimed to have missed witnessing the assassination by only a few yards. However, recently discovered film footage of the west side of the underpass has now become public. This film along with still photographs show the Kennedy limousine speeding through the underpass and on to Stemmons Freeway with Rather nowhere in sight.

Why did Rather lie about the fatal headshot and his whereabouts at the time of the assassination?

The media, of course, is of primary importance to the Guardians of Wealth. Control of the media is essential in controlling the masses. Space does not permit an overview of the entirety of the media coverage of the assassination. However, the mainstream media promoted the "lone nut" Oswald theory without question for nearly fifteen years. When media giant Time-Life paid Abraham Zapruder \$150,000 (an enormous sum in 1963) for his famous movie—after one private showing (which resulted in Rather's deceitful account of the fatal headshot)—they immediately proceeded to lock the film in a vault. The American public would not get to see the film for twelve years (although a poor copy was used in the Clay Shaw trial in 1968). Why would a media organization pay an exorbitant sum of money for the most sought after twenty-two

seconds of film in human history only to *not* use it for twelve years? This defies all logic. Just turn on your TV news at night and see how eager the media is to splash the latest video clips of disaster. "Stay tuned, film at eleven," is the most familiar news promo of all time. Except in this instance.

To show the Zapruder film would mean revealing to the American people that Kennedy's head did not go forward "with considerable violence," but that it went backward. Which means the fatal headshot could not have come from the Texas School Book Depository, which was behind Kennedy. Therefore, to show the Zapruder film would have meant revealing to the American people that there had to be at least one other person firing at Kennedy besides Oswald.

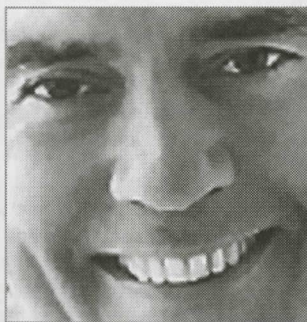
The news promo for the JFK murder? "Stay tuned, film in twelve years."

Over the last two years, "The J Man Times" has been in contact with three retired Dallas police officers that were at Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963. They state that they witnessed Dan Rather on the north sidewalk of Elm Street, holding a radio in his hand. One officer is certain that he monitored Rather on his own radio, and that he heard him say, "This is Kenneth, stand and deliver," just a second or two before the fatal shot to Kennedy.

I questioned this gentleman about how he could monitor Rather's radio at this time, when it was known that there was an eight-minute disruption of the Dallas Police radio motorcade channel during the time of the shooting. He stated that when he reported back to his duty station and was logging his radio, he noticed he had used the wrong channel. His "interception" of Rather's command to "stand and deliver", therefore, was completely accidental.

Was Rather "Kenneth," and did he signal J.D. Tippit to "stand and deliver" the fatal head shot to the President? In 1986, Rather was accosted by a "mentally ill" man demanding to know, "what's the frequency, Kenneth?" on the streets of New York City. The incident—after it was determined no harm was done—became a source of great amusement. A "sign of the times," as it were. A poor "lunatic," obsessed with a riddle born deep in the cortex of a malfunctioning brain, by chance happens to cross paths with one of America's most powerful disseminators of information. A man with an unanswerable question colliding into a man whose job it is to provide answers.

For more of *The J Man Times*, write to 2246 St. Francis #A-211, Ann Arbor MI 48104-4828 or visit http://members.aol.com/_bt_a/thejman99



THE UNITED STATES IS AT WAR. However, no nightly body counts appear on the news nor do weekly updates with colorful graphs in Time Magazine. This is a war of words and of economics. At the center of it all is a billion-dollar commodity rich in potassium, a bunch of bananas.

The Banana Battle has roots far into the 1950s. The United Fruit Company has been a major player in the underhanded deals of the century. They've kept their economical interests in mind while helping the CIA to topple threatening governments and even put their fingers in the pies of corporate conglomerates like RCA and NBC. Meanwhile, the current conflict originates in the fall of 1996.

At a World Trade Organization summit in Geneva, two delegates from the Caribbean were expelled on the grounds that they weren't permanent government employees and, thus, represented a "security risk" to the other countries' trade deals. In the eyes of the governments of St. Vincent and St. Lucia, however, the expulsion was a sign that they were being told they were unable to choose their own representatives to the WTO. In other words, they didn't have the clout to play with the "big boys."

The United States escalated its conflict with Europe in 1999 but nary an eyelash of the average US citizen was batted. In one of the most potentially pun-inspiring and unpublicized events of the decade, the United States declared that the European Union was engaging in an unlawful policy that directly violated international trade laws.

Under European import laws, banana growers in former European colonies (Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands) have been given easier access to the European market than US-owned banana producers in Central and South America. When both the United States Senate and the puppet World Trade Organization cried, "favoritism," sanctions were placed against the European Union of one hundred percent duties on a laundry list of imports amounting to over half a billion dollars.

Why all this mess over bananas?

One likely source for the banana bugaboo is that in 1997—after the Democratic National Committee repealed its one hundred thousand dollar per donor limit on soft money campaign contributions—Carl Linder, president of Chiquita Bananas, was one of the largest patrons of President Clinton's re-election campaign. All told, the political powerhouse of Chiquita contributed over two million dollars to political candidates and parties in 1997 and 1998.

Denying that pressure from Chiquita has anything to do with this dispute, the President of Economic Strategy Institute in Washington, Clyde Prestowitz said that, "If we don't win the banana case...other products could be affected down the road."

Indeed, the US has had its feathers ruffled by another economic powerhouse, the Beef Industry. For not only are Europeans eating bananas grown by their ex-compatriots but they are *not* gorging themselves on US-grown beef! The gall! Was this another case of rampant favoritism? Perhaps, but the reason given by the European Union for passing on US beef was one of safety. The US has one of the highest concentrations of growth hormones in its food (especially beef) of any nation in the world. Sure, these hormones have been approved by the US Food & Drug Administration, but bear in mind that they're the same group who once gave thalidomide a passing grade.

To counter the bullying moves made by the US, a spokesman for the European Trade Commissioner suggested that if the Caribbean were not put to work producing bananas that another cash crop might come into favor: "There is a risk of driving these countries into drug production and that is not in anybody's interest, least of all the United States." Coupled with this, the repeal of a 1997 trade and security agreement has been threatened; an act that would disallow American law enforcement agencies to pursue drug traffickers into their territorial waters and air space. In other words, the Caribbean could be a protected haven for drug cartels.

By early 2000, there are no signs of Europe backing down and obeying the World Trade Organization's ruling in favor of the US. President Clinton commented late in 1999 that, "There is an international body which is supposed to resolve these disputes and you win, and then you win again, and then you win again, and nothing happens. It's very frustrating and it undermines our ability to build support in the Congress and the country for a new trade round."

As we enter a new millennium, the battle rages. Occasionally you might catch a glimpse of it buried deep in the financial section. Even when front pages raged for a brief instant when some of the aforementioned "frustration" was demonstrated by the riots in the streets of Seattle during the last WTO summit. Nevertheless, among the clouded reasons given for taking to the streets, the war over bananas stays far from the madding crowd.



THE BANANA REPUBLIC

by Mike White
art by Bradley Wind

If you've taken notice of what our pals in Hollywood have had to offer lately, then you've probably been avoiding the movie theatre as much as I have been. Don't get me wrong. I love to pay \$8 to get into a theatre only to be shaken down for another \$10 for snacks and then have some chucklehead behind me talk on his cell phone for two and a half hours while I try and watch a movie.

Why should we, as consumers, accept the sub par warmed over tripe that Hollywood is serving us? Have they run out ideas in Tinsel Town? Is a feature length CHARLIE'S ANGELS movie the best they have to offer us?

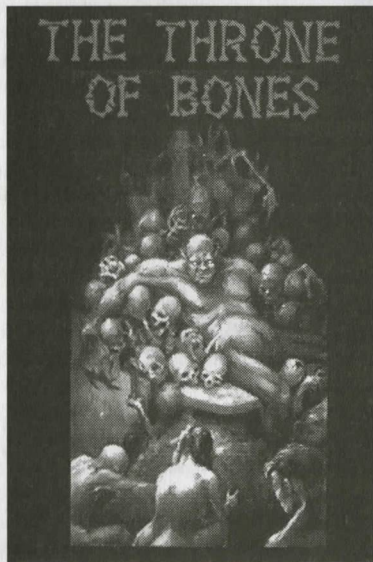
No matter how many lame-brained folks talk about there being no such thing as original ideas ("Good artists create, great artists steal"), there are plenty of fresh ideas around. A good number of them can be found in the great books that have not yet been made into movies. Granted, there are many bad movies made from great books (and vice-versa), but there are a tremendous amount of cinematic books that would ignite the screen when provided with the right screenplay, director and cast. Listen up, Hollywood, here is what you are missing:

A Confederacy of Dunces by John Kennedy Toole

Those of you that have read this book know that it is the funniest book ever written, and I will fight you if you say any different. Those of you that haven't read it are missing out. Unfortunately, we are all missing out on what could be a hilarious movie. More times than I can remember, I read that this was finally going to be made into a movie. Why hasn't it? My guess would be screenplay problems. The book is brilliant, but transferring this into a screenplay is a Herculean feat. In the wrong hands, this movie would be undoubtedly abysmal.

Toole's Ignatius J. Reilly is a thirty-two year old buffoon of the highest order. He's a slacking, doing nothing with no ambition and a lot of gas. What happens when his mother makes him get off of his enormous ass and get a job is inspired beyond belief. From one ridiculous scenario to the next, Reilly screws up royally without ever realizing just what he has done, but leaving no doubt in anyone else's mind that he is a walking disaster.

In what has to be the biggest kick in the ass of all time, the book won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction eleven years after Toole killed himself. One must suspect that the book is more about his life than anything else is. The greatest pity in the world is that he is not here today to prove me wrong, although I doubt he could. The world is a lesser place without more novels from this genius. On second thought, forget the movie; go the buy the book.



Throne of Bones by Brian McNaughton Imagine if H.P. Lovecraft wrote the Lord of the Rings in a series of somewhat inter-related short stories. Well, Brian McNaughton has created a complex fantasy world of hideous flesh-eating ghouls in a sort of quasi-medieval world where you don't dare enter a cemetery at night, or walk through the sewers... ever. Simply the most breathtaking horror I have read in recent years and fresh enough to satisfy even the most jaded reader of fantasy novels. I look every week on Amazon.com to see if there is a new volume of stories coming out. At the very least, I pray for the day when this book is released in a mass-market paperback so that the friends I recommend it to don't

balk at the \$40.00 price tag. At that cost, I don't dare lend mine out.

Being that Throne of Bones is a series of stories; the title story is definitely the way to go. Unfortunately, this would be a hard sell to Hollywood. I doubt that anyone would want to invest in a movie that has such a limited audience appeal (needless to say, this would not be a good date movie) but maybe with the upcoming big budget LORD OF THE RINGS films there will be some interest in this type of book. Although with the sad, sad state of horror movies today, it would almost certainly have to star Jennifer Love Hewitt and be written by some one trick pony in order to make even a few dollars. Oh, and let's not forget the top forty soundtrack.

Flood by Andrew Vachss

Pick up an Andrew Vachss book and flip it open to the author's picture. Gruff look, eye patch, trench coat, giant dog at his feet- the kind of guy that you would expect to see running a seedy crime organization. Would you believe that he is a New York attorney who works almost exclusively to help children? Well, it's true and that is the focus of many of his books as well. Most of Vachss' ten plus books contain the same motley assortment of characters led by Burke, the scheming, tough guy who has a soft spot for kids in trouble. I have had the pleasure of meeting Vachss twice at book signings. The question that fans seem to ask him the most is whether or not Burke is his alter ego. Vachss claims that he is not, but you have to believe that the books are some sort of release from the demons of his job.

Although Flood is not my favorite of his books, it would be hard to make a movie from another book in the series first.

Most of his books are very short, initially establish a brief setup, and the launch right into the plot. He doesn't need to spend much time defining characters that he has already taken so much care with in Flood. After Flood, there is a certain progression and there are always references to characters from past books, but it would be easy to pick any other book and not be too lost. The characters are what really make Flood such a great novel. Amongst the gang you will find a street talking prophet, a genius who lives under a junkyard (who could easily build you just about any type of electronics you need), and Max the Silent—the most deadly martial arts master in the underworld. Filled with all the gunfights, tough-talking dialogue and all the car chases you could take, it is amazing that nobody has brought this brood of motley criminals to the silver screen yet.

SOME NOVEL IDEAS

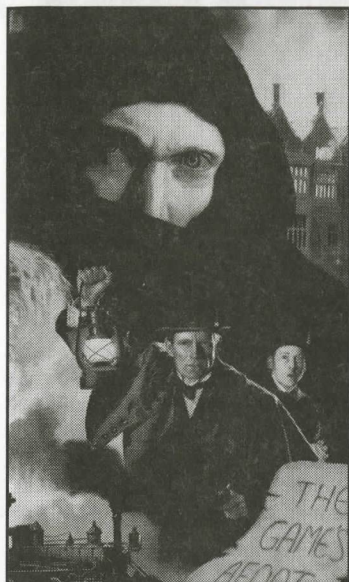
By Jesse Nelson

Tapping the Source by Kem Nunn

Absolutely the most fun and cinematic a novel can be. Incest, Satanism, Snuff Films, Bikers, Surfers, Murder and one naïve boy from the desert who is plunged into it all. What would you do if a stranger showed up one day and told you that he knows your runaway sister and is pretty sure she is now dead? Well, if you are Ike, you take what little money you have and head to California circa early-mid 80's punk scene to find out what happened and maybe take some revenge. From there, all hell breaks loose. And it doesn't stop until the blood-soaked finale that has been running in my mind like a movie since I first read the book 15 years ago (this is one of only three books that I have ever read twice).

My secret dream has always been to make this movie myself. I have a cast and the outline of the screenplay in my head already. At one time, I read that the film rights were floating around the studios, and I honestly think that POINT BREAK was originally a script for Tapping the Source. Rather than a kid looking for his sister amongst drug dealing surfers led by an aging guru type, we have an FBI agent looking for bank robbers amongst surfers lead by an aging guru type. This only means that some Studio Hump decided that the screenplay needed some gunplay and other dopiness, so he made the screenwriter make some changes. Probably just enough changes that they either wouldn't have to credit the book or the author would want the credit removed. Unfortunately, it also means that if they ever did make a movie of it, everyone would compare it to POINT BREAK.

By the way, if you are looking for the book, it has been out of print forever, but I recently read that it will be re-released in the summer. Bring it on!



The List of 7 by Mark Frost
Marvel Comic's "What if..." was always one of my favorite comic books as a kid. I couldn't wait to find out what kind of warped realities would occur if David Banner's wife was not killed, or if Peter Parker had never been bitten by the radioactive spider. Well, List of 7 is a kind of "What if..." What if Arthur Conan Doyle lived the type of adventures that he later wrote about in the Sherlock Holmes mysteries.

Written by "Twin Peaks" co-creator Mark Frost, List of 7 is a brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed adventure book that dwells into the supernatural throughout. Without a doubt, this book could make a fantastic movie. It has big

budget, summer special effects spectacular written all over it. It would be

nice, for once, to have a summer movie that actually had a plot along with great action scenes and lots of creepy special effects. Hollywood, what are you waiting for? I guess you think we would rather see WILD WILD WEST 2 or a remake of another classic horror movie à la THE HAUNTING.

The Painted Bird by Jerzy Kosinski

A very good friend recommended this book to me. Luckily, he knows me well enough to know that I would love the book. I, on the other hand, would never recommend it to anyone. Never have I read a novel with such gut wrenchingly horrible scenes. The story concerns a young boy during World War II whose parents pay a woman to look after him right before they are taken away to a concentration camp. After the woman dies, the boy is forced to wander from village to village accepting humiliation and torture from the villagers in lieu of being turned over to the Nazis. Every action is described in gory detail and leaving nothing to the imagination. The book is supposedly semi-autobiographical, but there are many critics out there who doubt that this is true. Nevertheless, it is work of a profound madman.

So, why even make this into a movie? Well, in this day and age, I doubt it could be made into a movie. However, in the 70's, in the hands of say, Alejandro Jodorowsky (EL TOPO), I could see how brilliant this would be. I picture a grainy washed out look with short animated sequences depicting some of the more bizarre hallucinations of the book and with all of the gore intact. A sort of artsy, trippy, gore film such as Jodorowsky's SANTA SANGRE. Oh well, some things are better off unseen.



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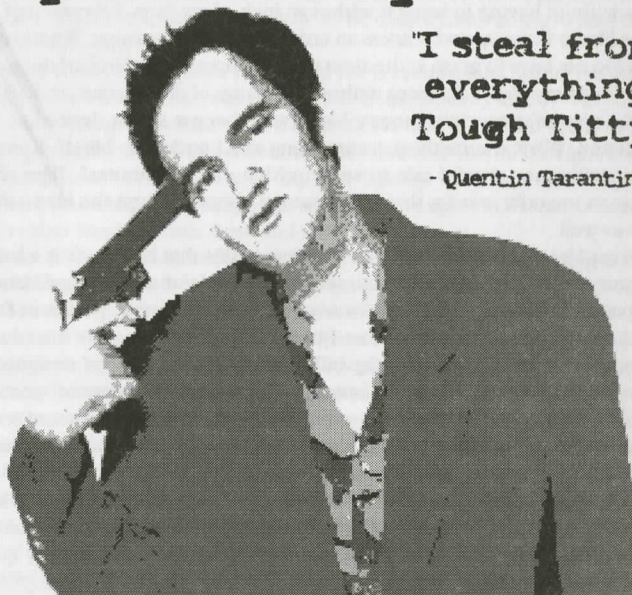


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everything.
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- Quentin Tarantino

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The Eyes Have It

It still takes me a few seconds every morning to realize that I can see. Or, more accurately, I should say that I can now see clearly. My world used to be a senseless blur of shapes and colors.

I got my first pair of glasses when I was in Second Grade. My eyesight steadily deteriorated as I got older. I don't recall when my myopia finally plateaued but I also don't necessarily remember a time when I had the ability to see objects with any distinction without aid of corrective lenses.

I made the changeover from glasses to contacts before I entered high school. It was more of a vanity move than anything else. Initially, I was freaked by the idea of having to touch my eyeballs as I dealt with my daily-wear lenses. I quickly got over it.

By the time I was twenty-six I was tired of the rigmarole of contacts and glasses. Like the Elephant Man fantasizing about being able to sleep like a normal person, I had a personal aspiration to wake up at night and see my bedside clock without having to bring it within an inch of my face. I dreamed of what it'd be like to wake up and witness an unfuzzy, glorious morning. What would it be like to not have to grasp at the air in the early hours searching for my glasses? How would my life be different without the pangs of dry contacts at day's end?

The idea of corrective surgery had always been a secret desire but I was frightened. What if something went wrong and I ended up blind? I pictured myself telling my woeful tale to some schlub on "60 Minutes". The idea of paying an ungodly sum for this experimental operation kept the idea a distant hope as well.

When I heard about a doctor in Rochester Hills that had made it a habit to perform corrective surgery for a nominal fee while defrauding optical insurance companies I thought that I had discovered my opportunity. I went in for the initial consultation and by the time I had finished watching the introductory video tape I wanted to head for the hills. Oh my gosh! Whoever designed that video should have their head examined! The tape is all computer generated with blocky 3-D models (not a lot of polygons). The area where there seemed the most detail was in the gnashing, awful teeth of the machine that runs over the patient's eyeball to make the initial incision.

I felt faint. Those gears probably measured mere fractions of an inch in real life but on that tape they loomed like thrashing machines, just waiting to catch an eyelash and destroy my sight forever. My dreams of Lasik surgery quickly faded as the blood drained from my face.

It would take three years before I got the courage to try this operation again. In the fall of '99 I got fed up with my contacts and started strictly to wear my ugly glasses. I was going to do this and I wanted glasses for all of their inconvenience. I'd figured that I'd get so annoyed that I'd *have* to get the surgery—gears be damned!

I went in smarter this time. Whenever an optometrist gave me anything about my surgery, I would come home and throw it out. No video tapes for me, thank you! Any waivers I was handed I signed sight unseen. I knew the risks and was willing to take them—I didn't need any reminders of what could go wrong.

Waiting for the surgery, I felt as giddy as a kid waiting for Christmas. I was counting down the days of January, waiting for February 11th.

I arrived at the optometrist's office at 7:30 AM on the morning of my surgery. There were a few initial tests. As one of the assistants stuck what looked like a pencil to my cornea to measure the thickness I realized how carefree I was.

"This would probably freak most people the hell out," I thought. I didn't give a rip. Go ahead and poke me with everything you've got! Bring on the laser!

Andrea took the day off work to drive me to and from the surgery. As an added bonus she got to watch while they performed the procedure. After the initial tests, she and I went to a rear waiting room. I was the first surgery of the day and there was a cadre of nurses testing the equipment. If I didn't feel tranquil before, I certainly did after one of the nurses gave me a little something to relax me. It went right to my head and I was a giggling fool when I went in to go over the specifics of the surgery with the doctor.

Lucky for me, the doctor had a good sense of humor. As he described how I'd have my eye held open with an ocular speculum I asked him, "Have you ever seen *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*?" He replied that he's always wanted to have Beethoven's Ninth Symphony playing during surgery but he didn't think anyone would get the reference!

No Beethoven's Ninth, and no film of violent images awaited me when I stepped into the "surgical chamber." All I can recall is a chair and a big ass machine that seemed to take up the majority of the space in the room.

I laid back, had a sheet placed over my left eye as my right eye was opened with the speculum. No fear for my long, lovely lashes—they were taped back out of harm's way. When I looked up I could see a red light. The laser. I had an instrument of some sort placed over my cornea and then came the only really disturbing part of the surgery.

My eye was apparently "pressurized." It felt like someone had a shot glass over my eye and was sucking out all the air and the light. My little red laser friend slowly disappeared until it seemed like I was looking at a field of black with white pinholes scattered about it ("My god, it's full of stars!"). Apparently, this was the time that the incision was made. After that, it was a piece of cake. The pressure was released and I could see again.

The incision is almost a complete circle...leaving a little bit of cornea connected so that there's essentially a "flap" of cornea that can be lifted up, exposing the tissue and lens underneath. Then it's time for the laser to actually get to work.

If I thought my world was blurry before, it was nothing compared to how fuzzy everything looked when that flap was lifted. I still had that red dot in my field of vision and I was told to stare at it. Don't look away because it's going to be burning away my lens to the specifications I need.

With mechanized precision I could hear the machine shooting and could actually see a difference in my vision with each noise. Unbeknownst to me, Andrea was sitting in front of a monitor in another room watching this procedure with avid interest. There was a video camera set up so that she could see everything the doctor was seeing. She swears that after the laser was done shooting away my lens that she could see a little wisp of smoke trailing up from my eye. I believe her.

How effective is the surgery? As soon as that flap was laid back down into place (the doctor did so with a little brush, smoothing it down), I could see that machine perfectly. Crystal clear. Was this a sign of things to come? The procedure for my right eye took all of five minutes. The left eye took the same.

When everything was done, one of the nurses dropped some antibiotics and steroids (to control the swelling) into my eyes before they taped some patches onto my face. I was told that I couldn't open my eyes until 9 AM the next morning. Until then, I was blind.

I was given a sleeping pill and told that I should get as much sleep as possible throughout the day in order to help my eyes heal. Not a problem. I hadn't slept very well the night before from the anticipation so I was ready to snooze.

The result? The next morning I woke up and couldn't see the clock. I still had big patches over my eye. But, after I peeled off the tape, there it was. Red, bright numbers as clear as could be. Going in later that day for a check-up, my optometrist told me that if 20/20 is perfect vision, my eyes were about 20/1000 (an object 20 feet away was as clear as if it were 1000 feet away). My first exam had my eyes at 20/15 and they've evened out over the weeks and months after my surgery to 20/20. Glorious.

I still get a weird feeling at night when I go to bed and can see everything. I still think, "I forgot to take out my contacts." In the morning I'm still hesitant to look around, forgetting that I can see my surroundings now. But, what a wonderful thing it is to get up in the middle of the night and be able to take a pee with deadly accuracy. No more "best guesses" for me!

To see Lasik surgery online (with RealVideo) visit www.vslc.com/video2.html

"It was the time of the preacher..."

by mike thompson



That's how it all starts. But don't worry, it's not too long before the sex, violence, bloodshed, graphic bullet wounds, bestiality, blasphemy, brilliant characterization, heartbreaking moments and all around fun begin. Yeah, I'm talking about Preacher, one of the most outrageous comic books to find a popular audience.

Written by Garth Ennis and beautifully illustrated by Steve Dillon, Preacher explores the notion of God, loyalty and has a character named Arseface to boot (and his name's not just for fun). It may sound ridiculous, which is good, because it is, but it's never stupid.

Preacher is the kind of comic book that nobody expected. And at first glance it's the kind that nobody would really want. I found Preacher after it had already been running for a year. The first trade paperback was on sale at Borders and I had heard enough about it to pick it up. I didn't know what the hell I was looking at when I read it.

There's a fight scene in the first trade that left me sick for days. Was this just exploitation? Is this just some writer/artist team getting off on excess? Yeah, but there was a lot more to be found under that.

Preacher is part of DC Comics' Vertigo line. Vertigo spawned from the more adult nature that comics began to take on due to comic books like Watchmen, The Dark Knight Returns and Swamp Thing. In the mid-eighties, comic books began to change as new writers came in and deconstructed the characters and the very medium itself. Superheroes became people with real problems. People became superheroes with super problems. Some comics became about people with regular problems. And being a business, DC Comics cashed in.

Lucky for us they decided not to sacrifice the art for the buck. DC's Vertigo line has boasted some of the most talented, brilliant writers working in the comic book medium (or any medium) today. After a few years one book emerged as the flagship Vertigo title: Neil Gaiman's Sandman. Sandman was a brilliant look into the world of the troubled God of Dreams. It would focus on him or on characters around him or even on characters that had only been briefly touched by him. Sandman was somber and sweet.

Pretty much everything Preacher is not.

Which is what makes it so strange (at first) that Preacher replaced Sandman as Vertigo's flagship title when Sandman came to a close. Where Sandman was understated, Preacher is in your face. Where Sandman was subtle, Preacher is brutal. Neil Gaiman himself says you can't say it's an apples to oranges comparison, it's more apples to fish.

But there is a similarity that helps makes sense of readers' desire to get every issue. That similarity is what sets Preacher, and all good comics (or writing in general) above the rest: Character.

It's the people in Preacher that make each issue sell out. The story itself is somewhat ridiculous and way over the top, but the characters are grounded. We care about them. Whether they're facing God, or trying to work things out with their significant others, we follow them, with equal interest.

Preacher is the story of Jesse Custer, a young Texas Preacher who one day, while addressing his congregation, is possessed by a being called Genesis. Genesis is the creation of an unholy union between an angel and a demon. With Genesis inside him, Jesse is given the Word of God. Whoever he uses the Word on has to do exactly what Jesse says.

With his newfound power comes knowledge and a quest. Jesse learns that God has left his post in heaven. The big man has just up and quit. Jesse finds that more than a little hard to swallow so he decides he's going to find God, and make him pay.

Jesse is writer Garth Ennis's notion of the true American Spirit. His father laid down the rules for him early on (before being brutally killed): "An you be a good guy. You gotta be like John Wayne: Don't take no shit off fools, an' you judge a person by what's in 'em not how they look. An' you do the right thing."

Joining Jesse in his quest are Tulip and Cassidy. Tulip is Jesse's longtime girlfriend. She's smart, sexually aggressive and an expert marksman. Cassidy, on the other hand, is crude, Irish and a vampire.

There is also one other character in Jesse's band that plays a significant part, although Jesse is the only one who can see him. The Duke - that's right, John Wayne - appears to Jesse from time to time to help him get his act together. John Wayne is the one man that Jesse respects most in the world, and through Jesse's journey, the Duke provides guidance and the hard truth.

Other characters include Starr, the psychotic all-father of the all-powerful Grail, who's out to destroy Jesse for defying and defiling him. Also along for the ride is the Saint of Killers, an indestructible gunfighter, who took over for the Angel of Death. The Saint's loyalty is to himself and his undying hate. And I would be remiss if I forgot to mention Arseface, who lives up to his name. Trying to emulate Kurt Cobain, Arseface blasted out a lot of his head, but succeeded in only turning his face into an ass. On the bright side, he did find meaning in life and, in an odd way, has become Preacher's most positive character.

As I mentioned, Preacher's story is ridiculous. But it works through the character. Writer Garth Ennis has created a group of different, individual people that are so interesting it doesn't matter what's happening in the main story, we will follow them.

Ennis is from Ireland, and as Joe R. Lansdale says in his introduction to the first Preacher collection, "Garth struggles now and then to be too Texan. But the spirit is right...." And so is the dialogue. Ennis has an ear for it and an almost overwhelming ease of bringing strong emotions out of the reader. More than once Preacher has made me laugh or brought me to tears.

While Preacher will be drawing to its almost assuredly violent and heart wrenching conclusion this summer, you can find the trade paperback collected editions at Borders and better comic stores everywhere. The first trade throws you in hard and fast and it's tough to hold on, but if you can, the second one it will break your heart, lift you up, and have you hooked for the rest of the ride.

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I WAS A TEENAGE DOMINATRIX

WHILE THE TITLE of this slender tome recalls exploitation films of the past, Shawna Kenney's memoir is anything but sensationalistic. Written in direct, candid prose, Kenney takes the reader quickly through her early years from swimming at the YMCA to her discovery of punk rock, to graduating high school and moving out of her parents' house. By age 18 (and page 22), Kenney applies for her first position in "the sex industry" and from there the book becomes an intense page-turner.

Working her way through college first as an "exotic dancer," Kenney's vocation puts her in some precarious situations. Later, as a professional dominatrix however, Kenney relishes her newfound position of power. Just as the reader might be incredulous that not only are there men willing to pay to be verbally abused and beaten, Kenney is amazed to find that the demand is such that countless women around the country make a living at doing that...and worse!

As Kenney discovers the various aspects of what it means to be a professional dominatrix, she relays these often astounding tidbits to the reader in her conversational, matter-of-fact narrative voice. For example, it's without a hem or haw that Kenney discusses how her ability to urinate at will made her a hit among the members of her clientele with a penchant for "golden showers." Kenney is to be commended for treating what is normally highly taboo subject matter so frankly.

At first I found the quotes from old punk rock songs to be a bit contrived but, after a while, I realized just how important they were to the story and to reflecting Kenney's personality. By making us privy to her youth and how important punk rock was to Kenney as a teen struggling with her self-image, the use of lyrics acts to ground the woman doing what might be considered "outrageous," showing that she's not taking herself too seriously. Rather, Kenney remains true to herself while acting the role of the Dominatrix. While she's always striving to be a better Domina, she admits to her limits without making excuses for them.

Between her sincere tone and the inherently interesting subject matter, Kenney has managed to craft a highly compelling read. Once I picked up Kenney's book, I honestly couldn't put it down until I was done.

Thanks to the fine folks at WHAP!, I was able to ask Shawna a few questions. For ordering information visit their website at www.retro-systems.com. - MW

Cashiers du Cinemart: *How's the reaction been so far to your book?*

Shawna Kenney: It's been extremely positive. People at readings have been very inquisitive and supportive. I've also received so many interesting fan letters. Most recently one from a 70-year-old man who read it and loved it! I was shocked and pleasantly surprised.

CdC: *What's happened between the end of I Was a Teenage Dominatrix and now?*

SK: I fell in love with a guy I met in DC (at a Slayer show, by the way) and we moved out to Cali together. We lived in San Diego for a year and have been in Los Angeles for just over three years now! I worked in the film industry for about a year while still freelance writing on the side, all the while feeling like I was gonna explode (hated working in the industry). In my writing endeavors I met up with the Whapsters (at a zine fest), they hired me to be an editor at the mag, and then later offered to publish my book. They've since moved across the country and Whap! is mostly just online, so I freelance fulltime now.

CdC: *Have you and your parents ever settled your differences? Did they get a copy of your book?*

SK: No, we have not settled our differences. Relations had been better but tenuous since college. After I told them about the book, my mother ordered it through Amazon.com, was very upset after reading only a few pages, and has not spoken to me since. I'm fine with that.

CdC: *Do you feel that BDSM is something best left to professionals or that it's got a healthy place in the bedrooms of Mr. & Mrs. America?*

SK: I think it has a healthy place with any two (or more) consenting adults.

CdC: *How does BDSM play a part in your life - if at all?*

SK: I am much more informed than ever about it after everything I've experienced. My boyfriend and I have a great sex life and are both very open-minded people, but no I don't spank him. (He's a wimp when it comes to pain, and I have no desire to hurt him). I am extremely "fetish aware" now, too, if that makes any sense. I notice particular things about friends and

acquaintances and draw conclusions from my experience—that's about it.

CdC: *From where do you think people's need for submission stems?*

SK: For some I think it's maybe from the need to feel protected or "babied." For others it's a release/relief from "real life." Most of my clients were in extreme power positions at work and I believe that submitting for an hour was a huge relief to them—no need for them to make any decisions or take control. (Being a decision-maker or responsible is very draining!)

CdC: *How do you think your punk rock proto-riot grrl sensibilities helped you as a Domina?*

SK: Though it is male-dominated, punk rock "allows" girls and women to be aggressive and outspoken, so I was definitely already comfortable with myself in that way. Also in punk rock you already feel outside the mainstream, so I was doing things that other people thought were weird before I was ever a Dom (dying my hair, shaving my head, being vegetarian, doing stage-dives at shows, going to protests in front of the White House, etc.) Being a Dom was not an "acceptable" or talked-about profession for most of society, either.

CdC: *Why do you think folks treat BDSM as if it were inherently "wrong" or morally corrupt?*

SK: American society is uptight and puritanical about so many things. BDSM is sexual so it's not going to be accepted by the mainstream in a society that won't even show condom commercials on TV or allow women to breastfeed in public!

CdC: *What question have you wanted to be asked but haven't, yet?*

SK: How about "what else do you write?" or "what do you do for fun?" because I do lots of other things besides spank men or talk about spanking men. Most of my other writing is freelance journalist-type of stuff focusing on pop culture and underground music. I write almost everyday. I have children's books I want to publish along with tons of other ideas. And living in L.A. is fun for me right now, too. Lots of freaky people! And the open vibe in California is extremely different from the more uptight East Coast one I grew up with. I'm loving it!

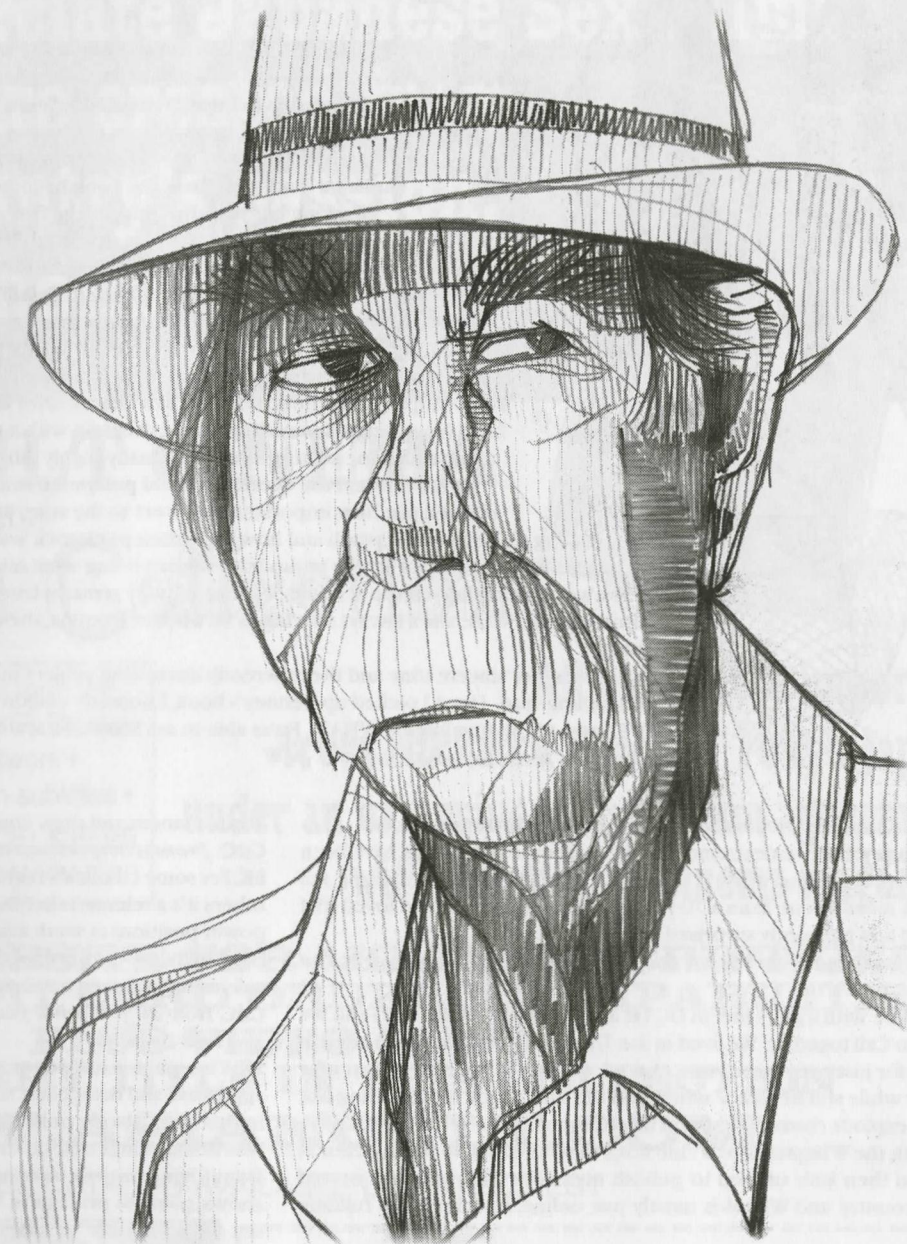


Illustration by Pat Lehnerer

MADNESS IN THE 20th CENTURY

by Mike White

"A boy who doesn't have a father around doesn't develop a superego."

"That's silly. Superego is only a jargon word for 'conscience,' and everybody's got a conscience."

"Have it your way, Bernice."

-The Burnt Orange Heresy

While I could bemoan the shabby treatment that Charles Willeford has received by his peers, lament the unavailability of his work in one's local bookstore, or herald the coming of a new era in which Willeford will attain the attention he deserves, I won't. That would be unfair and overly idealistic. The time has not yet arrived for Charles Willeford. I fear that it never will.

Charles Willeford's books are unpleasant ventures past the veneer of "modern life". The cop, the critic, the soldier, the writer, the director, the priest, the short-order cook, the artist, the cockfighter, the used-car salesman; he showed their dirty little secrets and big ones too. He did so with even-handed, well-mannered, eloquent prose.

Reading about the gritty lives of his protagonists, one can't help but be impressed by his polished love of language. His well-chosen words hit like a heavy fist in the gut while being unadorned by baroque turns of phrase. Along with the often hardboiled narratives was an element of dark humour that made Willeford's works unique. Even when presenting rough-and-tumble narratives, there was a glimmer of crazed glee behind the Willeford poker face.

It's dubious that Charles Willeford's name will ever become household. Yet, lovers of quirky, engrossing literature should continue to seek out Willeford's work and embrace it. His voice is true, steady, and unequivocally American.

"I parked and went into a bar. I ordered a straight gin with a dash of bitters. Sipping it, I looked over the customers. The man next to me was my size. I put my drink down, raised my elbow level with my shoulder and spun on my heel. My elbow caught him just below the eye. He raised a beer bottle over his head and my fist caught him flush on the jaw. He dropped to the floor and lay still. I threw a half-dollar on the bar and left. No one looked in my direction as I closed the door. I felt a little better but not enough."

- High Priest of California

Willeford's work is delightfully unsettling. Usually writing from a first-person point of view, Willeford has his readers often identifying with sociopaths like Russell Haxby, a used car salesman obsessed with a married woman, in *High Priest of California*. More than bedding the gal, Haxby is trying to determine "if she was really mysterious, or just plain stupid." As evidenced by the above, Haxby also has a penchant for random acts of violence to sooth his savage soul.

Willeford challenges the reader to determine if the protagonist of the book is clever or just plain crazy. Willeford's characters are not murderous psychopaths who drool at the thought of spilling blood nor are they petty thieves who cut corners in order to make a buck. No, they fit in society easily enough and function with relative ease. That's the scary part.

Often Willeford's protagonists don't even realize that they're off-kilter. They take what's given to them with natural aplomb. For example, in Willeford's short story "Some Lucky License" (found in *Everybody's Metamorphosis*), police Sergeant Bill Hartigan finds himself penalized under Section 1277 of the Criminal Code which states that "any police officer who fatally shoots six persons—in the line of duty or no—will be separated from the force, and will not be reinstated." This section is known unofficially among policemen as the 'trigger happy' rule."

Instead of being tossed off the force some political strings are pulled and Hartigan is reassigned as an unnecessary guard in a low security prison. Upon learning of an escape plot, Hartigan determines apprehending the culprit will allow him to be reinstated on the force as a hero.

Waiting in the dark for the prisoner to make his way down the prison wall, Hartigan realizes that what he enjoys most about police work is having a shooting license. "I wanted to shoot and kill men," Hartigan thinks to himself. And why not? "Why should I wait for someone else at a later date? Sooner or later I was going to get a sixth victim anyway."

Willeford learned during his days in the Army that too many men gained an affinity towards cold-blooded murder. "Tankers I knew used to swap bottles of liquor in exchange for prisoners, and then just shoot 'em for fun...I used to wonder, 'What's gonna happen to these guys when they get back into civilian life?'" These men and their carefree attitude about killing helped populate Willeford's fiction.

Even when a Willefordian character doesn't have a penchant for bloodshed, they're not presented as being entirely stable. Take, for example, "the Hoke Moseley books"—named after the cantankerous police detective.

His novels often closed with a morality that felt forced. His protagonists were caught, killed, or institutionalized for their

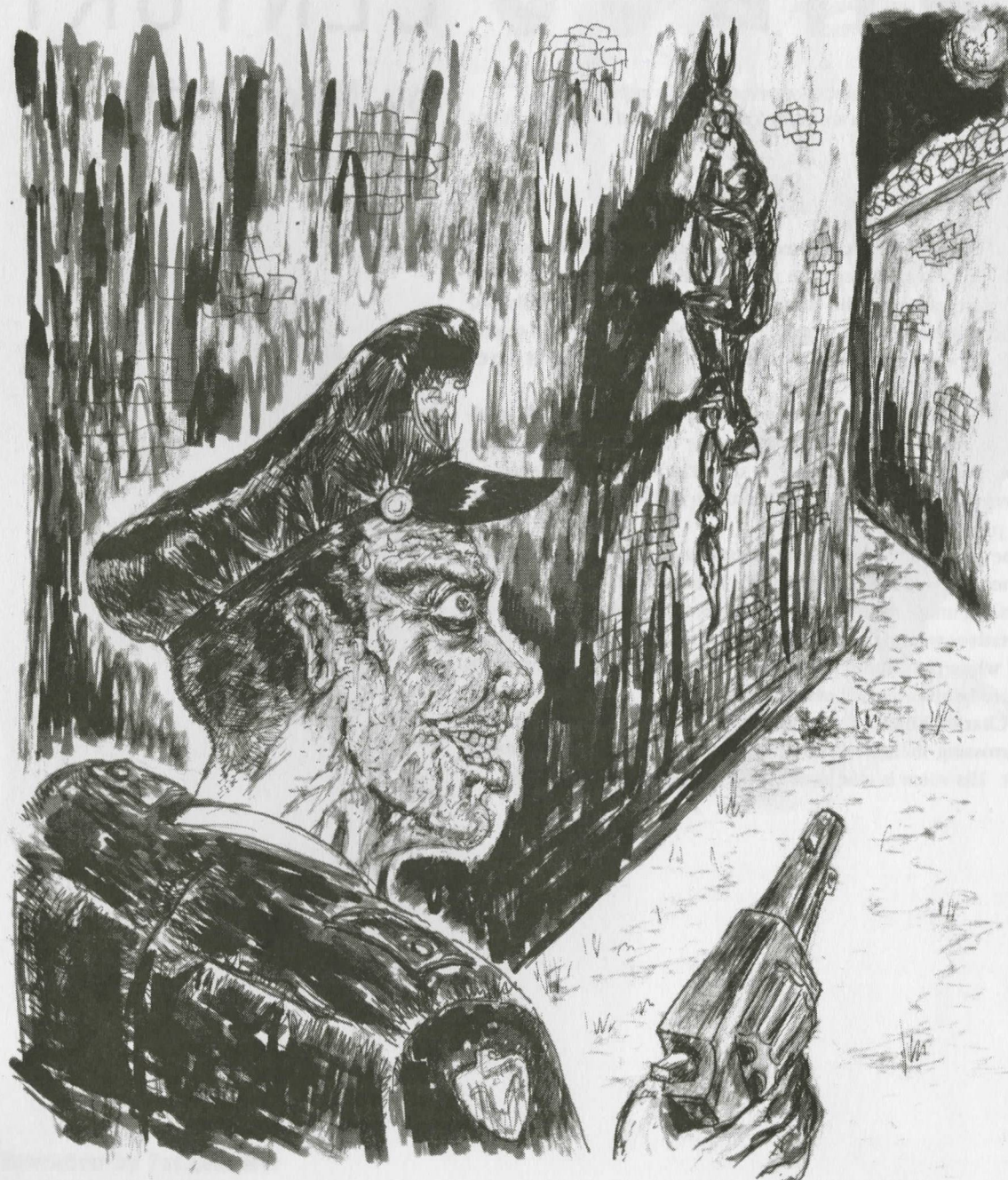


Illustration by Kevin Lee

misdeeds. However, this changed in 1984 with the release of Miami Blues—wherein Willeford employed a third-person narration and two protagonists, the psychotic Freddy J. Frenger Junior and the man on his trail, Hoke Moseley. Willeford had used this technique a few years prior in his fictionalized recount of “Son of Sam,” Off the Wall (see page 67).

Having written for over forty years, Willeford finally attained popular praise with Miami Blues. Suddenly there became a demand for another Willeford novel starring the ornery toothless detective, Moseley. Willeford didn’t want to become beholden to maintaining a series, yet, this prospect also presented an interesting challenge. Willeford knew “the rules” of the detective series from teaching them at the University of Miami and here was an opportunity to break every one of them. This possibility and Willeford’s popularity helped him relent—to a certain extent.

An early draft for the second book in the Moseley series, New Hope for the Dead, is commonly known as “The Grimhaven Manuscript.” Herein we witness Hoke burnt-out from his job as a homicide detective. He begins a quest for “absolutely nothing” and determines that this may best be attained through killing off his ex-wife and two daughters. Needless to say, Willeford’s publisher refused the draft. The second (and successful) stab at the sequel, New Hope for the Dead, stands as not only the best of the Moseley books but of Willeford’s oeuvre.

He stayed true to this idea of Hoke enjoying inner silence courtesy of synaptic misfires in the third Moseley book, Sideswipe, in which Hoke has a complete nervous breakdown by page thirteen. Balancing the story of the less-than-stable Hoke is the parallel tale of Troy Loudon, which was reworked from Willeford’s 1962 work, No Experience Necessary. Willeford would write a fourth Moseley book, The Way We Die Now, before his death in 1988.

“Freddy unwrapped the bath sheet and dropped it on the floor. He probed her pregreased vagina with the first three fingers of his right hand. He shook his head and frowned.

‘Not enough friction there for me,’ he said. ‘I’m used to boys, you see. Do you take it in the ass?’

‘No, sir. I should, I know, but I tried it once and it hurt too much. I just can’t do it.’

‘You should learn to take it in the ass. You’ll make more money.’”

— Miami Blues

Willeford’s world was not limited to historical events; his books weren’t world-spanning epics. America was Willeford’s playing field and his predominant theme was the madness that plagued the post-war nation. They were usually first-person accounts of men dealing with their private worlds and obsessions.

As ambitious as a writer as Willeford was, when becoming familiar with his bibliography, one can’t help but sense the uncanny reoccurrence of phrases, names, and themes. Wallets are made of ostrich skin. Men wear gabardine suits. Telephones are not hung up; rather, they’re “racked.” Cigarettes are never lit, they’re “lighted.” Protagonists often bare the name Richard Hudson, Russell Haxby, or some variation of Jacob Blake. It’s not unusual for a Willefordian protagonist to shower with the water as hot as they can stand it: as if trying to rid themselves of their dirty tendencies, or the filth of the world, via this ritual.

The music to which his characters moved was also born of the crazed twentieth century. The challenging compositions of Bela Bartok are frequently among the pages of Willeford’s work. When Richard Hudson of The Woman Chaser finds his artistic calling it’s while exerting himself

to Bartok’s “Miraculous Mandarin”. This is the same music to which Russell Haxby reads T.S. Eliot’s “Burnt Norton” in High Priest of California (right before donning a blue gabardine suit). Additionally, note that it is Eliot who inspires Hudson before bedding his formerly chaste assistant in The Woman Chaser.

Along with this appreciation of a modern composer, Willeford’s formal schooling in art was apparent in his works. Willeford often cited artists of this century’s art movements such as Chagall, Klee, and Kandinsky. From the dealer in Wild Wives to the collector in Sideswipe to the student in Lust Is a Woman, to the failed painters of Pick-Up and No Experience Necessary/Sideswipe, art often played a major role in Willeford’s work.

Art was the central theme of The Burnt Orange Heresy wherein art critic Jamie Figueras (another popular Willeford moniker) scores a once-in-a-lifetime interview with the father of Nihilistic Surrealism. The price for the exclusive privilege is having to steal one of the elusive “great master’s” paintings.

More than the occasional mention of waking up at 6 A.M. or an errant copy of Heidi laying around, of all of Willeford’s themes and motifs the one that flourished late in his career—especially in his Hoke Moseley books—was the practice of anal sex. Willeford had a number of instances in the Moseley books of characters taking “the road less traveled.” Along with Freddy Frenger (see above) putting a can of Crisco to good use in Miami Blues, Hoke attempts to indulge in some assplay with a murderess in New Hope for the Dead and has the sanctity of his bunghole threatened in The Way We Die Now. This most likely sprang from Willeford’s experiences during his years in the service with Filipina prostitutes who stayed “good catholic girls”—protecting their hymens by selling their keisters.

“If a restaurant owner pays a cashier fifteen dollars a week and he, or she, sees that the owner is raking in two or three hundred dollars a day, that cashier is going to supplement his income from the cash register. One is merely correcting the moral deficiency of the employer. Any employer who shortchanges his help gets the kind of worker he pays for.”

— Something About A Soldier

Orphaned at eight, Charles Willeford was raised by his grandmother in Los Angeles. Growing into the Great Depression, Willeford left home as a young teen and spent his youth as a hobo, riding the rails and wondering where his next meal was going to come from. He learned the art of story telling in railroad jungles and Hoovervilles of the Southwest US and found that a properly told tale could help him bum money and food. These days of living by his wits also aided in forming Willeford’s unique work ethic.

Unable (or unwilling) to find proper work by the age of sixteen, Willeford lied about his age and entered the service. I Was Looking for a Street chronicles these days on the road while Willeford’s Something About a Soldier is an account of his days in the military. Throughout Soldier, Willeford jockeys for positions in the service that require the least work for the best pay. In other words, Willeford was an ideal slacker.

Even in his post-Armed Services life—beginning in 1956—Willeford was highly concerned about the number of hours he had to work. He enjoyed a post as the Associate Editor at Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine and boasted about only having to work fifteen hours a week. Eventually, he was wooed away from this position to a job where he was promised a twelve-hour workweek: serving as a professor at the

University of Miami.

This is not to say that Willeford was lazy. The less he had to work, the more time he had for writing. Likewise, the commonalities in his oeuvre don't reflect a penchant for redundancy. Rather, Willeford is more of a perfectionist. He would retool his ideas, sometimes growing them from asides to short stories, lean books, or possibly magnum opera. Willeford would take incidents from his life and either weave them into his fiction or use them as a jumping off point for a story or book. For example, "Jake's Journal" (one of the stories found in The Machine in Ward Eleven) contains many passages that would later be found, nearly intact, in Something About a Soldier.

Some critics of Alfred Hitchcock contend that he was content to make the same "man on the run" film repeatedly throughout his career. And, likewise, some could say that Willeford tread familiar waters with his tales often finding voice from a maladjusted male protagonist who might mention murder as casually as a tweed coat. Upon closer examination, however, there is no such animal as a "typical Charles Willeford novel." Even when dealing with protagonists of the same profession (writers, police officers and used car salesmen), Willeford placed them in disparate contexts.

Likewise, Willeford was not content to keep to fiction. In addition to the aforementioned autobiographies, Willeford also recounted significant incidents in his life such as the adaptation and filming of his novel, Cockfighter in Cockfighter Journal or his hemorrhoid operation in A Guide for the Undehemorrhoided.

Willeford also wrote nonfictional literary and social critiques, a good number of which are collected in Writing and Other Blood Sports. Willeford was a scholar of writing. In addition to his love of words and diction, Willeford was a student of the writing process. Willeford has written about the importance of a proper photographer for one's dustjacket ("What Book Covers Tell You"), the merits and pitfalls of book dedications ("A Matter of Dedication"), and of the significance of how large one's name is in comparison to the title of one's book ("The Name Above the Title").

Willeford has frequently written ruminations about his strong opinions regarding book titles. The author penned "The Trouble with Titles" in a 1958 issue of Writer's Digest where he wrote, "I have always been fond of titles with a double meaning. For the first time in my life I had an idea for a private eye novel. I wrote it and I was proud of it, chiefly because I had never written anything like it before. The manuscript, however, remained on my desk while I racked my mind for the perfect title. After two weeks I finally got it. 'Death Finds a Lover!' I

typed a cover page and mailed the novel to my publisher. That's right, you guessed it. The title was changed by the publisher and issued as 'Wild Wives! No. I don't know why.'

In "What Book Covers Tell You," Willeford discusses the profitability of longer titles, "Perhaps the only valid clue in the title as to the readability of a novel is the word count. A two-word title usually indicates that this will be a better book than a novel with one-word title, and a four-word title better than one with three words. But there are too many exceptions to make this rule infallible." Practicing what he preached, Willeford often aimed for four to six word titles: The Machine In Ward Eleven, The Burnt Orange Heresy, Nothing Under the Sun (released as No Experience Necessary), The Black Mass of Brother Springer (originally released as Honey Gal), Until I Am Dead (released as Pick-up), Deliver Me from Dallas! (released as The Whip Hand), and The Man Who Got Away (which ended up being The Woman Chaser), to name a few.

Willeford was said to have bandied about the titles Kiss Your Ass Good-bye, and The Shark Infested Custard for a handful of his books until they finally found homes among Willeford's bibliography. Kiss Your Ass Good-bye and the short story "Strange" (found in Everybody's Metamorphoses) were recombined and expanded upon in The Shark Infested Custard, posthumously published in 1993. Oddly, the one apparent time the Willeford *desired* a two-word title was for his western novel (written under the name Will Charles), The Difference, which was originally published as The Hombre from Sonora.

My eyes fell on a copy of Newsweek on the coffee table near the white-brick fireplace. I read Time! A vocabulary of only 20,000 words is required to read Newsweek, but the Time reader needs a vocabulary of 25,000 words. A little thing, maybe. But on such minutiae rest the standards of culture in the United States, and in this one qualification, at least, Richard Hudson was a notch above THE MAN!"

-The Woman Chaser

During his time in the service, Willeford found time to polish his abilities as a poet (among his first published works was a collection of poetry, Proletarian Laughter). Additionally, he began to hone his skills at writing dialogue and suspense by penning a story for Armed Forces Radio, "The Machine In Ward Eleven." He also wrote a weekly radio serial, "The Story of Mrs. Miller" where Willeford began sharpening his acting chops by playing a doctor in the series. He was in several plays while with the occupation army in Japan. Back stateside, he was active in Community Theater in Santa Barbara and West Palm Beach throughout the 50's and 60's.

The show business in his blood became a frequent theme in his work. From thoughts on script writing ("Why Write for Television" from Writing and Other Blood Sports), to acting ("An Actor Prepares" from Everybody's Metamorphosis) to directing ("The Machine in Ward Eleven" from the collection of the same name and The Woman Chaser), Willeford's apparent Hollywood ambition would culminate in Roger Corman's New World Picture's purchase of the rights to his novel, Cockfighter.

Willeford agreed to sell the rights to his work with the stipulation that he could write the screenplay. "Not every novelist wants to adapt his novel for the screen, but I had wanted to write a screenplay for some time, just to see if I could do it. I had even considered the mad idea of writing an original screenplay, on speculation. But to write a screenplay on speculation, knowing in advance that it has such a very small chance of ever being produced, is a luxury for any writer who never has enough



Corman: To my knowledge, no one had ever made a picture about cock-fighting. Now I know why. No one wants to see a picture about cockfighting. The picture failed. I thought it was an interesting, commercial film about the dark side of rural America. What can I say? I was wrong.

Hellman: COCKFIGHTER was one of my least favorites, only because I was not to do as much work on the script as I would have liked. In fact, I hired Earl (Mac) Rausch to re-write many sequences, particularly the ones involving the love story.

Corman: Monte shot a good film, but he pulled away from the action, the bloody stuff, and we never got the graphic close-ups that we should have had. I knew we'd have to shoot them second unit later.

For the postproduction shoot of a dirt floor with the fighting cocks, the film's editor, Lewis Teague, volunteered, "I can direct that." And did he direct it. He and a cameraman had to go to Arizona, one of the states, like Georgia, where cockfighting is legal. Lew just got in there with the camera. This was his chance. His stuff was so good, with such bloody close-ups of the action, that we had to cut back on it in the final cut. People looking at dailies in the projection room had to turn away. Nobody wanted to see what he had put on the screen, including me. It was too rough.

Hellman: I don't recall whether Lewis shot any footage. Roger got someone to shoot some added blood (spattering on shoes, etc). It's possible that Lewis shot some added extreme close-ups of cocks fighting since those are the sequences he edited. I edited all non-fight scenes. Someone shot the scene of the man eating chicken at the last cockfight, because I didn't.

Willeford: It opened in 58 theaters in Georgia, and was panned by the Atlanta reviewers in the newspapers. The gist of the reviews was that Georgians really didn't engage in cockfighting, and even if a few of them did (out in the rural areas), the prominent Georgians who played in the film, with speaking parts and as extras, shouldn't have done so. I considered such reviews vicious, and wished they had reviewed the movie instead of the social aspects, but city people, I suppose, rather resented the exposure of cockfighting in Georgia.

Corman: I really thought this picture would turn out to be a fascinating look at a subculture of American life. But I believe when I use the word "fascinating," many other people would use the word "disgusting."

Willeford: The movie did well in drive-ins in South Carolina and Georgia, and then the prints moved down into northern Florida. It soon became obvious that the movie was not going to do well in the cities. Women did not want to see it, which meant that couples on dates went to movies elsewhere. By the time the film got to Fort Myers, Florida, Roger Corman pulled the prints and the movie was retitled BORN TO KILL. A new campaign was launched, with new two-sheet movie posters showing Warren Oates wielding an ax. No mention of cockfighting was in the posters.

Corman: We lost some of our money on the picture, then tried to save it and rerelease it as BORN TO KILL, I asked Joe Dante to help in the salvage operation. The beauty of Joe then was that as a trailer editor he was never limited by the movie he was doing.

Dante: COCKFIGHTER was really more of an art film. Warren Oates takes a vow of silence until he wins the COCKFIGHTER of the Year award or something like that. Bizarre movie. I'm doing the trailer and I've got Warren doing sign language, a bunch of chickens, no action. What am I gonna do? I make a fairly good trailer, the movie opens in Georgia, where Roger is sure it will be a hit. Roger's in Europe. Well, in Georgia it turns out that cockfighting is an embarrassment. It's like child molesting. It's not something people talk about. So no one goes to the movie. It gets terrible reviews and it's a disaster. Roger's stuck with a film that cost more than usual.

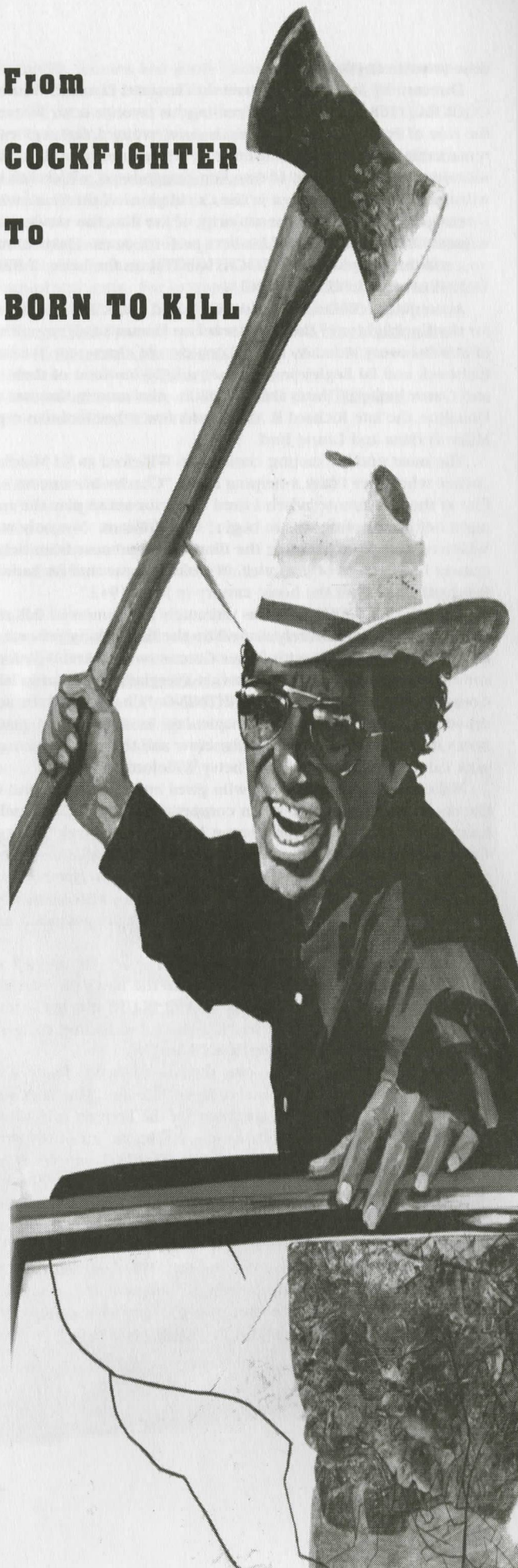
Teague: Immediately after the initial release of COCKFIGHTER, Roger Corman wanted to change the title and the ad campaign. He instructed Joe Dante who was cutting trailers at New World to put in all the shots of sex and violence possible. When informed that Monte Hellman had not shot any sex or violence, Roger said, "I don't care where you get them." I called Roger complaining that it wasn't ethical to put shots in the trailer that weren't in the film. So Roger said, "Then put them in the film!" Thus there was a version released with a dream sequence in which Warren Oates had a sexy violent dream. I don't think I ever saw it.

Hellman: The re-cut eliminated the porch scene with Mary Elizabeth (one of my favorites) and added several dream sequences of tit-and-ass and car explosions, supposedly to justify their use in trailers. This cut was variously titled BORN TO KILL or GAMBLIN' MAN. Any version titled COCKFIGHTER is my original cut.

Willeford: Sight and Sound, the British film magazine, listed it as one of the ten best foreign films shown in England during 1974, placing it between AMACORD and SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE. It was shown at several film festivals, Edinburgh and London, and also at Telluride, and these audiences seemed to like the film. But it lost money. Roger Corman has directed and produced some 137 films, and COCKFIGHTER, he said, was the only movie he ever lost any money on. I suppose this is true, but he didn't lose much.

Quotes from Joe Dante and Roger Corman are from How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime. Quotes from Charles Willeford are from Cockfighter Journal. Quotes from Monte Hellman are from Cashiers du Cinemart #7. Quotes from Lewis Teague are from Cashiers du Cinemart #11.

From COCKFIGHTER To BORN TO KILL



time to write anyway."

Directed by long-time Cashiers du Cinemart favorite, Monte Hellman, COCKFIGHTER saw Hellman directing his favorite actor, Warren Oates, in the role of Frank Mansfield. Stoic and determined, Oates gives a remarkable performance as Mansfield, who swore himself to silence and sobriety after an incident of drunken braggadocio, which left him without a bird and a chance at the Cockfighter of the Year Award. Uttering nary a word for the majority of the film, the viewer is able to witness Oates giving one of his best performances. Oates certainly was on a roll that year as he did COCKFIGHTER on the heels of BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA.

According to Willeford, he loosely based Frank Mansfield's mute quest for the Cockfighter of the Year Award on Homer's *Odyssey*. It's a journey of self-discovery, aided by an amazing cast of characters like Steve Railsback and Ed Begley Jr. (two men a little *too fond* of their chickens) and Oates' nemesis, Harry Dean Stanton. Also among the cast were Troy Donahue, the late Richard B. Shull and a few other Hellman regulars like Millie Perkins and Laurie Bird.

The most notable casting choice was Willeford as Ed Middleton, an ex-cocker who gives Frank a helping hand. "Charles became an actor in the film at the last minute, when I fired the actor set to play the role the night before shooting was to begin," says Hellman. Not only was Willeford able to experience the filmmaking process from behind the camera but in front of it as well. Willeford wrote that he hadn't "worked [as] hard since I left the horse cavalry in June, 1942."

Though COCKFIGHTER was ultimately a commercial failure, Willeford was apparently not entirely soured on the filmmaking process. The author stayed in touch with Roger Corman who asked Willeford to do some location scouting in the Florida Everglades and Marco Island for Corey Allen's THUNDER AND LIGHTNING. "Charles read the script, drove across the Trail, spent a couple days looking around, made some notes, arranged for housing for the crew and the cast, and bought a few junk cars," says Charles' widow, Betsy Willeford.

Willeford plays a bartender who gives booze-runner David Carradine the short end of the stick when competition (Roger C. Carmel, best known for playing Harcourt Fenton Mudd on "Star Trek") moves in on Carradine's territory. Not much of the film is remarkable except perhaps for the many ingenious uses of Kate Jackson's undergarments and the great line from Charles Napier, "Hey asshole, stop that kung-fu shit!" Otherwise, THUNDER AND LIGHTNING boasts long-winded car chases and cornball set pieces.

Willeford wouldn't write for the screen again. He refused a chance to adapt *Miami Blues*, leaving that task up to the film's director, George Armitage—another Corman alum. MIAMI BLUES was made under the impetus of Fred Ward whose Passing Moon production company optioned the rights to Willeford's book in 1986.

Originally, Ward wanted to play the role of Freddy Frenger while Gene Hackman agreed to play Detective Hoke Moseley. That idea was scrapped after Alec Baldwin tried out for the Frenger role, blowing everyone away with his performance. Hackman graciously accepted the decision of Baldwin to play Frenger with Ward taking over as Moseley. Baldwin does an excellent job as the unstable Frenger while Ward shines during his all-too-brief moments on screen as Moseley. With his unshaven face and dour expression, Ward often resembles Warren Oates and provides a performance worthy of the late actor.

For years rumors circulated about Fred Ward reprising his role as Moseley for film versions of the rest of the books in the series. That's unlikely as Passing Moon doesn't own the options for the books. Instead, the film rights for those and *The Shark Infested Custard* are now in the

hands of Curtis Hanson who has plans of producing a series of Moseley films for HBO. Additionally, the film rights for *The Burnt Orange Heresy* currently belong to Eamonn Bowles of Shooting Gallery productions.

"That was the beginning. It is also a flashback and narrative book. This much about writing I have learned from the movies. Also, I don't want to fool anybody, including myself. Especially myself. I believe now that I should have remained Richard Hudson, Used Car Dealer, and I should never have become Richard Hudson, Writer-Director-Producer."

-The Woman Chaser

On the opposite end of the Willeford protagonist spectrum—far from the essentially noble characters of Mansfield and Moseley—is the disillusioned and delusional Richard Hudson of Robinson Devor's THE WOMAN CHASER. Unsatisfied with his success as a used car salesman, Hudson determines that his only path of redemption is through creating a work of art. Of course, Hudson realizes that becoming a true craftsman takes years of practice and perhaps an inherent ability. However, it's his opinion (which is ultimately proven true) that the one area remaining where a nobody can create a masterpiece is in Hollywood.

The Woman Chaser is the most cinematic—leastwise in its construction—of Willeford's works. Herein, the protagonist, Hudson, writes a recollection of his days as a movie director. He writes his memoirs in quasi-screenplay style, preceding every transition in the novel with direction such as "CROSSFADE", "DISSOLVE", or "FADE TO BLACK". Throughout the novel, the reader is given insight not only regarding Hudson's life but also in the method by which audience members react to the words on the page or the images on screen.

Like Hudson, THE WOMAN CHASER is director Devor's first try at a full-length motion picture. And, like Hudson's film-within-the-film, THE MAN WHO GOT AWAY, Devor has created a masterpiece. Running six full reels, Devor's film is free from unnecessary padding and moves at a breakneck pace. With a budget on par with THE MAN WHO GOT AWAY, THE WOMAN CHASER has tremendous production values. Shot in color but presented in breathtaking black & white, THE WOMAN CHASER is a beautiful looking film. The screenplay (penned by Devor) is delightfully accurate in its adaptation of Willeford's work, not only in being faithful to the tone of the book but in keeping ninety-percent of the original dialogue.

Starring Patrick Warburton as Hudson, the actor doesn't "portray" Hudson so much as he "inhabits" the role. His deadpan narration holds true to Hudson's sociopathic outlook on life. Hudson is a bastard and makes no bones about it. His moral ambiguity frees him to be completely outrageous in his appraisals of the world and unapologetic in his heinous actions.

Warburton often comes off as flat as a flapjack. Contrasting this insouciance are wild turns of emotion. Hudson is passionate about his desire to create—to give meaning to his money-grubbing life. Unfortunately for him, he learns too late that Hollywood's studio system is far more ruthless than he could ever be. As Hudson, Warburton often wears a mask of indifference, slightly squinting at scenery as if trying to make sense of the way of Hollywood. It's only after he dons a conspicuous set of sunglasses that he can operate in this foreign place with all the autonomous command he had over his Used Car lot.

Hudson's hardboiled demeanor, the employment of first-person voice-over narration, a flashback framing device, the use of Milos Forman theme from THE ASPHALT JUNGLE, and an inherent moral ambiguity might lead

critics to assume that THE WOMAN CHASER is a "modern day film noir." Indeed, THE WOMAN CHASER has an absurdity reminiscent of the work of Edgar G. Ulmer, but there is a modernity and self-reflexivity in Willeford's scenarios that puts THE WOMAN CHASER heads and shoulders above films that try to ape the classic noir traits. To see when THE WOMAN CHASER will be in your town, check out www.womanchaser.com.

"[In the 11th Horse Calvary] I had trained my mount to piss into a Pepsi-Cola bottle. The way you do this is to put a case of 24 empty Pepsi bottles under the horse. Each day you remove one bottle, until only one is left. When there is only one bottle left, the horse is forced to pee in it."

- Cockfighter Journal

Upon first seeing Don Herron's name on his biography of Charles Willeford, simply called Willeford, one might recall Willeford's essay, "The Name Above the Title", which deals with the size of the author's name versus that of the title. Here Willeford's name was so prominent it looked as if he was finally getting a point size worthy of his ability. Could this be a book called Don Herron by Charles Willeford? Unfortunately, a more appropriate summation would be that the book should be titled Don Herron as written by Don Herron.

By everyone's accounts, Don Herron is a nice guy. He's learned in fiction and can craft quite a story. Whether intentional or not, however, Herron's work comes off as an ingratiating, self-serving publicity piece wherein he touts his prowess as a writer and friend to the often cantankerous Willeford.

Herron's book is divided into three sections: "In Life," "In Conversation," and "In Print." The second section is undoubtedly the most infuriating for those readers who want to know more about Charles Willeford and not Don Herron who dominates the transcription of (often inane) taped discussions. Rather than discovering/disclosing the source

of Willeford's motifs, themes, and goofy "facts" (see above) that went unexplained by Willeford's body of autobiographical work, Herron merely states that he was never sure when Willeford was pulling his leg or not. Now that's investigative journalism!

While it might be nice to allow Willeford to keep some of his enigmatic qualities, The Burnt Orange Heresy's Jamie Figueras would argue that Herron shirked the onus of critical in his refusal to provide interpretation of the author's work. Apart from that, one would hope that a proper biographer would have at least included a more structured look at Willeford's life, including the years not covered by Willeford's own autobiographical texts. For example, while Willeford's aforementioned part in THUNDER AND LIGHTNING was important enough to merit a mention in "Hats" (an expanded story from I Was Looking for a Street found in Writing and Other Blood Sports), the only record of this work is buried in recesses of Willeford's bibliography.

Though an invaluable volume of Willefordian lore, Willeford is ultimately more frustrating than informative.

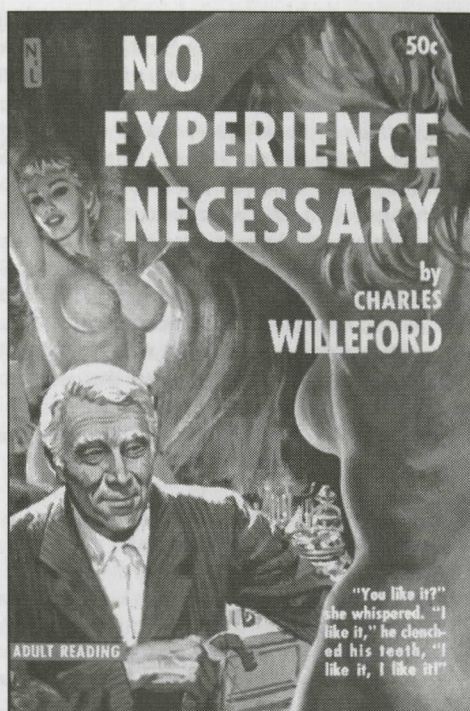
*"Incentive, O disposed one.
A dishwasher has no future.
But if you, too, require incentive
To equal my hard-earned success—
I know where a dishwashing job is open..."*

- Understudy for Love

Not every Willeford novel is as delightful as the last. At times his work was marred by overzealous editors who demanded tawdry sex scenes (Understudy of Love) or felt themselves more qualified to write than the author (the first few chapters of No Experience Necessary were rewritten by an over-eager editor). While Willeford's career progressed, his writing improved as he gained autonomy over his novels.



Illustration by Pat Lehnerer



As mentioned earlier, Willeford was constantly improving on the stories and themes that fascinated him. His early works provide valuable insight into the greater themes present in Willeford's oeuvre. The following three books are undoubtedly the most quirky entries in his bibliography—not only in their themes but in their production.

Lust is a Woman (1958) is a shoddy book – not necessarily in the quality of writing but in the treatment of the material by publisher Beacon Books. Initially, one may presume that the stature of Lust is a Woman, as a rarity among Willeford bibliographies, may stem from the cover sporting a byline of “Charles Willeford”. The text of the work contains instances of twice-printed sentences and paragraphs as well as a scattering of omitted letters.

Aside from the textual flaws of the book, Lust is a Woman is a tawdry, compelling read. One of Willeford's first and few ventures into a third-person narrative, the novel is structured with the conceit he would employ in Off the Wall, Miami Blues, and Sideswipe of alternating the narrative between two central figures. In this case, the dual protagonists are Ralph Tone—an art student working as a bellboy for summer break—and Maria Dugan.

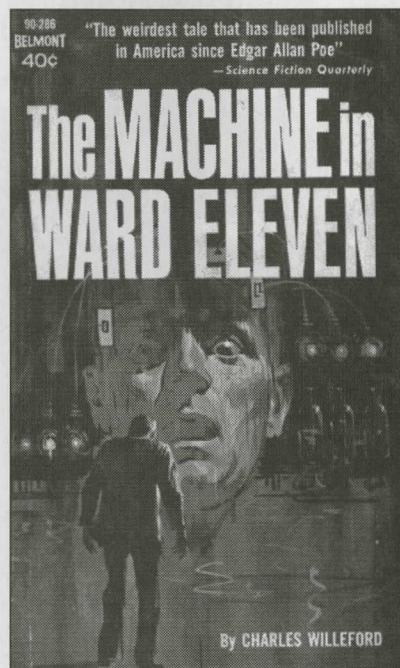
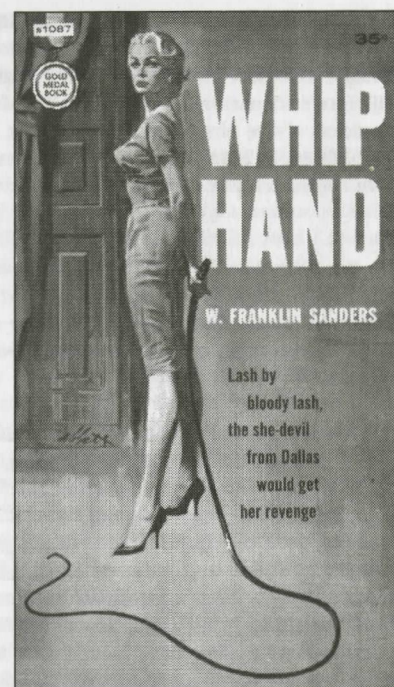
The cover states that Maria desperately wants “to become a movie star.” This was an apparent ploy to paint the novel as a seedy tale of star-struck seduction. Yet, Maria is on vacation in Miami Beach—hundreds of miles from both the footlights of her native New York and the alluring glare of Hollywood glamour. Escaping from the typing pool to the sandy beaches of Florida, Maria never expresses desire for anything other than money. Her single-minded ambition ensnares the beautiful Maria in “an evil game” of white slavery.

Despite her apparent amorality, Maria is a more sympathetic character than is the hapless Ralph. Though he only manages a solitary, aborted date Ralph becomes hopelessly infatuated with the “big buxom woman” (whose breasts are under intense narrative scrutiny). Ralph's obsession is fueled by sleep deprivation, booze, uppers, and a lack of self-respect. Willeford highlights Ralph's underlying dementia in a familiar manner; “In less than an hour, Ralph was standing beneath the shower in the upstairs bathroom...completely sober, sick to both heart and stomach, as the hot water sluiced over his head he repeated to himself: I'll never be clean again. I'll never be clean again.”

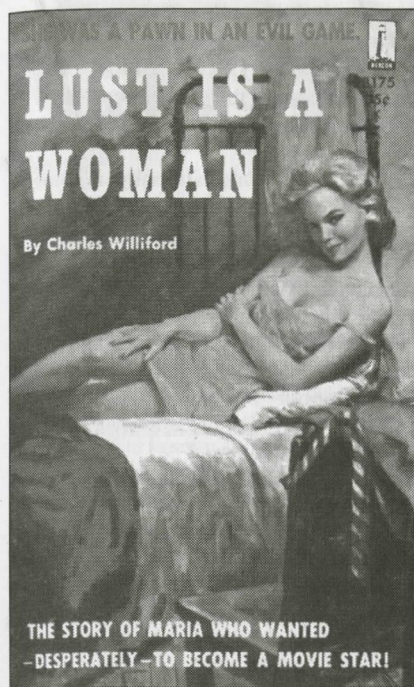
The protagonist in Understudy for Love (1961) bears the name “Richard Hudson.” However, there's little in common with the bastard hero of The Woman Chaser. Actually, the Hudson of The Woman Chaser is a direct descendant of used car dealer (and all around bastard), Russell Haxby of High Priest of California.

The Richard Hudson of Understudy for Love could be viewed as a primitive amalgam of the art critic (Jamie Figueras), and artist (Jacques Debierue) of The Burnt Orange Heresy. Like Figueras, Hudson is a writer for a periodical. In this case, Hudson churns out crappy copy for a daily newspaper in Lake Springs, Florida. Additionally, as Debierue, this Hudson is a frustrated artist.

Having some success at dramatic writing in college, Hudson had ambition of becoming a Broadway playwright. Instead, he spends his days ruminating over the handful of pages he's penned. His proposed play, “The Understudy”, is a tale of duplicity in which a gifted amateur actor, employed as a dishwasher, plots to steal



A few harder-to-find Willeford novels. Clockwise from upper-left: No Experience Necessary, Whip Hand, Lust is a Woman, Understudy for Love, Understudy for Death, and The Machine in Ward Eleven.



the job of a well-educated theater director by aping the mannerisms and skills of the director. Willeford's dishwasher as actor turns in an appearance in his story "An Actor Prepares" from *Everybody's Metamorphoses*.

Hudson recognizes that he is both "director" and "dishwasher" by being the creator of the play as well as being stuck. Like the dishwasher, Hudson sees his job at the newspaper as unbefitting his creative gifts. It takes a quixotic quest for "the unattainable" for Hudson to begin to glean that he is fortunate to have a job writing poignant items about a child bitten by a pet raccoon, a drunk throwing a bowl of chili through the window of Charlie's Chile Bowl, or an old boy of eighty exposing himself to some elderly ladies at the shuffleboard courts.

The impetus for Hudson's change of heart derives from a feature assignment regarding the upswing trend of suicide in America. At the center of his

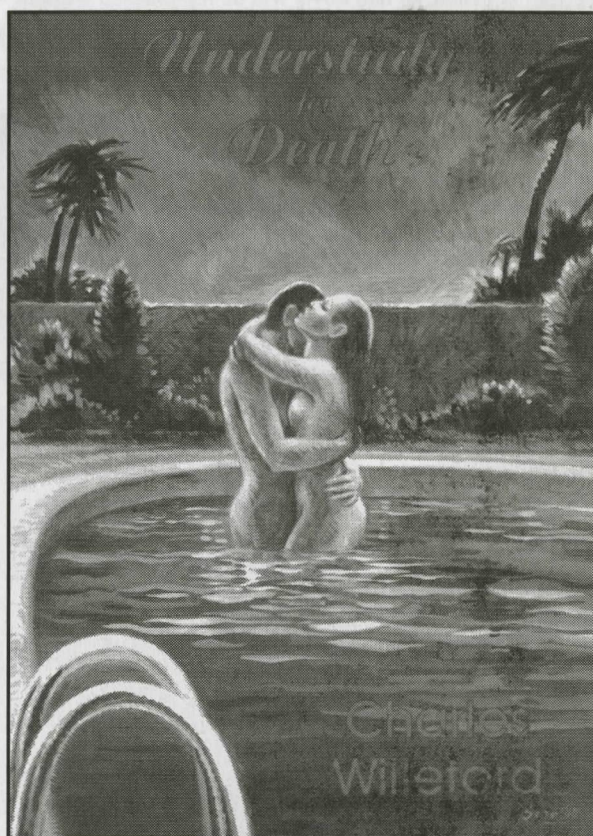
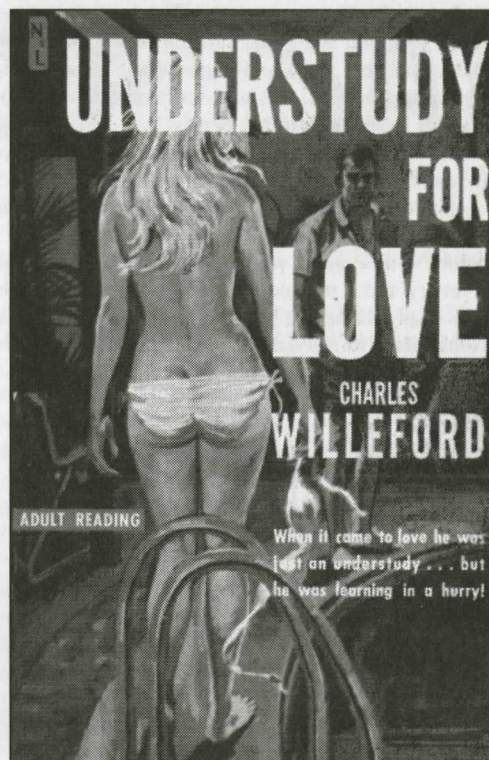
research is the murder-suicide of Marion Hunecker and her two children. Written from Hudson's point-of-view, the reader is repeatedly presented with Hudson's apathy about his task and his slipshod journalism. Hudson's self-centered personality helps foster an inability to observe his surroundings. Hudson makes little progress in finding any motivation for Mrs. Hunecker murdering her children and taking her own life. While Hudson's busy chasing the skirt of Hunecker's best friend, Gladys Chatham, he fails to realize that his wife has taken a role in a the latest Community Theater production. By this, Hudson's wife becomes "director" to his "dishwasher".

The required sex scenes meant to sell the book as "adult reading" provide the novel with an overabundant amount of padding. A thoughtful character study and astute treatise on the creative process, *Understudy for Love* is flawed in its herky-jerky pacing and abrupt resolution.

The Whip Hand (1961) is undoubtedly the strangest entry in Willeford's bibliography. Published by Gold Medal (a major paperback publishing house that Willeford failed to crack), *The Whip Hand* bears the sole byline of W. Franklin Sanders. An old Army buddy, Sanders and Willeford are said to have worked on the original manuscript in 1946 (making it Willeford's first full-length book!). Gold Medal rejected the book in 1946; accepting it fifteen years later, after an extensive re-write by Sanders. By all accounts, "Deliver Me From Dallas" (the original title of the book) was released unbeknownst to Willeford. The amount of Sanders' input during the 1946 writing of "Deliver Me From Dallas" is questionable. *The Whip Hand* stands as the elusive Sanders' sole title.

Employing eight narrators—four of which "speak" in thick Okie vernacular—*The Whip Hand* follows Bill Brown, an ex-Los Angeles detective, through his misadventures in Dallas. Brown gets mixed-up in a kidnapping-turned-murder performed by three yokels. The leader of the trio is Junior Knowles, a cold-blooded killer who seems a graduate of the John D. MacDonald school of unexpectedly shrewd rednecks. The victim's family is the aristocratic Dixon clan, led by Galin Dixon and his firecracker of a daughter, Kay. Despite the implications of the cover art, Kay never gets to use her father's bullwhip.

However, Kay might like to have one used on her: "I leaned against the staircase and forced my right breast between two of the posts, under the top rail. The space



Publisher Dennis McMillan had plans of reprinting *Understudy for Love* as *Understudy for Death* just after Willeford passed away. The deal soured (after the covers were printed) but McMillan has recently revived this idea, saying he'll reprint it in future with Willeford's original title *The Understudy: A Novel About Men and Women*.

between was a tight fit. The pressure felt nice against my flesh...I twisted my body as much as I could and the pain was nearly brutal. I flipped my skirt up to my waist and dug my nails in, all the while punishing my captive breast...In a few short minutes I felt better...I'd gotten some relief for my screaming nerves."

The use of so many narrators often proves tiresome as events are unnecessarily explained from multiple points-of-view. Yet, a few scenes benefit this conceit, especially those chapters narrated by characters that would otherwise remain minor without a narrative voice.

Like Willeford's subsequent work, The Whip Hand bears plenty of brutality, perversity, and a prominent mention of a gabardine suit. While the book ranks high among the harder-to-find Willeford books, publisher Dennis McMillan plans to release the original Willeford version at some point in the next few years. It should be worth the wait.

"The collector's role is almost as important to the world of culture as the critic's. Without collectors there would be precious little art produced in this world, and without critics, collectors would wonder what to collect."

- The Burnt Orange Heresy

Now comes the fun part. Finding the books of Charles Willeford can be a challenge but it's a quest that guarantees satisfaction. While it's a shame that some of his early works are incredibly difficult to track down, the fruit of these seedlings can be plucked from Willeford's polished novels (such as Cockfighter, The Woman Chaser, The Burnt Orange Heresy, The Collected Memoirs of Charles Willeford, and the Hoke Moseley books).

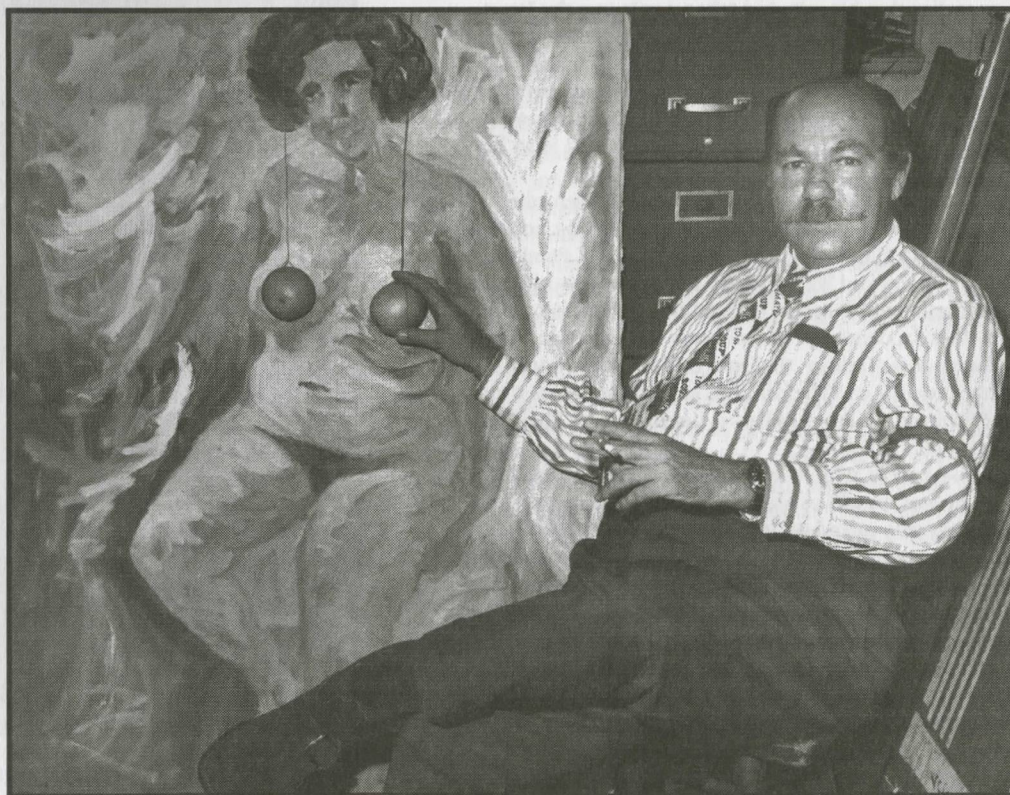
On occasion, an odd novel will be republished without warning, such as Carroll & Graf's January 2000 release of The Burnt Orange Heresy.

Meanwhile, 1999 saw Disc-Us Books publishing both of Willeford's primary memoirs (I Was Looking for a Street and Something About a Soldier) in one volume. Disc-Us reports that they'll be combining these works along with A Guide for the Undehemorrhoided in a special CD-Rom edition of The Collected Memoirs of Charles Willeford. For updates, visit their website at www.Disc-Us.com.

The true champion of bringing Willeford's work, especially the more rare titles, is Dennis McMillan. Publisher of a good number of Willeford's later, more challenging tomes (Kiss Your Ass Good-bye, Everybody's Metamorphosis, et. al.), the last few years have seen McMillan releasing the aforementioned biography of Willeford along with The Difference and Writing and Other Blood Sports (which contains New Forms of Ugly). Knowing how difficult it can be to find Willeford's works, McMillan even offers harder-to-find works via his website at www.DennisMcMillan.com. Another proponent of Willeford's work is V. Vale from RE/Search. Vale's volumes of High Priest of California and Wild Wives are available from www.VSearchMedia.com and www.EssentialMedia.com as well as hipper bookstores and Tower Records.

Searching out Willeford's work at one's local used or new bookstore will most likely uncover his Hoke Moseley books or an occasional Black Lizard edition (Cockfighter, The Burnt Orange Heresy, The Black Mass of Brother Springer, or Pick-Up). Otherwise, the best source for good prices on common Willeford titles is via www.AbeBooks.com. For high quality copies of Willeford's hard-to-find work, there's no better source than Baltimore's Royal Books (www.AbeBooks.com/Home/RoyalBooks).

Thanks to Kevin Johnson, Dennis McMillan, Betsy Willeford, Lewis Teague, Eamonn Bowles, George Armitage, Jim Trupin, and Joe McSpadden.



Charles Willeford
1919 - 1988

SUMMER OF SAM

THE SUMMER OF '77 Record-setting temperatures baked the streets of New York City. In the oppressive heat, the people of New York were terrorized by a killer who struck in the night, shooting people seemingly at random as they sat in their cars. Beginning his year-long reign of terror on July 29, 1976, the unknown assailant quickly gained the nickname, "The .44 Caliber Killer" for the Bulldog Special he used in his close-range, shoot-and-run attacks. Later, after leaving one of a series of notes for the police, the killer, David Berkowitz, became better known as the Son of Sam.

When dealing with a story as infinitely interesting as the madness of and manhunt for the elusive Berkowitz, author Charles Willeford chose to focus on Berkowitz's downstairs neighbor, Deputy Craig Glassman. In his book, *Off The Wall*, Willeford contrasted Berkowitz with Glassman—two men living on their own; one a crazed killer scrawling notes about Satan on his walls (hence the book's title) and the other out on his own after being asked to leave by his wife. An odd couple, indeed. Interspersed between the alternating chapters are newspaper accounts of the Son of Sam's activities and reproductions of some of his letters to the police.

Writing about Berkowitz, Willeford was treading familiar ground. Though no Willefordian protagonist ever reached the depths of homicidal paranoia to which Berkowitz plummeted, the author long held that "madness was a predominant theme and a normal condition for Americans living in the second half of the century." *Off The Wall* is a fascinating portrait of the Son of Sam, detailing the origins and extent of Berkowitz's insanity. The only weak spot of the book is the over-informative introduction by Edna Buchanan, a reporter for "The Miami Herald" who gives an unnecessary, albeit well written, summary of the book.

Off The Wall, which was purportedly written for some quick cash in 1980, shows Willeford's immense skill as a writer. One might think that it's difficult to go astray with such captivating material but filmmaker Spike Lee disproves that notion... in a big way.

Of all the adjectives I might think to describe a movie about the Son of Sam, "boring" is not one to come to mind. Yet, Spike Lee's **SUMMER OF SAM** is that and more. Hell, it's dull. Deathly dull. Drawn out, humdrum, monotonous, uninteresting, and tiresome—those words don't even begin to describe the tedium of **SUMMER OF SAM**.

Written by Lee and actors Victor Colicchio and Michael Imperioli (the latter best known for his role as the "stuttering prick" Spider in *GOODFELLAS*—not only does Lee cop camera movements from Martin Scorsese but actors as well), **SUMMER OF SAM** uses the paranoia of New York '77 as its backdrop, giving the character of David Berkowitz (a completely miscast Michael Badalucco—looking like he's in his late thirties with a scruffy face—not at all the angelic twenty-four of the real Son of Sam) all of ten minutes of screen time, meaning that the most absorbing character is missed for the rest of the film. The remaining one hundred and twenty-five long minutes concern Vinnie (John Leguizamo conspicuously playing an Italian-American in a neighborhood that can't tolerate "spics and niggers") and Richie (Adrien Brody).

Taking a cue from Berkowitz who spells out words in lettered blocks; Lee employs big, overwrought, over-stylized scenes. Amongst the cluttered narrative, stereotypical characters, and disco dancing is the theme of man's duality. Like David Berkowitz, Richie and Vinnie have aspects of their personalities that they keep hidden from everyone around them, allowing them life only under a cloak of secrecy.

Richie, a punk rocker that has come back to "the neighborhood" from places unknown, makes bread to support his lame band, *The Late Term Abortions*, by dancing at a male strip club and getting blow jobs in the upstairs Ladies Room. Other than introducing some old-fashioned homophobia to the film, Richie's around to justify the overly-loud use of *The Who* on the soundtrack and provide a contrast to the shiftless neighborhood greaseballs that hang around a "Dead

End" sign - what subtle symbolism, Spike! (And what self-respecting punk would be rocking to *The Who* in '77?)

Richie also becomes the target of the inevitable lynch mob. What's a tropical New York summer in a Spike Lee movie (er, "Joint") without a lynch mob (**DO THE RIGHT THING**)? Is there a monster on the dead end street? What the interchangeable goombahs fail to realize is that the Son of Sam isn't going to stick out like a sore thumb, wearing a mohawk and safety-pinned pants. Instead, the most horrifying thing about Berkowitz, as well as so many other killers, is their innocuous outer appearance. Again, a good idea would have been to show more of Berkowitz, especially when not senselessly ranting in his apartment but, instead, calmly interacting with the rest of the world.

Meanwhile, Vinnie cheats on his wife, Dionna (Mira Sorvino) because of his guilty desire for three-input sex. Sleeping with his hair salon clients (business is booming after it's announced that the Son of Sam shoots long-haired brunettes) and his wife's cousin, the wishy-washy Vinnie often suffers from bouts of self-reproach so severe that I was waiting for him to stick a lit match under his hand a la Harvey Keitel in *MEAN STREETS*. When Dionna dons a blonde wig, it looks like Vinnie might be able to leave the light on and switch up positions from missionary but, alas, it's yet another false hope for *something* to happen in this tired movie.

SUMMER OF SAM is not immune to the blazing summer sun of 1977. It chugs along in dire need of maintenance, its engine labored, sputtering, always threatening to overheat. All too often it grinds to a halt and roughly idles, smoke billowing from its tailpipe before stalling out. It's then that one hopes to hear footsteps creeping up on this immobile film and pepper it with a spray of .44 slugs.

At times it seems that Spike Lee may be aware of the audience's ennui and attempts to liven things up with (rare) scenes of Berkowitz screaming his head off, a musical montage, goofy anamorphic effects (reminiscent of *CROOKLYN*) a half dozen subplots and discordant flashbacks. In addition to these, there are the occasional sequences shot with the ultra-luminescence of *CASINO* (and *CLOCKERS*). Ellen Kuras's cinematography is as schizophrenic as Berkowitz himself.

The narrative is equally uneven, not staying with any one storyline long enough to have any impact; giving short shrift to everyone involved, especially Berkowitz. Hell, even Spike Lee has more screen-time as a heavy-lidded, mush-mouthed television reporter (again showing his complete inability to act).

The most impressive thing that Spike Lee did with **SUMMER OF SAM** is that he managed to make a movie even worse than *GIRL 6*—I thought that was impossible until Sam Carr's dog, Harvey, pattered into Berkowitz's apartment and started speaking to him with John Turturro's voice. "Go out and kill!" he commands. The walls were soon ringing with my laughter.

For a while I was afraid that Lee wasn't dealing with Berkowitz for fear of glamorizing a serial killer or exploiting the memory of his victims. Yet, with the words of Harvey (maybe they should have gotten that dog from the Bush's Baked Beans commercials, he might have delivered his lines better), I realized that Berkowitz's psychosis was being played out as a joke. The threat of the Son of Sam isn't just a backdrop to this inane film; it's a punchline.

If you're looking for a great exploration of mob mentality, check out the old "Twilight Zone" episode, "Monsters Are Due On Maple Street." For an insightful look at Berkowitz, you can try to track down Willeford's terrific book or check out Corky Quakenbush's hysterical "Davey and the Son of Goliath." Art Clokey's cloyingly Christian claymation series, "Davey and Goliath," provides the perfect opportunity for parody as both simpleton Davey and killer David Berkowitz were stringent Jesus freaks and believed that dogs could talk to them! Quakenbush's short is not only far more entertaining than **SUMMER OF SAM**, but, even with its liberal interpretation, more accurate in its portrayal of the .44 caliber killer. - MW

TEENAGE RAMPAGE

By Rich Osmond

As part of Rich Osmond's continuing series of articles about "Punk Rock Girl" movies, he takes a look at the classic *LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE FABULOUS STAINS*. For his write-up on David Markey's *DESPERATE TEENAGE LOVEDOLLS* see CdC #10. Stay tuned for Rich's review of *LOVEDOLLS SUPERSTAR* in a future issue of CdC.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE FABULOUS STAINS

Veteran record producer Lou Adler gets most attention these days for his frequent appearances on VH1's "Behind the Music." But he dabbled in films, as well, producing *THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW* and directing the first Cheech & Chong movie, *UP IN SMOKE*. His second film as a director, 1981's *LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE FABULOUS STAINS*, was shelved by Paramount. Instead, it received its widest exposure from frequent mid-eighties airings on the fledgling USA Network's weekend "Night Flight" program. It remains a classic of punk rock girl cinema.

After appearing on a "60 Minutes" type show during a segment on her dying Pennsylvania town, surly teen Corrine "Third Degree" Burns (Diane Lane) still craves the spotlight. With her cousin, Jessica (Laura Dern), and sister, Tracy (Marin Kanter), Corrine launches a punk rock band, the Stains. Three rehearsals later ("but they were real long ones!"), the Stains appear on a follow-up segment on the TV newsmagazine and score the opening slot on a seedy cross-country tour with heavy metal burn-outs, the Metal Corpses (led by Fee Waybill of the Tubes), and Brit punkers, the Looters (comprised of Ray Winstone and real-life punk pioneers Paul Simonon from the Clash, and Steve Jones and Paul Cook of the Sex Pistols).

Adler has the Stains' TV debut and those rehearsals take place off screen, so we aren't exposed to their act until opening night. To say they suck doesn't begin to describe their sound. But Corrine's see-through tops and "we don't put out!" motto intrigues TV reporter Alicia Meeker (Cynthia Sikes). After several profiles on Meeker's news program, the Stains are cult heroes to a mob of alienated teen girls who follow them from show to show, copy their skunk-stripe hairdos and lingerie outfits, and, most importantly, spend tons of dough on Stains merchandise.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE FABULOUS STAINS gets credited a lot with prefiguring the riot grrrl scene of a few years back. The film plays like a before-the-fact parody of the whole movement. Adler and screenwriter Nancy Dowd (using her nom de plume, Rob Morton) nail their intended satirical targets, from TV news to the rock scene, from teen angst to rampant consumerism, with dark, cruel humor. As Corrine, Diane Lane has her showiest role as one of the coldest, least sympathetic characters ever to be the protagonist of a teen movie. She never worries about making Corrine likable and

under-plays the handful of scenes where Corrine actually shows a glimmer of humanity. And while *STAINS* never becomes the *DR. STRANGELOVE* of rock movies, it could have been. The wonderfully cynical epilogue captures what the eighties were ultimately about.

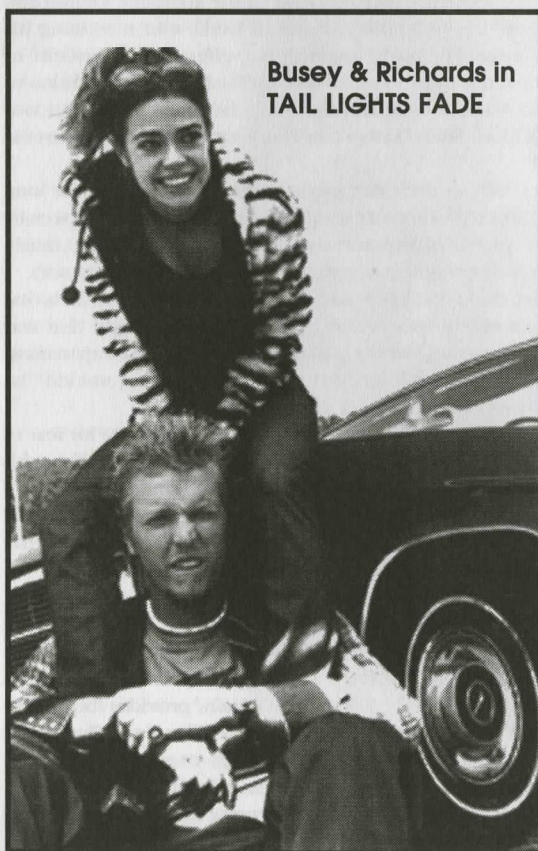
According to the end credits, a soundtrack album was released on Adler's Ode records, preserving such painful Stains anthems as "Waste of Time" and "Professionals" (the Looters take on "Professionals," written by Cook and Jones is a cool punk-pop nugget). To date, however, there hasn't been an official domestic video/DVD release of the movie itself. In the meantime, a high quality copy is available from Video Search of Miami (www.vsom.com).

TAIL LIGHTS FADE

Who better to bring the road movie to the twenty-first century with tires squealing than the greatest yahoo actor working today, Jake Busey? Especially when he's got fellow *STARSHIP TROOPER* Denise Richards riding shotgun. Unfortunately, they're just the supporting players in 1999's *TAIL LIGHTS FADE*. This isn't an ass-kicking joyride but one of those "indie" movies... Kevin Smith even gets credit as "executive advisor."

When Angie's (Tanya Allen) brother gets busted for marijuana possession in Vancouver, she convinces boyfriend Cole (Breckin Meyer) to drive up with her to help her sibling out. Once Cole's hot-rodding pal Bruce (Busey) gets word of the road trip, he and his girlfriend Wendy (Richards) convince Cole and Angie to turn the trip into a race, with both teams vandalizing and photographing landmarks at predetermined checkpoints to prove they were there. This great, obnoxious concept is abandoned when the gang finds out that Angie's brother has his own growhouse. At this point the race's stakes become the growhouse contents: ten kilos of pot.

Director Malcolm Ingram (one-time Canadian editor of *Film Threat Magazine*) and writer Matt Gissing are more interested in the character than the action, which would be fine if Cole and Angie weren't the clichéd twenty-something crybabies with whom too many independent filmmakers are obsessed. Prepare yourself for lots of talk about Angie's troubles getting into a good grad school and Cole's inability to grow-up and become responsible. Busey and Richards seem like they're in another movie. When Kitty (Lisa Marie, gal pal of Tim Burton) shows up for a few scenes as a small town drag-racing waitress who challenges Bruce to a side race, it just proves that car chases are still a lot more fun to watch than non-stop whining.



Busey & Richards in
TAIL LIGHTS FADE

You've Got... No Ideas!

Somewhere in Los Angeles, Nora Ephron sits in front of her television set, VCR whirring away, a pile of videocassettes resting beside her. Her hands greasy, an empty bag of chips is wedged between the couch cushions. In her cathode haze, eyes glazing over, eventually something will strike her fancy. She watches long into the night, waiting to find *the film*—the film that she can use as fodder for her next project.

A gasp. Some notes are hurriedly scribbled in the dim light as images of Jimmy Stewart and Margaret Sullavan cross the screen.

It worked once, dammit, and it can work again!

Ernst Lubitsch's *SHOP AROUND THE CORNER* was a delightful, if slowly paced, 1940 comedy of manners about two lonely hearts who correspond lovingly with one another through letters. Unbeknownst to them, they bicker throughout the day as co-workers. The idea's been reworked a thousand times and, by now, sounds as trite as "Three's Company" or "Saved By The Bell." Under the control of a master filmmaker like Lubitsch and his stellar cast, however, it works. In the greasy hands of Nora Ephron, it doesn't.

In Ephron's film, Tom Hanks plays the Jimmy Stewart role and Meg Ryan acts as Margaret Sullavan. Instead of being co-workers with personality conflicts they are business rivals. Tom Hanks plays Joe Fox, heir to the multigenerational Fox Books (think Barnes & Noble) empire, sired by Schuyler Fox (John Randolph) and made prosperous by Nelson Fox (Dabney Coleman in full 9TO 5 mode). Fox is set to open a new branch on the West Side of Manhattan where he's destined to crush the competition. That includes Meg Ryan as Kathleen Kelly, second-generation owner of the quaint children's bookstore, Shop Around The Corner, where she knows all of her customers by name, of course.

Meanwhile, the irony is that Fox and Kelly have begun an e-mail correspondence where they refuse to divulge any details about their personal life. Instead, they exercise their abilities to write effusive prose poems and pseudo-intellectual drivel about New York; each of them dishing it out and eating it up with a spoon, hungrily awaiting that next note. Oh, speak to me of bouquets of sharpened pencils!

Instead of referring to the characters as "Fox" and "Kelly," I might as well just call them "Hanks" and "Ryan" for it's a rare movie where these two actors break out of their traditional on-screen personas. Ryan continues playing her one-note kooky leading woman that she's perfected in *FRENCH KISS*, *WHEN HARRY MET SALLY*, *SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE* and *I.Q.*, who finds it necessary to deliver half of her dialogue with her eyes closed.

With the opening of Fox Books, if you can't see the "corporate America versus the little guy" theme coming, don't worry because Ephron will hit you over the head with it a few dozen times. Oddly enough, Ryan's character is the champion of all things corporate. Instead of going to a small indie coffee shop, she stands behind Hanks in line at Starbucks. Instead of signing up with a smaller internet service provider, she's a customer of the America Online behemoth. Instead of going to Film Forum or the Angelika, she's more at home at the Sony multiplex. When Ryan finally steps into Fox Books, she might as well say, "Gee whiz, corporate America isn't so evil after all. The clerks may need a little educating but the kids are happy." She looks as pleasant as the lobotomized McMurphy at the end of *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST*. (And, oh, how I'd love to put a pillow over her face.)

How can the audience sympathize with a character fighting "big business" while the director gives us no reason to find fault with any of it? Hanks may poke a bit of fun at Starbucks ("The whole purpose of places like Starbucks is for people with no decision making ability whatsoever to make six decisions just to buy one cup of coffee") but that doesn't stop him from getting his daily fix at the coffee shop that has come to symbolize the homogenization of America; an ideal that Ephron openly celebrates! Even after Shop Around The Corner folds, Ryan doesn't seem particularly upset with anything except, perhaps, frustration with Hanks' "I-told-you-so" attitude.

The "omniscient" Hanks has learned that it's Ryan to whom he's been writing and uses this knowledge to manipulate her. Do you hear that sound? Yes, it's the familiar sound of Nora Ephron pounding yet another nail into the coffin of Feminism.

In addition to supporting patriarchy, large commercial operations, and chain stores, Ephron also applauds technological gadgetry. Ryan's boyfriend, newspaper columnist Frank Navasky (Greg Kinnear) is a typewriter enthusiast who loathes computers ("Name me one thing—one!—that we've gained from technology!"). For this, he is chided as being a "weirdo" and compared to the technophobic Unabomber.

Oh, did I forget to mention that while Ryan and Hanks' letter writing is going on that they are both involved with other people? Jimmy Stewart and Margaret Sullavan were single in *SHOP AROUND THE CORNER* and I imagine Van Johnson and Judy Garland were as well in the first remake of Lubitsch's film, *IN THE GOOD OLD SUMMERTIME*. Ephron must have been focusing on the "shop around" aspect of the title as she continues to show her penchant for infidelity. Let this be a warning! If you're slightly odd or boring and going out with Meg Ryan, you might as well kiss your sweetie goodbye because someone—most likely Tom Hanks—is going to come and take her away.

There are no messy break-ups in *YOU'VE GOT MAIL*, however. Instead, we see the world's second mutual break-up (the first taking place on "Seinfeld") between Kinnear and Ryan. Meanwhile, Hanks' father is nonplussed when he visits his son after breaking up with his fiancée. It seems that along with the elimination of "mom & pop" stores, the disintegration of the nuclear family is to be rejoiced as well.

Ephron has been trying desperately for the last few years to recapture the success of *WHEN HARRY MET SALLY* (the poster art for *SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE* was nearly identical), but that was helmed by a *real* director, Rob Reiner (his recent work notwithstanding). The earlier film also had some believable conflict between the characters—cutesy Meg Ryan had a good counterpoint in acerbic Billy Crystal instead of the white-washed Tom Hanks (who replaces cynicism with whining).

More than *SHOP AROUND THE CORNER*, *YOU'VE GOT MAIL* takes cues from *WHEN HARRY MET SALLY*. Take, for example, the nearly identical scene in which Greg Kinnear meets Hanks' girlfriend Patricia Eden (Parker Posey) at a party. Like Jess (Bruno Kirby) in *WHEN HARRY MET SALLY*, Kinnear is flattered by Hanks' girlfriend, as she is familiar with his work. Posey doesn't go so far as to quote an article to Kinnear—as Marie (Carrie Fisher) did to Jess—but she comes damn close.

Parker Posey, Greg Kinnear, and all of the other members of the supporting cast such as Steve Zahn, Jean Stapleton, and Dave Chappelle are completely wasted in their roles. When they all disappear for the last act of the film, they aren't really missed.

Hanks and Ryan are meant for each other and for this film. Their characters and their letters are as lacking in substance as everything else in *YOU'VE GOT MAIL*. The film is without the wittiness and sharp dialogue of Lubitsch's work (except for the parts Ephron pilfered line by line) and leaves *YOU'VE GOT MAIL* as soulful as a Marvin Hamlisch tune and as deep as a coffee commercial. Instead of making *YOU'VE GOT MAIL* a 119-minute trailer for *SHOP AROUND THE CORNER*—as *SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE* was for *AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER*—it is more a pitch for Starbucks, AOL and the film's soundtrack (my speakers were in danger of blowing out when The Cranberries came on early in the film.)

Now the question becomes; what movie shall Nora Ephron malign next? Will someone stop her before she strikes again? Or, will she continue unhampered on her spree, destroying classic films of Hollywood's Golden Age by "modernizing" and cheapening them: robbing them of their souls and leaving vaporous trash in her wake? - MW

This review originally appeared in Crimewave U.S.A.



The above comic strip is the equivalent of "Japanese Dilbert." The lazy worker reads manga on the job. When confronted by his boss he claims that the work he is supposed to do is degrading and better suited to secretaries than to someone with his high degree of learning. His manager is unimpressed.

A CASE OF THE MONDAYS: OFFICE SPACE and the American Work Ethic

In the world of mindless, unrewarding office work, there are only two kinds of people—the ignorant and the miserable, and anyone with half a cortex and an ounce of self-worth soon finds themselves dragged, frustrated and broken, into the realm of the latter. Even more depressing than the misery itself, though, is the way in which employees are expected to casually accept their plight as a normal, unavoidable—even desirable—part of daily life. In the world of office drones (and, by association, the larger corporate America they reflect) it's fine to hate your job, and even bitch about it openly, as long as you continue to show up and do it. Despite popular opinion, the most threatening thing a person can do is not post cynical Dilbert cartoons around one's cubicle but, instead, it is to imply that there might be another, better way of life beyond the double glass doors. Mike Judge's *OFFICE SPACE* is the story of a group of guys who, for a while anyway, do just that.

Peter Gibbons (Ron Livingston) is a low-end software tech working on the Y2K bug (remember that?) at a faceless company called INITECH. He hates his job, not so much for what he actually does (or, more accurately, *pretends* to do) as for all the daily inanities he's forced to endure. There's the chirping drone of a secretary in the next cubicle, the possessed fax machine, the constant fear of unemployment, and a Kafkaesque, memo-obsessed cadre of middle managers, headed by the passive-aggressive Antichrist of a VP, Lumbergh (Gary Cole). Like most people at INITECH, Peter is unhappy. And, like most people, he doesn't do a damn thing about it.

All that changes, though, when a botched hypnotherapy session leaves him in a state of subconscious bliss. In the days that follow he ditches work, dumps his problem girlfriend, and devotes his time to sleeping, fishing, and watching "Kung-Fu" with his new love interest, Joanna (Jennifer Aniston), a waitress at one of the local "wacky" theme restaurants, Thotchke's. It's not that he's quitting his job, he explains to her. He's "just gonna stop going." Logic would dictate that such an attitude would quickly get him canned. But logic has no place in the office.

In a meeting with the new downsizing consultants, Peter does the unthinkable—he tells them how he really feels about his job—and is awarded with a promotion. He also finds out that his two fellow programmers, Michael (David Herman) and Samir (Ajay Naidu), are about to be fired. Faced with the dread of finding yet another crappy screen-staring gig, they reluctantly conspire with him to create a virus that will rip off the company (à la *SUPERMAN 3*) and make them independently wealthy. Of course the fail-proof plan immediately goes awry. And, unfortunately, *OFFICE SPACE* quickly goes down the tubes as well.

In all but the most well-crafted cases, comedies set up amazing scenarios full of decent characters and then don't seem to know where to go from there. Too often, an otherwise great idea gets lost in the panic to resolve it all, and the result is usually a much too tidy, obvious, sitcom-style ending. It's no surprise that, coming from the creator of "Beavis and Butthead" and "King of the Hill," *OFFICE SPACE* is weak in the story department but packed full of right-on characterizations and hilarious background details. Anyone who's done time in an office will smile knowingly at the little things—the sickly cheerful jokes about Mondays, the blatant insincerity of the team players, the "rewards" of Hawaiian Shirt Day, the politics of staplers and birthday cake.

Some of the images—a cubicle wall falling, the bludgeoning of a fax machine, keyboards engulfed in flames—are downright subversive. The gangsta rap soundtrack is a nice touch, given the nerd-as-wannabe-criminal theme (and Michael's tendency to spout rap lyrics even as he locks his car door at the sign of a black man). Judge does a good job of sending up (in a genuinely disdainful way) places that are too often taken for granted. He targets not just offices but the world around them as well; clogged freeways, thin-walled apartment complexes, and parking lots lined with identical prefab buildings. One of my favorite shots is simply of four guys trudging awkwardly across a grassy ditch on their way back from lunch—a testament to the basic inhumanity of the modern car-centric office park. Judge must be congratulated, too, for giving a rare nod to another, equally insane line of work—the blues-busting chain restaurant.

Unfortunately, having split suburbia wide open, the movie seems clueless as to what to make of it all, and crumbles. About his film's weak third act, Judge says, "I don't want to dog on my own movie, but the ending probably could have been better... there might have been something better I could have done with [it]. At the test screenings, [the film] was a little too close to home for some people. A lot of people are working in those jobs and that kind of an environment and they've accepted it, which is great, but I think some people were insulted by it."

Not only does the film's ending hand its audience the tired "all you need is love" Hollywood treatment, but—more dangerously—it ends up perpetuating the very "work sucks but we need the bucks" mentality that it originally set out to challenge. I know it's a comedy and, as such, I shouldn't expect Rossellini or Marx. But if there's a real disappointment here, it's in *OFFICE SPACE*'s ability to set up a fresh, merciless attack on a much-deserving (and sadly under-skewed) subject, only to retreat, like its characters, into the same old shitty routines.

Leon Chase is a longtime corporate vassal and author of Temp!, a musical comedy about disgruntled office employees. This entire review was written at work, on company time. Quotes from Mike Judge come courtesy of Andrew Rausch.

What was it like for the people of Germany to lose two major wars within the first half of the century? How does one think about one's former leader when one's country has unconditionally surrendered? And when stories arise that one's leader is responsible for the systematic destruction of millions of Jews? Did the people of Germany suddenly wake as if from a dream? Or, do they sleep still?

WHERE IS MEMORY (dir. Christopher Gallagher)

Some people—not necessarily Germans—feel that it's too early to judge Adolph Hitler. Has he been a victim of vilification? Will history ultimately be kind to the fallen leader? Do these people reject the traditional historical view of Hitler because they want to distance themselves from the hatred? Or, do they do it in order to keep themselves from being viewed as sheep? How could they have followed this man? Do they ask this groggily, clutching their head as it throbs the morning after? Do they sleep with a clear conscience? Or, do they thrash in their beds every night, haunted by visions of wartime atrocities?

Christopher Gallagher's *WHERE IS MEMORY* poses these questions and employs a lone character, The Sleepwalker (Peter Loeffler), as an investigatory agent. The Sleepwalker receives a case from a mysterious stranger who stays hidden behind shadowy glass. Inside is a bewildering array of wartime memorabilia, all of it marked with a strange insignia. What are these things? Where do they come from? Who are the people who created them? That is the mystery the Sleepwalker feels he must unravel. He is without memory, having no knowledge of the past, including Adolph Hitler.

He is aided in his search by a camera. He considers it the perfect witness to history. By looking through the viewfinder, he gains access to what the camera once "saw." He travels Germany seeing the past through his camera, witnessing the objectified images that passed through the lens. Likewise, we the viewer are made privy to the world of the past through filmmaker Christopher Gallagher's wonderful intercutting of modern and archival footage; often switching from a shot of a location as it existed in the '30s and '40s to current conditions. The lines between eras often blur for the Sleepwalker—he begins to live in and communicate with the phantoms that seem to haunt the fatherland.

While cameras aren't responsible for memories, they help shape our perception of the past. Likewise, time alters these perceptions, especially in its effect on the geography. More than showing the ravages of war, *WHERE IS MEMORY* demonstrates the alterations of peace. Gone are the offensive symbols of the Third Reich; the swastikas that decorated public buildings. Or, if they've not been destroyed or taken away, at least they've been covered with a thin veneer of plaster.

In his search for the past, the Sleepwalker tries to get information from the current residents of Germany. These interviews are insightful and highly varied in tone. From the haunted recollections of a disfigured fighter pilot to the dogmatic revisionism of a British soldier, the Sleepwalker listens patiently between his probing questions. Through this even-handed, respectful approach to the material, *WHERE IS MEMORY* could be seen as being noncommittal. Instead, it should be considered as an objective document of the Nazi war machine—one not comprised of metal tanks and bombers or stone and marble statues but of the flesh and blood people who survived the war and their progeny.

One highly telling interchange has The Sleepwalker conversing with a man who was a member of one of Der Führer's youth brigades. The man speaks of his teenage years with a mix of shame and pride. The gleam of youthful enthusiasm still shines in his eyes but the man cannot permit himself to admit that he is proud of his accomplishments; he must disown all that defined his development. The Sleepwalker, in his staunch white coat shows neither sanction nor disapproval—he is the embodiment of *tabula rosa*. Like the angels in Wim Wenders' *WINGS OF DESIRE*, he is present as a witness to the man's words, to record them without judgement.

WHERE IS MEMORY has a slow, determined pace, appropriate for the somnambulist's search for history. Accompanied with appropriate Wagnerian pieces and a creepy score by Dennis Burke, Christopher Gallagher's film is an innovative experimental documentary that succeeds in its quest to consider the meaning and fluidity of memory.

An appropriate companion piece to *WHERE IS MEMORY* is Peter Cohen's

ARCHITECTURE OF DOOM. Both deal quite a lot in the monumental aspects of the Third Reich such as the massive statues and public displays of the Nazi Party. However, whereas Gallagher's film is a narrative-documentary hybrid, Cohen's is strictly non-fictional. Cohen's approach to his film is the demonstration of how the Nazism was influenced by artistic backgrounds of its core members. Indeed, to listen to the rhetoric of the Third Reich is to hear about a Utopian society of purity, which uses the arts as an intermediary to this goal.

Sculpture, literature, painting, and architecture were all employed in the massive campaign of propaganda put forth by those in charge. One could say that propaganda became Hitler's outlet for his foiled artistic ambitions. Often he designed banners and standards himself. He provided preliminary sketches for new, grand buildings. With a nod to his love of Wagner, Hitler staged Nazi rallies as grand operatic events.

Cohen's film introduces its audience to the sinister side of Hitler's vision early on. To achieve the purity that is so valued by the Third Reich, there must be sacrifice. That includes the elimination not only of "degenerate" art (*Entartete Kunst*) but also of "undesirable" and "unproductive" members of society. Cohen presents "studies" which juxtaposed physically deformed people with the impressionistic works of the day. These were meant to clearly demonstrate the ties between the degeneration of the German corpus and culture. Eventually, Jews would be fingered as the instigators of this art that brought about "spiritual and intellectual depravity."

ARCHITECTURE OF DOOM runs the risk, at times, of not doing enough to deter positive impressions of Nazism. The idealism is presented without dissent. Much of this comes from Cohen's over-reliance on presenting propaganda films without counterpoint. Intercutting *THE ETERNAL JEW* with *WAR IN MINIATURE* (a film about the problem of vermin) demonstrates all-too-well the point that the Nazis were attempting to get across and that is dangerous. Cohen relies more on the assumed abhorrence of Hitler than competent filmmaking. He dawdles far too long to draw back the curtain and show his audience the extremes of Nazism as an "artistic movement."

Eventually, Cohen harvests the seeds planted earlier in the film. The combination of the need to purify the German folk along with experiments in euthanasia and an avid love of building are demonstrated to be the major pillars that supported the Final Solution. As the tide turned in World War II and Germany began losing, the Nazis provided the image of an enemy that could be conquered, the Jews. Sketches of triumphant arches became blueprints of death camps. Pest control products were implemented on human subjects. Innocents were now enemies and beauty was said to be achievable through violence.

Though lagging in the middle section of the film with tedious recollections of annual art openings, *ARCHITECTURE OF DOOM* provides yet another piece in the puzzle of the German mindset.



ARCHITECTURE OF DOOM is available from First Run Features (www.firstrunfeatures.com). *WHERE IS MEMORY* is available via The Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Center (www.cfmcd.org).

A NIGHT OF MÄRCHENFILME (dir. Lisa Hammer)

Welcome to the Elaborate Empire of Ache. Herein there are no words. There is no color. Everything you see hides behind the dust, scratches, and grain of the ages. Images flicker along to pulsating rhythms. There is nothing natural here. Movement is stilted, slowed, or speeded. Shadows abound and eye make-up is plentiful. This empire of ache originates from the cinema primeval, an extension of early experiments in expressionism. This is filmmaking capable of evoking a visceral response to the seemingly simple oneiric monochrome images and overtly complex soundtrack. These are sights and sounds that don't belong to the world. These are visions that remain on the periphery of conventional modern narrative. They have been summoned out of the darkness by the talented Lisa Hammer and the members of her Blessed Elysium Moving Film Company, submitted for your approval in A NIGHT OF MÄRCHENFILME.

A collection Hammer's films spanning 1987-96, A NIGHT OF MÄRCHENFILME is presented as a night out at the cinema complete with public service announcements stating the rules of the theater (and the severe consequences of breaking them). Also included is a preview for "Not Farewell Sweet Flesh," the only full-color piece to be seen on MÄRCHENFILME. The look of the piece is reminiscent of Italian horror films, complete with over-dubbing that sounds as if it's come from some third-party preview. The rest of the films can best be described as beautifully rendered, nightmarish fables.

The real stand-out of the collection is "(The Elaborate) Empire of Ache" which has less Maya Deren and more Robert Weine. The outlandish costumes, askew sets, chiaroscuro lighting and multi-layered music cohere to create an unsettling fantasy world.

This video is available from www.insound.com. For more information visit www.morssyphilitica.com.



DOOMED PLANET (dir. Alex R. Mayer)

This had disaster written all over it—and I don't mean that the plot of DOOMED PLANET revolves around apocalyptic cults. Not only does it carry the stigma of being shot on digital video, bear the weight of being a feature-length film, and sport an ensemble cast; DOOMED PLANET is a comedy—the hardest genre to do right and the easiest to screw-up. But, lo, every ounce of ambition (and there's an abundance) is repaid tenfold to this hilariously perverse movie.

A send up of everything from cable access production values to the insidiousness of Microsoft, DOOMED PLANET is a hyper-kinetic trip through the underworld of Seattle prolific cult scene. The movie documents the battle for membership between the Cult of Eternal Consciousness the Sad Flower Cult and the eponymous Doomed Planet cult through small vignettes, bestowing the impression of late night psychotic channel surfing. With guest appearances by Charles Manson and Jerry Garcia, DOOMED PLANET is an experimental work rife with deadly frisbees and ironic disemboweling scenes.

With a well-constructed plot that humour that only gets better with repeated viewings, DOOMED PLANET is a millennial hoot! For more info check out www.doomedplanet.com.

THE TARGET SHOOTS FIRST (dir. Christopher Wilcha)

This amazing High-8 video documentary revolves around Chris Wilcha's first job out of college. Armed with a degree in philosophy, the well-spoken Wilcha scores a spot in the marketing department at Columbia House—the oldest and largest CD/cassette mail order company in America. More than experience, Wilcha gives the impression that he managed to gain employment based on his knowledge of so-called "alternative music." The year was 1993 and while Nirvana's smash album, *Nevermind*, may have been out for a few years, the alternative crowd had not yet been properly marketed to and exploited by "The Man." Wilcha soon finds that it's his dubious honor to aid his employers in this task. Smells like a new demographic.

Wilcha not only gives insight into the inner-workings of Columbia House as a business (no one seems to mind his constant camera), but THE TARGET SHOOTS FIRST also serves to highlight the apparently universal conditions of office politics and interdepartmental strife. At Columbia House, the division between the creative promotional department (consisting of graphic artists, copywriters, etc) and the managerial marketing staff (of which Wilcha is a member) is not only mental but physical as well. The rift between the two is demonstrated in the promotions department being housed on the 17th floor while the marketing department works above on the 19th. Is the creative staff composed of carefree slackers or do they get easily bent out-of-shape about company policy and ergonomically inferior working conditions?

Instead of making an unfocused scattershot piece about corporate life, marketing techniques or introspection about Punk Rock™ values, Wilcha balances all these ideas and brings them all into play when he is asked to create an alternative music magazine to allow Columbia House to capitalize on this "new" music niche. Gathering a handful of folks from the 17th floor, Wilcha and his team strive to do away with the differences in titles and responsibilities as they spawn an irreverent magalog that shows a true passion for the music selections within. But, will Columbia House allow such a product to exist?

Told in a linear style, THE TARGET SHOOTS FIRST moves at a good pace, never getting dull even when Wilcha documents his boredom at endless meetings. The editing is remarkable and even garnered a special award of recognition at the 1999 Slamdance festival. The story is moved along, too, through the well-written voice-over narration. Beautifully shot, the compositions are often a feast for the eyes and the video quality is remarkable. The image is as sharp as documentary is poignant—no mushy colors or half-baked ideas.

THE TARGET SHOOTS FIRST is available through www.insound.com.

N.Y.H.C. (dir. Frank Pavitch)

I remember wasting hours of my teen years in my parents' basement watching *URGH! A MUSIC WAR*, *ANOTHER STATE OF MIND*, and *THE DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION (Part One)*—the triumvirate of Punk Rock documentaries. Yet, even then I realized just how ridiculous some of the folks in the "punk scene" could be. There was the vacuous skater dude in *ASOM* who'd change his hair color at the drop of a hat or the overly-serious pre-pubescent kid in *DOWC* who induced laughter from my friends and me whenever he was on screen.

Following well in the footsteps of *THE DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION* is Frank Pavich's *N.Y.H.C.*, a look at the "hard core" scene in New York in the late nineties. The first question that the film tries to tackle is the definition of "hardcore." Is it a type of music? A lifestyle? Neither or both? I've always thought of "punk" as both music and a lifestyle (albeit a way of living that need not be ascribed to in order to enjoy the music!). Meanwhile, judging from the incredibly diverse group of people involved in hard core and their divergent viewpoints, I'd have to say that hard core is more about power chords than politics; more about piercings (and tattoos!) than perceptions.

N.Y.H.C. is rife with embarrassing interviews with the mush-mouthed lead singers of several hardcore groups. While these guys appear to think that they're spouting poetry and liberating the minds of the faithful, all I can hear as an "out of touch old dude" is a lot of good music competing with badly done vocals. In order to give a sense of "community," the singers in a lot of these hard core bands often turn over their microphones to fans in the front row and let them croon a bar or two. Ironically, I found all of the fans to be much more competent and comprehensible singers than the guttural fulminations of the "real singers." Luckily, as with *ANOTHER STATE OF MIND*, the songs are often presented with subtitles in order to allow the clueless a bit of lyrical insight.

Hardcore rose out of the ashes of some of the bands in the aforementioned films; Black Flag, The Misfits, Minor Threat, et al. It traveled along the same musical route as groups like The Exploited and G.B.H. and crossed paths with offshoots of heavy/death/speed metal such as Morbid Angel and Sceptultura. The end result sounds very much like old punk with heavier guitars and barking vocals.

There have been a few bands like Agnostic Front and the Cro-Mags who have weathered the years and made the slight move from punk to hardcore successfully, though not without a struggle. Hardcore is not to be confused with "straight edge," which is more of a lifestyle than a musical genre. As testified by a member of the Cro-Mags, drug use among hardcore fans and groups is widespread.

Pavich's documentary is well made in that it's technically competent and the subject matter is inherently interesting as it presents a subculture that is not highly visible or recognized. However, it's the subjects themselves—the bands—that are tiresome; their music and their boisterous swaggering. The film is as claustrophobic as a mosh pit. Perhaps this is intentional in order to demonstrate the hardcore scene as being tightly-knit. Instead, everything seems to run together and the film becomes as sensually assaulting as the one-note music played during countless concert sequence.

At a little under an hour and a half, *N.Y.H.C.* seems to go on forever—even when viewed while fast forwarding. *N.Y.H.C.* is available from Velebit Productions (www.velebitpro.com)

THE WILD WORLD OF HASIL ADKINS (dir. Julien Nitzberg 1993)

A friend of mine first turned me on to Hasil Adkins from West Virginia who claimed she had seen him play live many a time in and around Charleston. She spun fantastic tales about this musician drinking out of a big jug of cheap wine throughout his show; his words and guitar slurring more and more as the night progressed. She even told me that on one of Hasil's albums (that he recorded in his shack back up in the hills of Boone County) you can actually hear "The Haze" getting increasingly hazy. The result, she claimed was that Hasil did an alternate version of his song "I Need Your Head" as "No More Hot Dogs." I don't know how much, if any, of the aforementioned is true but I always think of those stories when I listen to the music of Hasil Adkins, the One Man Band and creator of The Hunch.

If you've not heard of Hasil Adkins, don't fret. While he does have quite a loyal following among rockabilly cats and connoisseurs of offbeat music, Hasil never got his big break. According to Hasil, he missed his chance at fame by just a few hours, leaving California and a troop of eager talent scouts on the night before opportunity came knocking at his door. Instead of being the next Elvis Presley, Hasil didn't even become the next Carl Perkins. Hell, even no-talent Hank Williams, Junior(!) gets more respect among country music fans.

His talent fermenting in the back woods of West Virginia like moonshine in a rusty still, Hasil began producing his own music. Often it'd be just him, his guitar, his bass drum and high hat, and maybe a female companion or two recording a track onto a cardboard record. And, truth be told, his career didn't get much more glamorous than that.

Hasil is not a slick Nashville recording artist. His music is raw, unvarnished. His songs usually consist of one or two chords with solos so primitive they would make Neil Young jealous in their simplicity. The music is frequently interchangeable from song to song and the lyrics usually border on being overly repetitive if not incomprehensible. But, when singing a song with a refrain of "punchy wunchy wicky wacky woo," one never doubts Hasil's boundless creativity.

Showing the viewer Hasil's polka-dotted abode, ardent fans, and awe-struck county litigators, director Julien Nitzberg helps to shed some light on an eccentric man that many folks consider a national institution. Running at a mere twenty-three minutes, Nitzberg doesn't allow Hasil to outstay his welcome while packing the documentary with interviews and performances. Luckily, there's no "fish out of water" subplot or ham-handed theatrics. *THE WILD WORLD OF HASIL ADKINS* is as genuine as its subject.

Looking at Nitzberg's other work; it would seem that the Appalachians are rife with oddball talents. Nitzberg produced *DANCING OUTLAW*, the story of mountain dancer Jessco White (see CdC #8) while on hiatus from his project with Hasil (due to "The Haze" having a bit of a nervous breakdown after a coffee and bourbon bender). Recently, Nitzberg directed *BURY ME IN KERN COUNTY* (see CdC #10) where he again demonstrated his ability to portray characters that might be considered "trailer trash" without exploiting or demeaning them.

Hasil's records can be purchased from finer record stores across the country or purchase them from Crypt Records (www.crypt.de).
Nitzberg's video is available at www.appalshop.org

hasil wearing some interesting headgear



THE GREMLINS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN

Joe Dante's GREMLINS is one of the most consistently entertaining films of the 1980s. It's a perfect blend of horror and comedy with the added bonus of countless in-jokes for movie fans. However, what most people don't realize is that GREMLINS was originally intended to be a straight-out horror film. GREMLINS' screenwriter, Chris Columbus was urged by Dante along with Executive Producer Steven Spielberg to eliminate some of the darker aspects of the film and punch up the too-subtle humor in early drafts of the script. It took Columbus *eight drafts* until he presented a script upon which all parties agreed. The result was the GREMLINS that audiences are familiar with today.

But what of its precursors? I was recently able to get my hands on the second draft of GREMLINS, and it offers a view of a much different, and ultimately much less entertaining film.

This screenplay opens with Rand Peltzer (here a businessman instead of the Ron Popeil, gone-wrong inventor from the finished film) looking for a gift for his son Billy. A wizened Asian shopkeeper sells him an intriguing pet called "Mogwai." The man instructs Peltzer to be sure to keep the mogwai out of bright light, as it would kill the animal. On the return flight to his town of Kingston Falls, PA, Peltzer asks an Asian stewardess if she knows what "mogwai" means. She informs him that the word translates as "devil." Roll credits.

Meet Billy Petlzer. In this early draft, Peltzer is the stereotypical geek down to the wire-framed glasses. Billy is an aspiring writer who dreams of penning tales about King Arthur while working a dead end job at the local bank. Here Billy pines for his co-worker, Tracy Allen (name changed to Kate Beringer in the completed film). Unfortunately, the security guard of the bank is Gary Lucia—Tracy's semi-boyfriend and all-around jackass.

Billy is pals with Pete Fountane, a local teen who shares many of the same interests. The two often visit with Dorry Dougal, a local antique proprietor who has custom made a sword for Billy. Back at the Peltzer household, we discover that Billy's mom, Lynn, is the extremely nervous type who enjoys popping Valium every two minutes. With the character set up and exposition out of the way, the story begins.

Rand returns from his trip and gives Billy the unusual gift of Mogwai (at no point in the film is it referred to by any other name). Billy instantly dislikes the cute creature and he'd rather not be bothered with it. After mogwai knocks over Billy's precious new sword and damages it, Billy is so enraged that he actually considers killing the creature. Instead, he inexplicably becomes sympathetic to it.

Soon enough water is spilled on Mogwai and it spawns several more creatures. Pete expresses a great interest in adopting one of the new mogwai and Rand immediately sees them as a great money making idea. There's only one problem: the mogwai hate to be separated.

Enter Roy Hanson—Billy's biology teacher—to examine the creatures. Hanson discovers that the creatures are drawn to water and if one is separated from the group, the others will follow. (Can you smell the foreshadowing?) Later that night, while the Peltzers sleep, the mogwai move downstairs and eat Billy's dog! Rand grabs all the mogwai and locks them in the sealed attic, planning to release them into the morning daylight to destroy them. When the Peltzers awaken, they discover that the mogwai have undergone a transformation, and are in cocoons. Rand has to go away on a business trip, and the family unrealistically decides to wait until he returns to remove the cocoons from the house.

As Billy heads for work, his mother stays at home preparing for Christmas. At the bank, Billy receives a panicked phone call from his mother. The cocoons have hatched! By the time Billy gets home, however, Lynn Peltzer

CHRIS CUMMINS LOOKS AT AN EARLY DRAFT OF AN '80S FAVORITE

has been fatally attacked by the mogwai, who have now transformed into the monstrous gremlins we all know and love. Billy grabs his sword and proceeds to behead, blend, and microwave the creatures. He is wounded in the attack and when he tries to call the sheriff a gremlin pulls the phone wire from the wall. Billy pierces the creature's arm with his sword. When the gremlin escapes, Billy pursues.

Meanwhile, Billy's friend Pete is Christmas caroling with a group of teens. Pete stands at the back of the line of singers and is pulled away and killed by the gremlin. His cries aren't heard over the festive singing. A pissed-off Billy chases the gremlin into the local YMCA where a battle ensues. During the scuffle, Billy and the creature stumble and fall into the pool. The water instantly causes the gremlin to multiply. Billy flees the scene and runs to the sheriff's office.

Billy tells his story to Sheriff Frank Lucia as well as Officer Brent. They don't believe a word of it, but eventually the sheriff relents. At the Y, Officer Brent leaves Billy handcuffed in the police cruiser before going in to investigate. Officer Brent is soon overcome by gremlins. The creatures spy the cuffed Billy who, luckily, has his sword with him! He cuts himself free from his cuffs and rushes to Tracy's home, which is under siege by the murderous gremlins.

After they escape, they discover Gary Lucia in an overturned police car. Gary had gone with his Dad, Sheriff Lucia, when Frank was attacked by a gremlin and lost control of the vehicle. Billy rescues Gary from the car, but it's too late for Frank. By now, the gremlins are taking over the town, eating everyone in sight. Tracy, Billy, and Gary drive to Dorry's antiques store on the outskirts of the town. Billy predicts that the creatures will head to the nearby water tower. "If they get to the water tower...they could spread all over the state...maybe the country. They're like inhuman divining rods," Billy surmises.

Steven Spielberg would be too politically correct to produce this film today. Want proof? Witness the kid in E.T. who says he is dressed as a terrorist for Halloween. I always thought that an intelligent line, which really represented the era in which the film was made. However, Spielberg now feels it is an insensitive line and has since had it removed from the film.



Gary irrationally blames Billy for the death of the entire town and they fight until Tracy breaks it up. Billy, Tracy, Gary, and Dorry (sounds like a troupe of Mouseketeers) hide in Dorry's antiques shop, hatching an ill-conceived plan to call the authorities to stop the gremlins from reaching the water tower. As dawn approaches, the gremlins leave, fearing the impending sunlight.

Now daylight, the group heads outside in search of rations. In a ringing endorsement for McDonald's, the group discovers that all the customers at the popular fast food joint have been eaten while the food remains untouched. This is perhaps the cleverest scene in this draft, and it would have been nice to see it in the completed film.

Tracy realizes the gremlins are hiding in the town's old movie theater. As in the completed film, the group tries to blow up the theater. Tracy turns on the projector, which shows SNOW WHITE, to distract the creatures. When the reel ends, the gremlins hear the four do-gooders and begin to chase after them. Gary panics and leaves the others behind. The rampaging gang of gremlins kills Dorry. Billy and Tracy are able to get outside just before the building explodes. Unfortunately, the sprinkler system comes on soon afterwards.

Billy and Tracy find Gary. Billy and Gary start fighting over Gary's cowardice. Gary goes nuts and grabs Billy's sword. But, before he can impale the geeky protagonist, Gary is fortuitously attacked by gremlins. Billy and Tracy get into the police car and escape, only to discover a gremlin on the back seat.[†] Driving away, the creature begins screeching due to separation anxiety. Low on fuel, and Billy stops at a gas station where the gremlin escapes. It climbs into the engine and renders the car useless. Tracy and Billy eventually find the pesky critter and lock him in a toolbox. As the pack of angry gremlins approaches, Billy and Tracy decide to hide in a nearby greenhouse.

Billy puts the imprisoned gremlin on a table and sees the group of monsters right outside. Billy and Tracy climb a high tree where Billy fights the oncoming gremlins with his sword. The creatures surround the tree, eating away at the trunk until it's knocked to the ground! Billy and Tracy are nearly killed by the impending mass of former-mogwai when the sun comes up and melts all the creatures into nothing. After Billy and Tracy make their way out of the greenhouse "they look out over Kingston Falls. Now a ghost town."

Exhausted, Billy collapses and wakes up in the hospital. Rand Peltzer has returned from his business trip and sits at Billy's side. Tracy is in the hospital as well. They will both survive. Billy suddenly remembers about the gremlin locked in the toolbox at the greenhouse.

Cut to a worker cleaning up the sticky mess at the greenhouse. As he leaves, he picks up the toolbox and takes it in his truck. Driving away, the toolbox starts shaking, and noises come from within. The worker throws it out his window, and it lands in a lake. As it sinks to the bottom of the lake, the sound of giggling gremlin can be heard as the credits roll.

Had this earlier draft been made, it wouldn't have been much more than just another standard horror film. While reading this draft, I recalled all of the post-GREMLINS knockoffs like GHOULIES and CRITTERS. The script is rife with pat action scenes and characters lacking clear definition. Rand is simply after money, Lynn loves her Valium, Gary is an asshole, etc. Furthermore, Billy never comes off as a sympathetic character. One doesn't feel an attachment to anyone, and therefore it doesn't really mean anything when characters die. Furthermore, when Gary becomes murderous towards Billy, it seems especially forced and unnecessary. The script follows a simple formula of Billy repeatedly making narrow escapes from the gremlins. This was beginning to tire me upon reading the script, and I'm sure that if it were filmed it would have been the same way.

The most important aspect missing from the early draft is the offbeat humor that the completed film provides. For example, take the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Futterman as portrayed by the incredible Dick Miller and Jackie Joseph (who first worked together on the original LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS). The Futtermans are the perfect comic relief after the film's scenes of surprisingly intense violence. Also sadly missed are the great invention gags from the completed film. (I would love to own a Rand Peltzer Bathroom Buddy!)

Likewise, in the bar scene where Kate Beringer (Phoebe Cates) is forced

to serve drinks for the gremlins, there was only a brief description of that scene in the finished script. During production, Joe Dante and his crew created a list of visual gags resulting in a visual barrage of strange and hysterical images—gremlins playing poker, a breakdancing gremlin, a mugger gremlin, a flasher gremlin, etc. It is a testament to the genius of Dante to take written lines and expand on them in such an interesting way for the screen.

One of the most interesting subtexts in GREMLINS is how deceiving appearances can be. Gizmo is just about the most lovable creature ever conceived, but he is essentially responsible for the destruction of a town. He may look harmless, but the terror he can cause is unimaginable. I was always fascinated about how GREMLINS was marketed towards kids. However, in a subversive twist, it is an incredibly dark comic film. While it is always interesting to compare a rough draft to a completed film, in the case of GREMLINS, the rewrites drastically aided in helping to strengthen it into a contemporary classic.

[†]As one knows from the wisdom of David DeCoteau's SORORITY GIRLS AT THE SLIMEBALL BOWL-O-RAMA, a monster in the back seat is "the oldest trick in the book."

WATCH YOUR GIZMO



Over the holiday season, I had a temporary lapse of sanity and I purchased the new Interactive Gizmo from Tiger Electronics. (Let me just jump in here and defend myself by stating two things: I am a toy collector. I am also a sucker for GREMLINS merchandise. I still hope they will bring back that tasty cereal based on the film. Mmm Gizmo-s). Anyway, once you realize that the toy looks and sounds nothing like Gizmo from GREMLINS, it dawns on you that it is actually incredibly annoying. The box proudly proclaims that the toy contains the actual voice of Gizmo. However, upon hearing the thing talk, you discover that it sounds almost but not quite, entirely unlike Gizmo from the movies. The Interactive Gizmo came about as a result of a lawsuit settlement between Warner Brothers and Tiger. Warner Brothers sued because of the similarity in appearance of Tiger's inexplicably popular Furby toy with our beloved Gizmo. So, it really shouldn't have come as much of a surprise that Gizmo is really a Furby in Mogwai's clothing. At no point does Gizmo actually say any dialogue that he uses in the two GREMLINS films. Instead, he spurts out little nuggets of wisdom such as "You da bomb!" and even (GASP!) says "Yeah Baby!" ala Austin Powers. If you are really lucky, maybe he will hum a few bars of something that sounds like "Strangers in the Night" (so there's another potential lawsuit). This toy is almost worth it for a very fun feature — if you put your hand over its mouth, it will make a very nice screaming sound. It is as if he is begging you for his furry, marketable life. He will then close his eyes and seem to go to Mogwai heaven. Maybe if it could repeat some of the profanity that I was using around it, it would be worth the money. But alas, no such luck. Maybe I will reenact my favorite scene from GREMLINS, and cook the little bastard in my microwave.

- Chris Cummins

THE CHASE IS ON

I grew up on chase movies. CONVOY, SMOKEY & THE BANDIT, CANNONBALL RUN—I loved them all. More than any other decade, the 1970s were the heyday of car chase films. Highways connected the forty-eight continental United States allowing folks to tear ass from just about any place in the U.S. to any place else. It gave Americans a sense of freedom. If they didn't like some place, they could hop in a car and move on—and often at speeds that exceeded posted limits.

In the early seventies, women were cheap and gas was cheaper. A man and his machine could meld and venture into the heart of America, blaring some bitchin' tunes and seeing some bizarre sights. If the last few sentences had the ring of some cheesy tag lines, it's intentional because all of that malarkey would feed the imaginations of countless filmmakers.

Certainly, Tod Stiles and Buz Murdock's adventures along "Route 66" in the early sixties exemplified that "Wagon Train" pioneer spirit but the fine era of car chase films most likely was spurred on by EASY RIDER. Yeah, Billy and Captain America rode motorcycles and weren't on the run from anything except people hassling them, but they were free, man.

I'm not going to pass this off as any sort of definitive expose on car chase movies. I could dedicate an entire issue to that and not even come close. I just got on a kick for a while of watching some movies that all had a similar theme—guys in cars, driving fast and on the run from cops, other guys, or themselves. Also, with shit like BLUES BROTHERS 2000 and the upcoming remake of GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS (see below) trying to reclaim the glory days of car chases, it's good to look back at some other failures (and a few successes) in an era of speed.

NO ONE'S FASTER THEN CRAZY LARRY... EXCEPT DIRTY MARY!

Peter Fonda didn't abandon his wheels after being blown away in EASY RIDER. Instead, he tried his luck at souped-up cars and Winnebagos. I couldn't stomach a second viewing of RACE WITH THE DEVIL in which a killer cast (Fonda, Warren Oates, Loretta Swit) in a recreational vehicle are on the run from ever-present disciples of Satan. If I'm going to see folks on the run from devil worshippers, I'll just watch SATAN'S CHEERLEADERS again. Instead, I went for John Hough's screen adaptation of *The Chase* by Richard Unekis, DIRTY MARY CRAZY LARRY.

Early in the film I was reminded of Tim Roth's monologue at the beginning of PULP FICTION where he discussed a bloke who pulled off a robbery using a telephone. He just simply walked into a bank and said that there was a kid on the other end who was going to be killed by some really mean guys if the teller didn't give him the appropriate amount of cash. This story could have very well be true but, more likely, it was an interpretation of the beginning of DIRTY MARY CRAZY LARRY in which Larry (Peter Fonda) pays a visit to grocery manager George Stanton (Roddy McDowall) while his partner, Deke (Adam Roarke), holds Stanton's wife and kid hostage at home.

The unique robbery goes off without a hitch until Larry comes back to his getaway vehicle only to find Mary (Susan George)—the twist he boffed earlier that morning—waiting for him. From that moment on Larry and Mary begin their volatile relationship, fighting like cats and dogs and constantly spouting crude and goofy dialogue at each other—lines like "I'm going to break every bone in her crotch!"; "Will you stop calling me dingleberry!"; "How 'bout that... Supercrotch here goes to the big city and right away she gets glib.";

"Unload! Kiss off!"; and "I'm gonna braid your tits!"

Fonda plays Larry with a spacey indifference, living only for speed. While trying to be a perky screwball, George comes off as perpetually obnoxious and sports choppers so unruly that Patricia Arquette, Jane March and Ba Ba Booney would be amazed.

After picking up Deke—sullen mechanic and former alcoholic—the chase is on. Larry drives like a madman while the cops are usually three or more steps behind, despite expert direction by loose cannon Captain Franklin (Vic Morrow—who ironically spends 90% of his screentime in a helicopter), an unconventional cop who doesn't carry a gun or badge. Franklin figures out that Larry's on his way to the Walnut Grove, a confused maze of roads and thick tree-cover, perfect for hiding from land and air pursuit.

Tensions mount as the three outlaws hide in their "briar patch," driving aimlessly and narrowly avoiding their pursuers. It's usually during scenes like this that the audience is let in on the character's real motivations, that they drop pretenses and give us their background and/or dreams. We might even get some understanding as to why this chase is so personal to Captain Franklin. Oddly, though, we never get any of this information. The characters are allowed to keep to themselves—even when Franklin and Larry make radio contact there's little interaction and a bare minimum of psychological warfare. This, coupled with one of the best endings I've seen since DEATH GAME make DIRTY MARY CRAZY LARRY a fun, albeit quirky chase film.

HIS BUSINESS IS STEALING CARS... WHEN HE GOES TO WORK THE EXCITEMENT STARTS—AND GOES—AND GOES!

Written, directed, starring, and produced by H.B. Halicki, 1974's GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS is the story of Maindrian Pace of Chase Research, insurance agent by day, expert car thief and wearer of bad wigs by night. Okay, he wears bad wigs during the day too. In fact, Pace could easily be mistaken for one of the Beastie Boys in Spike Jonze's "Sabotage" video ("Guest Starring Sir Stewart Wallace as Himself"). Pace and his crew are under a deadline; they've got fifty cars to steal within a week to make good on a contract with a South American baddie with a terrible accent.

Pace has an odd habit of referring to cars by women's names. He steals four Hillarys, three Patricias, three Natalies, et cetera. Yet, the car that's giving him the most trouble is Eleanor, a yellow '73 Mustang Fastback. Pace steals several Eleanors but keeps having to replace them after various mishaps such as when he finds that one Eleanor is not insured. This is an attempt to show that Maindrian's got a conscience - he doesn't want the owners to have to pay to replace their stolen vehicles. (Yeah! Bilk the insurance companies for all they've got!) Yet, later he doesn't seem to give a shit about any of the folks who get hurt when he's being pursued by the police.

Everything's going pretty good for Pace until one of his crew heists a drug-laden car that could have doubled for the ride in THE FRENCH CONNECTION. Eugene, one of his fellow car thieves gets edgy, wanting to sell the heroin in the car and become a millionaire. Pace will have none of it, however, and torches the drugs and the car. In spite, Eugene tips off the cops to Pace's next attempted Eleanor robbery. A chase ensues, and what a chase it is! At times, it gets as dull as O.J.'s pursuit while at others it's nearly as fun in its excess as THE BLUES BROTHERS.

Much like Peter Yates' BULLITT, if it wasn't for the car chase this film wouldn't

have anything going for it. Horribly acted and terribly shot, most of the dialogue is delivered as voice-over narration to save money. One scene takes place at Eugene's wedding—an obvious opportunity for Halicki to try to turn reception footage into a feature film (perhaps with this he inspired the first half of Michael Cimino's *THE DEER HUNTER*).

IT'S GRAND THEFT ENTERTAINMENT!

"Why remake a classic? Is nothing sacred?" Increasingly those words are shouted by cinephiles as they shake their tiny fists at the overbearing behemoth of Hollywood commercialism, expressing their umbrage. I've been right there with them, yelling my head off about *KISS OF DEATH*, *PSYCHO*, *SHOP AROUND THE CORNER*, and *PLANET OF THE APES*. But Dominic Sena's *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS* is likely to present a problem with the idea that original films are better...in this case *both* films are likely to suck.

Written by Scott Rosenberg (with a rumoured polish by Jonathon Hensleigh), the new *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS* is sure to be a bloated, overindulgent, mess of a film. But that's nothing new for a Jerry Bruckheimer production. Filled to the brim with characters as Rosenberg is wont to do (*CON AIR*, *THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD*), the new *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS* boasts no less than ten car thieves, a tense family situation, a love story, a wise-ass cop, and a mob boss with a penchant for carving coffins for his intended victims.

Rosenberg obviously penned this script with Nicholas Cage in mind for the lead of Randall "Memphis" Raines, a former car thief trying to do the right thing. When he gets word that his little brother, Kip (Giovanni Ribisi), has chosen the same career path and is perilously close to being fitted for a custom-made coffin, Memphis comes back to Boston to save the day. The script idles along for a while, the only excitement in the first hour being the scene of Kip screwing up his deal with mob boss, Calitri. Yet, this scene is handled as follows:

"Look, chase scenes are like love scenes, what makes one man hot leaves another cold. This ain't shirking responsibility but the only thing duller than writing chase scenes is reading them...Suffice to say, this will be one exciting chase."

Something tells me that the only thing duller than reading this script will be watching the final version, unless Jonathan Hensleigh gives the script a kick in the pants (my first suggestion would be to remove the four page exchange between the crew regarding television characters and the cars they drove).

As arrogant as he is, Rosenberg is smart enough to recognize the elements—few as they may be—that worked in Halicki's original film. The trick becomes building a hundred twenty-five-page script around five minutes of material.

Does he succeed?

No.

In Rosenberg's script, Eleanor is referred to as Memphis' "unicorn" whereas in Halicki's original, Eleanor is more of Mandrian's "white whale." Half of the limited amount of fun in the original *GISS* is Mandrian's inability to steal and hold onto an Eleanor. In the Rosenberg's version, Memphis dreams of Eleanor but has no trouble holding onto her once he grabs one. Another item that Rosenberg introduces into his script that doesn't go anywhere is the car stuffed with heroin. There is little freaking out over the discovery of millions of dollars worth of smack, no talk of keeping it, and no sign of what becomes of the car once the scene is over.

THE CHASE THRILLER OF THE '80S!

Eight years after *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS*, H.B. Halicki made a quasi-sequel/follow-up, *THE JUNKMAN*, which he directed, wrote, etc. Halicki stars as Harlan Hollis, a junkyard owner turned blockbuster movie director. Of course, it was *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS* that earned him his fame (according to the faux "Hollywood Reporter" headlines at the beginning of the film).

Little does Hollis know that he's got a squad of unintentionally goofy terrorists after him, determined to not let Hollis' big wrap party for his new "exciting" movie go off without a hitch. As he makes his way to the James Dean Festival (huh?), he suddenly finds himself being pursued by terrorists on the road and in the air! Thus begins the first car chase of *THE JUNKMAN*.

This time around the budget's bigger, Halicki doesn't wear a wig, and the police dispatchers are bodacious babes. Otherwise, the acting is still sub-par, the characters are still goofy, and Halicki still drives with four spare pairs of sunglasses on his dashboard.

After a long damn time, Hollis manages to escape his pursuers and realizes that someone within his organization wants him dead. Yeah, no shit. For a while the story follows the standard trajectory of a television detective show. Hollis pretends that he's dead and snoops around while a reporter and her two gay cameramen interview all of the suspects including the mysterious Richard (Richard L. Muse), the over-emotional Arthur (Lang Jeffries) and the overly-sincere Michael (hammy soap actor Christopher Stone).

Now it becomes a choice between the lesser of two evils. Which do you want more—the boring detective stuff or another interminable car chase? Regardless of the answer, when one of the terrorists becomes a loose end that needs to be eliminated, Hollis comes to talk to him minutes after the dude's been shot. When Hollis is seen leaving the scene of the crime, yet another chase ensues. He manages to escape yet again and travels via blimp to the Cinerama Dome where he defeats the bad guy and prevents a bomb from killing his daughter and non-evil friends.

The late Hoyt Axton appears in a small role as himself. He and Freddy "Boom Boom" Cannon provide the film's soundtrack, doing a markedly improved job over *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS*' composer Philip Kachaturian.

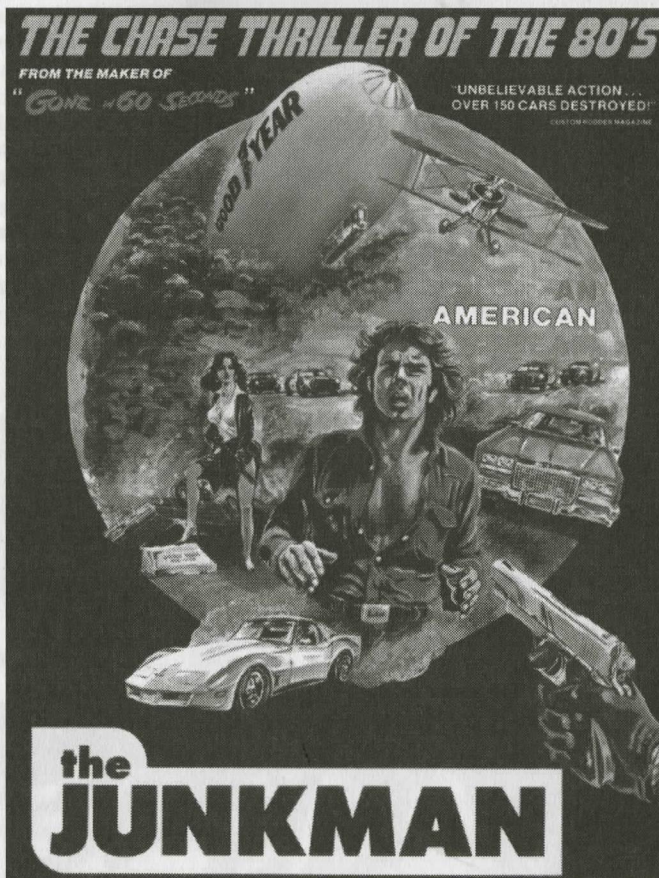
However, I don't think that "Lookout, Junkman" gets a lot of requests at an Axton show.

After *THE JUNKMAN*, Halicki did one more chase film, *DEADLINE AUTO THEFT* and, according to www.halicki.com, he was said to be working on a sequel to *GISS* when he died in an auto accident.

IT'S ALL JUST FOR GLORY AND A GUMBALL MACHINE

The apparent blueprint for the coast-to-coast race movies, Charles Bail's *THE GUMBALL RALLY* has all the ingredients for a successful road rally flick, but ultimately fails miserably.

Starring Michael Sarrazin as Michael Bannon (looking like a poor man's Peter Fonda), a bored businessman with a need for speed, *THE GUMBALL RALLY* has the typical corps of goofy (often stereotypical) characters from the southern-fried bozos (one of which being Gary Busey) to the proper English gents. However, Bail has no idea how to handle so many characters and most are left stalled on the sidelines. The result is that the majority of the film is a two-way race between Bannon and his rival Smitty (Tim McIntire) with the hard-nosed Detective Roscoe (Norman Burton) trying to but the kibosh on their speedy shenanigans. It all gets very old very quickly.



PUT YOUR BRAIN IN NEUTRAL

Unfortunately, Paul Bartel's *CANNONBALL* replicates much of *THE GUMBALL RALLY* from the simplistic characters to the unbearable dullness.

Our hero, David Carradine, stars as Coy "Cannonball" Buckman, an ex-con entered in the greatest underground sporting events in the country - the Trans-American Grand Prix. Running from Santa Monica Pier to Manhattan's Lower East Side (just about the opposite of *THE GUMBALL RALLY*), the hundred thousand dollar purse attracts an eclectic crowd including a cast of New World Pictures acting and directing talent (Mary Woronov, Richard Carradine, Archie Hahn, Joe Dante, Allan Arkush, Sylvester Stallone, Martin Scorsese, Dick Miller, and even the head honcho himself, Roger Corman).

The film's combination of deflated humour and gut-wrenching melodrama mix as well as water and gasoline, leading me to believe that in order to be successful cross-country race films should gravitate toward either outrageous comedy like the *CANNONBALL RUN* series or introspective art films like Monte Hellman's *TWO LANE BLACKTOP* (see *CdC* #4 & #7). Notable most for its incredible cast and for being produced by the Shaw Brothers (who would later produce the *CANNONBALL RUN* movies), the film is far more subdued than Bartel's previous racing film, the spectacular *DEATH RACE 2000*.

IN THE YEAR 2000 HIT AND RUN DRIVING IS NO LONGER A CRIME. IT'S THE NATIONAL SPORT!

Starring David Carradine as Frankenstein and Sylvester Stallone as Machine Gun Joe Viterbo, much of the cast of 1975's *DEATH RACE 2000* went on to star in *CANNONBALL*. However, *DEATH RACE 2000* is wonderfully dark, violent, and absurd—everything that *CANNONBALL* would lack.

In *DEATH RACE 2000*, a diverse group has entered the Trans-Continental Road Race. Like the Hanna-Barbera "Wacky Races" cartoon, each of the initial five drivers burning their way from New York to New Los Angeles has a theme. In addition to Frankenstein and Machine Gun Joe, there's Mary Woronov as Calamity Jane, Roberta Collins as Matilda the Hun, and Martin Cove as Nero the Hero.

Set in the violent future, the race has become the new nation's favorite pastime. Supported by the despotic government, this year's race is being protested by Thomasina Paine (Harriet Medin) and her band of freedom fighters. They feel that the race is simply a political diversion and a barbaric practice, especially since drivers get points added to their overall score when they kill pedestrians (meaning that a driver could win if they reached the finish line second as long as they had more points).

Unlike Machine Gun Joe, who continually froths at the mouth, Frankenstein plays it cool, even when he discovers that his navigator, Annie (Simone Griffith), is Thomasina's granddaughter and has been plotting against him from the outset of the race. Yet, as the film progresses, they come to realize that their ambitions aren't so dissimilar.

Written by two of the best New World writers, Robert Thom

(*CRAZY MAMA*, *BLOODY MAMA*) and Charles Griffith (*NOT OF THIS EARTH*, *BUCKET OF BLOOD*, *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS*) from a story by Ib Melchior (*THE ANGRY RED PLANET*, *ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS*), *DEATH RACE 2000* was based on Hans Ruesch's novel, *The Racers*, which had been adapted into a film starring Kirk Douglas, Cesar Romero, and Lee J. Cobb by Henry Hathaway in 1955. Writer Charles Griffith is said to have directed the racing scenes while Paul Bartel handled the more acting-intensive areas.

A FUTURISTIC GAME OF LIFE AND DEATH!

When talking about futuristic chase films of the 1970s, no conversation is complete without a mention of *THE LAST CHASE*.

Set in a future that looks a lot like the late seventies, Franklyn Hart (Lee Majors) is one of the survivors of a plague that claimed most of the world's population as its victims. After twenty years, insanity has befallen most of those left; they use public transportation, bicycles, and even—oh, the humanity!—*walk* to where they need to go! It's a madhouse! A madhouse!

Obviously written during the energy crisis when people put "When Leaving The Room, Turn Lights Off!" stickers over their light switches, writer/director Martyn Burke must have been offended by acts of environmental-consciousness; feeling that the next step was the plundering of all of our civil liberties. Sure, first buses and then communism!

Forced to speak to classes about the advances made in public transportation, former race car driver Hart is torn up inside when he spreads such untruths, warping young, fragile minds. A man—a real man, a race car driving man who felt the wind in his hair and shards of glass in his gut—can only take so much. Hart snaps and begins telling the truth—that cars are a symbol of individual freedom, he's suspended from his lectern by the Big Brotherly government agents who've been keeping their eye on this loose cannon.

During an outburst in his lecture, his message of individuality reached a young rebel with fanciful dreams of cartography and electronics, Ring (the ever-effeminate Chris Makepeace). On the run from the police after hacking into the government's computer-controlled television system (it looks as high tech as an Intellevision console), Ring takes refuge with Hart. Soon the two are on the run to California in Hart's flimsy-looking Formula One racecar, hoping to find The Resistance.

The government calls upon the talents of crusty former flying ace Captain J. G. Williams (Burgess Meredith) to track down Hart and eliminate the threat inherent in his mobility. Piloting the world's slowest jet, Williams' pursuit isn't speeded along by his frequent kite-flying breaks. Apparently, this is to give us insight into his free-spirited personality.

Oh, when will this terrible suspense be over? Don't tease me Martyn Burke! I want Williams to find Hart and for the two of them to team up and show the public transportation the liberation of burning through thousands of gallons of gasoline! I want Burgess Meredith to put down the booze and take



on a mentorship role like *ROCKY* or *CLASH OF THE TITANS*! Enough with the Native American reservation, square dancing, and cactus-killing laser beams!

Yet, Burke avoids the inevitable team-up and, instead, opts to have Williams sacrifice himself so that Hart and Ring may go on in their quest and be welcomed into California with open arms, much to the impotent chagrin of the government agents who have watched Hart's journey all the while on their amazing system of closed circuit television monitors.

On the other end of the spectrum from the outrageous, madcap ultraviolence of *DEATH RACE 2000* (which would later be the inspiration for George Miller's *MAD MAX* films) and the crummy sci-fi ruminations of *THE LAST CHASE* is Richard C. Sarafian's *VANISHING POINT*.



Kowalski and Super Soul in *VANISHING POINT*

TIGHTEN YOUR SEAT BELT! YOU'VE NEVER HAD A TRIP LIKE THIS BEFORE!

We join this movie already in progress...

It's a small, sleepy town: the kind of place where violence loves to visit in a Sam Peckinpah world. But in director Richard C. Sarafian's, it's a town in the middle of nowhere, about to see the only excitement it'll have in years. Two bulldozers rumble lazily down the main drag. This is a town falling somewhere between Point A and Point B, noteworthy for nothing; not even the Green Frog bar where they make fresh pork rinds on Thursdays.

Kowalski (Barry Newman - looking like a cross between Eric Bogosian and Tom Jones) is about to try to pass through here and the local police are determined to stop him. With an impolite clang, the bulldozers lower their broad hydraulic blades to the pavement, creating a formidable barrier. Even in this podunk burg, folks come out to see what happens when an unstoppable object encounters an immovable object. They know him because in the two days since he left Denver, Kowalski has become something of a folk hero thanks to disk jockey Super Soul (Cleavon Little) singing the mysterious and dogged driver's praises on the air.

Running his white '70 Dodge Challenger like a mad dog, Kowalski is no "Golden Driver of the Old West" as Super Soul has made him out to be, inflating him to mythical proportions—or is he? Ironically, though blind, Super Soul acts as Kowalski's eyes, beaming information off the police wire straight to him like a person-to-person call. "The blind leading the blind."

A former motocrosser, racecar driver, and policeman, Kowalski is currently a car delivery driver taking the Challenger from Denver to San Francisco where it's due on Monday. But, wait, it's Sunday now (the subtitle told us so)...what's the big rush? What has motivated him to drive so fast that he's caught the attention and heat of every cop in Denver, Nevada, and California? Is it a thirst to fulfill some lost nuance of the American Dream? Or, could it simply be that he bet a drug dealer in Denver the price of a handful of bennies that he could be to San Fran by 3 P.M. on Saturday?

Along the road, Kowalski encounters a collection of people on the edge of America: an old snake charmer, some hippie freaks, gay banditos, etc. Kowalski is unaware that he has been there with them, skating along the edge and nearly falling off. But, now he's driving straight toward the middle - into the limelight. It's not the destination that matters so much as the journey itself. It's not the chase that concerns us, though it holds our interest, but the moments in between and the circus that forms around this man, the images projected onto his white car and lumpy face.

VANISHING POINT is lovingly filmed, skillfully edited and wonderfully crafted. Written by Guillermo Cain and based on a story by Malcolm Hart, the narrative moves fluidly through time, carefully revealing Kowalski's past while steadily proceeding in his present after returning from his future.

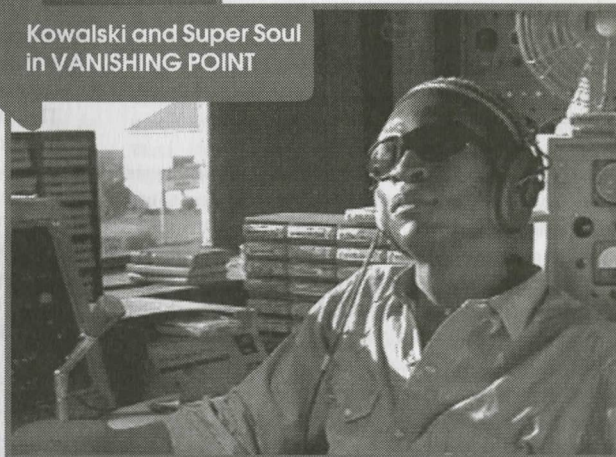
Look for John Amos in a small role as Super Soul's sound man as well as Robert Donner as one of Kowalski's pursuers—he later went on to play Exidor in "Mork & Mindy". *VANISHING POINT* was remade in 1997 as a wretched TV movie directed by Charles Robert Carner (the man who penned *GYMKATA*) wherein Jimmy Kowalski (Viggo Mortenson) is stricken with a bad case of radar love and races to get home to his pregnant wife while facing off against Steve Railsback and Keith David.

According to an interview of Barry Newman in *Musclecar Review Magazine*, the original cut of *VANISHING POINT* ran eight minutes longer than what was finally released to theaters (and subsequently on home video). Among the missing material is a scene of Kowalski picking up a hitchhiker (Charlotte Rampling) who carries a warning for him not to go to San Francisco before disappearing. Newman thinks the reason for the cut came from

the studio second-guessing the audience, feeling that the general public wouldn't be able to grasp such an existentialist moment.

A SUBGENRE STALLING OUT?

Chase movies proliferated well into the '80s, (though nothing seems capable of topping the absolute excess of *THE BLUES BRO-*



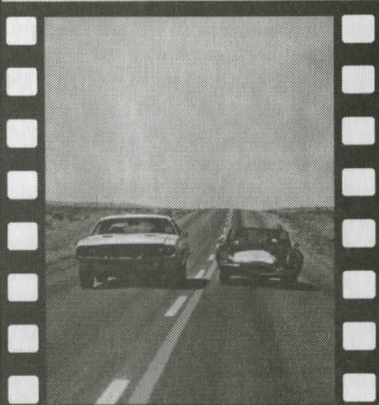
THERS, especially the dim-witted sequel).

While most of the aforementioned films were made on a low budget, the idea of an obligatory chase scene has remained a staple for Hollywood action films—witness Michael Bay's *THE ROCK* or John Frankenheimer's *RONIN*.

Personally, I think there should be a return to the wacky chase films of old. I think that a lot of films with ensemble casts could benefit from having the characters pitted against each other in a coast-to-coast contest. For example, look at films such as *SHORT CUTS*, *BOOGIE NIGHTS*, or *MAGNOLIA*—try to tell me that sticking those characters into some prime automobiles and turning them loose on the highways of America wouldn't make for better entertainment.

Ironically, as I was putting the finishing touches on this article I was made aware of a new book about "road movies" by Jack Sargeant and Stephanie Watson, *Lost Highways* (ISBN 1-871592-68-2) from Creation Books (www.creationbooks.com). Sporting a still from *VANISHING POINT* on the cover, it looks like this one will be quite a definitive guide to this under-appreciated genre. - MW

LOST HIGHWAYS



AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF ROAD MOVIES
Jack Sargeant & Stephanie Watson



RUNNING TIME

BY ANDREW RAUSCH

Film criticism has reached critical mass. Movies are entitled "masterpieces" before they even hit the box office while the filmmakers responsible are touted as the next Orson Welles or Stanley Kubrick. The result of this across-the-board bandwagonism is that these new films and their creators become the momentary obsession of the film literati, by which all subsequent films will be judged. Unfortunately, the labels applied to most of these so-called "saviors of American cinema" are the result of studio campaigning. As a result, rarities that may truly deserve the labels of "revolutionary" or "visionary" are not given such designation. Because of the luxuries afforded by the larger studios, critics are generally much too busy attending the latest bubblegum flick by Roland Emmerich or Joel Schumacher to bother with these smaller gems.

Critics are not solely to blame for this apparent lack of originality and flood of banal cookie-cutter films. Rather than embracing the budgetary constraints of independent filmmaking, all too often indie filmmakers try too hard to get the most bang from their buck and simply ape larger studio productions. They employ gloss where guts should prevail. In an indie movie, all bets should be off—time for experimenting with narrative, form, and construction at hand. A look at recent indie faves like *HAPPY*, *TEXAS* and *BOYS DON'T CRY* reveals an uncanny resemblance to scaled-down Hollywood productions simply peppered with "taboo" ideas. It's almost enough to make a cinephile lose hope.

As if to spite the indie-cum-Hollywood system, there are the occasional films that contain an experimental spirit. Unfortunately, as these films aren't money making movie machines, they tend to remain virtually unknown.

One such film is Josh Becker's *RUNNING TIME*—one of the finest examples of American cinema-as-art produced in the past decade. It's the U.S. equivalent of Tom Tykwer's *RUN LOLA, RUN*. At a mere 70-minutes long and shot in black-and-white, *RUNNING TIME* is not a commercial film in any way, shape, or form. Inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 thriller *ROPE*, Becker attempts to give the viewer the illusion of one long take, with no visible cuts. Where the usual hour and a half film averages roughly six hundred shots and sometimes as many as a thousand cuts, *RUNNING TIME* has only thirty cuts, none of which are visible. Becker's camerawork and Kaye Davis' editing are highly inventive and astonishingly effective.

It is a common misconception that the editing of Alfred Hitchcock's *ROPE* was completely seamless. Sure, the first few cuts are clumsily "hidden" by ending a reel of film with the camera pointing at a jacket or other dark surface and beginning the next reel at the same point. However, as the film progresses, the experiment appears to fall by the wayside. Reels run their course with no attempt at concealing the cut to a different shot. The one-take fallacy was likely begotten by a lack of attention from the conditioned acceptance of montage or by viewers simply tuning themselves out, which is not unimagin-

able as *ROPE* is one of Hitchcock's most tiresome pieces. The film is

stagnant in both its sets and its overly theatrical performances.

Much of the impact of *ROPE* was due to it being one of the first attempts at making a film in real-time with seamless editing. Until 1997, there had only been films such as Fred Zinnemann's *HIGH NOON* or John Badham's *NICK OF TIME* that played with time during their narratives, but their editing style was conventional. As most cinephiles have yet to discover the treasures *RUNNING TIME* has to offer, they continue to view Hitchcock's effort as the end-all statement on real-time shooting. However, viewing the far more effective *RUNNING TIME* reveals that there is room for growth and the expansion of boundaries in American cinema.

The real-time technique is perfectly employed in *RUNNING TIME* with its story about a heist where timing is everything. During the robbery, the tension and suspense build to a frantic level that puts the viewer on the edge of his or her seat. As precious minutes tick by, the criminals engage in an argument. While they bark at one another, the camera nervously moves back and forth between the frenzied robbers, the hostages, and the safecracker, creating a sense of urgency, and contributing to the claustrophobic feeling of the scene.

While Quentin Tarantino has been lauded for his employment of the occasional long take, *RUNNING TIME* is wholly comprised of beautifully choreographed long takes. The viewer moves not merely through time but space, unlike the stationary conversation of *RESERVOIR DOGS* or *PULP FICTION*. Effectively staging lengthy scenes without a cut—even with the most talented of thespians before the camera—is an incredibly difficult task. In *RUNNING TIME*, the largely unknown cast is lead by genre veteran (and *Cashiers du Cinemart* favorite) Bruce Campbell, Jeremy Roberts, and Anita Barone.

After being overshadowed for many years by former collaborators Sam Raimi and Joel and Ethan Coen, Josh Becker displays practical camerawork that is more visually stimulating than anything Raimi has attempted in years. In a scene where a hostage calls the pick-up men to ask for ice cream in an attempt to buy the robbers more time, the camera's POV is from behind a can of Slim Fast sitting across the room, revealing that he's trying to signal the pick-up men that something's wrong. In another scene, the camera does two slow full turns around Campbell, effectively conveying his feelings of queasiness. In the film's most brilliant shot, the camera focuses hard and tight on Campbell, sitting on a curb, before slowly pulling back to reveal the junkie getaway driver who doomed the heist, only fifty feet away. In a stunning demonstration of the terrific depth-of-field, we see the junkie making a deal with a drug dealer in the foreground, with Campbell in the background.

Unlike any other film released in 1997, *RUNNING TIME* artistically altered a playing field without giving way to the temptation of excess a la James Cameron's *TITANIC*. Rather than being dubbed "king of the world," Becker and his film remain shrouded in relative obscurity.

Sadly, films are judged either by the amount of money that went into their production or by how much they raked in at the box-office. In an era where Chucky, *LEPRECHAUN*, and *THE CHILDREN OF THE CORN* spawn countless sequels—all of which easily find theatrical and/or video distribution—conceptual films with artistic merit like Becker's *RUNNING TIME* can float around for years before finding ambitious video distributors. Recently released on DVD by Anchor Bay, *RUNNING TIME* is available for purchase and slowly finding its way into hip video stores. Tellingly, *LEPRECHAUN IN THE HOOD* will be hitting the shelves of rental center across the country this spring.

Andrew Rausch: *What was your initial inspiration for RUNNING TIME?*

Josh Becker: Well...ROPE! I had always admired the technique, but I never thought Hitchcock pulled it off. The material just wasn't right. So I sat down and tried to analyze why did I like this technique so much and what was wrong with ROPE. My conclusion was that if it's all done on a soundstage, it doesn't matter. The only thing that's making not cutting cool is that you're on location. I also concluded that if you were gonna use the real-time concept, it had to be part of the story, which it's not in ROPE. There's no time element in ROPE. There's a body in the trunk and they have a party. Well, it's not like there's a timer and at that time the trunk's gonna pop open, so where's the fun in that? You need that time element if you're gonna work in real-time. Otherwise, why bother? Since a heist film is always based on a time element, it seemed like a natural fit. Then I just tried to compound it as many ways as I could. You've got an hour and ten minutes. Time is the issue, and time continues to re-establish itself as the issue.

AR: *I think with RUNNING TIME you've accomplished something that Brian DePalma hasn't been able to do in twenty-five years of attempts, which is to do Hitchcock better than Hitchcock.*

JB: To be fair, ROPE is probably the weakest thing Hitchcock ever tried. It's really a miserable picture. I mean, he never had any respect for it. He lost interest before he ever shot it. It was a way for him to fart around with new equipment. He had a new dolly made to go through doorways—which is where our doorway dolly comes from! It was his first color film, too.

AR: *What are some of the difficulties of writing a screenplay that moves in real-time as opposed to something more conventional?*

JB: I found writing the script much more difficult than shooting the film. In our cut-happy world, we are so used to seeing a character say, "Okay, let's go to the store." Then they step out of frame and they're at the store. You don't see their trip to the store, unless there's a scene in the car. So if I need to get people from place to place, that means the stuff in between has to actually mean something. It was very difficult! You're constantly fighting the temptation to illogically place these places too close together.

Other hurdles I faced were things as simple as the characters having to change a tire. If your tire blows out and you can't cut, how do you do that? Another one was flashbacks. In real-time, how do you do flashbacks? So I did this in the tunnel scene with sound and the character had an audio flashback.

AR: *There's a scene where Stan Davis' character breaks his glasses just before the heist, which kind of foreshadows that this heist is going to be problematic. I think that's very interesting. What made you decide to write that into the script?*

JB: I just thought it would be kind of funny—a safe-cracker with broken glasses. Although you can't really see it, there are times when he's holding his glasses up in front of his face, trying to see the dial, which just seems ridiculous to me.

AR: *Stan Davis' performance was outstanding. Had he been in any films prior to RUNNING TIME?*

JB: Not really. He was more of a stand-up comic. I think he's very good. That's the beautiful thing about making independent films in Los Angeles—you have this ridiculous selection of actors. Unless it's someone like Mel Gibson, you can get them in your film for next to nothing if they like the script.

AR: *I think the dialogue you use in the film is much more natural than what we see in most films today. You don't use pop culture references or a lot of long-winded moviespeak dialogues.*

JB: Call it what you like; I call it Tarantino dialogue and I think it's nonsense! When you go into that self-reflective, non sequitur dialogue, your story stops. Let's say, two hitmen are going to kill someone (this is Tarantino's whole career), instead of talking about what they're about to do, they're talking about Madonna's latest

record. Non sequitur; it has nothing to do with what's happening!

Anyway, I'll tell you exactly when I could have used that in RUNNING TIME. The guys pull up in the van in front of the laundry and they're a little bit early. I'd written a whole scene out with all of them and Buzz was saying, "I'm thinking about buying a new car." And they go, "What kind of car?" And he says, "Well, I've been looking at Fords." And Bruce [Campbell] goes, "No, no, no, you don't want a Ford. You want a GM." And another guy's like, "GM? Forget that! You need a Chrysler." Then the other guy's saying, "No, you wanna go foreign on this," and they just get into this whole thing about this until finally the car pulls up and they all start to pay attention again. To me, that's a Quentin Tarantino scene. It'll get a laugh, but it does nothing to advance your story. Instead, I had them discuss the safe. It continues the story as opposed to stopping for a laugh. Rather than just making up bullshit [about foot massages], I actually had to go to the library and look at some books about safes and safecracking.

AR: *During the heist, the characters argue about a football game that happened 20 years ago. Where did this idea come from?*

JB: I'm a total movie geek though I try to hide it as much as I can. I guess don't want people to know how much I am inspired by other movies! The inspiration here is STRAIGHT TIME. It's Harry Dean Stanton and Dustin Hoffman robbing a jewelry store. As far as the football thing, I don't know where that came from. I'm a writer. What can I say?

To me, that was the tensest heist I could think of. Time is completely the issue. Then, suddenly you're in this situation where you know Dustin Hoffman's not going to stop. I'm not sure why I went the way I went, because you're sort of stuck into a one-act play there. Once you go in, you're stuck in the room with those people since there's no cutting in the film. I'm a very old-fashioned writer. I

don't think using the structural concepts of writing make you old fashioned, but nevertheless, when I establish a theme in my writing, then I'm finding ways to express that theme. So the football story—the past problems with the same issues—is following a theme with their characters.

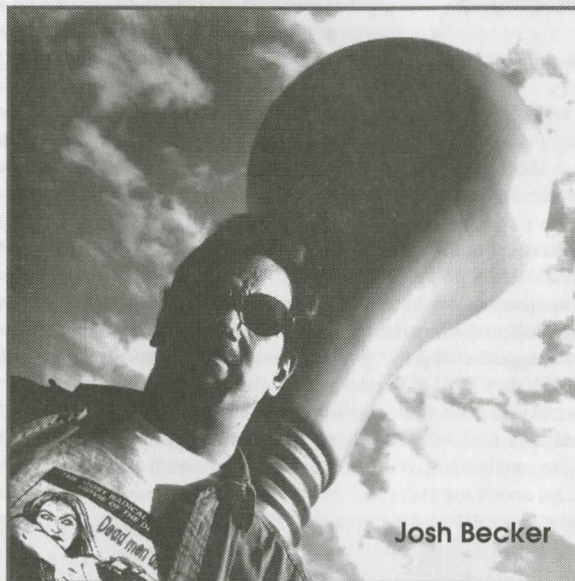
AR: *It took several years for RUNNING TIME to find a distributor. What were some of the problems that distributors had with it?*

JB: Well, it's 70-minutes and it's black-and-white. Nobody took it seriously from a theatrical level. And of course it never got a theatrical release. And then I met a guy at American Film Market who just completely surmounted that problem. The guy bought the rights to A GREAT DAY IN HARLEM, which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary about three years ago. It's about a famous photograph by Art Kane and the whole thing was sixty minutes long. So the problem was, how could he release a sixty-minute movie? He bought the rights to a 1948 Academy Award-winning short on jazz

music with Duke Ellington's band playing in beautifully photographed black-and-white. It's twenty minutes, so he cut it onto the front of it, released it and made millions of dollars on the release. So, it would have been really easy, had someone wanted to, to cut a short on the front of it. They could have cut my goddamn short CLEVELAND SMITH, BOUNTY HUNTER on the front of it! [Laughs.]

AR: *The thing that I find phenomenal about RUNNING TIME is that you've found one thing in the medium of film that could still be advanced and expanded upon at a time when it seems like everything has been done to death.*

JB: I think I've found another one in my new movie, IF I HAD A HAMMER. It's a musical in the sense that CABARET is a musical. You're in a club where people are performing, but the actors are actually singing their songs and playing their instruments. It's not playback, and I don't know if anyone's ever done that before. The people we cast actually had to be able to sing and play their guitar, and when they get up to sing and play their guitar, that's really what they're going to do. In the whole history of sound cinema, no one has done this as far as I know.



THE LOST ART OF THE MADE-FOR-TV MOVIE

EVIL - ROY - SLADE

BY DAVID MACGREGOR

IN THE MONTHS AND YEARS leading up to the year 2000, there appeared any number of lists that sought to define the best films and best television programs of the 20th century. Lost in all the hoopla was the bastard child of both of these mediums—the “made-for-television-movie.” This type of film is a relatively recent cultural phenomenon, and it traces its lineage back to the 1960s when movies that were considered too poor to be theatrically released began to pop up on television. They drew in reasonably favorable ratings, so it wasn’t long before Aaron Spelling and Universal began to produce films specifically for the television market. These were roughly the equivalent of what were termed “B-pictures” in earlier decades; that is, low-budget productions designed to be part of a double-feature alongside more glossy and expensive feature films. Occasionally, there were made-for-TV movies that attracted a little bit of attention; for example, BRIAN’S SONG (1970), THE GIRL MOST LIKELY TO (1973), and DUEL (1971), which was directed by Steven Spielberg (and even released theatrically overseas). But for the most part, made-for-TV movies have been resolutely ignored, and they certainly weren’t going to get any attention in all of the end of the millennium polls and rankings.

While that might seem exclusionary and unfair, the reason for this is quite simple. Everyone knows that, by and large, made-for-television-movies are the lowest artistic life form imaginable. Currently alternating between “disease of the week” and “abusive husband gets his just desserts” themes, it is common knowledge that made-for-television-movies are only marginally more interesting than filling up the black space between commercials with static or religious programming. This has led to an attitude in which these films are consumed and then discarded like so much trash. In most cases, this is a justly deserved fate, but as it happens, there is one made-for-television-movie that stands head and shoulders and torso and pelvic area above the rest. This colossus of the genre, this paragon, this shining star in the foetid effluvia that is prime time television, is a film called EVIL ROY SLADE.

Not quite a cult film, it might best be described as “sub-cult” in status. The film serves as a kind of touchstone, a secret sign that only a select few in our society possess. When you meet someone who has seen the film, and when that mutual knowledge is made evident, an instant bond is formed that transcends such mundane things as gender, age, race, or religion. As a child, it was the favorite film of one of the goofiest kids in my neighborhood. When I got to high school, I was

surprised one day to hear my learned and studious French teacher announce, “There is a film on television tonight that I think some of you should watch. It’s called EVIL ROY SLADE.”

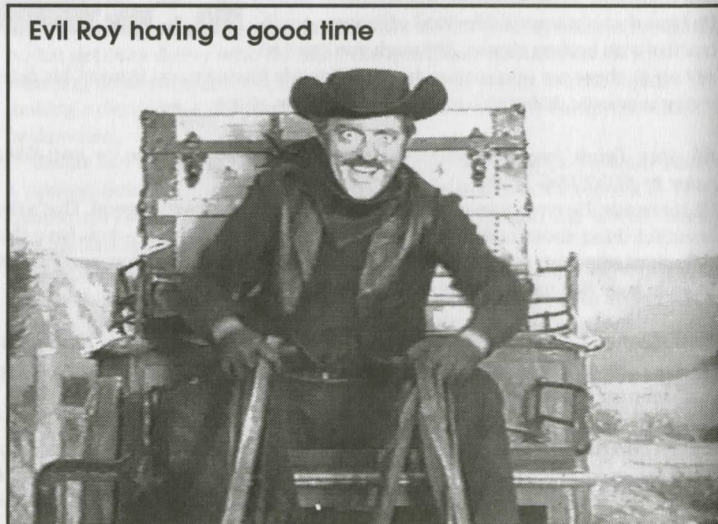
Produced by Universal for NBC in 1972, it was reputedly a pilot for a television show called “Who’s the Sheriff?” The basic idea of the show was that the villains would be the regular cast, and each week a new sheriff would appear, only to be dispatched by the bad guys in some fashion, thus necessitating the arrival of a new sheriff the next week. In a sense, this would have been an ideal program for the time, because as the Vietnam War dragged on, America seemed to have a greater and greater appetite for stories and characters that were essentially anti-heroic in nature. Movies like DIRTY HARRY (1971) and THE GODFATHER (1972) gave the public heroes who were not quite as pure as the driven snow, and well-established heroes were only considered viable if they were reinvented in some fashion. For example, in the film THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (1969) it was intimated that the great detective was gay, and in the novel (and subsequent film) THE SEVEN-PER-CENT SOLUTION (1974), Holmes was portrayed as a paranoid drug addict. This anti-heroic trend was apparent outside the arts and entertainment industry as well. In 1970, Jim Bouton published *Ball Four* (ISBN: 0020306652), a baseball diary in which he revealed what went on behind the scenes in baseball, including the boozing, the womanizing, and the somewhat bizarre practical jokes (such as defecating on birthday cakes). The baseball establishment was appalled, but the public loved seeing iconic figures like Mickey Mantle being revealed as all too human. In short, anti-heroes were the order of the day, and EVIL ROY SLADE personified that trend.

The film stars The “Addams Family”’s John Astin as the title character. His supporting cast includes Milton Berle, Mickey Rooney, Pamela Austin, Dom DeLuise, Henry Gibson, Dick Shawn, and Edie Adams, with bit parts being taken by the likes of John Ritter, Penny Marshall, Ed Begley Jr., and Pat Morita. Now, there are some people who will read through this cast list and swoon at the idea of so much talent in one made-for-TV film. Then again, as the comedic stylings of performers like Milton Berle and Dom DeLuise aren’t for everyone, many folks might consider this a film well worth missing.

That would be a mistake. Consider it a phenomenon along the line of Jerry Lewis films. Either you consider Jerry Lewis to be an underappreciated genius or an embarrassment to humanity. If he doesn’t happen to be your cup of tea, the thought of watching Jerry twitch his way through a “comedy” probably fills you with a kind of unspeakable dread. However, seeing him in Martin Scorsese’s THE KING OF COMEDY is a revelation indeed, because his performance in that film is nothing like anything else he has done. The same principle applies here to Milton Berle and company. Unlikely as it may sound to those of a skeptical turn of mind, the cast in this film turn in impressive performances all around.

EVIL ROY SLADE was penned by Jerry Belson and Garry Marshall and directed by Jerry Paris. If those names sound familiar, it’s probably because they’re the same trio who were responsible for the first episode of “The Odd Couple”, and Garry Marshall and Jerry Paris would go on to collaborate on “Happy Days” as well. It is worth noting that Jerry Paris is one of the most prolific directors in television/movie history, yet he is practically unknown. After several years as an actor in both film and television, he moved behind the cameras in the early 1960s, directing such programs as “The Joey Bishop Show”, “The Dick Van Dyke Show” (for which he won an Emmy), “The Munsters”, “Here’s Lucy”, and “The Mary Tyler Moore Show”. He directed more episodes of “The Odd Couple” than anyone else, then really hit his stride with “Happy Days”, directing 237 of the show’s 255 total episodes! This is in addition to his feature film work, which included DON’T RAISE THE BRIDGE, LOWER THE RIVER (1967), VIVA MAX!

Evil Roy having a good time



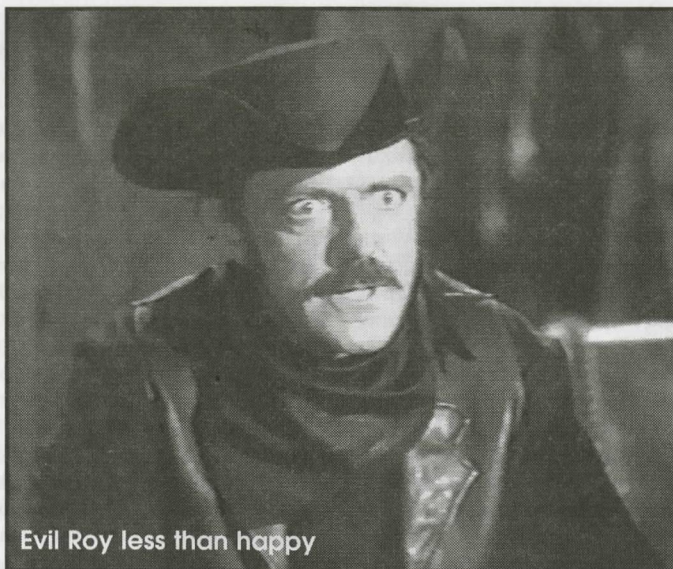
(1969), and later in his career, *POLICE ACADEMY 2: THEIR FIRST ASSIGNMENT* (1985) and *POLICE ACADEMY 3: BACK IN TRAINING* (1986). The third *POLICE ACADEMY* film was the final project that Paris completed, as he died in 1986.

As you might expect given his television background, Paris's directorial style is fairly straightforward: focusing on the story and the characters rather than chiaroscuro lighting and other directorial smoke and mirrors designed to catch the eye of film cognoscenti. Paris tends to use a lot of medium shots and close-ups to draw us into the lives of the characters, and he favors opening scenes with close-ups, then zooming out to reveal a more traditional kind of establishing shot. The direction is intended to be unobtrusive, but there are still a number of clever visual touches, especially in the first few minutes of *EVIL ROY SLADE*.

The film opens with a shot of a band of Apaches circling the remains of a stagecoach that lies in smoldering ruins. The passengers are all dead (and in those pre-DANCES WITH WOLVES days, Indians were still considered capable of the odd social misstep or wholesale carnage), except for a crying infant. The film is given a pseudo-documentary feel through the narration of Pat Buttram, who played Mr. Haney on "Green Acres", was Gene Autry's sidekick in many Westerns and whose Western twang—verging on a yodel—can be heard in a number of animated films. Buttram's voiceover explains that Indians had been known to raise children as their own, but the Indians take one look at this child and vamoose. The same goes for some wolves that show up, then hightail it after one sniff of the mewling infant. This is the genesis of *EVIL ROY SLADE*, who grows up to be "the meanest man in the whole West." Surely, one the most memorable shots in cinematic history is that of John Astin, clad only in a diaper and clutching a teddy bear, kicking cacti as he walks through scrubby underbrush, scowling in every direction, and shaking his fist at the sky.

We next see Slade as a kind of reincarnation of Richard Boone's cowboy hero Paladin (from the television show "Have Gun Will Travel"), as he stalks along a street in a Western town. Like Paladin, Slade is dressed from head to toe in black, but unlike the noble Paladin, Evil Roy shoots at the feet of a man on crutches, pops a child's balloon with his cigar, throws a lady's shawl to the ground so that he won't have to step in the mud, and rips a man's shirt off his back to polish his boots. What takes the edge off his various cruel deeds is the sheer joy that Evil Roy takes in all of these activities, along with his boisterous laugh. Similarly, when he robs a train, he doesn't just take the money (which would be bad), he also steals the train's whistle because "he likes the toot-toot sound" (which makes it okay). In part, the charm of the character lies in his childlike simplicity and directness. When he robs a bank, he walks up to a teller and simply says, "Gimme money." When he is smitten by one of the customers in the bank, he asks for her address, and, as she jots it down on a bill, he announces with pride to those cowering around him, "She can write!"

It is this customer, Betsy Potter (Pamela Austin), with whom Slade falls in love, and the feeling is more than reciprocal, thanks largely to Evil Roy's kissing prowess. Betsy is a veritable Barbie Doll come to life, and she is determined to set



Evil Roy less than happy

seems resigned to his fate until he finds out that Betsy still loves him and regrets what she has done. After that, it is merely a matter of time before Slade escapes. While still in jail, he amuses himself by driving a priest (John Ritter) mad with his confession, and watches with an approving smile on his lips as a souvenir salesman (Jerry Paris in a cameo role) stands in front of a crowd and demonstrates a "genuine *EVIL ROY SLADE* hanging doll... fully equipped with a head that comes right off!" When Slade does escape, he hooks up once again with Betsy, and she renews her efforts to reform Evil Roy.

In large part, the subversive quality of the film lies not only in the celebration of Slade's "evil," but in the results of Betsy's scheme to turn Evil Roy into a law-abiding middle-class citizen. Imagining that she can change him with her true love, Betsy takes Slade to Boston and gets him a job as a salesman in her cousin Harry's (Milton Berle) shoe store. With her eyes shining, she promises him stability, a home, and the opportunity to "pay taxes." For Betsy's sake, Slade tries to make a go of it, and the film makes the most of this "fish out of water" section of the film. Mistaking a surprise party for an ambush, Slade fills the cake and crockery with bullets. Misjudging the appropriate use of a shoe-horn, Slade holds it to a customer's neck and growls, "Get that shoe on!" At the behest of Betsy, he even goes to see psychiatrist Dr. Logan Delp (Dom DeLuise), where all of the inkblots remind Evil Roy of his gun. In fact, one of the things the film does best is subvert expectations, which is a key to a great deal of comedy, and this is particularly evident in the scenes with Dr. Delp. After attempting to feel the bumps on Evil Roy's head, Dr. Delp explains that, "There's

a new science called phrenology." The question Evil Roy will ask seems obvious enough, but we are pleasantly confounded when he asks instead, "What's science mean?"

Were this a movie concerned with such niceties as "growth" and "character arc," we might very well see some change in Slade due to the taming influence of Boston. But this is a comedy, and it's also TV, so thankfully there is no effort made to redeem Evil Roy. Instead, when he is entrusted with taking the shoe store's money to the bank, he ends up taking not only the shoe store money, but he robs the bank, then stops back at Betsy's cousin's house to steal the baby's piggy bank as well. As Betsy tries to stop him, Slade declares, "I tried, Honey! I tried, but I just can't do it! This straight life ain't for me! It's too boring!"

Back in the West, Nelson L. Stool con-



Nelson Stool's stubby index finger

trives to bring the famous Marshall Bing Bell (Dick Shawn) out of retirement to help bring Slade to justice. Bell, dressed like a cowboy version of Liberace, is the precise opposite of Slade. Just as Slade is engaging because of his unrelenting evil, Bing Bell is repugnant because of his smug goodness. And just as Evil Roy seems to caricature Paladin as far as attire is concerned, many aspects of Bing Bell's character serve as a nod to Paladin as well, for just like Paladin, Bing Bell resides in fancy digs in San Francisco with an obsequious Oriental servant (Pat Morita) who brings him messages from prospective clients. Like Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, Bell sings as he "lopes along" on his white horse, and he is irritatingly gracious to everyone he meets. In the cultural atmosphere of 1972, the image of the good cowboy is held up to ridicule, and Evil Roy's smiling declaration that, "everyone turns on you sooner or later," seems much more realistic.

With a shotgun hidden in his guitar, Bell arranges to marry Betsy Potter, knowing that this will lure Slade out of hiding. This duplicity on his part (he never really intended to marry Betsy) makes him even less sympathetic, and when Evil Roy and Bing meet in a final showdown, it is Evil Roy we are rooting for. And, keeping true to its blackly comedic tone, it is Bing Bell who is shot and killed as he tries to stop Slade from shooting Bell's beloved guitar. Slade trades clothes with Betsy, and as the posse falls for the ruse, Slade rides off into the sunset, whooping and wearing Betsy's wedding dress.

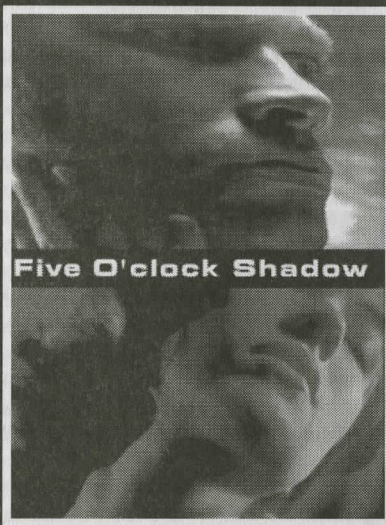
When it was first aired, and even now, part of the pleasure in watching the film arises from a "I can't believe this ever got made" perspective. It is inventive, anarchic, wantonly anti-heroic, and it contains any number of lines that don't pull back from the edge. When Slade and his gang are confronted with a group of lawmen piling out of a stagecoach, they are surprised to see midget lawmen popping out of suitcases sitting atop the coach. His men are alarmed,

but Slade stays calm, telling them, "Aim for their tiny little hearts." And again, when Slade is paying a visit to Betsy at her home, one of his men on lookout calls to him, "Rider coming, boss." Slade replies, "Shoot 'em." His lookout replies, "It's a woman." Slade relents only a little, saying, "Wound her."

Mind you, there are occasions where the film tries too hard and the lines seem a little forced. Most of those occur when Evil Roy himself is not onscreen. Similarly, the joke of naming a character Nelson L. Stool is perhaps underscored a little too heavily in giving him a private train with "Number 2" written on the side. In addition, depending on your perspective, the film is insensitive towards midgets, and it is hardly a clarion call for feminism ("You're the boss," Betsy tells Slade). Finally, Slade seems to be overly concerned with what he terms "funny boys" throughout the picture. But when you consider that the film came out in a year in which prime time programming included "The Waltons", "The Julie Andrews Hour", "The Brady Bunch", and "The Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour", it was a breath of fresh air indeed.

The list of memorable comedic Westerns is a short one, perhaps not going much further than CAT BALLOU (1965) and BLAZING SADDLES (1974). They have their good points, certainly, but the truth is, EVIL ROY SLADE belongs right up there with them. For years, the only way to see the film was to hope that some network would choose to broadcast it, an event that usually took place in the wee hours of the morning. However, as further evidence that all is not bleak and chaotic in the universe, EVIL ROY SLADE was released on video by Universal Home Video in 1998. Currently out of print, the best bet to secure a copy of this film is through Critics Choice video (www.ccvideo.com). Be forewarned though. There exists a shadowy group of individuals whose lives will only be complete once they have secured a copy of this film for their very own. Get yours while you still can.

a bizarre tale of desire, obsession and bondage



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QA WITH SVENGOLIE

Cashiers du Cinemart: *What's your background?*

RK: I grew up in the northwest 'burbs of Chicago where I first got into broadcasting at my high school radio station. When I got into college I would write material (unsolicited) and send it to Jerry Bishop, the original Svengoolie. He eventually hired me on to do writing and voice-over work on his show and—when "Svengoolie" was cancelled in '73—I went on to be his second banana for his radio show.

CdC: *What did you want to be when you grew up?*

RK: Originally, a cartoonist—along the way, such odd sidetrack ideas (all very short-lived) as joining the FBI or being an astronaut!

CdC: *How did you become the "Son of Svengoolie"?*

RK: In the late '70s, Jerry moved out to the West Coast. He gave me his blessing to carry on "the Svengoolie name" and in mid-'79 I managed to get "Son of Svengoolie" on the air.

I'm always amazed to get feedback from people who saw me on the various Field stations back in the 80s. I was doing the show from the Chicago station, and we ran on the four other Field stations. Most felt the show was "forced" on them, and didn't promote it, rarely giving me any feedback on it.

Only now, years later, I run into people who said "So *this* is where you came after (Boston, San Francisco, Detroit, etc.)! Everybody used to watch!"

I never knew there were fans out in the other cities! I ran until January of '86 in Chicago (when the show was deemed "not suitable" for the station because it was about to join the prestigious Fox network!). I went back to that station from '89-'93.

CdC: *I remember you as being the Son of Svengoolie—how'd you get the full "Svengoolie" title?*

RK: When I joined up with WCIU in '95 Jerry declared that I was "all grown up" and graciously bequeathed to me the "Svengoolie" name! I've been using the name and have been on "The U" ever since!

CdC: *What does it mean to be Svengoolie?*

RK: Actually, it means a lot—not just to me, but, to the viewers. After I was fired by Channel 32 in '86, for the next nine years at least, at least once a week somebody would

recognize me on the street and ask, "When are you going to do "Son of Svengoolie" again?"

If it meant that much to people, then, obviously, when Channel 26 asked me to do it again, I felt like there was still a public demand for the character, and how could I refuse that?

It means a lot that I've become a Chicago TV icon and that the popularity of Sven has crossed generations. For some I symbolize a little of what's left of the old "Chicago school" of fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants TV from the '40s/50s. That, and the paycheck...

CdC: *Who are your biggest influences?*

RK: Wow! My influences include mentors like Jerry G. Bishop (the original Sven), Dick Orkin (a radio and advertising genius who created the "ChickenMan" and "ToothFairy" syndicated radio features and whom I also had the great opportunity to work with). Then, a lot of old TV and movie comedians; Groucho, Jack Benny, Gleason. Then, side influences of comic books, other radio guys I listened to growing up.

CdC: *What have been your favorite movies to host?*

RK: It was always fun to do the old Universal Classics, the American-International flicks, and Godzilla-type movies.

CdC: *How about your least?*

RK: Not *all*, but some of the Vincent Price Poe films. I love Vinnie but I remember the network giving me almost two months in a row of his films and it became physically wearing on me. The absolute worst was a coming-of-age film called KENNY AND CO. It's about some crappy pre-teens but the dolt program director at the time thought was a slasher film. I still have nightmares.

CdC: *What was the effect on you when "Mystery Science Theater 3000" took off?*

RK: Well, at first, I had no idea because it wasn't on my cable system. I remember a guy I worked with saying, "You have to see this, it's your show." I replied, "Oh, it's my *kind* of show?" And he said, "No, I mean it's *your* show! It's a little too similar to Sven!"

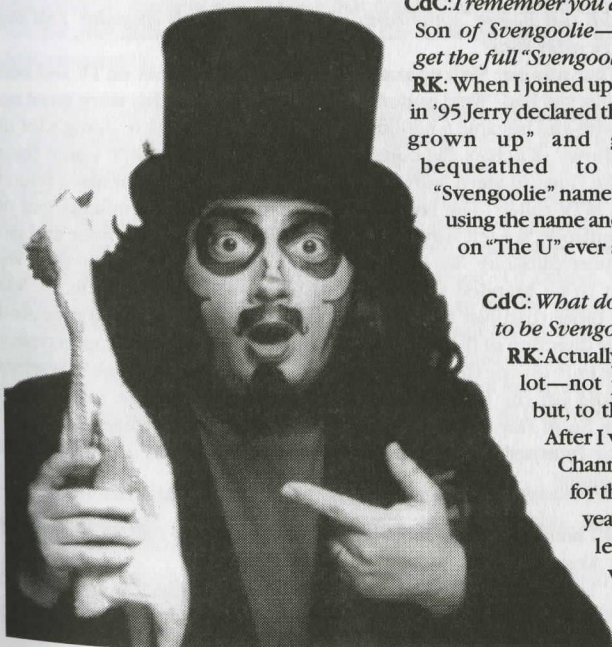
Personally, it really didn't bother me much. What *did* bother me was when I went back on in Chicago in '95 and people who never saw my stuff wrote angry letters about how I was ripping off MST3K!!!

The story I usually relate is how, on my very first show in '79, the movie we were running was short so the crew grabbed the next week's movie and rolled about ten minutes of it, with me (who had not even seen any of it) superimposed in the lower corner making wise cracks! (Sound familiar?)

Personally, I never felt they were "ripping me off." They did a great show and, I felt good when about nine months ago, the Chicago Tribune did an interview with the guys and they mentioned Svengoolie as an influence (a couple of them grew up around here). I'm not sure if they meant Jerry (the Original Sven) or me, but, it was nice to finally see it in print. People who had been at various conventions would tell me that the MST3K guys would talk about Son of Svengoolie, but this was the first concrete verification I ever saw.

CdC: *What question have you always wanted to be asked?*

RK: Easy: "Is that your final answer?"



"ROX": TV SHOW OF THE MILLENNIUM

Zines and public access TV both serve as an outlet for the public to express themselves when they may not otherwise have the opportunity to do so. Since a small group or a single person often makes them they both have a very personal feel. They can be focused on a very small audience and don't have to pander to a broad demographic. Zines and public access only have to satisfy the people who make them. Neither resembles a corporate-owned magazine or network TV show. Where's the love in something like Newsweek or "Veronica's Closet?"

Public access TV began back in the '70s when cable companies first began setting up shop in American cities. Local governments argued that if they were to award exclusive franchises to these cable companies, they had to give something back to the community in return. I still find it amazing that city leaders once had the balls to demand business monopolies give something back to its residents. This would be like demanding that Microsoft give free web tutorials and free websites (without ads) to its users.

Sure, there's lots of dreck on your public access channels. Local residents can be as brain dead as any network TV executive. In order to find the occasional gem on your local origination channel, you'll have to wade through dozens of religious shows, school productions, talk shows and lots of other "talking heads" types of programs. But, amongst them are programs so original, so entertaining, so thought provoking that they never could have been aired on network TV. If there is a perfect blend between zines and public access then it is a TV show called "ROX."

"ROX" isn't a TV show in the conventional sense. It's not a sitcom or a talk show or anything that can be easily sorted into a category. It's basically the real-life exploits of a group of twenty-somethings in the college town of Bloomington, Indiana. "ROX" first aired between 1992 and 1995 but still pops up occasionally at film festivals and on other access channels. The closest thing you could compare it to is MTV's *The Real World* except "ROX" isn't contrived and doesn't suck.

The cast grows and changes from week to week with the two constants being the show's co-hosts Joe Nickell and Bart Everson. Joe and Bart armed with a Hi8 video camera film themselves along with their friends and loved ones and sound off about anything on their minds. It sounds simple enough but as anyone who's familiar with zines will tell you, it's all in the presentation and "ROX" presents itself well.

It's a page out of collegiate, off-campus living where the typical meal consists of coffee, cigarettes and cheesy macaroni. The show makes you feel as if the gang from "ROX" were your actual friends, or better than your real friends, and that they made the show just for you. It's hip in an early '90s, grunge aesthetic kind of way. "ROX" is sexy like Winona Ryder, cool like Eddie Vedder and smart like Janeane Garofalo.

The show's main claim-to-fame is an episode titled "J&B Get Baked" dealing with marijuana legalization. But don't get the wrong idea, "ROX" *isn't* a show where a bunch of dopey guys sit around and get stoned while listening to Pink Floyd and discussing why the castaways couldn't get off the island. It's more of a show that speaks out against corporate greed, mindless conformity and middle-American hypocrisy.

You may be saying to yourself, "Well, this sounds cool and all, but how am I going to see a five-year-old public access show from Indiana?" Well, thanks to modern technology you can see complete episodes on the Internet. "ROX" became the very first TV show on the web way back in 1995 (visit it at www.rox.com). Yes, the "ROX" gang blends together elements of zines, television and the Internet to make "ROX" a full-fledged, multi-media experience.

Like DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, the show's co-hosts each have their own specific duties. Joe (J) is the bartender who shows you how to make that perfect mixed drink every episode. Bart (B) is the editor who takes care of business in front of and behind the camera. Editing any film or video project is often the most important and the most under-appreciated task. Talking with Bart gave me an understanding of how through hard work you can take your home movies and turn it into the best show on TV.

Terry Gilmer: How did "ROX" get started?

Bart: It started as a goof. We had no idea that it would take over our lives. The



show was born when Joe Nickell and I were sitting around one summer evening and we said, "Wouldn't it be funny if we made a weekly TV show?" Originally we called it "J&B on the ROX." The idea was to make a show hosted by Joe and Bart (J&B). It began as a show about mixed drinks—kind of an alcoholic cooking show. Every week we said, "This is a show that glorifies the responsible use of alcohol by teaching you, the home viewer, to mix a variety of mixed drinks." It was more of a pun than anything else was. We weren't really into mixed drinks in a big way. Both Joe and I had artistic and political motives. The whole series continued to focus on alcohol as an ostensible theme, but the show really came to be about our lives: us, the people we knew, the world around us—anything and everything. (Incidentally, this proved to be a good strategy for many of our episodes. They would seem to be about one subject, but really be about another. Great fun!) Later on, after producing sixty-odd episodes, we shortened the name of the show to "ROX". We took "J&B" out of the title because the show had become much broader in scope. It wasn't just about us anymore.

TG: Did you have any prior experience in film or video production?

B: Yeah, a little bit. At that point I'd made two half-hour compilations of short art videos. I'd also made one longer piece with my friend Brian Jones; a 40-minute documentary called "Indiana Urinalysis." It was about the urinals of Indiana University—kind of a folklore perspective.

TG: Was "J&B Get Baked" something of a breakthrough episode? Did the show change after that?

B: Ah, yes. That was our 59th episode. We smoked a lot of pot on TV and said "See? This ain't so bad." We'd gotten some local press, but this story went up on the AP wire and became a national item. Suddenly, we were doing a lot of radio talk shows all across the country. Clips from this episode found their way onto the Howard Stern Show and, eventually, into a documentary, which still airs on MTV called "The Straight Dope." We got so much mileage out of this single episode, we felt sure we could continue milking the issue and get more and more publicity. We made a conscious decision not to do this. We didn't want to be branded as "the marijuana guys." We felt like "ROX" was about a lot more than just that. So, although it could have had a profound effect on the direction of the series, I don't think it did. The whole experience did motivate us to do one thing. We wanted to prove to the world and ourselves that we could get the same kind of media attention without resorting to controversy. So, in May of 1995, we put "ROX" on-line and became the first TV series on the Internet. That got us write-ups in Time, Wired, and a bunch of other magazines!

TG: I haven't seen the article but didn't Wired magazine call "ROX" the best TV show in America?

B: Sure did. Let me tell you, as superficial as it might seem, that recognition was a real shot in the arm for me. Even though it's not what we got into this

whole TV gig for in the first place. That article appeared after we had finally stopped production on the show, and I was feeling pretty down. Since then I've realized that *Wired* has to be the most hyperbolic publication in the entire history of human civilization.

TG: *Why did you decide to get married on "ROX"?*

B: It seemed like a natural thing. I had a TV show. She had a TV show. So our marriage was televised. It was quite an event, too: a puppet show in two acts, written almost entirely in rhymed couplets. Taped in front of a live audience, natch.

TG: *Do you have any particular favorite episodes?*

B: Hmm. That's hard. It's kind of like picking a favorite child. I'm fond of them all, but there are a few of which I'm particularly proud. Our interview with Noam Chomsky is one example. The perverse side of me likes an episode called "Raw Footage"—the name says it all. There are a lot of favorite moments here and there, too, like when J mixed a "Maggot De Menthe" with crème de menthe and maggots. "Six Six Six" is another favorite episode which was about being on a talk show called "Studio Six" on the local PBS affiliate. We took our camcorder on the set with us and videotaped the whole thing from our perspective. In between her stand-up intro and the actual talk segment, while the title sequence was rolling, the host turned to us and said, "This is *real* television." I'm sure she didn't mean it to sound the way it came off, but it was priceless, especially when I played it again—and again—and again, throughout "Six Six Six."

TG: *Were there any other episodes that caused a media controversy?*

B: Oh yes. We got into controversy starting with episode #5, I think, and it was pretty much non-stop after that. We discussed the topic of coprophagia [eating shit - ed.] and showed a picture of it that had been downloaded from the Internet. Mind you, this was in 1992—some groundbreaking journalism! The picture would definitely have been ruled obscene by almost any judge in the country, if it had come to court. And it probably would have gone to court if it had ever aired, but the station director held it back. Eventually it was shown with the picture blocked out (but the graphic audio description of the picture remained intact). After that there were a couple more incidents of similar nature, mostly involving penises. Each time, we didn't think what we were doing was problematic. That may sound hard to believe, but it's true. After all, the show did have occasional nudity and lots of swearing and all manner of things you don't see on regular TV. We did this stuff naively, and were always surprised when the shit hit the fan. Then the local paper ran a story about controversial programming on the access channel, and we sounded like very sick individuals indeed. Naturally, we just made a TV show about it. Another controversial segment was the one that taught the viewer how to make a red box for phreaking pay phones. One of the network affiliates in Indy came down to cover it.

TG: *"ROX" seems to be both improvisational and very calculating. Was there a lot of planning involved in the making of the show or was it all in the editing?*

B: From the get, we planned what we would talk about. Shows sometimes had a theme or a subject. When we moved away from the sit-down talk format and starting getting around more, we often planned episodes in terms of activities, like, "let's go visit that train trestle out in Solsberry." But we never scripted the episodes. Everything was improvised. Of course, we weren't really acting, because we were playing ourselves, so maybe 'extemporaneous' is a better word. The importance of editing was undeniable, though. I was the editor, and I spent 40 hrs/wk editing "ROX" in its third season. It was a 9 to 5, Monday to Friday job for me. We often shot 6 hours of footage for a 30-minute show, and sometimes I had to be pretty creative to fit all that stuff together in a way that made sense.

TG: *Where did you get the music used on the show? I think I recognize the piece of classical music you run over your opening credits. And is the rest by local musicians?*

B: The theme music is "O Fortuna" which is the first movement of *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff. It probably sounds familiar because it's used in a lot of different films and TV shows. We chose it because it seemed so completely

inappropriate for what we were doing when we started—two guys in sitting in front of a camera in a basement with this totally bombastic classical music playing—it just seemed funny. The composition is public domain, I believe, but the recording and performance we used were not. When we licensed episodes to FreeSpeechTV, we inserted a new version of the theme music, which was graciously recorded for us by a great Bloomington band, Salaam. As for the other music on the show, it is all by unsigned musicians. Most are from Bloomington, Indiana, but some are from Indianapolis, Lexington and San Francisco. Some of the music is from my own (defunct) band, The Submersibles. Some music was written specifically for the show, and a few tunes were inspired by the show and submitted to us by people we didn't even know. It's a great way to share the glory and I recommend it to anyone who is producing his or her own TV. Help promote local musicians and get a great original soundtrack for your show at the same time!

TG: *What caused the death of "ROX"?*

B: Mismanagement, fiscal and otherwise. And since we managed ourselves, we have to shoulder the blame for that. We had some money coming in from various sponsors—essentially donations from businesses and individuals who liked what we did. That money helped offset the expense of making the show. It also enabled me to work on the show full time. Still, we accumulated a lot of debt. We thought it was important to own our own equipment. When you use the facilities of an access station, the station typically holds the copyright on your work. Getting our own facilities meant we held our own copyright. Which means I can license, sell, and otherwise distribute those programs to my heart's content. That equipment is expensive! Most of the stuff we used actually belonged to a friend who was starting a video production business. Even so, we spent thousands of dollars on equipment alone. One day, we simply ran out of money. Whoops! And I still had to pay rent. So we went out of production until we could get our financial affairs in order. We gave ourselves a year to come up with a viable business plan. And some great ideas were floated. We talked with people in L.A. and N.Y.C. We had an agent. Etc. Etc. But ultimately we couldn't do it. So we gave up. You'll notice that we were no longer in it for the sheer fun of it at this point, which is how we'd started. (To tell the truth, it stopped being sheer fun for me pretty early on—it was a lot of hard work, but it was very satisfying.) Somewhere along the way we were seduced by the idea that we could make a living doing this thing we loved to do. Sometimes I think that was our biggest mistake. I really don't know.

TG: *Are you still in touch with Joe or any of the other players from "ROX"?*

B: Sure. I married Christy Paxson, and we're still together. T Black, the anarchist clown, just called us today. Joe (J) and I are still in frequent contact via e-mail, especially on the "ROX" list, which is a discussion list we've been running for four or five years now (available via the website: www.rox.com).

TG: *What did you study at Indiana University?*

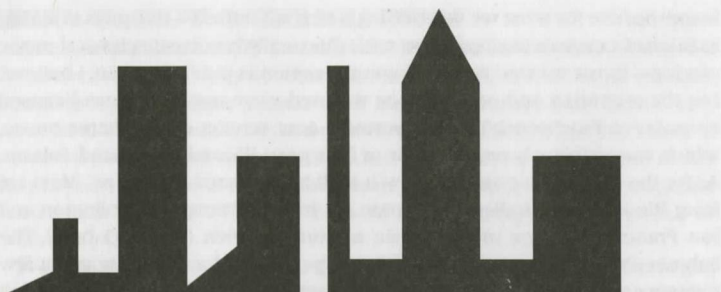
B: As an undergrad—everything. I got a Bachelor of General Studies. Seven years later I came back and got a master degree in "Immersive Mediated Environments," if you can believe it. Honest, that's the name of the program. It's in the telecommunications department, and it's basically about multimedia or new media or whatever you like to call it.

TG: *Did you design the "ROX" website?*

B: Yes, but don't hold it against me. That front page really needs an overhaul. Actually our original website was put together by Mike Bone, our first cyberfriend, back in 1995. Later on we had a guy named Tao Craig as webmaster. Both of these guys worked on the site for nothing but love. God bless 'em. Now I design websites (and CD-ROMs) for a living. I probably wouldn't be doing this today if it weren't for access television.

TG: *Any advice for someone thinking of doing his or her own public access show?*

B: Make deadlines for yourself and strive to keep them: crank that shit out. Think a lot about what you want out of the experience, and keep talking to your partners to make sure you're all on the same page. Don't neglect money issues or they will bite you in the ass later. Have fun. I think that's it.



NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Mary Gillen Makes Pickles Proud

The 7th annual New York Underground Film Festival, held at Anthology Film Archives on the increasingly lovely Lower East Side of Manhattan from March 8-14, boasted an impressive seven days of films and a five day sidebar of music and performances. Since I was able to make only the first two nights, I was forced to choose my screenings carefully. I did so in keeping with the spirit of the festival's beloved and recently deceased mascot, a monkey named Pickles. She had, in her yearning to "understand the world of giant 'hairless apes,'" shown a fondness for documentaries...

Opening night packed the house with punk rockers and film geeks alike for the premiere of Lech Kowalski's *BORN TO LOSE*, a tribute to Johnny Thunders—the prototype punk of The New York Dolls and The Heartbreakers. Almost 18 years in the making, *BORN TO LOSE* was a labor of love. The film succeeds as a visually and aurally engaging documentary. The use of subtitles in the opening clip not only helped the audience understand the lyrics, but also added a touch of irony, as if we were seeing something that should seem foreign to us living in this "modern era."

The performance footage was excellent, with a particularly poignant and thoroughly entertaining clip of The Dolls in drag doing one of my favorites, "Personality Crisis." An illuminating interview with Dee Dee Ramone featured prominently throughout the film. He rules! I expected (and dreaded) some glamorization of Thunders' junkie status and/or gratuitous needle-poking footage. Thankfully, I was spared. Substantive insight was gained without resorting to shock tactics, like the sequence where Johnny's sister takes us on a guided tour of his childhood haunts. Ultimately, *BORN TO LOSE* pleasantly surprised me by striking a delicate balance between insider cool and outsider accessibility.

That's more than I can say for Heather Rose Dominic's *THE SHIELD AROUND THE K* (preceded by waiting forty-five minutes on The Line Around the Block). *SHIELD* is an occasionally interesting (though visually uninspired) chronicle of K Records and a fawning tribute to label co-founder Calvin Johnson. As a fan of Beat Happening, I was psyched about this film and glad to see some silly footage of the group performing their endearingly simple lo-fi tunes such as "Bad Seeds," "Indian Summer," and "Foggy Eyes." Interviews with Calvin himself, his K partner Candice Pedersen, Ian MacKaye, Jean de Mecca Normal and many others amounted to not much more than a lot of Calvin-praising and dry historical recounting.

Unfortunately, it all felt very still for a *motion* picture: a common dilemma for documentary filmmakers. If even your target audience is bored, I doubt very much that your film can appeal to anyone beyond that specialized group. While the subject of the film felt close to my heart, it was

hard to deny my disappointment with the product itself.

I briefly left the world of documentary films for the "Sex on the Fritz: Performance Anxiety" program, which featured several short videos. An immediate standout was Miranda July's audio piece, *WSNO*. Visually, a glowing red screen accompanied the film. This work functioned like a weirdo radio station broadcast of a dial-in show for lonely people with freaked-out secrets. July uses the trappings of our media culture as a creepy locale for her equally creepy characters, and I dig it.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME #1 and #2, an animated short by Karen Yasinsky, was also spooky. It stars a truncated stuffed female doll and an ugly stuffed man. The woman clacks her heels like Dorothy in *Oz*, trying to escape the discomfort and disorientation of her barren surroundings. As she is made up of only a skirt, legs and feet, her displeasure is pretty understandable. The film gets even more disturbing when she tosses about on a bed, seemingly frustrated and lusty, then gets sexually assaulted by the stuffed man as well as by what appears to be his "wife."

A couple of the most effective pieces of this program dealt in found footage paired with new sound. Jennifer Reeder's *LULLABY* knocked me off my guard with its jarring arrangement of adolescent mania and body-conscious pain accompanied by a droning, lethargic modification of Madonna's "Lucky Star" (both the song and the classic video). It seemed to go on forever but that's also what made it work. The inter-cutting of hard, cold black and white typed "diary excerpts" made the experience feel a bit clinical, even intrusive. But when my friend pointed out that some of the text was pulled from Judy Blume books, it just seemed so...right.

Brian Frye Scopes Out The Scene

The New York Underground Film Festival (NYUFF) is well on its way to becoming an institution, whether it cares to or not. And as a semi-regular, I've appreciated a somewhat unexpected attention to programming and a markedly sharper focus over the last few years, presumably the doing of director Ed Halter.

To Ed's credit, the event has evolved into an event worth attending for something other than people-watching (always rewarding). Ultimately, however, I couldn't shake the feeling that three or more disparate festivals were running simultaneously.

A surprisingly hefty selection of the films came from the Fine Arts world (the sort of filmmaking previous incarnations of the NYUFF welcomed about as warmly as one might a rabid dog). The dregs of the fest were the obvious film-school projects, teflon-slick, insincere and totally vacuous.

The really raw films—the ones that are properly called "underground" (and the real soul of the festival)—made the strongest showing. They were obviously chosen by someone with an uncommon feeling for their most vital qualities. The number of strong films was far greater than previous years.

One of the few "Big Events" I made it to was the program organized by recording artist/video-maker/impresario Miranda July, imported from Portland, Oregon. Probably best known for her Big Miss Moviola project—a "video chain letter" created to circulate tapes by female artists. July has several phenomenally creepy recordings out on Kill Rock Stars, as well as a very strong video, *THE AMATEURIST*.

July presented both selections from the Big Miss Moviola collection and her new work, *NEST OF TENS*. The program began with Naomi Uman's *REMOVED*, a strange little film in which all of the women are physically bleached out of a particularly corny, poorly dubbed snippet from a '70s porno film. Both wonderfully raw and astonishingly subtle, it's one of the better films of the past year.

The second film in July's program, *TAXIDERMY: THE ART OF IMITATING LIFE*, was surprisingly sensitive and beautiful. A refreshingly minimal, neo-verite portrait of a very skilled Long Island taxidermist and his assistant, it restored a fragment of faith that something good might come out of film

school.

The last tape in the show was July's own NEST OF TENS. July's metier is plainly anxiety. In THE AMATEURIST she managed, with the humblest of means, to convey the profoundly unsettling impression of watching something quite horrible transpire, while never quite revealing what was taking place. NEST OF TENS is certainly more ambitious, incorporating several parallel events and broader themes, but the film lacks the incontestability of THE AMATEURIST.

Suffused by the soft-focus, semi-professional glow of the cable infomercial, the look of NEST OF TENS could have been perfect. At times it worked, especially when July appeared on screen. An intensely awkward, Crispin Glover-esque performer, she supplies the nervous tension and air of stunned bewilderment without which the tape goes from curiously enigmatic to desultory and unengaging. July's performances are riveting due in part to the barely suppressed quaver of terror in her voice. Meanwhile, her "actors" might as well be reading the instructions for operating a cheap vacuum cleaner. Bored and listless, they don't convey any of the subtle menace that made THE AMATEURIST so engaging.

Among the more unexpected films in this year's festival was Reed Paget's AMERICAN PASSPORT. Playing like a warped version of Ross McElwee's SHERMAN'S MARCH, Paget sets off on his own, shockingly literal version of a "Holiday in Cambodia," visiting some of the most notorious disaster zones of the '80s. Paget manages to treat the carnage he and his trusty CP-16 witness even more abstractly than McElwee. Hoping to get the scoop on the "Red Menace," the film ranges from fascinating to tedious to downright bizarre.

Paget's charming (if utterly hopeless) naivete colors the entire film. His interminable narration is rife with interview questions sounding like they could have been contributed by "sensitive" junior high students. The camerawork and editing are undistinguished, if downright sloppy. And, its various, very discrete segments never really cohere into one complete film.

Yet, there was something unexpectedly winning about AMERICAN

PASSPORT. The wonderful animated maps that chart his progress evoke the grand expeditions of Teddy Roosevelt or Frank Capra's WWII films. I can't recall the last time I saw such a well-meaning film without flinching. There's a real truth here, though I don't think it's the one Paget was looking for. For all his cheerful bravado and truly winning ingenuousness, Paget remains the classic tourist, the epitome of the America that can see the rest of the world only as a reflection of itself.

I'm particularly happy I stayed out late to see LIQUID SKY, the semi-notorious film by Slava Tsukerman. For some, the film is the defining statement on the wacky '80s East Village. Replete with trippy video effects, bizarre outfits, almost obscenely dated (yet suddenly cool again) music and some of the lamest (but fascinating) conspiracy theories-cum-ufology you'll ever find in any film. It's a classic almost by default.

The story, such as it is, centers on the East Village fashion victim community. The dialogue sounds as if it were translated through several languages and sends a comically bizarre situation halfway to terrifying. Junkies are smack at the middle of everything, though their tendency here to wax hollowly rhapsodic about getting off makes everything a good deal more fun. With the introduction to this mess of a pseudo-Reichian Russian "physicist" on an alien hunt and you're in for some real fun. The orgone energy is flying, the psychedelic alien vision is pulsing away, and one is bound to come to some deep mystical insights of some sort.

At first glance, LIQUID SKY may seem in keeping with previous incarnations of the NYUFF, which seemed to define "underground film" by its overt interest in guns, tits, junkies, or some combination thereof. While the visceral pleasure of such fare is undeniable, they make for a rather tedious festival. After the thrill wore off (a minute or two later), one came to the inevitable realization that an apparent majority of the "filmmakers" didn't seem to have the faintest idea what they were doing. Ed Halter, however, has committed himself to taking the festival seriously, not just as a business proposition, but as a place to actually watch films of substance.

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FILM FESTS OF THE GREAT LAKES STATE

EAST LANSING

ANN ARBOR

WORKING FOR FREE for long hours without even college credit was going against my grain, but I thought, "an internship will do me good," when Vicki Honeyman, director of the Ann Arbor Film Festival, came in looking for volunteers.

On my initial trek to festival headquarters I was struck with a sense of peculiarity. The nerve center of the fest resided in the back of Vicki's Wash & Wear Hair—Honeyman's place of business. While customers sat in the front section of the building, getting their locks shorn and jawing on about Vicki's fabulous collection of fifties furniture, I sat in the back with the piles of films, entering information in the fest's database that I culled off canisters and entries.

My daily trip to the Ann Arbor post office (sometimes requiring two or more trips when the films really started rolling in) appealed to me particularly. I'm a post office junkie and felt myself exhilarated each time I walked back to Ann Street with a basket full of films. And I do mean *films*...

The Ann Arbor Film Festival is just that—all films and *no video*! That's not so strange, I suppose, as the viability of video is a rarity in major festivals. There was a stringent adherence that under no circumstance would video be allowed - not even for pre-screening purposes. This insured that if a filmmaker's print were shown that it would have been run through a projector at least once to verify that it was technically functional (the sound and picture were there). This also circumvented waiting for last-minute UPS deliveries.

During my internship learned quite a bit. I saw the way film festivals function, the various attitudes of filmmakers, the importance of community relations, et cetera. However, I must admit that I squandered a plethora of opportunities to learn more. I never shirked any shifts or cried foul about going to the post office or picking Vicki up some coffee when the weather was inclement. Yet, for someone who considers himself a cinephile, I missed the meat and potatoes of the festival—the films themselves.

Instead of coming to the screening events, I spent my evenings driving sixty-some miles roundtrip for a few hours with my then-girlfriend (my now ex-wife). I don't say these words out of spite. Even then, I regretted denying myself the opportunity to check out all of the films I entered into the database day-in-day-out. I also abrogated my ability to make new friends and possibly find a home among the hipsters of Ann Arbor. As is my *modus operandi*, I did the bare minimum—keeping pretty much to myself the majority of the time.

Luckily, when the festival ran, I made the time to come out. I spent several nights in the darkened Michigan Theater paying rapt attention. It was the first film festival I had ever attended. Quite a few of the films bored me. A couple sickened me. A handful made me laugh. I can remember a film or two that pushed the limits of filmmaking and truly impressed me. However, for the most part, the films that left an indelible mark were Christopher Gallagher's *WHERE IS MEMORY* (see pg. 71) and John O'Hagen's *FIVE SPOT JEWEL*. (Vicki helped me track down the former film, while I'm still searching for the latter).

After five years, I started talking to Vicki again through the wonder of email.

She welcomed me back to the fold with open arms and invited me to this year's fest. The 38th Annual Ann Arbor Film Festival was bigger and better than ever, with the new addition of a second screen to the historic Michigan Theater, federal grant money, and more staff and space for the festival offices. And then there were the films...

Over the years, I had forgotten that the AAFF is *the* venue for experimental films. While I applaud experimental filmmakers, their work isn't often suited to my philistine tastes. I tend to find the majority of experimental works tiresome and overlong.

One flick that stuck in my craw as being particularly contrived was Ken Paul Rosenthal's *BLACKBIRDS*, which consisted of a split screen presentation of the infamous footage of the Rodney King and Reginald Denny beatings. The images ran ad nauseum at various speeds, in color, monochrome, and negative. They may have even run backwards, but I can't be certain. It was a struggle to pay attention to this heavy-handed social critique.

Not every avant-garde flick had me squirming in my seat. Matt McCormick's *SINCERELY, JOE P. BEAR*, was a wonderfully strange and creative use of found footage. McCormick employed reels of what appears to be promotional footage for an ice company. Starring a well-coifed 1950's beauty cooling her jets on some big blocks of ice, she's joined by a guy in a bear suit. The film is narrated by an unnatural voice reciting a fanciful love poem. It was equal parts sweet and surreal.

The films that really stood out for me were Paul Charney and Marc Vogl's *SUNDAY AFTERNOON* and Doug Wolens' *BUTTERFLY*—a comedy and documentary. *SUNDAY AFTERNOON* is a study in relationships or, more accurately, in the end of relationships. The catch is that there's but one line that could be perceived as actual dialogue—the rest of the razor-sharp rapport between the actors is expressed as descriptions of their speech. Thus, more than trite lines with which every audience member is familiar, *SUNDAY AFTERNOON* is a blueprint for a break-up.

Premiering at the Ann Arbor Film Festival, Doug Wolen's *BUTTERFLY* is intensely humorous at times—most often at the expense of the film's subjects. Capturing the crusade of Julia Butterfly Hill to save an ancient California redwood forest from logging, Wolens' work is narrow in its scope while being wonderfully wide in its focus.

Wolens takes the audience to the tree stand 180-feet off the ground where Hill spent two years of her life in an attempt to bring attention to her personal cause. We witness Hill as she scurries around breathtakingly high branches of the tree she's dubbed Luna. All the while, the audience has the opportunity to ponder whether Hill is incredibly brave or if she's just a foolhardy hippy.

More than life atop the Luna, Wolens shows the earthbound incidents radiating from the base of Hill's perch. Though Hill's action is the crux of the film, opinions on the ground often supercede her tree-sitting and deal with the larger questions of the morality of forestry and the politics of protest. Wolens doesn't overwhelm audiences with an abundance of figures about forestry; instead he employs wonderful shots of the vistas which Hill can see from her perch. He contrasts these shots with images of areas decimated by improper environmental management.

The theme of *BUTTERFLY* that I found most interesting was the conflict within the protesters. While Hill was not a member of Earth First! when she made her climb to the top of Luna, she was quickly adopted by the group. As the film proceeds there's a definite shift in opinions among Earth Firsters who not only seem to grow weary of transporting supplies to the base of Luna, but who also appear to resent the attention that Hill is getting. Within breaths, the quirkily named Earth Firsters (Shakespeare, Orange, etc.) contradict themselves about the importance of harnessing media recognition and the detrimental repercussions to the cause by public scrutiny.

Comprehensively developed, the opinions, facts, and story of *BUTTERFLY* unfold with a strong, steady tempo. By surveying the population of the town most affected by the clear-cutting of areas around Hill's post, Wolens succeeds in presenting a terrific array of opinions instead of opting to paint a stark dichotomy of righteous activists struggling against a corporate behemoth.

While I don't usually feel any qualms of guilt while taking in other film festivals, I guess that I felt some pangs of loyalty surfacing. I often felt underused as I lurked around the Michigan Theater, trying my best to kick back and

enjoy the festival purely as a spectator.

The Ann Arbor Film Festival is ignored more often than it is lauded. Thirty-eight years is a long time for a festival to survive and it's a rare fest that really sticks to its guns—promoting a single gauge of film along with non-commercial filmmaking. The AAFF is holding onto its indie cred with white-knuckled tenacity.

A WEEK LATER and an hour away I was making my way through the crowds at the East Lansing Film Festival. Held on the campus of Michigan State University, Wells Hall was packed with folks milling around, waiting for the Friday night feature attraction, Kimberly Peirce's *BOYS DON'T CRY*.

For as experimental as the Ann Arbor Film Fest is, East Lansing's Festival is commercialized. Not that there's anything wrong with that! In fact, it's a wise tactic for the fledgling festival to take. Despite being a college town, East Lansing lacks the presence of even mainstream-indie films like Peirce's. Hosting commercially viable yet artistically challenging works is a shrewd way to fill theaters and maintain credibility. And, hey, I've got to admit that of the screenings I went to I tended to enjoy the "bigger" flicks much more than the "smaller" ones.

I was most impressed with Don McKellar's *LAST NIGHT*. Originally part of an French funded ten-part series of films dealing with the changing of the millennium, McKellar realized how quickly dated his film would become if had made the story purely millennial. Instead, *LAST NIGHT* is an apocalyptic film that deals with the frailty of human emotions.

Cleverly leaving the cause of the inevitable conclusion to existence of Earth as something alluded to rather than the crux of the story, *LAST NIGHT* is much closer to Steve De Jarnatt's *MIRACLE MILE* than Michael Bay's *ARMAGEDDON*. Instead of a band of deep core drillers, terrifically real characters populate *LAST NIGHT*.

An ensemble piece, *LAST NIGHT* centers on Patrick Wheeler (played by McKellar who also penned the script), a lonely widower determined to spend his last night on Earth alone. However, he's disturbed early on in his melancholic wallowing by Sandra (Sandra Oh), a woman simply trying to make it home to her husband.

Sporting a great cast that includes Geneviève Bujold, Callum Keith Rennie, Tracy Wright, and David Cronenberg (who plays an incredibly devoted gasworks employee), *LAST NIGHT* is beautifully shot and wonderfully written. The plotting of the film is direct with strong pacing helped by the flow of revelation and information about the characters and their situations.

Turning from narrative to documentary, I headed to the theater next door and caught *LOUIS PRIMA: THE WILDEST!* I didn't know much of anything about Prima going in to the film and didn't know much more coming out. If anything, Don McGlynn's film did more to confound me than enlighten me.

For example, judging by the ages-old interview footage with one of Prima's ex-wives—the golden-throated Keely Smith—I had to assume she was dead. What a shock I had later that night when I turned on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" to see Ms. Smith performing a cut from her new album, *Swing, Swing, Swing!*

While I enjoyed *LOUIS PRIMA: THE WILDEST!* for the abundant performance footage, to call it a documentary would be a stretch. It was more like an A&E biography gone awry. If anything, I'd have preferred McGlynn to dump the stock footage of New Orleans and Las Vegas and just give the audience more of Prima and Smith's act.

The next morning I checked out Jean-Philippe Toussaint's *THE ICE RINK (LA PATINOIRE)*. A movie about making movies, the principle draw this film held for me was the casting of Bruce Campbell who stars as Sylvester a big shot American actor. Meandering and blithe, if you're a Campbell fan or you

dug Tom DiCillo's *LIVING IN OBLIVION*, I can recommend it.

The film that I most anticipated at the ELFF was the new documentary on the Branch Davidian massacre, *WACO: A NEW REVELATION*. I wanted to see if any members of the infamous Michigan Militia would turn out for this screening. Alas, the screening had one of the smallest audiences of all the screenings I attended.

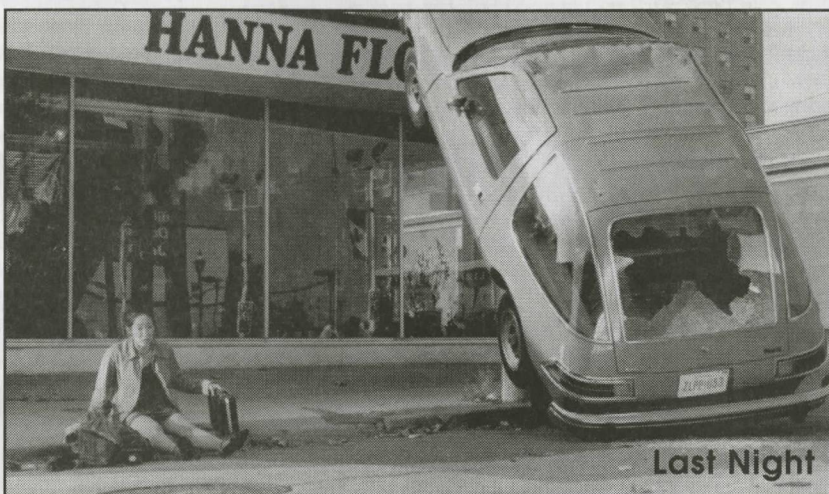
Maybe people are sick of hearing about Waco in the wake of the renewed interest in the cover-up or perhaps it's just "old news." Regardless, I was itching to see the evidence of the governmental collusion to continue piling up. I was also curious to see how this film would compare to William Gazecki's *WACO: RULES OF ENGAGEMENT*—a film I considered the last word on the Waco massacre.

I'm pleased to say that *WACO: A NEW REVELATION* proves better than a companion piece for *RULES OF ENGAGEMENT*. It stands on its own as a comprehensive analysis of the events surrounding Waco from a brief history of the Branch Davidians to the earliest parts of 2000 and the re-opening of the Waco investigation.

Director Jason Van Fleet does well to explain the confounding facts and contradictions that have been passed off as "fact" by the FBI and US Justice Department. As with investigations of other historical cabals, following the path of deception can prove maddening. This succinct documentary does well to present a boatload of information in a palatable manner—even if the subject matter is distasteful.

Along with the down-to-earth attitude of the ELFF staff and volunteers, I enjoyed the special attention that the fest gives to Michigan filmmakers with its "Michigan's Own" program. I made sure to attend the documentary section of the program as the first film screened covered a subject near and dear to my heart, Detroit.

In *CASS*, filmmaker Matt Gallagher presents the viewer with several "survivor stories" from folks who have refused to give up on Detroit. They spend their time and hard-earned money city once known as the "Paris of the West." Presently the city bears more of a resemblance to Beirut or some other decimated third world metropolis. Gallagher brings a unique perspective to the film via



his Canadian heritage. Living across the Detroit River where trees, parks, and commerce fill the streets of Windsor, Gallagher tackles the bad reputation that Motor City has garnered over the last few decades and does little to disaffirm it.

Though Gallagher's documentary could stand some tightening, it was brightened in comparison to the next work screened, Joan Mandell's *TALES FROM ARAB DETROIT*. Suffering from a lack of direction and in desperate need of editing, *TALES FROM ARAB DETROIT* has an interesting concept at its core—the cultural differences between generations of Arabs growing up in America and their elders. Unfortunately, Mandell's work meanders aimlessly wanders through endless interviews and seems to be unaware of how to present material in a comprehensible, organized manner.

Kathryn Vander's film, *WALK THIS WAY*, didn't deal with Detroit or its subcultures. Instead, at its center is a man, Ron Bachman. The film tries hard (maybe too hard?) to be an inspirational film about one person overcoming personal adversity. *WALK THIS WAY* covers the life of Bachman who was born with a condition that left his legs shriveled and useless. His parents had his legs amputated when he was four and he has lived the remainder of his life as essentially half a man. Personally, I'd rather see a film about Johnny Eck.

Still in its infancy, I can see good things coming for the East Lansing Film Festival. Well organized, affable, and sporting a nice mix of marketable and innovative films, this fest packed a wallop! Lookout, it's a force to be reckoned with!

ON SUNSET

by Lisa Wexton and Fawn O'Vey

INTERNET (HALF) LIFE FEST
COMES TO PARK CITY WEST

"SUNDANCE BLAH BLAH," "when I was up at Sundance yadda yadda," "didn't I see you at Sundance yadda blah yadda blah." Except for the naked white flesh offered up to West Hollywood's early spring, the Gen X, Y and Z crowd could have been hustling wares in Park City. Sell this! Buy me! The operative word was hustle.

The Yahoo! Internet Life Online Film Festival was billed as a "viable outlet for independent, shorts, and animation filmmakers." Despite its name, however, the event wasn't about film nor was it particularly "online." The two-day confab felt more like a tradeshow. Digital technology was barely exploited in its presentations and not one of the events was cybercast on the Web. So you say you're an online film festival, okay...

Rumor had it that fewer people went to the screenings than the panel discussions but both venues seemed to be completely overbooked as far as we could see. We waited on line (bad pun intended) about half an hour for people to sneak out of the short film program and even then we had to sit on the floor.

With titles like "Taking a Feature to the Net" and a ton of film, new media and Internet luminaries in attendance,

it was easy to see why the panel discussions were packed. Guests included Doug Liman (the director of *SWINGERS* and *GO*, who was tellingly identified in the festival program as "founder and chairman of Nibblebox.com"), "South Park" co-creator Matt Stone, and Craig "Spike" Decker (of *Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation*). The discussions seemed the most promising opportunity to see something interesting. But the venues hosting them were too small to accommodate the crowds that the panels attracted.

Were they worth it? Hard to say. We hung around outside the "Taking a Feature to the Net" panel discussion straining to hear something interesting with the rest of those that couldn't get a seat (and this amusingly included more than a few stunned-looking executive types), but didn't hear anything other than the usual hyperbole and conjecture. One Internet company CEO managed to sum up everything that was wrong with the festival's attitude and atmosphere with the jaw-dropping grand assessment, "That's the future. People who can make pretty pictures move are going to be very, very rich."

Even the coolest-sounding panel on the agenda, "New Media and the Underground," wasn't as interesting as it should have been. Moderated by CrapTV founder Jason McHugh, the panel was comprised of Matt Stone, music and new media producer Alexander Bard, digital filmmaker Abner Zurd, and a bunch of hot-shit new media types from companies such as Vidnet and iFuse. But, while some of the discussions on original content Web sites and the artistic freedom of the Net were interesting, nothing of any real substance was said. One couldn't help but shake the impression that no one really knew what the hell they were talking about.

To be fair, *some* of the films in the festival did appear on its www.onlinefilmfestival.com website. (Not on Yahoo!, by the way, to make it even more confusing for someone trying to find the festival without knowing the URL.) Some twenty-four shorts simul-streamed on the site and were evaluated by the web public for six months prior to the fest then awarded prizes through this online popularity contest. But who wants to see postage-stamp sized movies when you can go down to the Directors Guild and see them on the big screen? Half the films were worth the wait. The other half wouldn't have made it into *Tromadance*.

We particularly liked *RACE SPEEDSTER*, the witty parody of '60s anime fave

"*Speed Racer*," and *FISHBAR #10: THE DELECTABLE PEANUT*, a wacky cartoon featuring female fish buttocks and a stewardess who talks about giving the passengers head. Honorable mention to *VEDMA*, a Gormenghastian stop-motion experience, as well as to the sweet homage to a departed grandmother, *BABIE*. We were horribly annoyed at *SUNDAY'S GAME*, a silly low rez bloodbath which sneers at its elderly cast, and the pretentious *MEN NAMED MILO*, *WOMEN NAMED GRETA*, an overwrought film school special.

A handful of films (Doug Block's *HOME PAGE* and Rupert Wainwright's *THE SADNESS OF SEX* among them) were held aloft as examples of different ways films can break over the Net. But, short of the evening premiere of Mike Figgis' *TIME CODE*, nothing seemed to make much of an impact among the festival attendees.

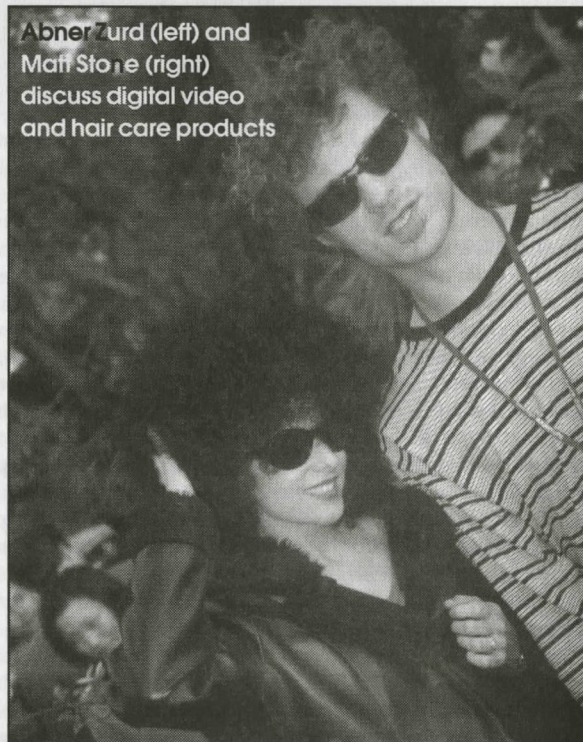
The film with the longest wait-line will not appear on the web anytime soon for very practical reasons: you won't be able to see a damn thing. Figgis' much-anticipated, thoughtful, overly schematic, jokey and sincere cinematic experiment *TIME CODE* premiered to probably his best-case scenario audience. Only a room of other digi-heads would appreciate it. Only techies would put up with the swirling madness of four audio channels haphazardly mixed from a four-way multiscreen. Only Yahoo! festival goers would ignore the fact that this movie had absolutely nothing to do with the Internet, let alone life.

For those who haven't yet felt the shift in the film force, get ready. Even with the glitches, this screening felt like the start of something truly new—the first brave steps toward expanding film language. As one of the presenters remarked, it's like the first talkie—a spot on assessment, when recalling that the first talkies were gimmicks. The early talkies neglected what had been learned about style and the language of cinema in their eagerness to embrace a new tech-toy.

Likewise, *TIME CODE* seems to have forgotten some very basic story criteria—compelling characters, interesting dialogue, innovative plot—in its absorption with handling the four real-time cameras running simultaneously in side-by-side frames.

The films took a backseat to technology; the discussion panels were so overcrowded that even celebs were turned away; free drinks, meaningless swag, and a whole lotta bullshit flowed freely all afternoon.

Abner Zurd (left) and Matt Stone (right) discuss digital video and hair care products



And can you follow all four stories at the same time? Surprisingly, yes. What Figgis realized is that he could set up elements one by one, establishing basic relationships and then directing the audience's attention by raising the audio level in a given frame and lowering or muting the levels in the other. Strange combinations of out of phase voices and rising volumes sometimes enhanced (and other times distorted) the effect. Overall it *worked*, and occasionally it did so with breathtaking virtuosity, as when Jeanne Tripplehorn breaks from shrillness into deeply felt pain. After following her through a four-ring circus of sexual roundelay, suddenly she just cries, alone in her own frame. Your eye then moves back to the source of her pain. Then you glance quickly at the other two "background frames," getting their message and returning to Jeanne. All emotion set to Figgis' harrowing audio dance.

Of the rest of the starry cast, only Stellan Skarsgård and Saffron Burrows really seemed to be performing. Everyone else did the best they could with their caricaturish roles by doing Tuesday night low rent improv. Figgis should learn that it is *not* good to have actors come up with something cute on cue rather than to give them a great script. It is also not a triumph to have highly-paid actors master the ability to synchronize watches so they can hit physical marks if not psychological ones.

In the end, we'd rather see Figgis fumble with something than sit through another panel discussion about digital convergences and the paradigms of viral models on a metric basis. (Or whatever those nice little white boys were saying.) Until then, we'll be browsing for tips on how to marry a web millionaire on the festival midway...

For all the money being poured into the presentations and all the giddy hyperbole flying around, there really wasn't much to see or do. That's probably why the exhibitor booths were where most of the socializing was being done. The complimentary cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, promotional trinkets, and cool live-action and animated shorts playing on big fancy-schmancy flat-screen

monitors offered lots of distractions. Just about every major or up-and-coming film, entertainment or new media Web company was on hand: AtomFilms, Reel.com, IFilm, Wildbrain.com, Shockwave, Amazon.com and the Internet Movie database, an on and on.

It was here that struggling filmmakers, studio execs, nineteen-year-old Internet CEOs and sundry industry types schmoozed like there was no tomorrow. Everybody was on the make, mostly trolling for investors—and they were there, too, with representatives from all kinds of non-film companies in attendance. And, with everyone getting liquored up on all the free drinks, there was lots of entertaining behavior going on.

For all its faults (and it had plenty), the festival had lots of potential, and with new technology changing the rules of modern filmmaking faster than anyone can keep up with, it's definitely a timely and needed arena. But, if one thing was painfully clear about the event, it's that it needs to figure out what exactly its purpose is. What audience is it trying to serve? Independent filmmakers? New media innovators? Web geeks? Film industry execs? The festival couldn't seem to decide. One audience that didn't seem to be taken into consideration, though, was film fans.

Although the festival gave some cursory props to digital filmmaking as an evolving art form, its focus was not what new technology and the Internet as a medium means to filmmaking as an art, but rather what these advancements mean to filmmaking as a business. Not that there's anything *wrong* with that. Okay, maybe there is. The unrelenting focus on profits and commercial potential rather than artistic innovation was appalling.

In the weeks since the Fest took place, it's taken a beating from critics for its apparent eagerness to blow off art in favor of commerce. Hopefully, festival organizers will take the next year to think about what they want the focus of this event to be. Hopefully, next year it will be more like a festival instead of a glorified tradeshow.

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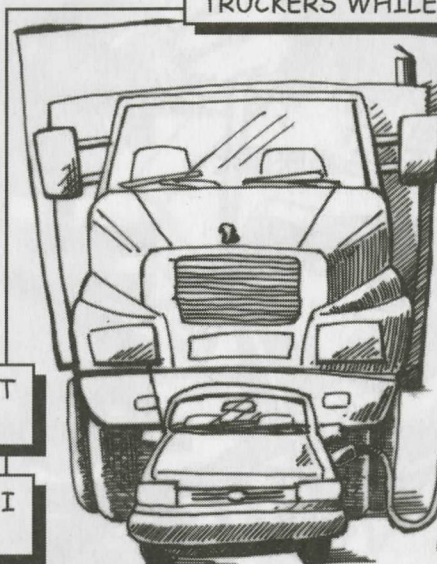
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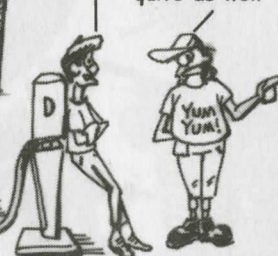
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so you're sure the best showers are at the Mobil off exit 38 on I-96?

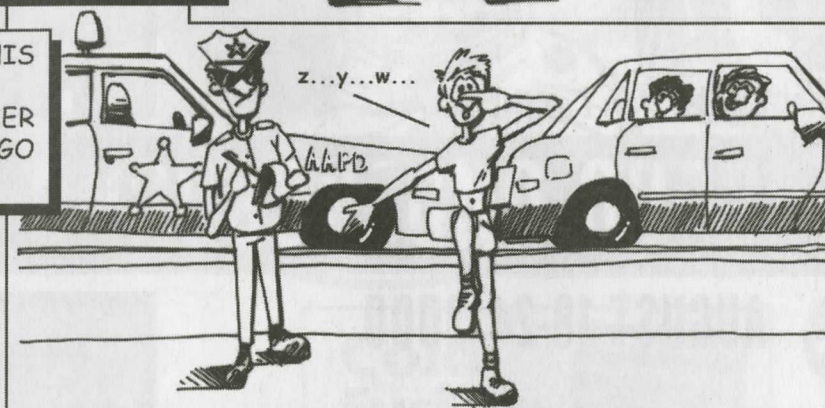
oh, definitely no one else's water rinses my conditioner out quite as well



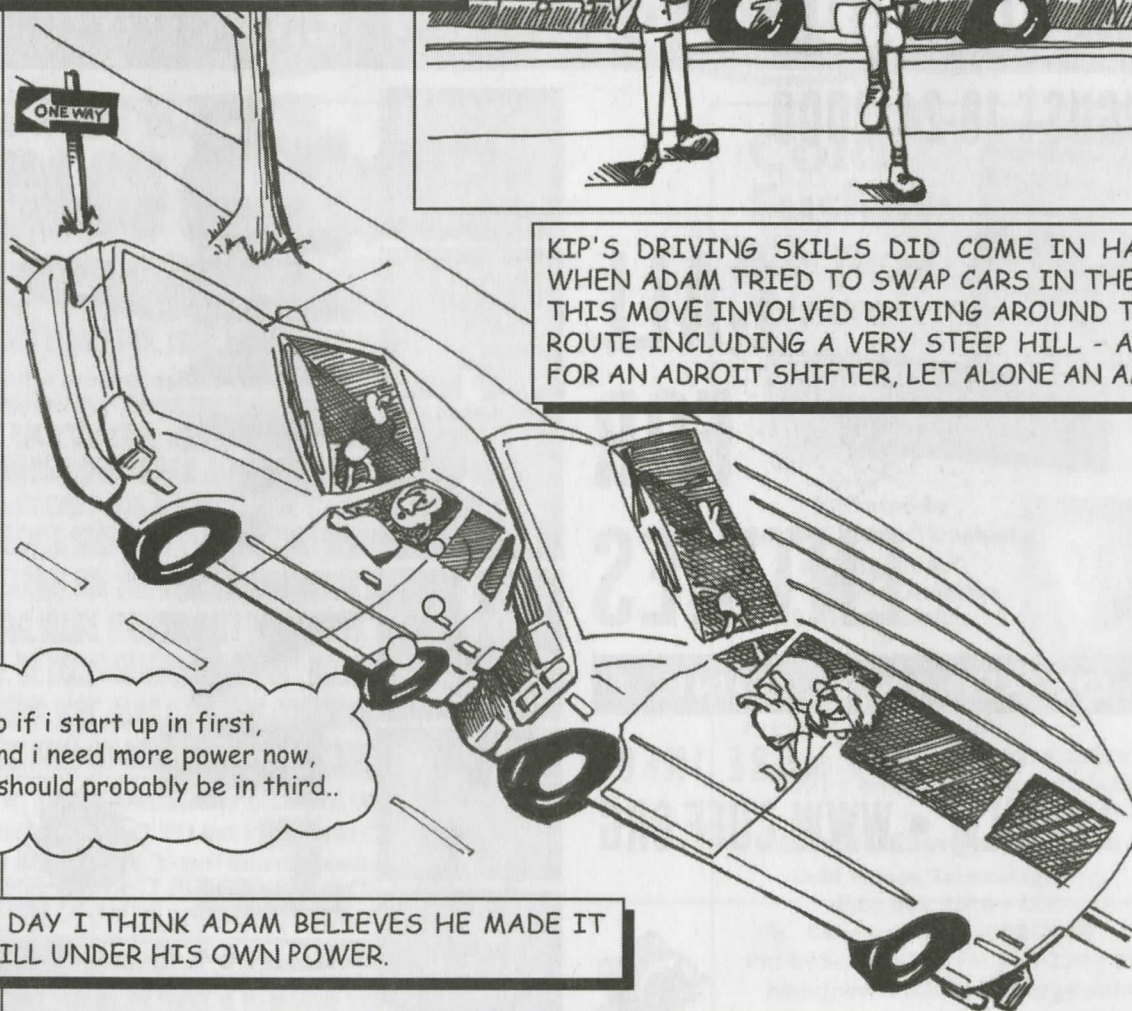
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KIP WANTED TO LEARN TO DRIVE A STICK, SO I AGREED TO TEACH HIM.

THE AAPD WAS UNIMPRESSED WITH HIS ABILITY TO AVOID STALLING. THE ADMITTANCE OF OUR EARLIER ATTENDANCE AT HAPPY HOUR DIDN'T GO OVER WELL, EITHER.



KIP'S DRIVING SKILLS DID COME IN HANDY LATER WHEN ADAM TRIED TO SWAP CARS IN THE DRIVEWAY. THIS MOVE INVOLVED DRIVING AROUND THE BLOCK, A ROUTE INCLUDING A VERY STEEP HILL - A CHALLENGE FOR AN ADROIT SHIFTER, LET ALONE AN AMATEUR!



so if i start up in first, and i need more power now, i should probably be in third..

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