TRASH CITY
23

TC 23 - November 2000

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This is TC 23, a pop culture time-capsule whose future is cloudy - see the editorial for details - and so, subscriptions to future issues are not currently being accepted. Feel free to keep sending me money though. Some old TCs (16/17, 20/21, 22) are available; buying now is wise, in case I can't be arsed to ship them to America with me. For British readers, they're £2.50 each including p&p; everyone else should get in touch for the correct rate, which depends as much on where **I** am, as where you are...

For similar reasons, getting in touch with me might be tricky, but email to **jmclennan@trashcity.org** should work, regardless of my location. For old-fashioned post, **Trash City, PO Box 8353, Scottsdale, AZ 85252, USA** becomes effective at the end of November. Updates will be posted on the web site, **http://www.trshcity.demon.co.uk**, as and when appropriate. The site is also a haven for more of this kind of thing: reviews, articles, rants, strip-club info and more. With *colour* pictures...

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Welcome to the Videodrome

And now, the end is near...or is it? By the time you get this, I will probably have gone to a better place. To be specific: Phoenix, Arizona. Yes, after several years of pontification and gradual progress, I am finally joining the Brain Drain and departing Perran Road (eight years in residence), HSBC (11.5 years), London (ten years) and Britain (34 years). Getting this issue out will be virtually the last thing I do before departing - I won't quite be posting them at Gatwick, but to all intents and purposes I might as well be. Interested parties are referred to the inside front page for contact info. You are welcome to come visit!

While this is something to which I'm hugely looking forward, what it means for the future of TC is uncertain, because it's probably the biggest change in my lifestyle since it was born. I started TC, largely because I was bored, and I doubt that will be the case for the foreseeable future. Printing and distribution will also, of necessity, radically alter since I'm going to be based in America.

The increasing importance of the Internet also comes into play. Hits on the TC site have tripled in the past two years, and sales of the printed version are in decline – there's a point beyond which the latter just isn't worth the time. However, we're not quite there yet, and while the Internet is ideal for some things (cross-referenced Film Blitz reviews, and stuff that can't wait 15 months for the next edition!), no-one really wants to *read* on-line, so I like to think longer articles will still find a home on paper.

All of which translates into a very big question-mark; this might be a good point at which to draw a line under the printed version, but getting this one out before I leave will let me move out without having to worry about it. The few months' slack which usually follows an issue will let me settle in: if interest, time and opportunity permit, I'll start on TC 24 in due course. If not, TC will continue solely on-line, though one of my current tasks is converting all the out-of-print issues and putting them up on the site. Suffice it to say, the world will hear from me again, one way or another.

Indeed, readers should keep an eye out on Channel 4 in spring 2001 for a documentary series about London strip-clubs, on which I've been helping out a bit. This may knock another couple of minutes off my fifteen of fame, although whether this will involve my mug appearing on screen is as yet uncertain. If I do, expect Jimmy Saville to publish an unedited transcript on his web site... The relevance of this will become clear shortly.

Top 10 Films of 2000 (so far...)

1. *Run Lola Run*
2. *Gladiator*
3. *Dancer in the Dark*
4. *Beyond the Mat*
5. *O Brother, Where Art Thou*
6. *American Psycho*
7. *Boiler Room*
8. *Final Destination*
9. *American Beauty*
10. *Toy Story 2*

With two months still to go, it may seem a bit early to be picking films of the year, but looking ahead, there's not much upcoming – save *Girlfight*, which threw this issue into confusion (I was banking on it as "G" in the A-Z!) when they delayed its release, supposedly to improve its Oscar chances. Er, excuse me! If people can't remember your film three months down the line, it doesn't deserve an Oscar. I digress. *Run Lola Run* and *Gladiator* were head-and-shoulders above the rest, both managing to be excellent entertainment that engaged the mind as well as the heart. Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* was purely a film of the heart but packed an amazing wallop if you could suspend your disbelief, while *Beyond the Mat* left me shaking my head in wonder and wishing it was fiction. The Coen Brothers truly returned to form with *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, based on the works of Homer - and I don't mean Simpson - while *American Psycho* lost the viciousness of the book, but became a far better brain-twister as a resultand would have been a fine double bill with *Boiler Room*. *Final Destination* had the moment of the year (the advert showing a cinema audience leaping vertically, is entirely accurate!), while *American Beauty* makes it in for sheer viciousness. *Toy Story 2* was just fun.

As for the worst of the year, if I had paid to see either *Bats* or *Stuart Little*, I'd be demanding a refund.

It is ironic that I abandon Britain as the BBFC finally legalise hard-core pornography, and go to the US, where both presidential candidates blame Hollywood for all society's ills. Still, what's life without something to rebel against? As I write this, what I'm rebelling against is Demon, my Internet service provider, who claim that part of the TC site, an amusing but probably entirely fake *Have I Got News For You* transcript, is defamatory. They refuse to say what specifically is wrong with it (which makes it a bit hard to fix), or who complained, but I suspect the answer is...Jimmy Saville. How's about *that* then, boys and girls? Even though there are a host of other places where the same material can be found, we're not even allowed to mention them, courtesy of 19th century precedent. It's all ludicrously amusing, though I am also acquiring an intimate knowledge of the 1996 Defamation Act.

Fancy a bit of TC? Rik has kindly given us the original artwork for this issue's cover, and we're offering the one-of-a-kind item as a prize for the most amusing and witty (or simply most defamatory to Jimmy Saville) piece of feedback on this issue, be it by letter or email. Usual rules apply - whatever they might be. We'll make them up as necessary!

Anyone keen to try out Customs new lax policy, in line with BBFC regulations, could do rather worse than order a copy of **Sick Puppy Comix** from Rabid Publishing, PO Box 93, Paddington, NSW 2021, Australia (www.sickpuppycomix.com). This slipped in just too late for Lino, but the phrase "does exactly what it says on the tin" comes to mind; I think the *Spice Sluts* one-pager amused me most of all.. What else has amused TC Towers over the past year? The *Playstation 2* doubles as a multi-zone DVD player, so provides two excuses not to watch TV, as if the lack of quality programmes wasn't enough. Exempted from this are *Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Ads Infinitum*, *Jam* and *The Powerpuff Girls*. And Delerium in the top five. Whatever next, VNV Nation on *Top of the Pops*? We can but hope, since their *Burning Empires* CD is the best thing since sliced bread (though less good for toasting), and they are the most consistentw live act I've seen. Otherwise, I find myself powerfully drawn to "tribute albums", which see people attacking - in some cases, "mauling" might be closer to the truth - other people's songs. Until you've heard Rebecca Romijn-Stamos - yes, Mystique from *X-Men* - doing Prince's *Darling Nicki*, you haven't lived.

Help with this issue falls into two categories: input & output. Premier spot in the former group goes to Chris Fata, who has been a fount of the tapes, magazines, CDs, kitsch and other essential fuels which keep TC running. *Bikini Bandits*, *Brawlin' Broads*, *The Big Bust Out*, *Buffy*, barbed-wire bouts. And that's just the B's. Without her, there would quite simply be no TC. Go visit her website - *www.trashcity.com* - and buy beads. On the output side, Vanessa Wells converted raw texts into things of beauty using nothing more than Microsoft Word and artistic talent. Without her, TC would be a telephone directory with a cool front cover. Visit her website too - *www.snarx.clara.net* - and marvel at Her Royal Surrealness. [Vanessa: you can now get out of Fareham!]

We also thank: Rik Rawling for another fabulous piece of art, John Spencer for his valuable layout assistance, Phil for proof-reading, David (Kaiju), Tim (Escape), and all the contributors, both those we can name and those who prefer anonymity. Plus, in the "drinking beer, watching videos and chat" category: Andys Collins/Waller/Walmsley, Nicolas Barbano, Simon Moore, Jonathan Clements, Brian Bower, Ian + Kini, Pam, Steve + Mike, Vanessa, Steve + Abigail (whose patience with me over the past decade has been awesome!), Lino, Rob Dyer and HSBC for "sponsoring" TC since its inception all those years ago. Plus, last but not least, everyone who has bought an issue off me, whether from a shop, at a convention, by mail order, or merely to stop me hassling you in the queue at *Shock Around the Clock*. If it wasn't for each one of you, I wouldn't have bothered.

And with that, I put on my coat, open the door and go into a blinding white light that conceals, well, who knows what. If this were a film, the music would swell and the credits would roll. Will there be a sequel? Do I live happily ever after? Who can say...

"All these things are lost, like tears in rain..."
– Roy Batty, *Blade Runner*.

"THIS IS CINEMA...IF YOU INVENT IT, THINK IT, THEN FIND A WAY TO SHOW IT... OTHERWISE DO SOMETHING ELSE." — ANDRZEJ ZULAWSKI

AGAINST SUBTLETY

I don't know about you, but things that go bump in the night stopped scaring me when I was about eleven. This thought comes to mind as a result of the plaudits that rained down on *The Blair Witch Project*: perhaps the most frequently heard compliment was for its non-explicit horror, relying instead on "subtlety" and "atmosphere". Underlying this praise was often an innate assumption that gory horror is somehow inferior, a quick and dirty fix for less talented film-makers. This elitism is also reflected in yearnings for some mythical golden age of horror, before in-yer-face splatter replaced artistic integrity. But do either of these claims bear close examination?

They do ignore the impact of outside forces: BWP's decision to go the low-tech, "noises off" route was motivated less by artistic considerations than a budget which couldn't afford even the most primitive of effects. This also informed the rest of their choices. Too cheap to hire real actors? Make it a pseudo-documentary! Locations too expensive? Film it all in some woods! The movie's only real asset was an ability to take the limitations of no-resource film-making, and bypass them. Believe me, the directors will not be relying on bunches of tied-together twigs for the rest of their careers.

The same is true for many of the often-touted "classics", such as the original *Cat People*. Any attempt to depict the sexual undertones or body horror which are inherent in the storyline would have been forbidden, courtesy of the Hays code. This is therefore not "subtlety", but censorship. In addition, with the effects available at the time, the transformation would have been derisory (you're referred to werewolf/Jekyll & Hyde movies from the same era as evidence), and the same applies to *The Fly* or *The Thing*, both of which were also remade in the 1980's to much greater effect, because the modern versions were freed from such technical limitations. Remember: a choice forced upon the artist is no artistic choice at all, and they should not be praised for it.

You could have argued a case for understatement, back when the audience's imagination was indeed far superior to what was on the screen. [This is why *Them!* works superbly in the first half, but falls apart as soon as you see the "giant ants" with their pipe-cleaner antennae] However, even possessors of the most fertile mind's eye have to admit that Rob Bottin's creations in *The Thing* trump anything they could envisage. And this is part of my case: I don't go to the cinema to "use my imagination" – if I want that, I can stay home and listen to the radio or read a book rather than pay ten quid up the West End.

Cinema is primarily a visual medium, and if it isn't used to the maximum extent, you are crippling yourself needlessly. Not that this means you must show everything, just that there needs to be some meat in the sandwich. For example, where would *Alien* be without the payoff? Ninety minutes of Something Lurking in the Shadows, sure, but the true horror only hits the buffers when you see H.R.Giger's famous creation, and realise it's ten times worse than you conceived possible. I admit there are directors who handle special effects better than their actors (James Cameron leads the way there) but this is scarcely new: D.W.Griffiths was a great technician, yet many of his films could fairly be described as empty spectacles on a par with the likes of *Armageddon*. Give me the works of Cronenberg or Jackson any day.

The problem with current horror films is less gore than innate predictability (although in point of fact this applies to all genres). Even the post-modern *Scream* and its clones are playing with the same deck, they just turn the cards face up, in a way intended to be ironic but which is, if anything, simply more banal. True horror is fear of the unknown: this "unknown" can be in-your-face, raw and bloody, or preparing to pounce from the shadows – that doesn't really matter, as long as it plugs into the right mental slot of the viewer. But above all, unknown it must be, rather than the turgidly obvious.

The Beeb Watch Project

As is normal with such things, *The Blair Witch Project* is much less original than its fans would like to believe. For example, *The Last Broadcast* predated it and bears more than a slight resemblance – but even before that, back on Halloween Night 1992, the BBC came up with its own pseudo-documentary ancestor: *Ghostwatch*. This drama was only screened once, and is most unlikely to be repeated: it caused near-panic at the time, and a lot of people believed it to be entirely real, for several reasons. Although the announcement beforehand clearly said it was a drama, if you tuned in later, there was no obvious sign. Many of the cast were people better known for factual TV than plays or movies. [The main exception was *Red Dwarf's* Craig Charles] And Steven Volk's screenplay was more restrained and plausible than you might expect from the man who did *Gothic*: noted paranormal author and researcher Guy Lyon Playfair was a consultant, and his input lent it much authenticity.

Its plot is devastatingly simple. The BBC, at the time, had a fondness for live outside broadcasts looking at a location over a day or weekend. For example, *Badgerwatch* involved a sett of badgers, with regular reports on the action therein. *Ghostwatch* purported to be that sort of thing, from a site of alleged poltergeist activity. Michael Parkinson was the studio host, with Mike Smith manning the phones, and studio "experts" to provide colour commentary. Out on location, Sarah Greene was inside the house with the residents (a mother and her two daughters), while Craig Charles loitered outside.

Eight years on and fully aware of its dramatic status, it's still impressive and scary. Initially, all is calm - even dull - and when something finally does happen, it has perfectly mundane origins. But in the background is a bunch of unsettling stuff, slowly developing. The studio gets a load of phone calls about a cloaked figure seen lurking in the background of some video footage; residents tell of recent disturbing events, such as the ritualised killing of a black Labrador; and the history of the area is slowly revealed. In true *Blair Witch* style, it dates back generations, with the most recent incarnation of evil a serial child-killer. This sets the scene for the last thirty minutes, which escalate from noises off to...well, let's just say if it goes over the top at the end, it has already landed the audience by then. En route are genuinely hair-raising moments, such as near-subliminal glimpses of figures lurking in shadows or behind doors – after all the phone-calls on exactly this topic, it's amazingly effective. You can imagine BBC phones melting as thousands called in to say, "I saw it!"

Parkinson and Greene are excellent. They're largely just playing themselves but, crucially, come over as wholly credible. Craig Charles - the presenter with most acting experience - is satisfactorily idiotic, while Mike Smith is weaker, especially when trying to show "concern" for real-life other half Greene. The

genuine actors, however, seem stilted; obvious thespians rather than the real people they are portraying. Once things start to happen, all such problems evaporate, perhaps because "running around and screaming" are easier than pretending not to be acting. This is pretty basic material, the stuff of camp-fire tales, yet its primordial power is apparent in the quavering voice of a genuinely disturbed continuity announcer, after the play finishes with Parkinson all alone in a dark studio.

This was television drama at its finest and most disconcerting, and perhaps also the nearest Britain has come to a *War of the Worlds* style panic, surpassing even the conspiratorial SF of *Alternative 3*. It's a stark reminder that, even in these supposedly sophisticated days, you can still fool a lot of the people, for ninety minutes of time. Indeed, it's probably good to do things like this every once in a while, if only to remind the population that you really shouldn't believe everything you see on TV...

"In October of 1998, four sorority sisters disappeared in the woods near Bareasseville, Delaware while shooting a documentary. A week later, their footage was found."

THE BARE WENCH PROJECT

The Blair Witch Project was a gift to low-budget film-makers, not just as inspiration, but a target for parody by anyone with a camcorder and a convenient forest. The closest and probably best is *The Bare Wench Project*, from B-movie luminary, Jim Wynorski. Long a TC fave for delightful trash like *Not of This Earth* and *Deathstalker II*, he cast some babe friends in the students-making-a-film roles, chucked in Julie Strain as the Bare Wench, added an immensely annoying guy for no apparent reason and, I strongly suspect, knocked this off over a weekend.

"Gosh, your titties are so sweaty."

You must have seen (and ideally, disliked) the original in order to appreciate this on any level beyond the mammorial. The set-up is the same,

many plot elements and scenes are direct references and the dialogue is skewed appropriately. There's even a Bare Wench mythology: a miners' prostitute hounded out of town now haunts the woods, driving all those who encounter her into a sexual frenzy which, from the film's point of view, is very convenient. Our heroines start by talking to local residents, such as Dick Bigdickian who runs the local magic shop (an uncredited cameo by another exploito-guru, Andy Sidaris), before heading into the forest, meeting the Bare Wench, and taking their tops off. A lot.

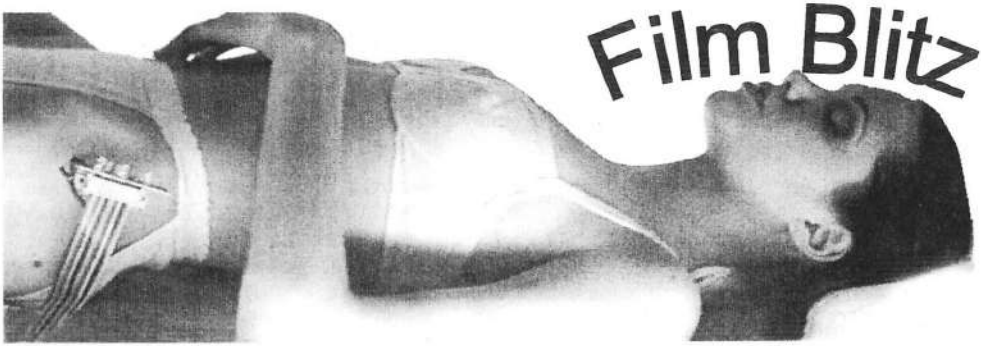
The parodic elements include blow-up dolls hanging in the trees, dildos arranged into mysterious shapes on the ground, a crucial sheet of paper labelled "BAD MAP", mysterious noises (even if they sound like a donkey in heat) and, last but not least, the bitchy squabbling between the participants. Lorissa McComas and Nikki Fritz are every bit as good actors as their *Blair* counterparts, although Antonia Dorian and Julie Smith are bland blondes with no obvious acting ability – in particular, the out-takes show Dorian struggling desperately with the simplest line. Nice tits though.

"C'mon! Give us your top!"

And after all, those, rather than frights, are the purpose of the film. So there's much jiggling, in particular from McComas who shows great potential. Her and Fritz' character appear to be "close personal friends" (a situation not too far from real - or at least Internet - life, where they do naughty webcam shows together), plus topless dancing round a camp-fire, skinny dipping, erotic ghost stories and Julie Strain in a blond wig and furry boots doing a dance number to a truly dreadful song in what looks like someone's garden. This last-mentioned is problematic: by adding things like background music, the film becomes Z-grade dreck with no production values, rather than a *parody* of Z-grade dreck with no production values. Luckily, it doesn't last long, and Wynorski drives on to a deliberately ludicrous climax involving hopscotch in a motel room.

"I insisted that we go without bras...
That we French kiss...That we shave down south...
And now this is where we've ended up.
It's because of me that we're here now.
I'm scared.
I'm scared to close my legs.
And I'm scared to open them..."

Wynorski, along with Fred Olen Ray, is a past master of low-budget nonsense, more entertaining and fun than many Hollywood productions. At his best when not taking things seriously, for the most part, *The Bare Wench Project* makes no such slip. With the aid of lingerie, silicone and torches, he's made something of a minor gem in 81 minutes, which is likely to be far more enjoyable than *Blair Witch 2*.



Un amour de sorcière (René Manzor) - So that's what Vanessa Paradis is doing now: Drew Barrymore impressions... At least, it seems that way in this French film which pits her, as Morgane the good witch, against Jean Reno's magnificently malevolent sorcerer Molok, with Jeanne Moreau helping the forces of light, and Gil Bellows as a Bill Gates-like figure, dragged in as the only person who can prevent evil from triumphing (largely 'cos Molok has killed all other candidates). The style here is really, really nice: flowers blossom around Paradis and Bellows after they've made love, and it creates a world half-a-step outside ours. It would have been interesting if they'd made more of the set-up which seems to pit technology against magic, and Moreau is sadly under-used. However, Reno steals the entire movie: he absolutely looks the part of a dark wizard, and he's perhaps *too* good, since you may find yourself quietly rooting for him, especially against the blatantly over-cute toddler who is the focus of things. Still, a sweet modern fairy-tale. **B**

The Art of War (Christian Duguay) - A step up for a director best known for doing the later entries in the *Scanners* series, to a "proper" Hollywood action-flick, even if it feels like it should go straight to video. For the film founders on a plot that rarely breaches the achingly obvious: Wesley Snipes is the UN agent framed for assassinating the Chinese ambassador, who must find the killers to ensure a trade deal goes through. Snipes does his best, despite looking like he's auditioning for a Malcolm X biopic, yet the bad guys are painfully clear to the audience from the outset. Therefore, the longer he takes to see it, the less interested we inevitably get. Although some nicely kinetic chase sequences mean you never totally lose attention, the "one man against the system" thing has been done far too often, and there's a sad lack of anything new here. **C-**

The Assault (Jim Wynorski) - As the title would suggest, this is a close relative to *Assault on Precinct 13*, with Stacey Randall as the cop who takes a murder witness to a women's refuge, only for the killers to lay siege to the place. There's the usual pot-pourri of stereotypes inside, from the mentally-ill to an old foe of Randall's, and the dialogue between them is mostly unconvincing – though at least it avoids the lame attempts at humour which plague the police HQ. When everyone shuts up and lets their guns do the talking, it's a good bit more pacey, with Wynorski getting in some fine *Night of the Living Dead* riffs – in particular, because the bad guys attack with the intelligence of brain-dead zombies. Predictable nonsense that takes itself a little too seriously. **D+**

Bad Girls (Lawrence Kasdan) - It's hard to see why this is as uninteresting as it is; probably something to do with a sudden change of director in the middle of production. The acting isn't bad, with Mary Stuart Masterton and Drew Barrymore fine and feisty, though Andie McDowell lives up to her surname once more. However, unanswered questions flail all over the place from the central

premise: I can just about credit four prostitutes running off from a Wild West saloon, and rescuing one of their number from a lynching, but their conversion into outlaws is simply implausible. Perhaps having four heroines was a mistake, since it dilutes the focus: it might have worked better as 'Bitch Cassidy' or summat. Or maybe I just don't like westerns very much – and two side-on glimpses of Barrymore's right breast fall some way short of making up for the deficiencies. **D-**

Bikini Bandits (Steven Grasse) – Few films get an immediate second viewing in TC Towers, but then, few films are less than five minutes long. The Internet is perfect for such shorts, whose material is better suited to low bandwidth connections, and gems like these two make the download time worthwhile. And what's *not* to like about girls in bikinis with guns? The first one (labelled "Episode 7" – a cunning ploy to bypass boring stuff like plot and character development) has the all-girl Bikini Bandits gang robbing a convenience store; the second, *Bikini Bandits and the Magic Lamp*, has them finding a genie. Both punch well above their weight with the visual style of *Natural Born Killers* - fortunately without the self-importance - and more sexual energy than a coke-crazed rabbit. Or am I misinterpreting the adverts for 'Beef Flaps'? As near to perfect as you can get in less time than it takes to cook a Ready Meal. Also available: *Bikini Bandits Go Dutch* – will someone give Grasse enough money for a feature? Please? Downloadable at *http://www.atomfilms.com.* **A**

The California Dolls (Robert Aldrich) - The plot here is formulaic: the Dolls (Laureen Landon and Vicki Frederick) struggle towards a championship match against the rival Toledo Tigers. What makes it work are the characters, most notably their manager - Peter Falk delivers a barnstorming performance as a man who keeps loaded dice in his pocket, a baseball bat in the car boot, and is ready to use either. Even though you know precisely where this is going, it's a fine look into the sub-culture of women's wrestling, and despite being twenty-odd years old, you get the feeling things haven't changed much. Anyone who watches the WWF will know how tough it is for women to get on without demeaning themselves, while life on the lower levels probably does still involve dodgy promoters and flea-bag motel rooms. **B**

Cyborg 2 (Michael Schroeder) - Parts of this are strikingly effective, and go way beyond what you'd expect. Yet there are just as many clichés, and the overall impact is slight, despite a surprisingly heavyweight cast which included Elias Koteas and Jack Palance – or, at least, his lips (you'll understand if you see it!). No Van Damme, admittedly, nor even any Albert Pyun in this sequel, instead, it's the rather more shapely Angelina Jolie, the daughter of Jon Voight. Did she ever dream she would win an Oscar (for *Girl, Interrupted*), while she played a 'borg pumped full of liquid explosives, intended for use as a corporate weapon? She's forced on the run, accompanied by human guardian Koteas, though going by the skills on view, it's questionable who's taking care of who. From here on, it's the usual post-apocalyptic mix, heavily influenced by *Blade Runner*, although the production values are not too bad, and

Karen Sheperd delivers a ruthlessly effective supporting role as a bounty huntress. Flashes of brilliance, flashes of mediocrity, and the rest is adequate entertainment – it also turns out to be rather good practice for Jolie's upcoming role as Lara Croft. **C-**

The Erotic Witch Project (John Bacchus) - "I'm very, very sorry..." Largely for wasting my bucks on this dismal piece of crap, whose sole reason for existence is to prove just how good *The Bare Wench Project* actually is. Three girls go into the woods and have thoroughly unconvincing sex with each other - so who is operating the camera which zooms, pans and changes angle even when no-one is around? There's a vague suggestion of an *Evil Dead*-like presence, and you get the same blow-up dolls and dildos scattered around as in *Bare Wench* – that's about as far as the parodic elements go, and what the bloke in a gorilla suit was doing running around, escapes me entirely. Lacking any spark of invention beyond the painfully plain, it fails as a satire, it fails as smut, it fails as a movie. **E**

Forbidden Zone (Richard Elfman) – While there are a lot of elements borrowed from elsewhere in this, Elfman has taken them from a wide enough range (*Pennies From Heaven* through *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* to the films of Guy Madden), and added enough of his own to come up with something that is genuinely different and *very* strange. It centers round a house with an entrance to another realm in the basement, into which the hero goes in search of his lost sister. Okay... It's ruled over by Hervé Villechaize ("Da plane, boss! Da Plane!") and Susan Tyrell, with Danny Elfman, the director's more famous brother, turning up as Satan. And everything grinds to a halt for jaw-dropping song-and-dance numbers that *truly* have to be seen to be believed. It's cheap, shot in b&w, and although you may find yourself looking at your watch despite the 75-minute running time, when it works, it's a wonderful slice of mad invention, and just the sort of thing for which cinema was invented! **B+**

Living in Oblivion (Tom De Cillo) - This starts off looking distressingly like a self-indulgent piece of "cinema about cinema" (anyone seen *Irma Vep*?), yet after twenty minutes, it does an abrupt flip and heads off in another direction, namely convincing wannabe film-makers to go back to their jobs in McDonald's. Steve Buscemi is struggling to make his low budget flick, in the face of truculent actors, actresses, cinematographers, mothers and dwar...er, "small people". Half the fun is trying to work out who the models for the various *prima donnas* were, and although I'm fairly sure there are a lot of jokes which will only truly be appreciated by industry insiders, there's plenty going on for the rest of us to enjoy, as Buscemi's waking nightmare heads towards completion. If the ending is somewhat lame, doing little more than peter out, the characters we meet are great – I get the feeling De Cillo is getting revenge for some very bad experiences... **B**

Noose (Ted Demme) - TC 23's Dennis-Leary-on-the-rampage movie has him playing another complex character: a coked-up and racist car-thief, yet fiercely loyal to his friends and family, even when they are unlucky enough to incur the wrath of highly disturbing Irish mob-boss Colm Meaney. It took me about 15 minutes to start catching the dialogue - heavy accents and cocaine do not make an easy listening mix - yet I found it easily worth the effort, as Leary develops unexpected depth and passion. I originally expected both Famke Janssen and Jeanne Tripplehorn to have more to do, but this is a very masculine movie, so they remain background characters. It's no surprise where this all ends up, and the ending may prove a little too open for some – I've no complaints on that score, and few on any others. **B+**

Titanic 2000 (John P.Fedele) - I was more than a little concerned, given the same company did *The Erotic Witch Project* – fortunately, this is nowhere near as bad. They've bothered with a script for one thing. And some actors, too, although Tammy Parks, as the lesbian vampire shipped out in the hold of new cruise liner TITanic 2000 (their capitalisation, not mine) does little but expose her, ah, fangs. There is so much computer-graphics and blue-screen work it goes beyond cheap and becomes almost a badge of honour, lending the whole thing an odd nobility, and there's enough humour to tide you over the dull moments (seen one lame striptease, seen 'em all). Still, how can you not like a film with lines like: "I'll lick you yet, you two-bit, penny-ante lesbian vampire from purgatory - and I'll put an end to your evil and erotic and sensual and seductive ways, which are quite fun to watch, but are pure unadulterated evil, nevertheless." Lovely. **C+**

Top Fighter 2: Deadly Fighting Dolls (Toby Russell) - This is an immensely irritating documentary. The Eastern Heroes crew have done the hard work, tracking down martial arts actresses both well-known and obscure. They then screw things up with amateurish mistakes, such as truly dreadful audio quality on some of the interviews, and an almost complete failure to tell you from which titles the clips are taken. Indeed, the clips themselves are another shortcoming; they obviously have only a limited selection with which to work. Thus, they talk about Michelle Yeoh, probably the most famous currently DFD after her Bond role, but show nothing from the last five years, when she really broke through. Having said that, there is some fascinating background material here, especially for the older, and less famous actresses. There are anecdotes galore, and you come away realising that there have been Deadly Fighting Dolls (a truly bad title!), for almost as long as there have been Deadly Fighting Dudes. **B-**

War Cat (Ted V.Mikels) - As soon as the chief villains says to his henchmen, "I hope you gentlemen are going to be safe out there. After all, she is an unarmed woman", you know that they won't be. For this is yet another remake of *The Most Dangerous Game*, though it takes its time getting there. To start with, you see more of a militia group - somewhat prophetically for 1987 - holed up in the hills, fending off Hell's Angels and the like. When one member kidnaps a writer (Jannina Poynter), she is set loose as a training exercise; a bad move, given she's an Army brat with a fondness for very sharp sticks. As *Angel of Vengeance* (not to be confused with the Abel Ferrara film), this ran into trouble at the BBFC and was refused a video certificate. Hard to see precisely why: despite some nastiness against women, aided by a brutish performance from Macka Foley as slow-witted thug Manny, it's nothing some pruning couldn't fix. However, its obvious cheapness limits it, and Mikels shows no eye for action, so this never gets much above the pedestrian. **D+**

There are perhaps two rules in life. The first is there are no rules. The second is, never tell your workmates if you happen to be attending anything that might cause slight embarrassment. Sure enough, ridicule ensued after announcing my proposed venture to *Torture Garden*. However, as Adam and the Ants once warbled, ridicule is nothing to be scared of, and having been assured of my safety within a sado-masochistic environment, I only had the odd 100 qualms as opposed to the previous 1000 about going. Plus, to be honest, I was far too curious to pass.

Torture Garden is the rather self-explanatory name given to the occasional meeting of 'perverted' minds - held at The Mass in Brixton. Generally known as the half-way point between a normal club (i.e. one without whips) and a fully fledged S&M haunt, it welcomes persons of any sexual persuasion as long as they look the part. Leather, PVC and rubber are in order to pass the dress code; otherwise it is quite possible to be turned away for not looking suited to the venue.

This is not to say that acting the part will also be required. The atmosphere at TG is relaxed and friendly, and this is possibly because any unwanted harassment of attendees is not tolerated. The ethos is 'each to their own', and that is just as valid for the straight and pain-intolerant as the hardcore S&M practitioner. Perhaps because of this, I felt safer than in some conventional clubs I have been to.

Safer, yet also over-dressed, despite being clad in a low cut, mini-skirted PVC number – I can assure you, it takes some very artful near-nakedness to bring about that kind of discomfort. No-one else appeared to care though, and the confidence with which attendees wear their S&M, dress code-sanctioned garb is not a threatening sight in the least. Whatever shape, age or daytime occupation, this is a place that people can express their sexuality with anything from skin suffocating 'gimp' suits to absolutely nothing at all. From the gorgeous to the, ahem, not so gorgeous, the main reason for appearing in public in their chosen 'almost second' skin is the feeling that the costume gives its wearer. Fortunately, with such interesting views on offer, voyeurism will not provoke an enquiry as to whether you wish to take a picture for longevity purposes. If anything, you can take heart from the fact you will possibly make

the recipient feel even better about themselves; on the list of earthly good deeds, this beats helping that granny across the road hands down.

'Looking shocked' is perhaps not a good thing. I was given the advice "expect to see anything - and don't be surprised when you do" by a well-meaning friend; while for the most part I was a picture of all that is cool and cucumber-like, a few outfits caused my eyebrows to rise above the permitted centimetre. The winner of my personal *Best Costume* award was a youngish man wearing nothing, save a plush velvet jacket, and a string of shiny silver self-adhesive beads down the shaft of his dick. The rubber-suited chap with the UV-glowing penis came a close second.

Although the outlandish dress sense of fellow club goers was almost intriguing enough in itself, *Torture Garden* has more to offer than a mere insight into the way S&M practitioners dress. Down in the crypt - literally, as (irony of ironies) it's housed in an old church - is where all the players go to have their fun. Cheekily named 'The Dungeon', this is a room of soft furnishings, mood lighting and instruments of torture. Anybody can go and wander round, even folks like myself, and so I took the opportunity to catch some people doing naughty-but-allegedly-nice things to one another in the flesh.

Upon entering the Dungeon, I headed towards the nearest gathering to see what was going on. At first, it appeared to be two women; one chained to an upright iron frame (and wearing a cute set of cat ears), as the other danced salaciously whilst giving her a rather gentle whipping. On second inspection, the cat-eared woman's make-up was not quite covering a slight five o'clock shadow. Not that any make-up *faux pas* would have bothered him – he was far too busy moaning with pleasure as every lash struck. His girlfriend made quite an art of her sadism, wriggling up to her boyfriend, grinding her behind against his legs whilst undoing her corset....

...and then came that Foster's beer moment. As the strings of the corset came apart, it revealed a hairy flat chest. Whilst musing again how unfair it was that some guys had such nice legs, I failed to notice the hush. I was not the only one to think he was a girl. The shock of that moment meant that the rest of the show was somewhat over shadowed, and none of the other exhibitionists present managed to put on such

an interesting display. Only the Japanese dominatrix was performing an explicit act on her blond submissive, and a hand job interspersed with a quick lashing is scarcely hardcore. As an onlooker, I found the scenario was curiously unsexy, and remained detached, despite being near enough to snatch the whip out of their hand, and have a go myself.

Perhaps this is because, although I'm a curious orange, I'm neither sadist nor masochist, and thus the essence of the club isn't something that appeals to me. I had seen about as much around the place as I could, and after that there was little to do. The music at Torture Garden is techno-orientated (although one of the other rooms was playing Britney Spears at one point – somehow *Hit Me Baby One More Time* was cheesily apt), and while that may be a dream to some, for me it's a night-club nightmare.

As if determined to prove me wrong, the TG world followed me, even into the chill-out room. A red PVC-clad lady with a middle aged man in a posing pouch and leash sat nearby, and proceeded to re-enact a scene from any S&M documentary on Channel Four. It was kind of bizarre to witness, in the flesh, a supposedly independent being licking a woman's boot, and then being chastised with a riding crop for lifting her leg too high. Though curiosity was the sum total of my reaction – by then, I'd had all the vicarious visuals I needed to get a flavour of what went on within those walls, and any more was just extra frills. I kept myself in the chill-out room for relaxation until the time came to go home.

I can see why people enjoy the place; it's a very friendly venue and the hedonistic events are pleasant experiences. But by the time I left, the *ennui* I felt proves that if places like Torture Garden are fine for those who enjoy S&M, for anyone else (save techno fans), they're probably only of voyeuristic appeal. The rest of the club had little allure, and even getting drunk is tough at £3.50 per bottle. Yet, if I feel I missed out on whatever everyone else seemed to get out of the event, I'm unconcerned: in my book, pain and pleasure are as separate as Ally McBeal's inner thighs.

The Tale of The Raven: Part 2

Following a disturbing vision of a futuristic, thought controlled fighter craft, Marc Lewes undertook research to explain away the imagery. Far from being deluded fantasy, he collated information from a variety of independent sources to conclude that, somewhere in the world, this awesome, horrific craft does in fact exist. He calls it the Raven.

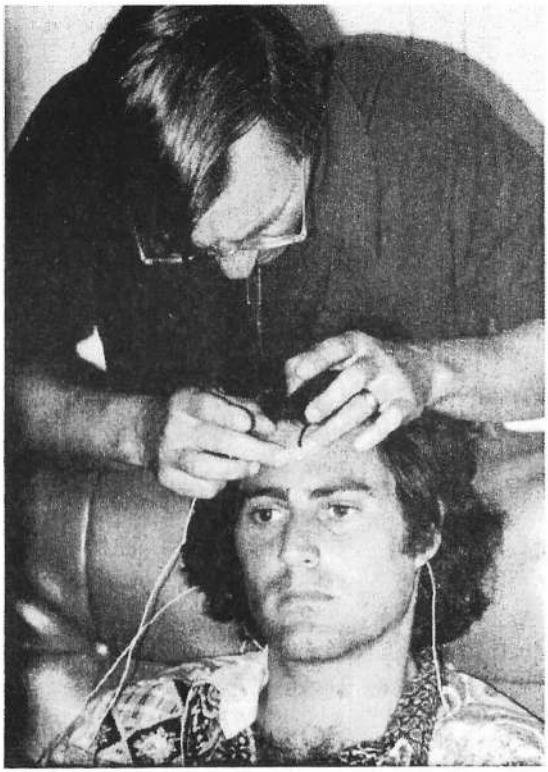
"Raven, Black as pitch
Mystical as the Moon
Speak to me of magic,
I will fly with you soon."

PART TWO - MAN MACHINE

The new fly-by-wire Eurofighter swoops and performs loops for the eager entourage, the "Fighter of the 21st Century". It rumbles perfunctorily through the sky, the pilot having such a choice of the latest electronics to choose from. The new Marconi UUHF radio devices. The enhanced radar imaging, with contour mapping and foliage penetration capability for weapons aiming. FLIR, HUD, and enough cunning computerised counter-measures to make Machiavelli turn in his grave. Gradually the Tornado and Harrier will be phased out, leaving this machine supreme in European airspace. But whilst millions upon millions have been poured into this project, started in the early 90's, we still see little of interest, nothing to amaze, no revelatory hardware. The jet still screams away, it flies according to Cartesian co-ordinates and Newtonian laws. It sees as far as its sensors allow. For all its fairing and contouring, it's still a conventional war machine. *Dreamland* (Area 51) stories aside, there seems to be no public awareness of any thought controlled aircraft. I began wondering just how prophetic my glimpse of the *Raven* was? How close was present day science to achieving such a fighting machine?

The highly unusual craft I had seen in my vision (perhaps a remote viewing episode?) was a symbiotic device, a melding of mind and machine, using non-linear interfaces. It was not a remote control prototype, a drone plane (as have already been tested by the U.S. military). The pilot was still an integral part of the device. In the coming months after the 'vision', I had sporadic flashes, almost a tuning in to the Raven - glimpses of its dark secrets. I remember with clarity the shocking image of the albino-like pilot, almost free-floating in some sort of fluid in the cockpit, embryonic, yet with acute awareness. Yet I saw no headsets, or direct links. Some sensors monitored the pilots bodily functions - endocrine system, adrenaline levels, and heart-function, but no neurological sensors as you might expect. Just a rudimentary bio-feedback coupling. In this article I will outline the science which might explain how the pilot would control the Raven with thought alone.

Time magazine (11/10/99) carried a retrospective piece on research which had taken place at Reading University Cybernetics department by Kevin Warwick in 1998. This man had experimented with the hard wiring of chips into the human CNS (Central Nervous Systems), creating a functioning, if not rudimentary, form of bio-feedback, the ramifications of which are obvious. By some strange quirk of



fate, I had briefly met this professor back in 1988, when applying for an AI computer course at Reading. I remember even then the intriguing hardware that littered the lab: robotic arms, quirky machines, the hypnotic hum of the powerful mainframe lurking in another room like a *Demon Seed* prop. I could not have guessed that just a decade later this fairly ordinary man would be sending emotional signals via in-built chips in his body to his wife back at home, who had a similarly implanted device.

Interestingly, the professor recently gave a lecture at the Imperial College, London (September 2000) - "A revolutionary investigation into the nature of intelligence itself. A system which unites human, animal and machine intelligence for the first time with *shocking* results." (my italics). So this type of research is taking place, but to what end? And why is there so little?

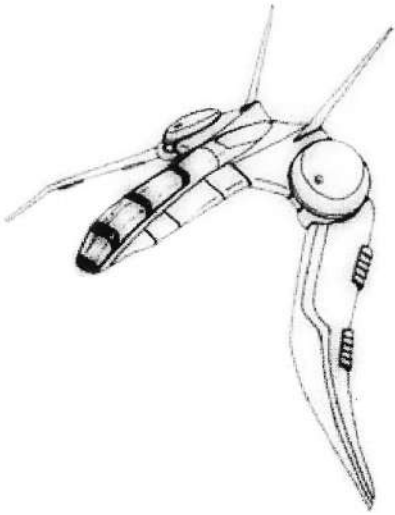
As is the unfortunate case with research institutes in Britain, besides being woefully underfunded, there is a distinct lack of forward thinking or bold experimentation. Whilst original thought is there, it is usually rejected or not acted upon, causing the so called 'Brain Drain' to America. However, I believe that the Raven is a joint-effort between this country and the US for reasons which will become clear in the coming articles. Surprisingly, one of the companies in the UK to which we might look to in further search of answers to the mind/machine conundrum has recently been bought by the US company, *General Electric*. This company, *CDC*, hides in the outskirts of Hastings, and is a military contractor. For many years they have been working on Tornado weapons systems, having had a prototype touch-screen (Ordinance control) cockpit as far back as 1985, which I was lucky enough to play with, and thinking back, it was a shockingly pre-emptive system which gave rise to the 'Arcade' style gunnery of the Gulf War. They are currently working on a 'Cognitive Cockpit', and seem to be very reluctant to release any information regarding this R&D special. The testing and experimentation goes on in a high-security room, behind unwelcoming doors. Advanced HUD (Head up Displays) seem to be the crux of the project, and more 'interactive' systems operation, but the idea of thought activated systems seems to be a very real consideration.

Stamford Research Institute, who are US military contractors, tested the Israeli 'mystic', Uri Geller in the 1970's (*picture above*). Once unfairly debunked by critics for his spoon bending antics, this man still certainly has a strange power coursing through him. For what purpose did they wire up and measure the mental activity of a renowned *psychic*? Part of the Lawrence Pinneo experiments?

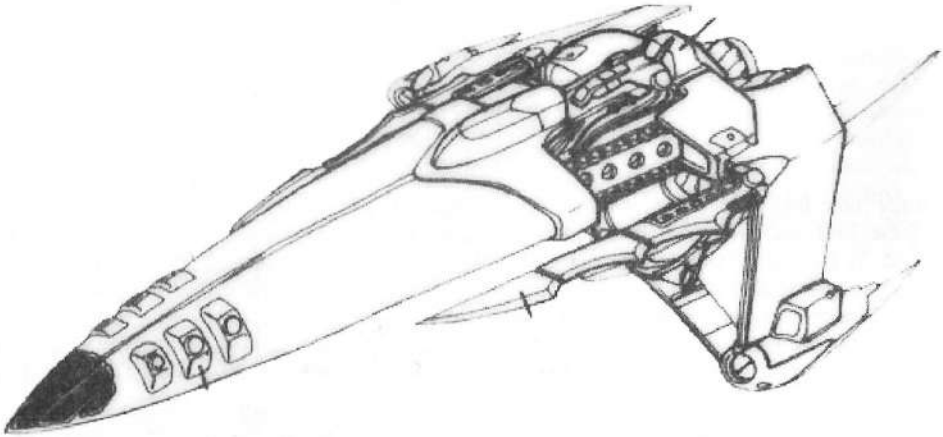
I wonder what reasons they gave him as he sat in that chair and let a scientist attach wires to his head? Was he allowed to see the resulting EEG trace, and does he know where the research information went to, and who used it? The institute are still undertaking top-line military projects, and were also involved in *Project Stargate*, the covert remote viewing project started in the 1980's. Throughout the institute's history, high level military officials have been visiting - one of whom was present for the Geller testing.

Another more high profile body who are also working on a 'Cognitive Cockpit' system are DERA (Defense Evaluation Research Institute), located near Farnborough. The nexus of these new style cockpits is increasing battle performance by reducing human error. Sensors embedded in helmets monitor pilots' brain patterns, and with training, devices can be operated by specifically focused thought patterns, allowing near instant response times. On-board computer systems take over in the event of pilot black-out, bringing the plane back into safe flight until the pilot recovers out of a high-G turn. DERA's team are using exactly the same methodology and hardware that, if enhanced and evolved, would enable the Raven to exist.

If all this sounds familiar it's because it is, and it is meant to be. A soft-drip approach to availability of information, particularly 'occult' or alternative technology, seemed the *modus operandi* of the previous decade, where everything was absorbed into the accepted popular media and the average awareness of once radical procedures and scientific theories were discussed openly without alarm. All this immersion seems only to conceal and wrongly demystify such things, a mindless acceptability which sadly detracts people from considering the real, and more often than not, horrendous consequences. Ultimately, it is we that suffer, in direct proportion to these operations. We suffer through military tax, through mis-information, through media-acceptance, through flash images of net surfing, and channel hopping. All the while, this craft lingers in the otherworld, being imagined, prepared, formulated and constructed. And whom does it serve? Of course, the minority - the decidedly warped minority as it transpires. Millions of pounds and dollars go in, suffering and a dangerous bubble of ego and power comes out. Military contractors profit, scientists proclaim post-experimental alarm and suddenly develop something that approaches a social conscience. It is not all right to defer blame by citing our 'defence needs' and the unimpeachable acid flow of 'scientific progress'. Their *modus vivandi* appears to be "We create to destroy".



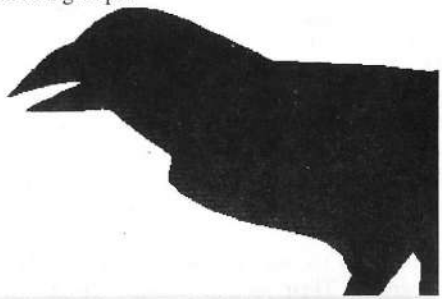
Suddenly the material world is derided by quantum physicists announcing that sub-atomic matter breaks all known laws - just as Einstein shattered the Newtonian Universe, they subvert *his* work - taking his unfinished theorems and corrupting and twisting them like the ruination of an innocent child. Morally, this is a criminal network. Think of the course of science in the areas I am talking about. The Raven craft would incorporate such despicable facets of ultra-science - microwave weaponry, EM propulsion/shielding, radioactive weaponry, thought control systems - and its creation would be beyond mere Blasphemy, perhaps something approaching the Devil incarnate - the Devil as machine. Just as quickly as they and the media denounce, ridicule and subvert anything paranormal, occult or of-the-other-medium, they invent their own black magic mathematical formulas, their own horrifying witchcraft, nearly always put to destructive use.



A melding of mind and machine - at work in the US - Los Alamos, at Lockheed, at Stamford Research Institute, Reading University, DERA, CDC, Harvard Physics Department and God knows where else. I found nearly every major aircraft company is currently funding and running R & D projects into thought controlled avionics systems. Once dreamt of by dark-Utopian sci-fi writers, and now the mechanical posturing of deceived, or deluded scientists, under the wing of dangerous, ego-maniacal, politically motivated individuals.

In the next article I will give credit to those incredible scientists whose names have all but been forgotten, those who built the foundations for free energy systems and gravity devices - Nikola Tesla, T. Townsend Brown, John Hutchinson and the great John Searle (who was working on a *manned* anti-gravity craft in the 1970's before being imprisoned on trumped up charges - his machine stolen by the Government!), and also delve into the machinations of the cartel who bought about the Dark Craft - The Aviary, Psi-Tech and other nefarious, mutually beneficial groups.

MARC LEWES - SEPTEMBER 2000



APOLOGY: In the last article I referred to the 'Blackbird' stealth plane as the SR-11. It is in fact the SR-71.

HIGH WEIRDNESS BY MAIL

Jim Swallow, London – "Another cool TC - and another cover that gifted me with plenty of dirty looks as I read it on the train... As usual, I found many things in #22 that had me highly amused or nodding in rueful agreement; the latter mostly when I read about your exposure to the "It's A Small World" ride at Disneyworld (be thankful you never entered "The Carousel of Progress") and your new taste for cordite. Thanks as well for the edifying wrestling feature; never have I seen so many scary Oriental girls in one place...outside of your video collection, anyway.

I was interested by your take on jai-alai - I had an experience of the same sort (that of being a foreigner exposed to an arcane, alien sporting event up close and personal) last year at an LA Dodgers game. I know baseball sounds less interesting - methinks that's why they have so many beer vendors - but I was still gobsmacked when I witnessed one batter deflect a supersonic fast ball and have his bat severed by its' impact. Watching a broken chunk of wood as big as my arm arc through the air and impale itself in the dirt at my feet almost made me drop my wax cup of Budweiser and hot dog. In addition, my weird shit-o-meter pinged loudly with Marc Lewes' "Raven" article...where did this guy come from?

I'll end with a tip of the hat to you, regarding your item on the Nick Carter books; my interest duly piqued by your descriptions of this pulp spy saga while visiting my folks on the East Coast, I found myself wandering through one of the myriad second-hand book shops that dot the region - and I left with copies of *Temple of Fear*, *Time Clock of Death* and *Trouble in Paradise* weighing me down. Great stuff...How could I not like a character with pet names for his Luger and stiletto knife? I for one wouldn't have minded seeing a longer article on the 'Killmaster'."

Ah, yes, Wilhelmina was the gun...or was it the knife? And wasn't Pierre the gas-bomb he kept in his underpants? Fabulous stuff. I actually have grown to like baseball, as you'll see from elsewhere in this issue. It has a fine rhythm, and can be appreciated on a whole range of levels, from Mark McGwire taking a ball coming towards him at 95 mph, and hitting it 150 yards, to the subtleties of pitch selection on an 0-2 count. And the fielding is amazing, even allowing for the help given by having a glove. It's one of the things I'm looking forward to seeing much more of in Arizona.

Tim Greaves, Eastleigh – "Have to say this wasnt one of my most favourite issues to date, mainly because the Japanese wrestling stuff wasn't of much interest. Mind you, it's your bag, it's your mag, so who the hell am I to complain? I liked the Bond movie overview (though didn't agree with all your ratings – *AVTAK* better than *FRWL* and *TB*? Come on now!), and was amused to see you posed with the inimitable Douglas James. When and where did that happen? I met him at a press screening/luncheon for *Tomorrow Never Dies* in November 1997 and found him to be extremely pleasant but extremely full of himself also. Other than this. I think the Floozies with Uzis article was probably the highlight, although the Film Blitz section is always a fave (but how anyone can't love *Dark City* is beyond me). Overall, however, another fine issue. How long till the next one then? Heheheheheehe."

Oh, about fifteen months or so – though there are some questions you just don't ask! I can see your point with regard to *From Russia With Love*; it has its moments, even if the novel isn't one of Fleming's best. But I found *Thunderball* simply dull: way too much of it took place wearing scuba-gear. Met Mr.James (Pierce Brosnan's stand in for the 007 films) at my birthday party, which Chris had arranged with a Bond theme; she hired him as a guest. It was a surprise anyway, but suffice it to say that my jaw dropped when I saw him...

Steve Pay, Brentwood – "Thought I'd drop you a quick line to enclose a cheque for some beans for some isses. (Well, alright, a tenner, which ought to see me through until I get my bus-pass.) I also thought I'd pass a few random thoughts about what was actually in the damn thing.

The Phantom Menace. I went to see it because *The Guardian* gave it a review that made it sound like a *Plan 9* for our generation, but it turned out to be a load of old tosh, albeit very pretty. The only thing that makes me angrier than its runaway success is the number of people, who should know better, who actually think it's a worthwhile way to spend two and a half hours. I've not seen *Titanic* (think I'm probably unique in the population of Great Britain, if not the world, that I can honestly claim not to have seen *Titanic*, *The Full Monty*, *Four Weddings*, *Notting Hill* or *Pretty Woman*.) but I do know that nobody could enhance their reputation for anything with the steaming pile of cack that was *T2*. A salutory lesson as to why stars should never, ever, ever be given script control of any kind. (See also *True Lies* and *Total Recall*.)

Got something against Arnie, have we? The only one of your list which I've seen all of, is *Four Weddings* (dragged by a then-girlfriend), and I can add *Phantom Menace* to the list. Did catch the last ten minutes of *Titanic* once...most amusing.

Women's wrestling. It might interest you to know that Terri Power (under the name Tori) is presently kicking her heels in the WWF, though frankly she might as well be farting in a wind tunnel for all the effect it's having on their moribund attempts to revive the women's title. Miss Texas is also knocking around, though I'm assuming her role- as "valet" means that she's decided the athletic stuff is too much these days.

Madusa Miceli is about as Italian as a Pizza Hut pizza. She's as American as apple pie, but she has had a longer career than most women wrestlers in the States. Certainly, when WWF was available in this country on ITV, she was kicking around trying to fuel a fire with (I think) Reggie Bennett. Under the name Alundra Blaze, she had some success in Japan, and indeed, the WWF brought her back as well as Bull Nakano, and they had some half dozen fights for the women's title in the mid-1980's. She 'retired' after losing a retirement match some 3-4 years ago, but has recently returned to WCW under the name Madusa, as part of that ageing, creaking pantomime..

Get a grip, man. The days of said intelligent SF cinema never did exist. Ever since its creation, it's been an ill-favoured bastard son of the cinema and is doomed to always remain so whilst the likes of Lucas are about. Whilst small, smart guys might get away with making something half-way interesting, anybody wanting money from the studios will automatically have to lower their sights to the likes of *ID4*, *Wild Wild West*, *Phantom Menace*, *Godzilla*, *T2* and *Total Recall*, none of which have anything resembling a thought in their pretty but very expensive heads. And there is every sign that the horror movie, left alone by Hollywood for decades, is about to suffer a similar fate with shit like *I Know...*and *Scream* flooding your local picture pit.

A good example of the Hollywood "dumb-down" factor is given in *The Hamster Factor*. You watch and weep as Terry Gilliam is made to jump through every hoop imaginable in order to get *Twelve Monkeys* made. Remember, the studio wanted to make *Brazil* a "revenge thing", centred around De Niro's character. Ridley Scott only got *Blade Runner* made after the studio tinkered with it to an horrendous degree. Frankly, intelligent movies of any kind have always been the exception rather than the rule. Have you ever read any of Harlan Ellison's pieces about his experiences in Hollywood? I think you'd like them – he makes you look mild-mannered..."

Certainly true that as budget goes up, control goes down. However, with respect to Gilliam, his rep in Hollywood has been troublesome since he went wildly over on *Munchausen*, so it's no surprise he has been subject to close control ever since. Would you give him $28 million of your money to make a movie based on a French short film consisting entirely of still pictures? Still, it is possible to make cinema that is intelligent without going up its own backside: the fabulous *Run Lola Run* comes to mind.

And finally, the following, which I thought was worth repeating in full, and as received. I hope I can find a suitable font in which to present it...

Florence Nabakooza, Box 12504, Kampala, Uganda, East Africa

"Dear friend in Christ. It is a blessing from God that I have come across your lovely name and address and that I have been able to introduce and share my problems with you in the name of Jesus Christ Son of the Living God. I am a Christian girl 17 years old the eldest of the five and a student of St.Joseph Academy and midwifery Training school. A tragic misfortune struck our family on the fateful day of 2-4-99 when both our parents perished in a boat disaster which sunk into Lake Victoria. All twenty three people who were on board of the boat perished.

May God rest their souls in eternity. We are now staying with our grandmother a widow who is blind and who do not have any income generating activity as a result we are now living in a very poor and bad conditions. Daily after attending school I become engaged with all sorts of petty jobs like cleaning toilets, collecting and dispersing dirty garbages, but the money which I receive is very little and sometimes not enough to buy sufficient daily food for the family. Although I am the one who is fully responsible.

Incidentally sir, I have been expecting to sit for the finals towards the end of the year, but now I am worried of failing to do so because I do not have any way of raising the money to clear payments of the school dues. I am humbly appealing to you in the name of Jesus the Lord for sponsorship of £200 to clear payment for examination, registration and all the school dues for a complete year and then sit for the final exams. Thereafter I would be assured of getting an Established job for the welfare of our family and our grandmother. I shall be very gratefull to receive a considerate reply.

Your prayerfully in Christ, Florence Nabakooza"

Dear friend in Florence, I think you really blew it with "Dear friend in Christ", I'm afraid. It would probably help your finances if you didn't waste your money on a PO Box, but I'm sure that's not because this is any sort of scam. Have you considered prostitution, or perhaps selling some unwanted minor body parts? Please find enclosed a sample copy of *Trash City*; we would love to expand our subscription base into Africa. Do write back soon. Yours prayerfully in Britney, Jim.

She never did reply...

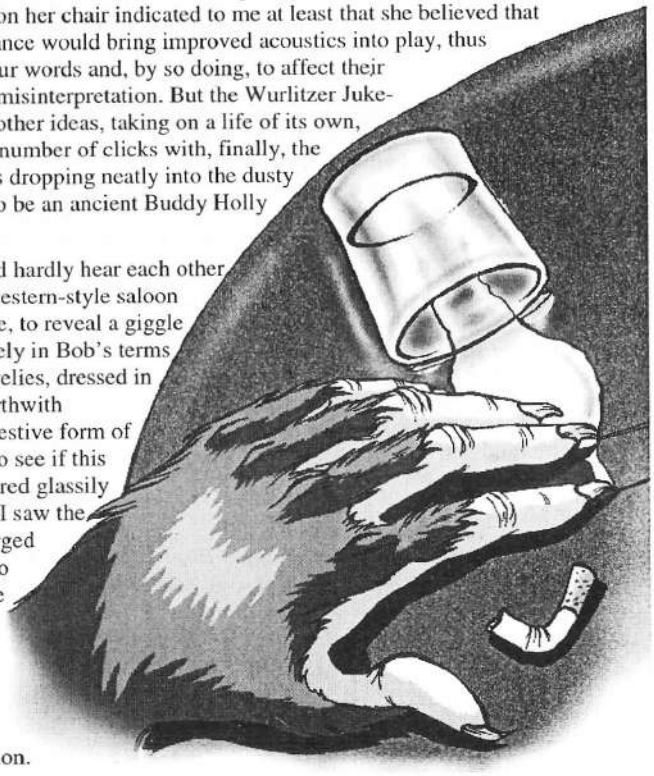
Night of the Lovelies

Every month there was a day when Bob and I met to talk of life, the universe, everything. My dear old mother would have had kittens had she known the places we ended up. Yet there was one occasion where I had my own doubts. In fact, wild horses could not drag me to the venue Bob had suggested.

"If not wild horses, how about some loose-limbed lovelies, eh?" said Bob, as if he had read my mind.

I looked at him askance, or at least I think I did. As usual, what had started off as a serious dialogue between deep-thinking individuals about the State of the Nation had quickly degenerated into ludicrous pub-talk and tasteless smut. However I still retained scruples enough to respond: "Bob, I wouldn't be seen dead in such a place, even if one of your so-called loose-limbed lovelies tugged me there by the short and curlies!" I could not believe my own ears. Had I really said that? Or was it purely the shallow imagination of a hard-pressed narrator?

Bob laughed in an uncivilised manner, with spittle-bullets rattling out like a Lewis Gun. During the rump end of our conversation, there had arrived a third party: a wide-skirted female by the look of it. She sat amongst the other shadows at the back of the otherwise deserted coffee bar. I could sense her eyes boring into my neck. I saw Bob once or twice glancing over in her general direction. We gave each other knowing looks in some pretence of macho coolness, each hinting to the other that the situation, albeit mysterious and pregnant with unpredictable possibilities, was one that we surely could keep within the tolerances of control. He took to whispering, so that the shadow could not hear, whilst the sounds of her fidgeting on her chair indicated to me at least that she believed that even the slightest change in her stance would bring improved acoustics into play, thus enabling her to gain purchase on our words and, by so doing, to affect their meaning by the simple method of misinterpretation. But the Wurlitzer Juke-Box in the corner seemed to have other ideas, taking on a life of its own, since it abruptly rotated through a number of clicks with, finally, the grating noise of the sapphire stylus dropping neatly into the dusty leader-groove of what transpired to be an ancient Buddy Holly disc.



Then, even Bob and I could hardly hear each other speak. And, with the music, the western-style saloon doors of the coffee bar swung wide, to reveal a giggle of what I could only describe loosely in Bob's terms as – what was it? - lick-limbed lovelies, dressed in an attractive Fifties mode, who forthwith commenced dancing a rather suggestive form of Rock and Roll. I glanced at Bob to see if this was what he had meant. As he stared glassily straight ahead in front of his face, I saw the jitterbuggers reflected in his engorged eyes. I mouthed a remonstration to indicate that this was not my scene at all. My mother would not only have kittens, but tigers, too. But Bob's mind had decided to go walkies. Nervously, I clutched my coffee cup and hunched my shoulders as a carapace of protection.

One 'lovely' approached our table and, beneath the music, muttered a few words to me, trying at the same time to drape her length over my lap. I was paralysed, but the shadow in the corner bellowed some innard-clogged gutturals which, despite their bestial incomprehensibility, the 'lovely' seemed to understand and she withdrew from my vicinity. I returned my attention to Bob, relieved to see that he was back from his skull-out. He leaned across and tweaked my shoulders, as if he wanted my ear nearer. The Juke-Box stopped suddenly (as they sometimes did if a coin of too low a denomination was used) and his whisper became louder than intended: "I've got a hard-on!"

The dancers freeze-framed. I grimaced, as embarrassment seeped up from the pit of my stomach - bringing with it a prurient froth to the roof of my mouth and rancid bile to my nose and nostrils. "Bob, for God's sake!" He blushed, as I must have done, too, and tried to stand up. However, the 'lovely' lurking at our periphery loomed to the very edge of our table territory. I could hardly bring myself to look up, whilst Bob, now forced back into the bottom of his coffee cup, desperately scried the pattern of its dregs.

The shadow's voice was simply a series of tongue clicks, throat grunts and belly laughs. The lights were doused, as if the meter yearned another shilling. I heard a sound that was too obvious to be implied: a crunching-off, like celery, a splitting asunder, a tearing-out of a fibrous root from the body-grabbing earth. And the she-shadow was now touchable terror: harnessed to such a root, as she jigged and jived, in the flickering of her own luminescence - like a jester on heat. The dream-eyed 'lovelies' gave grudging welcome to the jump-lead she now wielded, as they were in turn short-circuited to the very bottom bone and hell of the she-shadow's searing soul.

The lights flashed once and then came on permanently. The Juke-Box completed the Buddy Holly disc - but it now seemed to be a different song altogether, reminding us that love is ...getting closer, going faster than a rollercoaster.

Bob was slumped across the table, his head lolling, thick coffee drooling from his lips upon the formica. And there was a slurping noise upon the floor from somewhere below the table, a spilling that became a splattering. I shrugged. I could've wept blood. I'd taken Bob out on the wrong day of the month - yet again.

There was no sign of the 'lovelies' anywhere. Loose bits, all of them! I cursed my mother, for not warning me about life and its pitfalls. All she ever did was irritatingly twiddle her whiskers as she nagged me to keep clean by licking my underparts and always to help the earth to gobble up my doings.

D F LEWIS

ON HER MAJESTY'S SCHILTHORN SOJOURN...

I suppose it could be a symptom of watching too many movies, when your choice of holiday is decided by filmic location. But that's really what this came down to: in the blue corner, fighting for Team Kitsch, is Salzburg, home to singing families governed by ex-nuns. In the red corner, looking suave, sophisticated and somewhat Swiss, is Interlaken: the nearby Schilthorn mountain was Blofeld's lair in one of the best Bond films ever (albeit starring the worst Bond ever), *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. Julie Andrews vs. George Lazenby - an agonising choice by any standard. Interlaken finally won out, and I returned to Switzerland for the first time in almost a decade (readers are referred to the distant depths of TC5 for the details of that previous trip).

In some ways, Switzerland is a good place for any world dictator wannabe, since they have a proven track record in holding your coat (and your bank account) while you exterminate your fellow Europeans. On the other hand, woe betide any pedestrian who dares cross the road, except in the designated places - as I rapidly discovered. I wasn't exactly taking my life in my hands when I crossed through stationary traffic, and, even though no-one was put at risk or even delayed by my manoeuvre, I was *whined* at - there's no other way to describe it - by a local.

But what else would you expect in a town whose economy appears to run largely on Swiss army knives? These are on sale at the butcher, baker and cuckoo-clock maker – the last-named no doubt with a special implement for dealing with obstinate cuckoos. Said clocks are also near-omnipresent, as is chocolate, though the place does boast (in a quiet, Swiss way) a sex shop, engagingly described as "the last sex shop before the Jungfrau". Otherwise, it has about the trash quota you would expect from a town with a resident population struggling to make 5,000. Given the severe lack of nightlife (or at least, nightlife that doesn't involve the Vengaboys), it is perhaps no wonder that Swiss youth have such a fondness for drugs. And graffiti too: rolling through the towns on the (quiet, clean, inevitably spot-on time) train, tagging was at epidemic levels. Yet the phone boxes are pristine, and even have email terminals in them, which would last about five minutes in South London. Go figure. It's all rather disturbing, as if rebellion is only permitted within rigidly-defined boundaries.

It <u>all</u> looks like this...

Still, it's hard to complain in such a magnificent setting: as its name suggests, Interlaken sits on a river running between two lakes – judging by the bizarre colour of the water, these must be named Plax and Listerine. Even grocery shopping is enlivened when there are snow-capped, F-sized Alps at the end of every street. Except on the second day, that is, when we woke to find that the scenery had been kidnapped by SPECTRE, who were demanding the sum of one billion dollars for its return.

Actually, it was merely very misty – this was still unfortunate, as that day was the one slated to go up the Schilthorn, eat in the solar-powered revolving restaurant on top, and plan to take over the world. However, we were saved by, of all things, Swiss television. They are short enough on programming to dedicate an entire channel to footage from cameras on various peaks: MTV, as in Mountain Television. Although this may well sound like the most tedious program ever (and it is, despite an undeniably hypnotic quality, and the odd tourist looning around in picture), it did show that the Schilthorn was more-or-less above the clouds, so we headed off.

The journey itself was an experience...hell, buying the tickets was an experience, but the good thing about languages in Switzerland, is that if you can't remember the German word, use the French one instead. People are remarkably unfazed when you switch tongue mid-sentence. Er, where was I? Ah, yes – let's start that one again, shall we?

As is traditional, TC sampled the local kebab - once we found it (Interlaken only seems to have two fast-food joints, and one of those is, inevitably, McDonalds). Like the town itself, it was pretty but bland, with no chilli sauce on offer, though it came in something closer to a bap than pitta bread, which was an original touch. We give it a C-.

We also tried fondue, the main contribution of the Swiss to proper food - this discounts chocolate, and also muesli since breakfast is not part of the TC diet. But we like fondue, particularly the meat kind, consisting of a pile of raw flesh, a pot of boiling oil on a burner, and a selection of sauces. With typical Swiss ingenuity, all blame for how the end product tastes shifts onto the consumer, since you do the cooking. While one feels it should be cheaper, because you do most of the work, it is a satisfactorily Neanderthal kind of fare.

The journey itself was an experience: train, funicular, mountain railway and cable-car, up to a (literally) breath-taking ten thousand feet above sea level. En route, we passed through the hugely eerie town of Murren, which - maintaining the film theme - would be an ideal location if George Romero ever gets round to any more zombie flicks. At just the right height to be basically in the clouds, it was almost a ghost town: the end of April was too late for skiers and too early for hikers. Not a place to be stuck for the night, we careful noted the departure time of the last funicular out.

Shortly after, we were rotating slowly round at the top of the mountain. With virtually the restaurant to ourselves (clearly, not everyone had discovered Swiss MTV), the waiter approached to enquire about drinks. There was only one possible answer: "vodka martini – shaken not stirred". The waiter rolled his eyes, for the ten millionth time in his career. This near-schizophrenia over the Bond connection was a marked facet of the place; they seemed almost begrudging of the link. Certainly, a major opportunity was being missed, since the 007 souvenirs available were sadly limited – I would have merchandised the *hell* out of the Bond connection. CDs, videos, stuffed white cats...

Though if Blofeld put his kitty out at night, he'd have never found it again. For in every direction you looked, there was snow – and moreover, it was white. [Those who feel this is stating the bleedin' obvious, haven't experienced the grey substitute we get in London] And if I thought the scenery was good looking up from below, it was utterly amazing from the top, gazing down on a fluffy feather-bed of clouds and Alps, as far as the eye could see. Top of the world, Ma, and another ambition safely ticked off.

A Blofeld henchling puts the cat out for the night

And that's Switzerland: in fifteen words or less, a lovely place to visit, but somehow, I probably wouldn't want to stay there...

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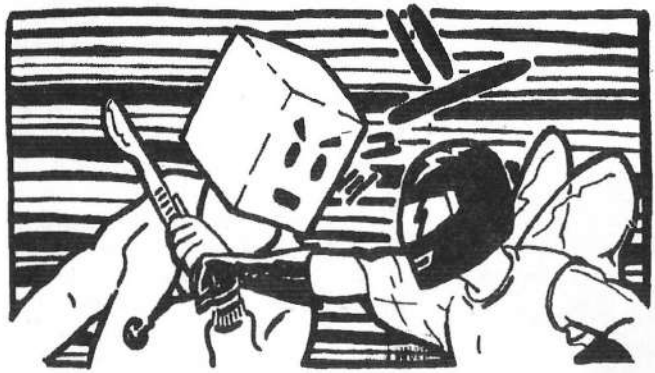
KAIJU BIG BATTEL

怪獣大戦闘怪獣大戦闘怪獣大戦闘



WHEN MONSTERS ATTACK

Take a handful of superhero shows, and add the insanity of professional wrestling. Over-cook until viewer's brains liquefy. Add Japanese commentary and cardboard buildings to taste. Stir. Welcome to the world of Kaiju Big Battel.

"A moonsault is harder than you think, especially when wearing a 30 pound rubber suit..."

What is Kaiju Big Battel? Well, "Kaiju" means mysterious beast in Japanese. For a fuller answer, TC went to the web-site, where this very question was posed. And the answer? *"Look out! Danger Can Happen! Kaiju have the many monsters which are making destruction the whole city! Also in the fair fight, the referee Justice keeping Dr.Cube from throw building at the mighty Silver Potato! See bizarre wrestling matches between gigantic absurd monsters! Watch Tokyo-style monster movie erupt into real life performance-art lunacy!..."*

At this point, TC decided to give up on the fuller answer thing, and go lie down in a darkened room for a bit. On our return, we headed for David Borden, the commercial monster of the Kaiju empire. Fortunately, he was inhabiting a concurrent dimension...

What is Kaiju Big Battel?

We Are Monsters! Kaiju Big Battel is a Boston based monster/ wrestling performance and media group which stages elaborately bizarre wrestling matches and other events featuring hand-built Japanese-style monsters. The "battels" are a ludicrous pop-culture hybrid of American pro-wrestling, Japanese monster mayhem, and B-movie antics. To fund monster creation and metropolitan destruction, Kaiju Big Battel produces and distributes its own merchandise including videos, trading cards, lunch boxes and a whole lot of other cool but useless, limited edition collectibles. Visit www.kaiju.com. for more information.

Why do you do this? Are you all entirely mad?

We are a bunch of (slightly mad) people who never grew up, and would rather play fight than get real 9-5 jobs.

***Kaiju Best Battel*, 30 min, $15 from www.kaiju.com**

...in which a bunch of guys and gals, obsessed equally with Japanese monster movies and professional wrestling, dress up in extremely silly costumes, and hit each other over the head with cardboard buildings for half an hour. So why am I laughing? Why do I have a near-irrepressible urge to buy the Kaiju lunch-box? And - God help me - why am I contemplating coming up with my own silly costume, flying to Boston, and *joining in*? And all this at 3pm on a Sunday afternoon, without so much as a beer to hand. It must be some kind of viral madness.

The basic principle will be familiar to fans of Godzilla, Mothra and their buddies: Japanese monsters, duking it out. Except in Kaiju, it's in a wrestling ring, decorated with miniature buildings to be stomped, thrown around or used as weapons, depending on mood. Oh, and these monsters are things like Dust Bunny (with his special attack, the Hide Behind Furniture Hop), Existentialist Automaton and Astro Turufu - who is green, and covered in plastic grass. Think about it.

It was Turufu's appearance that finally toppled me over from bemusement to amusement, and I began to appreciate the wry introductions for each combatant, the doubtful veracity of the on-screen captions (one bout supposedly took place in "Attica Prison, September 1971") and the music, unashamedly nicked from Japanese TV series and movies. There are even adverts for monster-endorsed products like Hell Monkey Hot Sauce - which you can now actually purchase through the Kaiju web-site.

You certainly can't deny the effort involved, with the costumes taking up to seven months to make, and round about twenty monsters in the roster at any one time. Part of the delight is, it's pitched just right: the concept of Atomic Cannon, a giant camera beast, may *seem* excessively ludicrous, yet I've seen precisely that on a Japanese show. [And it wasn't the worst: I think the monster bus was more insane. Or perhaps the 60-foot, sailor-suited schoolgirl. I'm not kidding.] Given these, is a "Tropical Fruit Grudge Match" really too bizarre to grasp?

The audience reaction at Kaiju events seems to mirror mine, ranging from bafflement to hysterical laughter, and make no mistake, this is the sort of tape you'll find either gut-clenchingly funny or totally unamusing. But trust me on one thing: you really haven't lived until you've seen a foam-rubber sandwich (armed with a club, for reasons I leave you to work out) attacking an oversized tin of chicken soup.

Where did the original idea come from?

There was no one original idea, it just evolved into what it is over time. Still, the beginning of Kaiju Big Battel was to make a short video of two monsters fighting to the death in a cityscape – like an Ultraman battle. Then someone asked if we wanted to do a live performance, so we accepted the offer, added two more monsters, and a Japanese narrator just for the hell of it. It took on a life of its own after that.

The first show was on Halloween Night, 1994. What was the audience reaction to it like?

People ate it up. Perhaps they were a little liquored, but they were cheering and screaming. Still, they thought we were crazy for wearing the suits because it was 100 degrees in the space, and we were having the time of our lives, fighting in the midst of a cardboard mini-metropolis for control of the jack-o-lantern full of Halloween goodies.

How often do you do events, and what decides where and when?

We do events whenever we get offers to perform. We do smaller events in addition to the wrestling tournaments, In the past we've hosted dance nights, competed in triathlons, played soccer games. The larger wrestling events take place every couple of months.

> "Some of the wrestlers were fond of smashing fluorescent lights over each other, but that's no longer allowed."

What are the people behind Kaiju like?

It's a diverse crowd made up of wrestling fanatics, video game geeks, monster collectors, and the like. Currently, there are about 13 members, most of them graduates of the School of Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Who creates the amazing costumes?

Rand Borden is the head monster maker. Sometimes others come up with costumes. But, for the most part he probably made about 90% of the Kaijus.

It looks a little dangerous: has anyone ever been injured?

Oh yes, plenty of injuries: a broken heel, two concussions, a dislocated knee, bruised ribs, to name a few. One guy even got light bulb glass stuck in his behind. Some of the wrestlers were fond of smashing fluorescent lights over each other, but that's no longer allowed. Mama Kaiju says so.

What kind of people come to your shows?

Drunk people. College kids, lots of art students and indie/punk rockers, monster fans, toy geeks and wrestling fanatics. Younger kids too, with their parents, of course. Some sober people too. We often perform in conjunction with live bands, so there are usually a lot of rock and rollers at the shows.

Is there any serious point, or is simply a bit of fun?

Its serious entertainment on our behalf and a lot of fun for the audience (so they tell us).

> "We all want our own action figures and personalised matching head and wrist bands."

Are the routines rehearsed or entirely ad-lib?

Both, about half and half. They are rehearsed but then what happens on the stage usually doesn't end up matching the script. Sometimes, the wrestlers get too tired and decide to die early. The ad-lib stuff usually makes the battels so entertaining.

Do you know what Japanese people think of it all?

They think we're crazy. Our Japanese friends have told us that such a thing would never happen in Japan, because it's too active and way too insane in the ring, but they love the costumes and the live battles

How does the spectacular range of merchandising fit in?

It's both financially and aesthetically important. The merchandise pays for all the costumes and covers all the pragmatic concerns like postage, phone bills, event posters and the like. We're moving into a new studio/office space and the goods will pay for that too (hopefully). We like to have fun – some of the merchandise, like the Hell Monkey Hot Sauce, is made for spoof purposes only. Didn't expect people to buy it, but they do: the Hot as Hell flavor is the most popular.

We thought we would stop after the trading cards, but that's not the case – we all want our own action figures and personalised matching head and wrist bands! I'm not entirely sure what we enjoy more, making monsters or making monster merchandise.

Everything is made in-house except the T-shirts and the video manufacturing. Fortunately, we have access to lots of equipment, like off-set presses, silk-screen facilities, video editing equipment and we love to play around with it all.

We try to make the products and/or the packaging entertaining. Lately, we have been putting a lot more effort into the packaging. As a matter of fact, lately we've been putting a lot more effort in the merchandise in general. We're really intent on improving the quality of the merchandise. Every time we do something, whether it be putting on an event or making new trading cards, we try to "one-up" it from the last effort.

Still, in the future we want to churn out more ridiculous products, like Dino Kang steaks (basically a rubber coated piece of foam in the shape of a large steak, with a Kaiju Big Battel logo on it). The more I think of it, we seem to make most of the products for our own enjoyment. I suppose we should start paying a little more attention to what our fans want, but they seem to like what we like.

What next for Kaiju?

Better, faster, stronger. We have the technology - we just have to figure out how to use it. Currently in the works, we're bringing Kaiju Big Battel out of Boston and into every TV den in the world. World Monster domination would be best. Still, we'll settle for a cartoon, pay per view wrestling matches and a few movies.

We all want to smash cities and wrestle for a living. But until the big deals come, we're working on revamping the Kaiju web site, complete with quick time videos, computer games, and other fun nonsense, as well as producing another video that focuses more on plots and more sophisticated wrestling – we've been practising on the mats. A moonsault is harder than you think, especially when wearing a 30 pound rubber suit...

Contact Kaiju

Kaiju International,
325 Huntington Ave,
Suite 101,
Boston,
MA 02115,
USA.
http://www.kaiju.com

AMERICAN PSYCHOS

Trash City witnesses the latest developments in America's mutant phenomenon

Chris: "America. Land of opportunity. Land the free. And in the American Southwest, home to a modern marvel. Those who have power misunderstood by mere mortals. Those whose power defies most of the forces of nature - gravity, co-ordination, balance and speech. And all this at speeds up to 75 miles per hour!"

Leo: "The opening of the film ***X-Men*** was exciting for me. I got to see the silver-screen realization of a long awaited dream, my favorite superheroes portrayed by actors and armed with eye-popping, computer generated abilities. It occurred to me after I saw the movie, that there are superheroes all around us, in our neighborhoods and in our towns, that we don't typically pay much attention to."

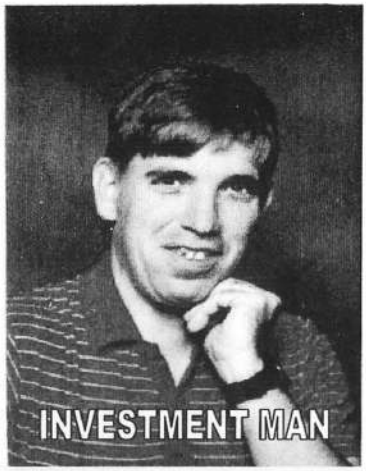
Amy: "They don't have fancy costumes or computer generated powers that dazzle the eye, but if you're quick, you might catch a glimpse as they perform miraculous feats of mutant coordination...all while driving a car. Presumably on their way to some planet-threatening emergency that only they can avert."

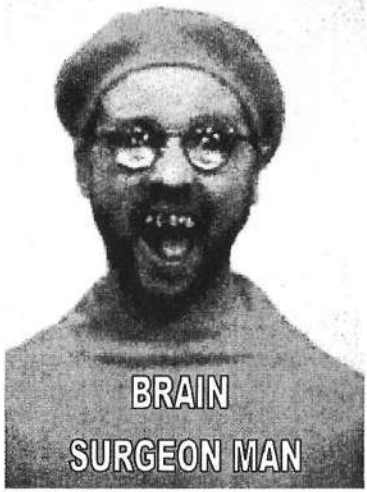
Chris: "We're talking about **Traffic Superheroes**, speed demons who must drive and multi-task at the same time. We've all seen them, but we never really realized that the person driving next to us, donning their makeup, drinking their coffee, eating their breakfast (hell, *cooking* their breakfast!), dressing, speaking on the phone and simultaneously driving, are masters of powers simply beyond our comprehension. My brother, his wife and I have been taking notice of these secret superheroes that are overlooked by the general public (unless they happen to have an encounter of the head-on collision kind with one of them).

Leo: "Some of you, although residing far from here, may recognize these names and descriptions quite vividly from one or more times you have crossed paths with them. For one of their most interesting powers is the ability to be in several places at once, since there have been sightings, at the same moment, thousands of miles apart. It stumps the experts how these creatures have developed hyper-warp-trans-dimensional-field travel, but we hope to one day figure that out."

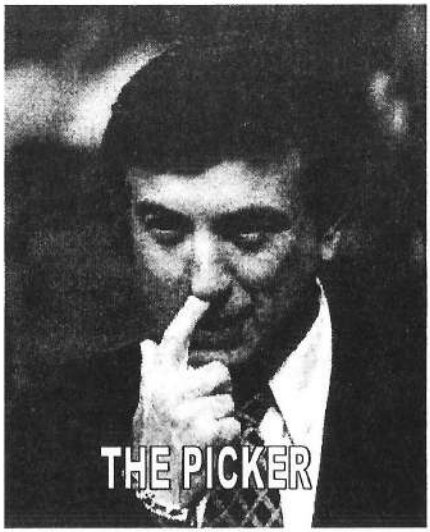
Amy: "We have decided that it is necessary to expose these superheroes to the world by their true names, in order that the rest of the population can pay homage to these beings, or perhaps just send their lawyer after them. So, in honour of all the mutants out there, who grace our presence daily with displays of super-human coordination near break-neck speed, and unusual activities, here is a partial list of those we have spied in our travels. Maybe you've seen them too..."

Name	Super-power
Breakfast Man	Able to eat breakfast, have his coffee, even *cook* breakfast, then eat it while driving. Is somehow able to eat cereal, drive his car, and even perform U-turns without spilling his milk.
Investment Man	The power to have the entire business section of the newspaper spread out in front of him, with a cell phone in his ear, trading stocks over the phone all while barreling down the road at 55 miles per hour.
Turban Man	Amazing!! Can drive and wrap nine hundred yards of material around his head. Fortunate, since it was necessary to wait till he was actually in the vehicle and driving in the speed lane to accomplish this. Watch in awe as he spins yards and yards of fabric around his head (Ooops! watch those eyes!), under his chin and across his forehead, never taking his foot off the accelerator, not even once!
Greased Lightning Granny	Faster than a speeding golfcart! More powerful than extra-strength incontinence pads! Look out! She's on the road and no red traffic light holds dominion over her. No stop sign even slows her down. It's **Greased Lightning Granny**!
Make-Up Lady	Shifting gears is no problem for this on-the-go cosmetic counter attendant (oops! Almost revealed her true identity), as she can accurately apply her make-up (even mascara!) and drive simultaneously.
Brain Surgeon Man	We've all seen this guy. He must be in front of you in traffic (HE MUST), and he gets highly upset if you don't let him (HIGHLY UPSET), because of the emergency brain surgery (URGENT!!) that awaits him at the hospital. Which happens to be in the opposite direction. Never mind.





The Picker

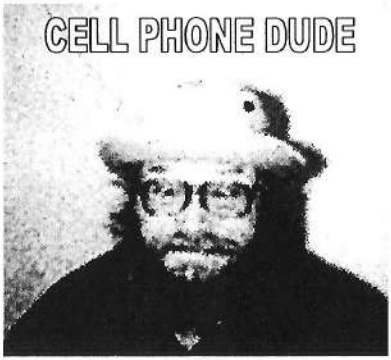


Breakfast for you will not be the same today. No, no. Maybe not the same for a long time, in fact. **The Picker** will make certain of that. **The Picker** is an unusual fellow in that he can change his appearance to look like countless people on the highway. You've seen him, although you may not have recognized him. **The Picker** has the ability to grow his breakfast. You know where. And, while mere normal humans such as ourselves shudder with spontaneous and violent disgust, **The Picker** knows a good one when he digs it out. We have to look at him and yell... "pick me a winner, asshole!"

The Speed Keeper

No matter how far up his ass you insert your front end, **The Speed Keeper** is in control. He knows that your goal is to go *beyond the speed limit*. His goal is to save your life from the treacherous perils of velocity by going exactly at the speed limit. Those signs are there for a reason, after all. Those signs are there for our health, contrary to popular belief, Mister! Sometimes **The Speed Keeper** enlists the help of an accomplice or sidekick, pacing each other in adjacent lanes, to deny everyone the right to be **Brain Surgeon Man.**

Cell Phone Dude



Cell Phone Dude is just way too busy for a single minute to go by. Way too busy!!! He must spend every minute that he's on the road, on the phone as well. His jet-set lifestyle doesn't permit him to take a break from telecommunicating. Oh, no...people have to hear from him. And it doesn't matter if he runs you and half of creation off the road while he's making that very important call. Those cell phone people *must hear from him at all costs!* He's got the best equipment for the job at hand, too. Only the best and fastest for jet-setting **Cell Phone Dude.**

Knuckles

Lives in a retirement community and is approximately 8 million years old, but ventures out every so often to teach us the value of decision-making. **Knuckles** believes that even though his/her left turn is over ten miles away, they are within their right to keep us waiting for the blessed event. **Knuckles** will invariably slow right down to make sure that pesky junction doesn't slip past them, and will typically make the turn from the middle or even right lane. **Knuckles** also owns the biggest car in the world, and can barely see over the steering wheel.

Rubber-Neck

If there's an accident, **Rubber-Neck** and his kin want every detail from the scene. **Rubber-Neck** can't go more than a few miles per hour as he cranes his neck, trying to get a better view from his vantage point behind the wheel. And though **Mrs. Rubber-Neck** warns him to keep his eyes on the road (they always marry their polar opposites), **Rubber-Neck** would be remiss in his duties if he didn't get every detail...after all, someone may one day ask him about *the big accident.*

Mrs. Discipline

Mrs. Discipline can't keep her kids from taking off their safety belts, but Has mastered the ability to talk without the need to breathe. Thus, these are the things that she says as she's disciplining her kids while driving on the road (which, by the way, is the best place to educate them).

"WhereisBobbyshappymealtoy?DidyoustealBobbyshappymealtoy?
Yougivethatbackthisinstant.Don'tyoubacktalkme.I'mgonnatanyourhide
COME'ERE!Sallydon'tbiteyourbrother.
Timmydon'ttouchthat,youdon'tnowwhereit'sbeen.
Stoppickingatit.It'sgonnagetinfected.Don'tyouspitatme!I'myourmother!
Takethatoutofyourmouthrightnow!
AndPUTYOURDAMNSEATBELTON!!!!"

Can't Find It Guy

Can't Find It Guy, just can't find it. But he's gonna try his hardest to locate it while he's driving all over the road right in front of you. Is the brother of...

Kickin' EQ In The Glove Box Dude

Must keep adjusting the levels of ear-shattering volume that his car stereo puts out, ever in search of what the salesman called the "Nirvana Level of EQ Serendipity". This is the exact combination of channels that his EQ controls, which will produce the perfect sound for every song. Unfortunately, every time he gets close to NLEQS, the song ends and he has to start all over again. Has the EQ cleverly hidden in the glove box (shhh), so thieves won't know it's there. If they do break into his car, they'll never think to look there, cuz who would ever think of putting an EQ in the glove box, anyway? Right?

Chris: "These are just a few. There are many more out there. We have borne witness to all these on the road over the years and are sure that there are more, interesting and dangerous examples out there, all over this Trash City World. We want to know who these people are. Let us know if you've seen any, we'd love to add to this list... Expose them.. tell us your *Traffic Superheroes* stories."

Chris Fata - North American Ambassador. (trshctygal@aol.com, http://www.trashcity.com).
Aided and assisted by the Trash City American Eyewitnesses (currently under the TC Witness Protection Program to protect their identities from vengeful Traffic Superheroes for exposing them):
Leo Morales (khthulhu@yahoo.com) & **Amy Drake** (amyaz_98@yahoo.com)

"Follow the rules and nobody gets hurt"
The Art and Style of Women-in-Prison Films

1. **The title**. Frequently, this has two parts, reflecting the genre: one to do with prison, the other to do with women. Particularly traditional are C-words: *Chained, Caged, Captive, Confined*, anything to do with sex or violence, such as *Heat, Fury, Inferno, Fear, Passion*, and plurals of the female sex i.e. *Women, Babes, Bimbos, Totty* or *Stewardesses*. In the box below are some classics.

2. **The sleeve**. Lure the customer in with lurid artwork - if they stop to actually read the text, you've lost the battle. Include as much flesh as you can, even if you have to fake it in some way. Juicy blood-red is a nice colour, and it goes without saying that an 18 certificate is a must.

3. **The tag-line**. Often follows a set formula:

Terrified.	**Tortured.**	**Humiliated.**
Imprisoned.	**Abused.**	**Afraid.**
Innocent.	**Incarcerated.**	**Insatiable.**

Get. The. Picture? Read down, diagonally or across: it's the basic concept which is important, rather than any actual meaning.

4. **The heroine** is innocent: framed, or taking the rap for her man maybe, but you rarely hear, "It's a fair cop, guv". And no matter the crime, there is absolutely no chance of a fine, probation, or a suspended sentence.

5. **The soap**. Jail is unpleasant: there's no such thing as an open prison, they're all hell-holes. But, no matter the conditions, hygiene is paramount, and rigorously enforced. Inmates shower frequently, paying special attention to soaping their breasts.

All-Time Great WiP Exploitles

1. ***Barbed Wire Dolls***
2. ***Concentration Camp For Girls***
3. ***Crucified Girls of San Remon***
4. ***Delinquent School Girls***
5. ***Emanuelle Escapes From Hell***
6. ***Naked Superwitches Of The Rio Amour***
7. ***Nurses For Sale***
8. ***School for Unclaimed Girls***
9. ***So Young, So Evil***
10. ***Strike of the Tortured Angels***

6. **The location**. The above two components are why so many movies are set abroad, where miscarriages of justice occur all the time; it could never happen here, of course. However, note that "here" is relative, naturally depending on where you are: American WiPs favour the Far East, Europeans like South America, and a recent entry in the Japanese *Female Scorpion* series was set in California.

7. **The prisoners**. As well as the heroine, the following may be included:
   - *The Innocent*. Our heroine may be not guilty, but that's different from the naïve young thing whom the heroine befriends, and has to rescue from...
   - *The Queen Bitch*. Usually with ties to the warden; expect a cat-fight with the heroine. Will either then bond, or become a deadly enemy who is brutally killed in the last reel.

8. **The guards**. On the other side of the bars, you often find these characters:
   - *The Warden*. Sadistic if male, dyke if female. May quote biblical scripture.
   - *The Nice Authority Figure*. Token effort to avoid a wholly negative portrayal of the rehabilitation profession. Can be a doctor or psychiatrist; usually entirely ineffective.
   - *Guards*. Shout things like "Move it, ladies, this ain't the Holiday Inn."

9. **The plot**. Not strictly obligatory. Should you feel the need, you can have something nefarious going on in the background; white-slavery is a favourite. When discovered by the heroine, she will either bring in the authorities (this usually takes a while), make an escape bid, or lead the inmates in an rebellion, which will inevitably be successful - Attica, this ain't.

10. **The ending**. Often sees the heroine released, sadder but wiser, to begin a new life outside on the straight and narrow. At least, until the sequel... If you're lucky enough to make one, expect to recast, since your leading lady will now consider herself a 'serious actress', above such things. Try waiting a few years - her career will probably plummet again, and she'll be glad of the work.

To test these ground rules as a working hypothesis, scientific practice now says we should apply some data to it, and see how it fits. Fortunately, Chris had just bought me a whole load of, er, data, because she thought I was into "that sort of thing". Who, me? With experimental subjects thus sorted, let's get on to the analyses:

Key
❶ Generic title
❷ Lurid artwork
❸ Terse tagline
❹ Innocent heroine
❺ Shower scene
❻ Foreign location
❼ Co-captives
❽ Incarcerators
❾ Flight or fight
❿ Heroine redeemed

The Big Bust Out (Richard Jackson) ❶❺❻❽❾ – Heh-heh-heh... He said, "Big bust", thereby covering both women and prison themes nicely. Difficult to tell the precise location here, but given the multi-national nature of the heroines, probably safe to say it's foreign for some of them. This one starts off with all seven already inside, neatly bypassing questions of guilt or innocence. However, it doesn't take long before they escape, along with their 'social worker' nun, only to fall into the clutches of white-slavers, filthy Arabs, and so on. Aided by a super-funky 70's soundtrack and some good use of locations, there is also a bizarre sequence in which the nun goes into town looking for food, and ends up smashing a dwarf over the head with a boulder. It's good to see a film which doesn't avoid asking difficult questions about the role of the church in modern society. By the end of the film, the ranks of the women have been sorely depleted, and you can't help wondering if they might perhaps have been better off staying in jail. **B**

Lisa Boyle is... 'Cassandra Leigh'

Caged Heat 3000 (Aaron Osborne) ❶❷❻❼❽❾ – This may be the sleaziest entry in Jim Cameron's filmography – albeit only through the spaceship of his, spliced-in from *Battle Beyond the Stars*. For it is a Roger Corman production, so anyone expecting other than exploitation *par excellence* is being startlingly *naive*. Lisa Boyle (under the *nomme-de-jail* of 'Cassandra Leigh') stars as a girl sent to a futuristic prison asteroid, where she rapidly peeves both authorities and fellow inmates, and shows a remarkable fondness for violence which suggests the verdict was perhaps right on the button. The cast seems to be a mix of strippers and porn stars (even Ron Jeremy has a cameo), though the sets are surprisingly good and it looks better than its probably minute budget. After a bright start, balancing delicately on the tightrope of self-awareness, it seems to forget about the SF angle and descends into a standard "prison revolt" scenario, albeit with rather more fist fights than normal. Leigh certainly has the hard attitude - and breasts - for the film, and there's enough of both to retain interest. **C+**

Caged Women (Luchetti Leandro) ❶❷❸❹❺❻❼ – This is something of a rare item, in that the video was initially refused certification by the BBFC altogether. 25 minutes later (or rather, fewer...), it seeps out, shorn of all potential offence, mostly by the distributors. Is there any *point* watching a film missing over a quarter of its length? Perversely, yes: if five minutes had been cut, this would have been tedious garbage, but beyond a certain point, coherence is replaced by a fugue-like state of random scenes, connected only loosely. One second, our two heroines are the titular caged women, surviving by licking sweat off each other(!); the next, they're in the jungle. Is this reality or delusion? Uncut, it made sense - perhaps - now, you've got to work hard at filling in the gaps, and whatever you come up with is likely more interesting than the atrocities removed for your protection. Admittedly, perhaps neither version ever did explain what an "American tourist" was doing in the middle of an Amazonian jungle. But it now gets the benefit of the doubt which, from an aesthetic, if not exploitative, point of view is a significant help. **D+**

Female Convict Scorpion: Jailhouse 41 (Shunya Ito) ❷❼❽❾❿ – This is the second entry in perhaps the longest running WiP series, beginning in 1972, and still going strong today. The first four all star Meiko Kaji as Matsu, a prisoner of very few words – in this film, precisely two. At the outset, she's under lockdown conditions about half a notch better than Hannibal Lecter, and we soon discover this is for good reason. Warden Goda, who has crossed her path before and come off worse, tries to break her spirit, but this merely leads to her escape, along with a dirty half-dozen of other murderous and malcontented maidens. They struggle through a surreal landscape, pursued by the warden and his men, leaving a trail of cadavers in their wake. It's definitely a classic: in some ways, the movie comes across almost like a Leone western, while in others it's more like *Kwaidan*, and it also possesses the hyper-red gore beloved by Japanese film-makers. Kaji does fantastically well given the limitations of her dialogue, and even the complete lack of background – it assumes you've seen the first part, so gives no hint why she's in jail – works in her favour. **B+**

Purgatory (Ami Artzi) ❷❸❹❺❻❼❽ – Ah, how the mighty are fallen...and Tanya Roberts too, now reduced to coy exploitation films like this one. She gets sent to eleven years in an African jail, where the governor, a graduate of the "Harvard School of Business", farms the best girls out as hookers in a reprise of much the same plot as *Chained Heat*. Meanwhile, her mother battles corruption and embassy apathy to try and free her. A lot of the exploitation here happens off-screen: you'll see rubber gloves being snapped on, and that's it. Another particular highlight is one client of hers, who has the least convincing Scots accent in cinema history, and sings *Take the High Road* to make up for it. It's pretty depressing to watch lengthy scenes of Tanya Roberts sobbing, as she loses her sanity but, inevitably, retains her immaculately coiffeured big hair. Though the political intrigue and conspiracy angles are well-covered, the lengthy final escape sequence can't shake off the torpor of the first hour, and there are not even any moral lessons to be learned here. **D+**

Slammer Girls (Chuck Vincent) ❶❷❺❼❽❿ – At least Vincent has the exploitation credits for this women-in-prison parody, and his porno background also means he's not short of actresses (there's no shortage of adult movie starlets to be found here – as well as Beth Broderick, who'd go on to be one of *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*'s aunts). This clearly wants to be *Airplane!* with breasts, and on odd occasions succeeds, partly through dumb gags, partly through a faithful recreation of every WiP cliché imaginable. Thus you get an innocent sent down, an undercover (very male!) journalist, secret medical experiments, etc. However, there are long spells when you could be watching a "serious" entry in the genre, and the acting rarely reaches a sufficiently giddy height to cover the gaps: only matron Veronica Hart pushes the pedal to the max, spitting out her lines with fine venom. It's just about amusing enough to fend off sleep, but in no way replaces *Reform School Girls* as the best example of jailhouse jollity. **C**

Star Slammer: The Escape (Fred Olen Ray) ❷❸❹❻❼❽❾❿ – Blimey, another SF/WiP crossover: stars 'n' bars, perhaps? Anyway, our heroine is framed for the murder of cult icon Johnny Legend, actually committed by Ross Hagen, and gets sent to the prison ship Vengeance, where all the usual stuff takes place. This being Fred Olen Ray, it's cheerfully trashy, with its tongue largely in cheek: Hagen and Ray regular Dawn Wildsmith sneer magnificently, and a very ill-looking John Carradine turns up for about ten seconds. It's daft, and knows it, remaining good-natured and surprisingly unsleazy (only one completely gratuitous topless flash). There is some stuff which could even be claimed as social satire except that, at the risk of repeating myself, this is a F.O.R. movie, so clearly can't be. While gleefully nicking stuff from other movies, such as the monster from *Deadly Spawn*, towards the end, Ray chucks in effect shot after effects shot, and the cast are left to stand around looking bored. They weren't the only ones, and it gelled badly with the cheery kitsch of the previous 75 enjoyable minutes. B-

10 Violent Women (Ted V.Mikels) ❷❻❽❾ – You have to admire any director who proudly proclaims "Ted V.Mikels Classic Gems" on the video box. Ten hot-pants clad (this was made in 1979, after all) gold miners opt for the easy option of a heist instead, but the sheikh to whom their loot belongs hunts them down. Ted himself turns up as a jewel fence, and performs creditably enough there: he just needs lessons in lighting, as much of the film appears to take place in a coal cellar. We're almost in the third quarter before they get put into prison, but Mikels makes up for lost time, cramming brawls, a lesbian cell-block head, a scripture-quoting loony, and a lot of beatings into a relatively short section which is the best part of the film. Sadly for the viewer, they escape, and things sink back into the abyss; it runs 20 minutes longer than the box claims, but that is probably more of a curse than a blessing. Certainly, it's neither a classic nor a gem. D

Women Prison (David Lam) ❶❺❼❽❾❿ – Hong Kong has produced some classic male prison films, such as *Prison on Fire* and *The Story of Ricky*, and this deserves to be up there with them, albeit closer to the former then the latter – scriptwriter Nam Yin also did *Prison on Fire II*. An excellent ensemble cast (Carol Cheng, Fung Bo Bo, Pat Ha, Charine Chan and Elsie Chan) tell the tale of Kelly (Ha), and the film wastes no time, turning her from bride to jail-bird inside four minutes. She then gets involved in a struggle for jail supremacy, and embarks on a downward spiral which pushes her to the edge of insanity. Oddly, a stretch in isolation proves to be a turning point (as well as providing a great version of *House of the Rising Sun* – "My power is always there/It will never die/Never complain or regret/To hold my fist of freedom") and things build to a rousing climax. While sex is barely mentioned and the ending seems unsatisfactorily rushed, the characters are wonderful, taking the usual clichés and adding depth (Pat Ha in particular does a fine job). You actually care – a pleasant surprise for the genre. B

WOMEN'S PENITENTIARY

Readers wanting a crash course in the women-in-prison film need go no further than the *Women's Penitentiary* series, released by video label MCM, no doubt to follow up on the cult status of blaxploitation flick, *Penitentiary*. While the *Captive Women* line may have reached eight, they still lag behind W.P. and its thirteen entries to date. Why not collect the set?

Covering a broad range of style, content and era, they are all cynical retitlings of other movies (albeit ones which only extend to the box, leaving the credits untouched). However, their trashiest and most appealing factor are probably the delightfully sleazy sleeves, on which models pose in costumes and positions that capture the whole WiP ethos admirably, yet have absolutely no connection to the film,

The same can often be said for the text on there too: if early entries did at least make the odd nod to truth in advertising, later ones appear to have largely made-up names which cannot be found anywhere else. Thus WP 11 borrows a couple of names from *Caged Heat*, yet isn't, and the cast of WP 13 appear to be complete unknowns. The series falls apart in other ways too: note the poor punctuation and spelling on the WP 13 sleeve below...

Just to add to the general confusion, the first entry in the series, was Ted V.Mikels' *10 Violent Women* (see above), but *Women's Penitentiary* is also an alternate title for *The Big Doll House*, Jack Hill's hugely influential Pam Grier movie. Hey, who said being a Women-in-Prison fan was easy...

- 1: *10 Violent Women*
- 2: *The Big Bird Cage*
- 3: *Women in Cages*
- 4: *Violenza in un carcere femminile*, starring Laura Gemser
- 5: *Femmine in Fuga*
- 6: *Women Unchained*
- 7: *Island Women*
- 8: *Five Loose Women*, a.k.a. *Fugitive Girls* (with an Ed Wood script + cameo).
- 9: *The Big Bust Out*
- 10: *Black Mama, White Mama*
- 11: ???
- 12: *99 Women*, from sleaze-master Jess Franco.
- 13. ???

HUNGARY LIKE THE WOLF

Following up on last year's ultra-successful Prague spring, the 2000 TC Eurojaunt was given to Budapest. It was picked from a shortlist of possibles including Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Berlin and Vienna, largely because it was deemed to be the most "Prague-like" of the options, though its reputation as the European capital of pornography did no harm either. Having gone for the city largely because we wanted Prague II, what we really got was something significantly different, but no less appealing. While the Czech capital was love at first sight, Budapest is like a mildly pretty girl with a great personality, whom you gradually come to like more and more.

The town is split in two by the Danube, into Buda and Pest (by this method, I would commute into Lon from my home in Don), with the former the older, hillier part, while the latter has all the bars and nightlife. Guess which we saw more of? It's bigger, more sprawling and less pedestrian-friendly than Prague, but the public transport puts London to shame: buses, trams, Metro, and trolleybus all fit together to make no journey a chore. This is a good thing, given the local taxi drivers' international reputation for chicanery, up to and including the extraction of "fares" at gunpoint. Strange, therefore, that the city centre was so utterly quiet, even on Friday + Saturday nights. Perhaps the concept of "going uptown" doesn't apply: the main street, *Váci utca*, was spookily quiet almost every time we went there. On Sunday night, we were the only people on the central square of *Vörosmarty Ter*, which was as unexpected as finding oneself the sole inhabitant of Piccadilly Circus.

Or maybe all the locals were in restaurants, for this was one way in which Budapest surpassed even Prague: the food was astonishing. We tried everything we knew - starter, main course, beers, dessert, liqueur, coffee - and were still clinically unable to get the bill up above nine quid a head. Though I'd be hard pushed to name any recognisable national cuisine beyond goulash, the Hungarians had enthusiastically adopted other nations' ways of cooking dead animal, including bits even I wasn't prepared to tackle: "lung in sour sauce", anyone? Thought not. But even discarding such questionable entrees, the appropriately named Fatal restaurant (at *Váci utca 67* – and it's actually Hungarian for "wooden platter") was sheer carnal delight. Better yet was the Haxen Király Sörhaz (*Király utca 100*), a Germanic-themed establishment that delivered a feast ranking among the best meals I've ever had. The waiter cheerfully reject your choice of side dishes if he reckons it won't work: take the advice, they know their stuff. As is now tradition, had a local kebab as well: pretty good (B-), if a little on the small side, with chilli sauce and yoghurt, it came in a pitta and tin foil, almost like one of those trendy wraps. And while Austria and Hungary have had their differences, national rivalries are overcome by a mutual appreciation of cakes and pastries: "world unity through gateaux" *(Jim didn't, however, have the bottle to enter 'BonBon Hemingway', a chain of stores dedicated to the epic struggle of Man and Chocolate).*

Hungary is better known for its wine, such as Bulls' Blood and Tokai, than the beer, yet there are competent local brews like Dreher, and a wide variety of places in which to consume them, often alongside the aforementioned slabs of dead animal. While a little short of Prague on the brewing front, it was still far more chilled-out than London. You could always get a seat, waitress service meant you never needed to

go to the bar, and "closing time" was an unknown concept, with some places simply rolling their staff around the clock. This means that things kick off later than in Britain, with places tending to be eerily empty before 10pm.

The second area in which Budapest beat Prague - and this was agreed upon by everyone in our party, from newly-single to happily-married - is babes. With hair that went beyond black, to a bluish tinge capable of sucking light in from the surrounding area, we were often reduced to awed gawping. At times it seemed like Hungarian women needed to have competed in a major beauty pageant, simply to be let out on the streets, with winning one a prerequisite for a job as a waitress. The Miro café (*Úri utca 30*) almost saw fights breaking out over one such beauty – "No, it was *me* she smiled at!" It's easy to see why the place has become a mecca for artistic film-makers, and unlike this country, where "looking" now appears to be a form of sexual harassment, in Budapest they meet your gaze unflinchingly. Although this was at first un-nerving (in London, it'll soon be possible to have an entire relationship without eye-contact), eventually you get used to it. Though it does make the tube journey back from Heathrow a bit tricky.

Walking down *Váci utca*, you will (at least, if "you" are male) be accosted by smartly-dressed thugs offering "drink-bar-striptease", in a variety of different languages. In one of the tourist brochure's elegantly flowery discouragements, "we cannot say not to go, but close friends might want to dissuade you", for these venues are adept at distracting you with stunning female company and selling you very expensive cocktails. However, unlike Soho clip-joints, you can actually buy sex as well, since a lot of them are just as much brothel as strip-club. Either way, best not argue over the bill, since the various East European mafiosi have a hand therein, and no aversion to violence – in 1998, four bystanders were killed by a car-bomb. So, despite Budapest's reputation, Prague is generally a more relaxed and laid-back place in which to appreciate the unclad female form.

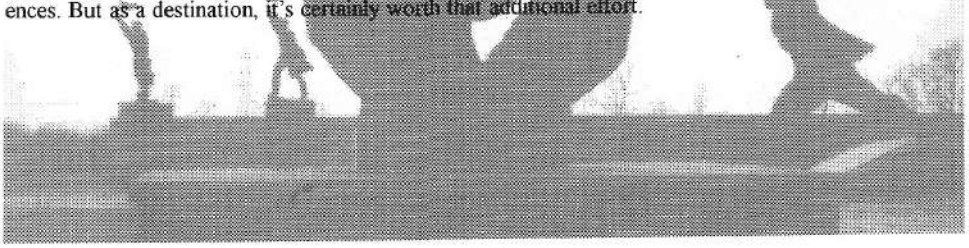
Not that we spent all our time there indulging in pleasures of the flesh (eating or watching it). Buda offers a lot of old buildings to explore along

Várhegy, though the site has been ravaged and rebuilt 86 times over the past seven centuries, a total surpassed only by Cher's face. The main attraction is Mátyás Church, which is largely a 19th-century remake, yet has a breath-taking interior, and is still in use, as we found out when the rear doors swung open unexpectedly and a bride and groom swept in for their wedding. The Japanese coach party went "Waaaaahh!", in a reverent tone previously only heard during barbed-wire death-matches, and an explosion of flash bulbs gave the bride the show-business wedding she'd always craved. But no-one could deny the impact of a genuinely overwhelming moment, one of those experiences that make travel rewarding.

The Hungarian language is a law unto itself. To quote one melancholy guidebook, "The Hungarian language belongs to the Finno-Ugric family. We do not understand our European relatives the Finns and Estonians either." Interesting to note that those countries are the only ones in Europe whose suicide rate surpasses Hungary's. Mere coincidence, or the natural result of having to cope with sentences like "Camilla egyszerü, hétköznapi lány, egyedülálló nö, aki ellen összeesküdött a világ?" It sounds like it reads – on the flight out, when we first heard it spoken over the intercom, we thought there was a fault with the PA. All we managed to learn, between the five of us, was "Thank you". The Hungarians seemed impressed we even bothered with that, perhaps because, by the end of the holiday, we had perfected saying it in a shy, not-sure-if-we-are-right kind of way. English and pointing are enough to get by in Budapest itself, though I wouldn't fancy your chances in more rural areas. It definitely helped that menus were bilingual, even if when shopping, we were lucky not to end up with cartons of lard instead of milk, since we largely had to trust in the picture of a cow on the packaging.

The apartment we stayed in was cheap (£10/night each), overlooking a central courtyard that was a feature of many city blocks. You could spend hours exploring all the little side alleys that open up off the main street, if you could avoid being mown down by the cars which had a propensity to whizz out from them at high speed. Well, highish speed, anyway – given the number of Trabants on the road, you had a fighting chance of walking away from a collision with less damage than the offending vehicle. Didn't spend much time in the flat, since the only leisure pursuit there was a black-and-white television, and our tolerance for MTV in monochrome was heavily limited by the discovery it was Backstreet Boys weekend. We opted for the delightfully bad (unless you're a big water-polo fan) Hungarian channel, with its stupendously poor, extremely cheap variety programmes. Improbable highlights were someone who looked like Michael Berryman doing modern dance while a blind pianist - shades of Suspiria - played Mussorgsky, and a children's choir, whose nervous glances off-camera suggested they'd been abducted and were being forced to perform at gunpoint. Far better to stroll the streets and contemplate bringing home souvenirs, such as the wild boar skin complete with hooves, seen hanging on a market stall by its nostrils, from a meat-hook. Ft 16,000, forty-five quid – meat-hook not included.

In tourist terms, Hungary has reached the gawky teenage years – not innocent enough to be unspoilt, yet not quite aware enough of its responsibilities. A recent story illustrates this: a party of four Danes wandered into the Halászcsárda restaurant on Ferenciek tere, ate a modest meal, and wound up with a bill of around £4,300. To quote the owner, "As far as I'm concerned, we can charge tourists anything we like." This attitude is unfortunately all too prevalent, and while it continues, Budapest is a city of great potential, which requires more than average care on the part of the visitor to prevent unpleasant experiences. But as a destination, it's certainly worth that additional effort.



Lino's 'Zine Reviews

No, I'm not wearing a silver suit, I'm not wearing a metallic string vest and I'm most certainly not launching myself into space to fight spinny flying saucers. The year 2000? What a letdown. The nearest thing we've had to an apocalypse so far is the petrol "crisis" and people slagging the Millennium Dome off (no, I'm joining in on that one, I really couldn't care one way or the other at this stage of the game). Strangely enough (and yes, my first bizarre tangent of the whole article), Jim has actually been chasing me for the reviews, I've had the things for ages, and now, here we are, Tuesday 3rd October 2000, with Jim descending on my house this coming Saturday to pick the finished reviews up, and I've not even started. How terribly Julie Burchill of me – minus the face like a spastic bulldog chewing a wasp.

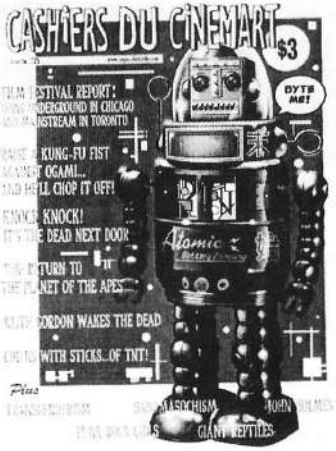
So, what's been happening with me? Hmm, well, quite frankly, it's really none of your business. I could ramble on about various job offers that had been made to me involving £3000 cash bonuses for moving (that I turned down – email me for the full story), or the fact that little Nick, who is basically my bitch at work (I promised I'd give him as many name checks as I could), has been offered a contract to play "soccer" for 2nd division Reading football club which means I'm going to lose him at the end of November, which *really* is a shame because, and this is being polite to the point of making even myself ill, Nick is one of the nicest people I've had a chance to work with. Ok, so when he started as a temp 2 years ago, at the age of 17, he was a freakishly tall, mute, scary-looking fella, but since we took him on full time, and he started talking, and more importantly, since my bleak, "cup is half empty" view of life has rubbed off on him, he's turned into quite a normal human being, and it really will be a shame to say goodbye. Well, unless I can bribe someone to run him over with a forklift.

What else, what else, oh, yes: my new game. Shopkeepers across the country (I'm assuming it actually is across the country, and not just in London) have started installing cashpoint machines inside their shops. A genius idea. Ok, so it costs £1.25 to get money out of the thing, but as I'm with the Abbey National and the only other cashpoint machine between my house and work is a Nationwide one that charges me £1.50 to get money out I'm not complaining (bear with me, this does get interesting and is in no way an attempt to put off reading fanzines, no, sir). Anyyyyyway, my new game involves said cashpoint machine in shop, me and an unsuspecting minicab driver. You ask the cab driver to stop at the shop: "Keep the engine running, I'll only be two minutes", then you go to the shop, take, ohhh I don't know, lets say £50 out (it always seems to pay out in £10 notes) then, clutching the money in one hand, come running out of the shop (or the closest approximation of running I can manage), jump into the car and yell "Drive! Drive! Drive!". Fine, so it doesn't actually freak the cab driver out, but it keeps me entertained. Try it, it's... Ok, don't try it. Ok, damn you, I'll start reading, you stay there and wait: believe me, it won't take very long at all...

Arteries – Issue one (£2.50). Oh, this really is priceless... I picked this up and was instantly transported back in time. I have tears of joy in my eyes. Anything with a picture of *Bad Taste* on the cover automatically gets my thumbs up, and the reviews, oh please, how totally wonderful. Here are some sample quotes; these alone will have you searching out a copy, believe me:

- *Mothers Day*: "an effective little shocker which will offend some and delight others, personally I liked it!"
- *Android of Notre Dame*: "Definitely for people who like body dismemberment in movies, Disney this ain't!" (my personal favourite!)
- "Sleazefiends (Muhahaha) will love the movie [*Caligula: The Untold Story*] but don't expect a UK release any time in the near future"

The editor also appears to have an unhealthy fascination with turds, mentioning them in almost every other review. The video game reviews and insightful Internet overview are merely the icing on a very, very wonderful cake. Oh, my aching sides...



Cashiers Du Cinemart – Issue 10 ($3). From the ridiculous to the sublime... This is more like it, and hell, I don't even mind all the advertisements scattered throughout the issue if they manage to keep the cover price down to $3; good luck to them. Issue 10 has enough material to keep you reading for well over 10 minutes (probably longer if your attention span is...er, what was I saying?). Bang! A six page look at the Babycart movies (including an exploded view of the baby cart itself – they never did <u>that</u> on Blue Peter). Bang! An interview with Keith Gordon, who you've probably never heard of (he was in *Christine* remember?): excellent stuff, and I still rate *Static* as one of the best films I've ever seen. Bang! Ok, that'll do, otherwise I'll just go through the entire thing saying you should read it, when in reality, all you want to do it go out, buy it and read it. Now, if it had a picture of Drew Barrymore wearing only little Victorian boots and a red ball gag it'd get my Magazine of the Millennium award, but well, you can't have everything, can you?

Vex – Issue 4 ($3.95). Ok, now I swear, I'm just pulling these things out at random, it's not some bizarre "Oh look, he's just putting all the stuff he likes in the article first", but I really <u>do</u> like Vex, this issue being no less funny that the preceding three. In-depth, stupid, sick and very, very, very entertaining. Disney this ain't! (heh, see what I did there, that was quite funny). You! Buy! Now!

Roadworks – Issue 5 (£2.50). Ok, look, it's Thursday, Mr Editor is coming around to my house on Saturday, I have <u>no</u> time to read all of this so, er, well, here we go...Wow, £2.50 for a magazine *packed* full of quirky short stories and poems, what a bargain. 64 pages long, that works out to around 4p a page. I can't recommend this highly enough, and the cover is green, which, as you all know, is the Celts good luck colour. What more recommendation do you need?

Hey, you know I think I bluffed my way through that last review quite well, I don't know why I didn't think of doing this *ages* ago, I would have saved myself so much time, and I don't know about you, but I welcome a "Price per page" count. And now...it's time for the

"Annual Bumper-Mega-Huge-Combo-Multi-Issue Mansplat review 2000"

Right, we can play this two ways, you can have all four issues reviewed in one huge blobby concoction or each of the issues reviewed, one after the other. Make you mind up and call *now* on 020 8900 %$(". Oh, the phone's ringing, how exciting, excuse me... "Hello?" "Get on with it! No-one has even bothered reading this far, so it doesn't matter how you review them as long as you *do* review them!" "Ok, thanks, Jim – I'll get straight on that, see you on Saturday."

Mansplat – Issue 17 (No charge, which reminds me of a country song). Ok, so I actually looked at this *after* 18 & 19, but you'll never know as I'm cunningly sliding it at the top of the Mansplat section. You fools! Muhahhahaa<cough>hahaha. Heh... The first thing that struck me about issue 17 was the "Movie villain guide"; my favourite villain from that article? "Fu Manchu – So solly – you must die". Excellent! Elsewhere is the TV guide we *really* wish we had, a Spiderman vs. the Internet face-to-face showdown, pages of video reviews, a picture of a cute Asian girl in strappy boots holding a gun (no, the boots aren't holding the gun. Look, I don't get paid for this, so grammar is out the window. Hmm, actually, even if I were being paid for this, the grammar would still suck) – ok, so that picture is from an ad, but it caught my eye. Talking of ads, there's also one for something called "Trash City", apparently, according to the ad: "Trash City is a magazine published out of London, England by a dedicated group of insane writers..." Blimey, I wouldn't want to meet any of those wacky sorts!

Issue 18 (Free!). Hmm, Julie Strain. We like Julie Strain, even though she is knocking on a bit, bless her, but she looks wonderful on the cover of issue 18, I think I'll just retire to the toilet so I can examine this issue more closely... Ok, I'm back, and it's quite easy typing with sticky fingers, don't believe what *they* tell you.

> The sky is bright blue
> Clouds are so fluffy, so soft
> I'll kill everything

What's that? Well it's one of the Godzilla haikus that appear in issue 18: genius! Ok, what else is there? Lemme carry on reading... Oh, look: "The 100 Women who Wrecked the World" article.. No. 43: Alanis Morrisette – "Geez, she gets dumped by one guy and 12 million have to hear about it." Marvellous! Also contains the Top 12 greatest women of all time, Hmm, Drew Barrymore is no.6. I knew there was a reason I loved Mansplat. Moving on, elsewhere in issue 18...nestled softly next to the "Where have all the fat wrestlers gone?" article (shut up, Jim!) is the invaluable "Burpology: cool words to say while belching" article, and hell, for the sake of journalistic completeness (ok, so completeness is the wrong word), I have in the space of the last 40 minutes burped my way through three quarters of the words listed. The easiest? "Keno". The hardest? "Duran Duran". **Go! Now! Write! Email! Get Mansplat!** This phrase is guaranteed to be repeated at the end of the reviews for the next issues of Mansplat, or your money back.

Issue 19 (Yep, still free). More of the same (see those four words? I'll be using those a lot), centre-page madness looks at American cereals. You know, I always maintain that American cereal is so much better than ours. Ok, we briefly had *Lucky Charms*, and there was the mad period where *Ricicles* had marshmallowy bits in, but look, you've not lived till you've started your morning with a bowl of *Fruity Pebbles* (what do you mean, you don't like lemon flavoured pieces of cereal?). Terribly informative guide to road rage – I do hope you're paying attention at the back, Mr. McLennan. And also in issue 19, Mansplat staff reveal the things in Batman's utility belt; I knew that bulge was a butt-plug.

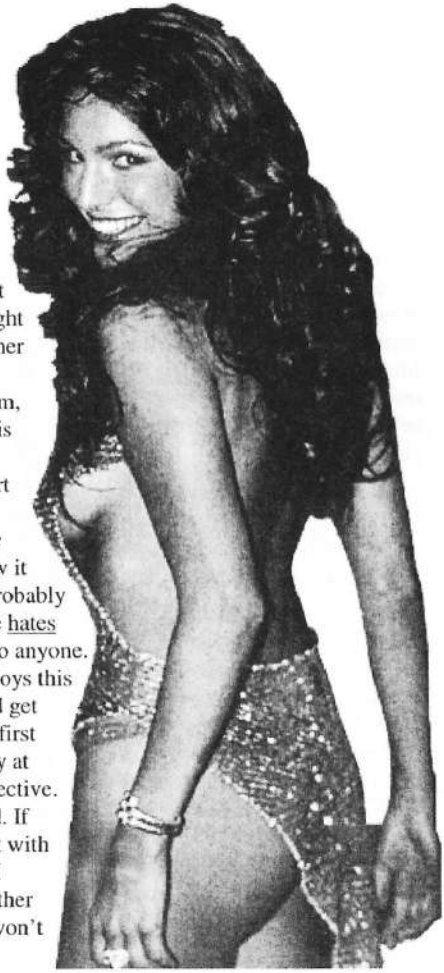
Issue 20 (Free, probably...see below). Er, I haven't got a copy of issue 20; I do have two of issue 19 though. I'm sure that issue 20 is lovely. Next!

Issue 21 (Free, to do what I like, any old tiiiiiiime). Here we are then, the last issue of our marathon "Annual Bumper-Mega-Huge-Combo-Multi-Issue Mansplat Review 2000" 4 issue splurtathon. Wow, look, there's an article on psycho lovers, I wonder who I know that could have done with reading it a couple of years back? A centre-page double-spread A-Z bra guide, bucketloads of video reviews, a loving look at greasy fast food (hmm, grease) and beer. Did you know that certain Americans think of Harp as the best beer in the world. Just sit back and digest that fact. Harp. The best beer in the *world*. How frightening is that? Last but not least, a **classified section**!! Oh, lets go read that now, shall we? Hmm, it was ok, but I was longing for the old Fangoria days (I'm assuming it is the old Fangoria days as I've not picked a copy of that particular rag up for years), where the classified section held lines and lines of "Jason Rools" and "Freddy Cuts Me Up" missives.

There you go: that's the end of our Mansplat journey, and what have we learned? We've learned that even over the course of four issues (let's forget the fact I didn't have an issue 20), Mansplat is one of the most consistently entertaining fanzines to come out of the States. So there, and what's more it's free, they've got a website, and er, pictures of ladies' soft pillows. How's that for a recommendation?

Heh, Jim and Vanessa (top-class arty designy layout type person to the stars) popped around last Saturday to pick up the fanzines I'd already looked at, and in-between conversations about Jim attacking Vanessa's nose with a Stanley knife in a fight over who got the last peanut (I think it was something like that), I stupidly mentioned that I only had four more fanzines to look at and was sure I'd written around 2,700 words. Well, that was wrong; bad and wrong. I just did a quick check and it turns out that I've actually written over 3,100. So, I guess I'd better not waste any more time and get straight on with the next review. Or should I? The more I think about it, the more the thought of Jim cutting swathes of rubbish out of this whole mess entertains me. No, no, ok, you're right, I'm bad.

The 'Mazing Adventures Of Captain Cadwallader (Issue one – Price erm, unknown) No, I've not lost the ability to spell even the simplest word, it's actually "'Mazing", and is according to the inside front cover (which, incidentally, has also got 22/100 written on it in silver pen – this makes me wonder if it's actually worth carrying on with the review as all the copies have probably gone by now, but whatever), a melodrama in seven parts. Think of it as a kind of *Around the World in 80 Days* if Jules Verne had been sniffing Vim (or Drano if you're reading this in a country that wouldn't have the first idea what Vim was) It's a lovely, small, A5 30-page piece of fiction (with some nice full-page illustrations). The ending is a bit of an eye-opener too: I say, that's not cricket! Worth a read if you can still track a copy down (here's a hint, Jim has got the copy I've just finished with, just think, issue one touched by Jim and myself!).

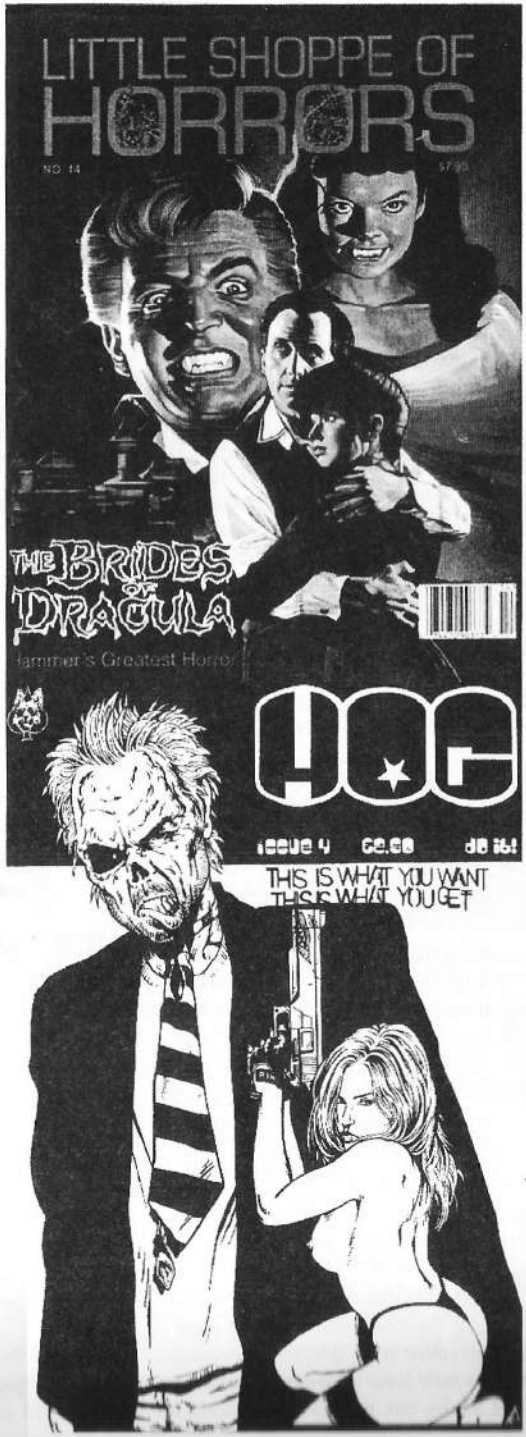


Arteries (Issue 2) He's only gone and put another issue out hasn't he? The conversation I had with Jim on Saturday night went something along the lines of this. "I see I've got another issue of Arteries to review, you know, I think I'm going to slag it off", "Awww no, we like Arteries" replied Jim. Hmm, I'm in two minds now. On the one hand, I don't think this is really doing anything that wasn't done 5000 times over 10 years ago, on the other hand, you've got to admire the effort that "Lord Brendan MBE" has put into both this and issue one. Just the general slagging off of Jess Franco's *Faceless* has me wanting to tear this issue into little pieces and throw it away (although knowing Jim's hatred of Jess Franco it's probably why he likes Arteries so much), and I have to wonder, if he hates the movie *Forced Entry* so much - "I don't recommend it to anyone. Women will find it incredibly offensive and if any man enjoys this mean spirited, unsavory movie he needs to see a shrink and get his head examined!" - why he bothered reviewing it in the first place. Or more importantly, why he bothered buying a copy at whichever film fair it is he enjoys visiting. Ok, let's be objective. Not everyone here has been around that long, so final word. If you're new, and want an easy way of knowing what's what with "video nasties", get yourself a copy of Arteries (although I would do something about the £2.50 cover price); on the other hand, if you've been around forever and a day, this really won't tell you anything you don't already know. How's that for partisan? No, not the cheese, that's *Parmesan* you maroon.

Little Shoppe Of Horrors – Issue 14 ($7.95). Fuck my old boots, he's put another issue out! Huzzah, Tiny Tim will eat some turkey this fine Christmas morning. After the nasty hiccup a few issues back when it seemed like Richard Klemensen (who seems to have lived a *far* more entertaining life than I could ever wish for) was going to stop working on LSOH (don't you just hate it when people put initials in instead of the full title, it's so slack, and in this case, almost as if the author is typing really, really quickly to get everything done before the editor arrives to collect the finished article. Finished? Hah! Anyway...). Luckily for us, that hasn't happened. Hell, I don't really love Hammer films, apart from getting all nostalgic about getting off the train at Kenton station and walking to school on the morning after one of the Hammer films had been shown on the TV. It'd be easier for me to tell you what *isn't* in issue 14, namely no pictures of Kelly Brook strapped to an X-frame with a bit gag. Hey, I'm nothing if not inconsistent. Let me give you a quick rundown on what *is* in the issue so you can

decide if it's worth shelling out the eight dollars. **[Three hours later]** Oh God, no, there is too much in here, really, *far* too much for just $7.95, oh and it's got nothing to do with the fact that the review of Trash City in there has choice quotes like "Probably the most fun reading fanzine coming out of the UK". Hmm, he doesn't mention me though, which is probably an oversight on his part! Go on, give Richard some of your money: well, give him some of your money if you like Hammer movies, don't bother if you hate them. Hmm, if you're rich and want to send him money anyway, you can do that. No, send it to me instead, I can always use extra money. Happy now?

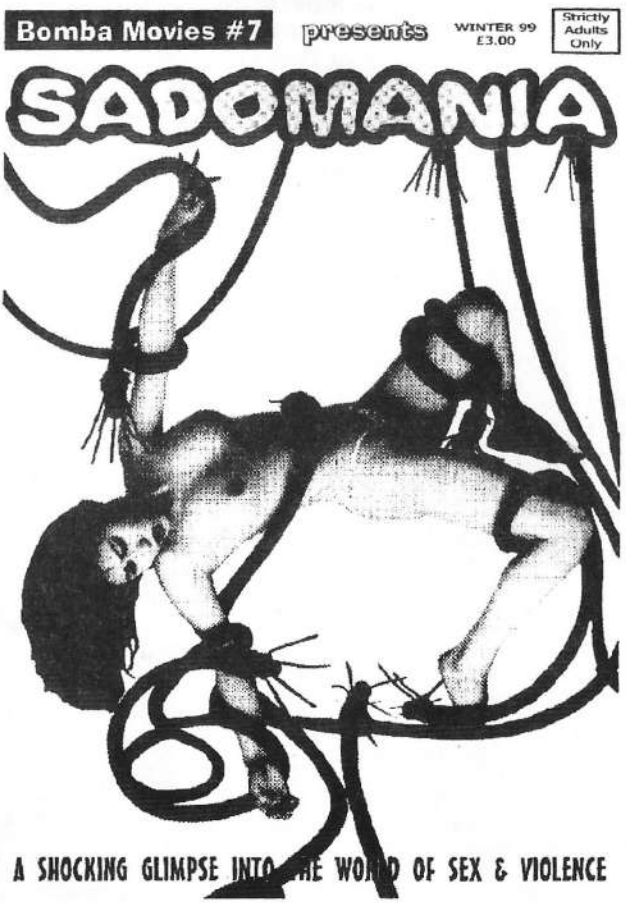
Hog – Issue 4 (£2.50). This is more like it. Nick has just walked past my desk. He pointed at the cover and said "That is the best front cover I've ever seen". How's that for an unsolicited quote? Balls-out comic art from people I've never heard of, but want to hear a lot more from. *Damn*, this is all good, and hey look! Teresa Scott "comic strip" with a gag! Brilliant. Brilliant. Brilliant. Get this, get a copy of the first three, and a copy of anything they've done after issue 4; you won't be disappointed! Without doubt my choice of comic fanzine of the month – or year, probably. No, it's the best comic fanzine I've seen all Millennium. So there!



The Fugazi Virus (one-off). Judging by the "96/100" written on the inside front cover, I'd say that this was from the same publishers that brought you "The 'Mazing Adventures Of Captain Cadwallader". Once again taking the form of a complete short story (this time with half page illustrations), and according to the inside back cover it was produced for the Break 21 Festival in Slovenia, May 1999 (oh, how I wish I was there). Fairly bog standard science-fiction story, without anything to recommend it. Sorry, boys. Probably not a good thing that I'm looking at this the morning after I had the most disturbing dream concerning a nuclear war. Remind me to tell you about that sometime: it's not often that I'm actually woken by a dream and have had to go and *do* something before I can get back to sleep.

I found a copy of something else hiding at the bottom of my drawer, so this is *officially* the final review (perhaps ever <sniff>).

Bomba Movies – Issue 7 (£3.00). Hey, look, the Bomba Movies boys are back, going all A4 sized and everything! <Sniff> It's like my little boys have grown up. I actually read this one through cover to cover (yes, yes, I read all of the fanzines through cover to cover, honestly). Pages of reviews for some obscure stuff that even I haven't heard of! They win extra points for a look at some of Jess Franco's women in prison movies, but lose points for slagging *Tintorera* off (I love *all* killer shark movies). Perhaps the Bomba Movies people could send a copy of this off to the people behind Arteries, just to show them how it could be done! My last review, and it's something I enjoyed. Isn't that sweet?



There we go then. That's it. It's all over. The end. With Jim disappearing to Cuba to start his own jazz band. will this be the end of Trash City and more importantly the end of my cutting edge fanzine reviews? Who knows, but I think, if we've learned one thing in the time we've spent together, it's that I generally don't like much, but I've got to the stage where I'm too old to *really* hate anything. Well, apart from those miniscooters, and commercial breaks, oh, and plastic wrapping that needs scissors to get into, and work. Yes, that's about it. No, I also don't have much time for old people whining that they don't have any money. Balderdash! (Christ, do you remember that game Boulderdash? I loved that). Everytime I see old people they are either driving around in brand new cars or lugging around shopping trollies full of groceries, piss-smelling old liars. Not to mention the fact they are vicious at bus stops: don't be messing with an old lady when the 18 bus arrives, let me tell you!

So, just before I go, some thank yous. Thanks to Nick for putting up with my constant mood swings over the past three years and good luck at Reading football club (someone tell him that they *really* do eat oranges at half time, he doesn't believe me). Thanks to everyone else at work (you know who you are), another thank you to Toby Russell for keeping me supplied with chocolate from Marks and Spencer (and for still being the most insane person I know: "Go out, spend money, stupid"). Thanks also to Jaime who, despite everything, is still lovely (things have a habit of working themselves out, no matter how long it takes). Thanks also go to the people who actually read this column - both of you - and to the one person who mailed me after the last issue wanting me to send them the Xena story

(which of course, I did). Final thanks go to Jim, who has the patience of a saint going through the rubbish I spew, and working it into something vaguely legible; good luck in Cuba and don't forget to send me some cigars occasionally!

If you have any comments (or pictures of Drew Barrymore), just send them along to:

lino@lino.demon.co.uk

and I'll be sure to send them straight to the trashbin. Oh, and Jimmy Saville is not a dirty old pedophile, no sir, no way, no how. Now if you'll excuse me, I have 26 episodes of Sooty Heights to watch – now with added Scampi, who actually makes Scrappy Doo look entertaining. I'm looking forward to the Brian Blessed episode. And people say I have a boring job!

Arteries – Lord Brendan, 49 Oxford Rd, Waterloo, Liverpool, L22 8QE.

Bomba Movies – Try Media Publications.

Captain Cadwallader + The Fugazi Virus – Noel K Hannon, 18 Lansdowne Road, Sydney, Crewe, UK, CW1 5JY

Cashiers Du Cinemart – PO Box 2401, Riverview, MI 48192, USA

Hog – 94 Emet Grove, Emersons Green, Bristol, UK, BS16 7EG

Little Shoppe Of Horrors – Richard Klemensen, PO Box 3107, Des Moines, Iowa 50316, USA

Mansplat – Hairball Press, 2318 2nd Ave, PMB 591, Seattle, WA 98121, USA

Roadworks – Trevor Denyer, 7 Mountview, Church Lane West, Aldershot, Hampshire, GU11 3LN

Vex – PO Box 2067, New York, NY 10108, USA

Reasons to be Fearful: Part III

(or, "Where is Francis Ford Coppola, and what have you done to him?")

As Hollywood budgets escalate, the lure of the sequel grows: why risk good money on a risky, new idea, when you can invest in one with a proven track record? The generally held critical opinion is that this is bad, because it's a short-sighted view which promotes the ploughing of unwarranted and bloated budgets into derivative and hackneyed movies, at the expense of original cinema. Or, put another way, "They're over-priced, and they're crap". While there are plenty of counter-examples available (*Terminator 2*, *Gremlins 2*, *Drunken Master II* and *Species 2* were all at least as good as the originals), when you progress further down the line, to a third film, the odds of coming up with quality appear to lengthen dramatically.

There are some cases where the cause is obvious: a new director is quite sufficient to send the most cast-iron franchise down in flames. Exhibit A in this category must be Batman, which Joel Schumacher appears to have made his life's work to destroy. Say what you like about the first two, they were at least memorable: I can't recall one single scene from *Batman Forever*. I admit that *Batman & Robin* is worse still, being many people's choice for worst film of the 1990's, but there's no doubt when the rot set in.

Even if you keep the same director and star, you can still run into difficulties by fixing what isn't necessarily broke. For examples, see *The Evil Dead* and *Mad Max* trilogies, which show some interesting similarities. Both start off with cheap, hugely profitable openers, followed by sequels which actually come closer to big-budget remakes. Then, realising they couldn't get away with doing that again, both George Miller and Sam Raimi head for the cinematic hills, opting for other than the simple "...3" title to boot. Although I actually quite like *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* and *Army of Darkness*, the former replaces hardcore action with a lot of mythic mumbo-jumbo (not to mention Tina Turner!), while *Army* is a Ray Harryhausen film filtered through the Three Stooges.

Alien 3 - sorry, that's the almost apologetic ^{3} - was another destined to be a disaster from the moment David Fincher stepped on board. Previous instalments had been directed by people with experience in the genres: the nearest Fincher had come to horror was working with Madonna. As a learning experience, it's marginal: compared to the classic horror movie and all-time greatest action pic which came before, it blows chunks and, measured against its predecessors, may be the worst third entry ever. The curse is of particular note here, since Fincher has since proven his talents with *Se7en*, *The Game* and *Fight Club*. In that kind of company, *Alien*^{3} seems an out-and-out aberration.

Speaking of aliens brings me to *The Godfather III*, since the only explanation for it I can imagine, is that at some point shortly before filming began, Francis Ford Coppola was abducted by ET's and had his entire talent sucked out through an anal probe. Since his return, the empty husk has been shambling around Hollywood, directing things like

Jack. Never work with animals or children, Francis – especially not your own. And, as an aside, I'm sure that Daddy had nothing to do with Sofia subsequently getting to direct *The Virgin Suicides*. However, going by that, it looks like the bug-eyed monsters got to her early.

At first, *Return of the Living Dead 3* seems to buck the trend, being Brian Yuzna's fabulously kinky eulogy to body-piercing, and a vast improvement on part two. However, don't forget that *Return of the Living Dead* was itself a sequel, to *Night of the Living Dead*. This means *Return of the Living Dead 2* was thus the true third part, and it duly blew chunks, allowing Yuzna to escape the curse. The moral of this story is that sometimes you have to look especially carefully in order to see the evidence.

There's another factor which might play a part, to do with a letter producers feel a particular urge to tack onto "3" titles: "D". *Jaws 3-D*, *House 3-D*, *Nightmare on Elm Street 3-D*, *Amityville 3-D*. Now, even at the best of times, it's a very tricky task to combine the usual requirements, like plot development, with the necessity to have sharp, pointy things coming out of the screen at regular intervals. Indeed, I've only seen one which works as a regular i.e. flat movie – *Flesh for Frankenstein*. For a double-sequel, already likely to be struggling, it's yet another cross to bear.

The strange thing is, this is all despite the fact that there are logical reasons why they should be better, not worse. By this stage, you should be looking at fully-developed characters, to whom audiences have already been successfully drawn twice. In addition, if a concept is good enough to sustain a solid sequel, then it should be able to squeeze out at least one more before collapsing. Let's face it, by the time you reach a third installment, the studio is thinking "franchise". Which may be the problem: after two hits, lazy executives will green-light a third almost as a reflex action, without bothering to concern themselves over trivia like scripts. I suspect you could hand over a hundred pages of the LA telephone directory and get it made, if you scrawled *Terminator 3* on the front sheet.

T3 will be an interesting test: looking likely to be Cameron-less, yet with Arnie on board, the odds are not in its favour, if our theory holds true. *The Matrix 2 + 3* will also act as a litmus paper: I predict the first sequel will be competent enough, and the second will blow chunks, despite being shot back-to-back in Australia, with the same cast and crew. I believe the third part will focus almost entirely on Carrie Moss's character, allowing them to call it *The Matrix 3: Wholly Trinity*. [Sorry...]

In conclusion then: "Sequels suck!", says a character in *Scream 2*. This is what passes in the series for wit – but perhaps the most ironic thing is that the lame, tame *Scream 3* provides damning evidence for the hypothesis that second sequels suck even more.

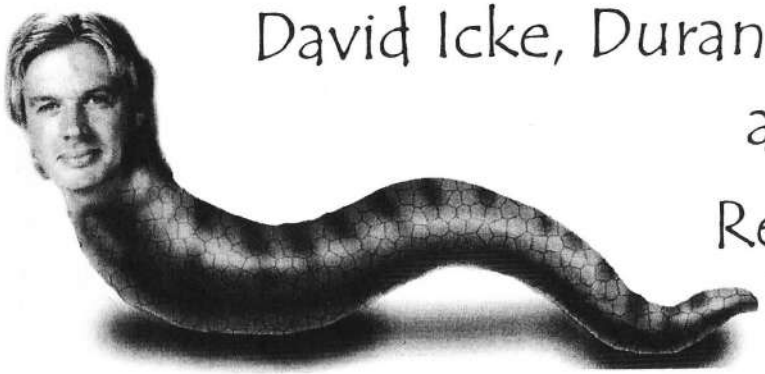
Strike threes...

1. *Alien*[3]
2. *Robocop III*
3. *Lethal Weapon 3*
4. *Star Trek 3*
5. *Hellraiser III*
6. *Return of the Jedi* (nominally Part VI, but one word: Ewoks)
7. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*
8. *A Better Tomorrow 3*
9. *Drunken Master III*
10. *Scream 3*

Three's that triumph

1. *In the Line of Duty 3*
2. *Goldfinger*
3. *Poison Ivy 3*
4. Er, that's it...

David Icke, Duran Duran and the Reptoids



"There is an enormous amount of challenging information in this book. Please do not continue if you are dependent on your present belief system, or if you feel you cannot cope emotionally with what is really happening in this world." – David Icke, *The Biggest Secret*

Okay. Hold onto your hats: you are now leaving reality and entering - literally - a parallel world of shape-shifting reptiles from the Nth dimension. This all started when a pile of photocopied material on mind control technology which I'd sent, went AWOL in the post – it did eventually turn up (five days for first-class post?), but while waiting, I was listening to Duran Duran and my paranoia latched on to the lyric: *"Voices in your body coming through on the radio"*.

Telegram force and ready
I knew this was a big mistake
There's a fine line drawing my senses together
And I think it's about to break

If I listen close, I can hear them singers
Voices in your body coming through on the radio
The Union of the Snake is on the climb
Moving up, it's gonna race, it's gonna break
Through the borderline

Night shades on a warning
Give me strength, at least give me a light
Give me anything, even sympathy
There's a chance you could be right

The Union of the Snake is on the climb
It's gonna race, it's gonna break
Gonna move up to the borderline

I sat up, since one of the things discussed in the mind control material was implants, and the use of radio by the CIA and others to make targets hear internal voices. That this reference came in a song called *Union of the Snake* was even more interesting: I had long been aware of underground reports in mysterious and anonymous documents, which posit that a reptilian alien race were controlling things from bases below the surface of the Earth.

Looking at the lyrics, it's certainly possible to read them in a conspiratorial light. *"I knew this was a big mistake"* is an odd line, and *"Give me anything, even sympathy, there's a chance you could be right"* is too – if even 5% of the reptoid theories are anywhere near true, we are **fucked**. But perhaps most interestingly, the chorus goes *"The Union of the Snake is on the climb/Moving up, it's gonna race, it's gonna break through the borderline."* William Bramley, in his book *Gods of Eden*, describes a secret organisation called the Brotherhood of the Snake, which is just too close for comfort. Does talk of "moving up" and "on the climb" refer to its increasing influence, until it crashes "through the borderline" to trans-national government? New World Order, here we come.

The video, directed by Simon Milne, shows the hero descending into an underground city, a relic of an advanced civilization - one reviewer described it as "reminiscent of H.P.Lovecraft's classic SF tale, *The Nameless City*." This ties in with *"night shades on a warning"*, since one meaning of "shades" is the underground realm of the dead, as in Hades. With all this, I think it's fair to say that Duran Duran - a name taken from a humanoid alien in *Barbarella* - have moved on from mud-wrestling totty.

To see the reptoid stuff in full effect, get hold of a copy of David Icke's book, *The Biggest Secret*. The former TV commentator turned New Age guru has turned in one of the most fabulously loony works I've ever read. It starts with him churning out rehashed Velikovsky, where the planet Venus careers around the solar system like a pinball, triggering floods, etc. on Earth. From here it moves into vanilla-flavour conspiracy, in which all history from the birth of civilization is controlled by a secret group, the Babylonian Brotherhood. Almost all Earth's leaders - Nelson Mandela gets a grudging exemption - are part of this. "So what?", you yawn. Ah, Icke's angle is different: this lot aren't actually *human...*

Yes, our controllers are reptiles from the lower reaches of the fourth dimension, who are merely occupying human vessels, though they occasionally "glitch" and reveal their true forms. For example, here's an eye-witness description of one such transformation. Which world leader do you reckon:

> *"...began to transform into a reptile. He eventually became a full-bodied Reptiloid, growing in size by some two feet. He was 'slightly scaly' and 'spoke fairly naturally'".*

That was Edward Heath, our former Prime Minister, taking part in a Satanic ritual near Chequers.

Overseeing this vast conspiracy is our Royal Family, who are near the top of the cold-blooded heap, being pure-blood snakes involved in human sacrifice and black magic, as well as the drug-running beloved of Lyndon La Rouche. Phil, Liz, Charlie-boy: they're all at it. Here's one of Icke's sources, talking about the Queen:

> *"I have seen her sacrifice people and eat their flesh and drink their blood. One time she got so excited with blood lust that she...just went crazy, stabbing and ripping at the flesh after she'd shape-shifted into a reptilian...She has a long reptile face, almost like a beak, and she's an off-white colour. The Queen Mother looks basically the same"*

Reading this, I had a sudden image of the Queen Mum, forked tongue flicking in & out of a large gin...

The further one gets in, the more berserk Icke's theories get, and they start spinning off all over the place. *"I have no doubt from the evidence I have seen that the Earth is hollow"*, he says. Princess Diana wasn't just murdered, she was ritually sacrificed, the time and place of her death planned years in advance. And so on. But Icke seems to suffer from a disbelief bypass: he accepts the much-discredited *Protocols of Zion*, and takes the wild *Trance Formation of America* at face value. The latter - conveniently available from the same publisher - is written by Cathy O'Brien, who claims to have been sexually assaulted over a 25-year period by more or less everyone who is anyone in American politics, business or entertainment, including the evil paedophile, Boxcar Willie. While *Trance* is certainly worthy of a salacious read (I assume libel laws are less strict in America), as a credible source, it leaves a great deal to be desired.

Never mind 5%, if any of Icke's theories are true, we are completely up the proverbial creek. Fortunately, I have my doubts – even if it all does add an entirely new meaning to another Duran Duran lyric, *"Please, please tell me now, is there something I should know..."*

- David Icke, *The Biggest Secret*, Bridge of Love, £15
- Cathy O'Brien & Mark Phillips, *The Trance Formation of America*, Bridge of Love, £12.95
- Duran Duran, *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*, Parlophone, £7.99

Tom, Jerry and... the Nazi Connection

"Oh, come on, Jim!", I hear you say. "You're not really trying to tell us there is a connection between animated mice and the Third Reich, are you?" Perhaps, perhaps not. But let me take you on a strange journey...

This started one Saturday afternoon in front of the Cartoon Network, when it was pointed out that, as well as being the most Oscar-winning duo in history, *Tom and Jerry* were also more-or-less the opposing sides in World War II: Tommies, the British soldiers, and Jerries, the Germans. I laughed. I thought about it a bit more. I did some research. I'm not laughing quite so loud now.

First, some history. We need to begin back before cartoons, before sound, before even cinema itself, in the Georgian era, which is where the term "Tommy" first arose. It's noted as far back as 1815, and comes from the name used to show Army privates how to fill in official forms: Tommy Atkins. This name became a general term for any British 'grunt' and is significant, because it strongly suggests that the term had been around for a long term, and likely was familiar to the creators of T&J. Though there's no such precise origin for 'Jerry', it's rather more obvious, and so probably dates to the first time an English-speaking nation clashed with the Germans in anything more menacing than a penalty shoot-out.

I think it's safe to assume, especially in the context of a series which began right around the time of the Battle of Britain, that the choice of these names was no accident, especially since it precedes the American entry into World War II. They are also markedly different to the meaningless names selected for other MGM cartoon characters around that time e.g. Sniffles, Droopy, etc.

In this context, it's particularly interesting to note that, while Tom might seem an obvious name for a cat (as in "tom-cat"), he was not called that originally – in the very first cartoon, *Puss Gets the Boot*, he is clearly referred to as Jasper. It wasn't until the second, *The Midnight Snack*, that the names Tom and Jerry appear. According to Patrick Brion's seminal book [1], they came from a contest among studio employees, but strangely, there is no mention of precisely who won it.

There had previously been another animated couple of the same name, from the Van Beuren studio, but neither a cat nor a mouse were involved, and they are names whose pairing originally goes back a great deal further. Again, we must return to the Georgian era - 1821, to be precise - when Pierce Egan published the spectacularly-titled *Life in London; or, the Day & Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn Esq., and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom.* Clearly Mr. Egan was paid by the word, but this was Tom and Jerry's first appearance in popular culture [2]. And by no means their last: while it's of limited relevance here (okay – absolutely no relevance at all), Simon and Garfunkel were known by that name, early in their careers.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about this theory is that Jerry is the **good** guy, the peace-loving victim of Tom's evil schemes, but who usually wins due to his superior

intelligence. Read in a wartime context, the suggestion that violence isn't a solution goes beyond the subversive and borders on outright sedition. An alternative explanation that Jerry = GI is no more loyal, since it suggests the two Allied sides were fighting each other. In either case, it's certainly worth noting that MGM were conspicuous by their absence in the field of animated Allied propaganda: even at the height of the war, *Tom and Jerry* was a series almost entirely free of political commentary. The closest approach was 1943's *Yankee Doodle Mouse*, but this treats hostilities as just another setting for their usual slapstick, not significantly different from the Wild West or Three Musketeers milieus used in other instalments. The only other acknowledgement of ongoing global conflict which I could find was the same year's *The Lonesome Mouse*, with Jerry drawing a Hitler-style moustache on a picture of Tom. This seems mere tokenism, especially when contrasted with Warner Bros, whose output included hugely jingoistic slices of xenophobic bigotry such as the amazing *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*.

But then, we can also discriminate between the background of the studio heads [3]: Jack Warner was born in the British Commonwealth (London, Ontario) while Sam Goldwyn and Louis B. Mayer were both Eastern Europeans, from Warsaw and Minsk respectively. Mayer didn't bother to become an American citizen until his late 20's, while 'Goldwyn' was not Sam's real surname. [Taking the latter as evidence of radical tendencies is, I admit, a bit much – I wouldn't want to go through life called Sam Goldfish either...] At the risk of drifting into anti-Semitic territory, perhaps this ties in with the 'Jewish Mafia' who ran - and to a lesser extent, still run - Hollywood, though the question of why they would have any interest in supporting Adolf Hitler is a bit of a problem, to say the least. However, revolution makes strange bedfellows, and both men definitely have the potential to fall into the two areas most often suspected of attempting to undermine American values: Jews and Bolsheviks.

There's a postscript to this subversive tale – or perhaps, tail. When MGM moved to revive the series in the early 1960's, they used a Czech animation studio. Supporting Communist enterprise at the height of the Cold War, right through the Cuban missile crisis, seems remarkably unpatriotic, to say the least, and adds a cherry to the top of this insubstantial, yet somehow intriguing, illusion. In answer to the question posed at the start of this article, the answer is: "not really". In many ways, it's merely an exercise in how easy it is to find evidence to back up any theory, no matter how ludicrous. However...pay attention the next time you watch a cartoon cat and mouse hit each other over the head with household items – you may be seeing more than you think.

References:

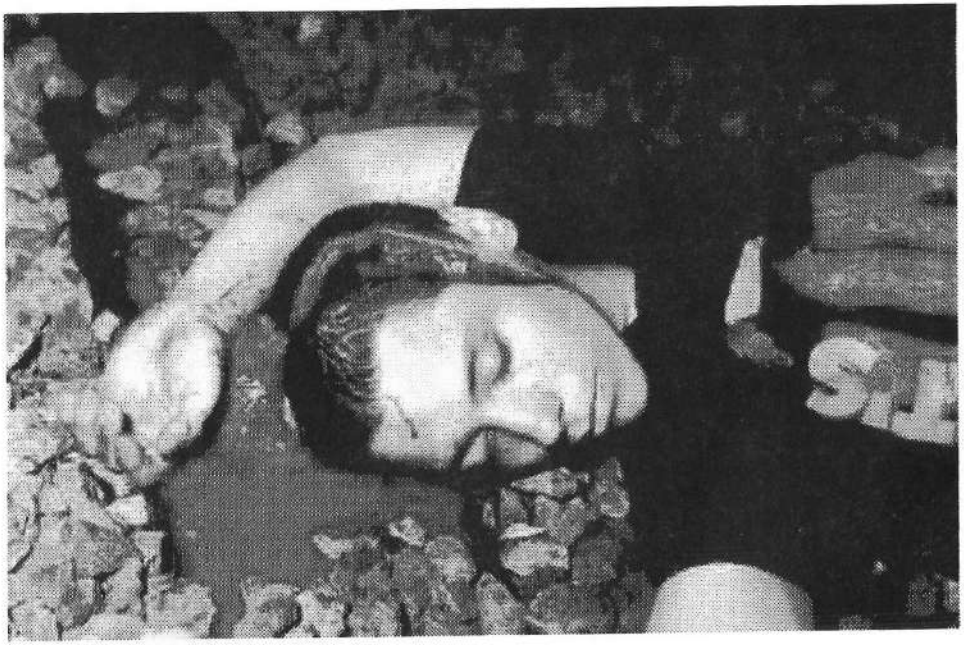
[1] Brion, Patrick: *Tom & Jerry*, Harmony Books, 1990

[2] *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, 15th ed.

[3] *Microsoft Encarta*: entries on Sam Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer and Warner Bros.

[Thanks to Vanessa for inspiring this odd article!]

The Art of the Sickie



Nobody gets enough holidays. After ten years in the same company, I have a mere 25 days off a year, nowhere near sufficient for the relaxed lifestyle to which I aspire. There are two ways to supplement this: ask for unpaid leave, which you probably won't get and which costs you money, or phone in sick and be not at work, yet still get paid. No prizes for guessing which is preferable. However, to make the most use of this supplementary time off requires the use of psychology, as well as acting skills that would put Keanu Reeves to shame, in order to convince your employers that there is indeed a minor outbreak of Ebola in Tulse Hill, but that you should be over it by Thursday.

Preparation

Firstly, choose your day. Everyone goes for Fridays and Mondays, so these are to be avoided for general sickies; this is doubly true for days around Bank Holiday weekends, when even the most gullible of bosses will begin to smell a healthy-but-faking-it rat. The advantages of, say, a Wednesday, is it chops the week right down the middle, leaving you no more than two days from legitimate leisure time. But remember to vary things a bit, as the aforementioned credulous manager is bound to notice you missing six straight Wednesdays.

Secondly, pick your cause. The ideal sickie

- comes on swiftly, avoiding the need to foreshadow your illness over the previous couple of days,
- matches your lifestyle; foreign trips provide an opportunity for exotic infections on your return,
- doesn't mock co-workers; if someone's genuinely asthmatic, using it as an excuse is impolite,
- leaves no trace, since questions about what happened to the chickenpox marks can be awkward.
- at the risk of stating the bleedin' obvious, it should probably also be curable.

Signing Off

Opinion is divided as to whether it is better to have someone call in for you, or do it yourself. My view is that it depends on the precise nature of the illness you are claiming: the more serious ones are more likely to benefit from this approach. If you opt to use it, someone of the opposite sex is best, to prevent potentially awkward rumours circulating while you're away...

You do not want any contact with your boss, who is liable to ask awkward questions. So speak to a sympathetic co-worker i.e. someone who won't give a toss, or leave a message on voice-mail. Phoning early in the morning is helpful, because it looks much more conscientious than leaving it until lunchtime, and your voice is also likely to sound nicely raspy and weak. It's worth setting an alarm-clock in order to do so, even if you crash out again immediately after.

If you are unlucky enough to encounter your boss, the question of when you'll be back is likely to arise. Technically, the correct (but none too diplomatic) answer is "ask the bacterial infection currently rampaging its way through my body". Therefore, vagueness is best: say you "hope" to be in tomorrow. For a short sickie, it's best to leave on an optimistic note, by saying you think you're over the worst and are feeling a little better this morning. This not only shows a keenness to return to your beloved job, it also primes an excuse, should you be heading out of the house.

Covering your tracks

Once you've convinced your boss, you want to enjoy your bonus holiday; this is fine if you work behind the counter at Millie's Cookies, and are certain no-one is going to phone you at home about anything. However, odds are that you work with a bunch of incompetent baboons incapable of wiping their own bottoms, and who will think nothing of disturbing your recovery with an endless series of inane questions. Which is a bit awkward, if the truth is that you're sitting in a beer garden somewhere.

Warn any unemployed/student/similarly sicky housemates who might get to the phone first: "I think he's sleeping and I'd rather not disturb him," is the answer they should give out if you aren't around, or perhaps the more dramatic, "he's in the bog puking up right now," which should forestall all but the most persistent. Either of these can be primed during the phone-in, when you say you hardly slept and how badly your stomach was upset. It need hardly be said that if you answer the phone, a weak and quavering voice is essential, until you're sure who's on the other end.

If no-one at all is around when work comes a-calling, you need to have a good reason why you didn't get to the phone. As well as the ones listed above, you can add things like "went to the chemists", though this is not much use if you're not around for the whole day. "At the doctor" gives a little more scope, since the NHS being what it is, getting seen the same day is a major triumph. An answering machine is almost essential: as well as allowing for call-screening, a phone that rings and rings is infinitely more suspicious than one which only trills twice before the message cuts in.

Do exercise care in your choice of destination: too many people have been nailed due to being spotted on the highlights at Lords' after claiming a sickie in order to head for the cricket. Avoid TV cameras like the plague, even if you are a witness to UFOs landing outside 10 Downing Street: you are supposed to be at death's door, not the Prime Minister's. It goes without saying that you should also keep some way from your job, or any places associated with it. It may be tempting to attend that leaving do in the evening of your sicky, but it will only cause trouble as claims of "miraculous recovery" are likely to be met with scepticism.

The Return

It may be painful to realise it, but you will have to go back eventually. Ideally, you should continue to play the invalid for at least the first morning back. The impression you want to give is of someone who has bravely struggled into work, despite not quite being 100%. There is a secret technique here, which I now reveal: start acting ill only when you are sure no-one is looking at you. If you see anyone noticing, smile bravely, and make a limp attempt at perking up. This is such a contrast to what people expect from skivers, that the very idea that you're pulling a double switch on them will never come to mind. You can now begin to plan your next scheduled malady...

A Note On Hangovers

Never underestimate the humble hangover: absenteeism and poor job performance induced by it is estimated to cost the American economy $148 billion a year. [1] Yet despite this, it is viewed with great disfavour by bosses, as a self-inflicted wound. This is inconsistent - would they use the same grounds to deny sick leave if you got AIDS? - but here at TC, we don't bitch about how unfair life is, we deal with it. Treat your hangover like a genuinely-ill sickie, and simply convert it into something less provocative. The exception is when those Kodo drummers in your brain are the result of a works outing: if everyone knows exactly what you were doing, you might as well bite the bullet and go in. It'll hurt, but establishes your credibility as someone who won't let "a mere hangover" stop them from coming in. Best not do it too often though, or "Jim is a conscientious employee" will become "Jim is an alcoholic", though this would open up whole new areas of opportunity, such as cirrhosis of the liver, detox sessions, etc.

[1] *Dr.Jeffrey Wiese, medical professor at the University of California, writing in the Annals of Internal Medicine, June 6th 2000*

Top 10 excuses for absence

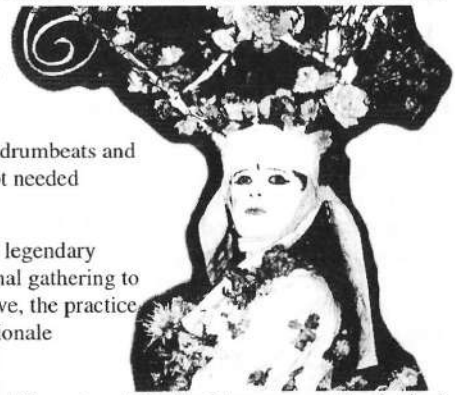
1. "Food poisoning". Your diet - curry, kebabs and other junk – sucks anyway, so this will come as no surprise to anyone. Discussion of bowel movements will block suspicious questioning.
2. "Women's problems". Obviously limited to women, but if you are, you have a huge advantage: any male will blanch, and not pursue things further. Also a reason to act the complete bitch.
3. "Migraine". Excellent for emergency use, when you need to get out of the office quickly, although best to previously establish a pattern in less critical moments. A naturally recurring infirmity too, so can be used often.
4. "Flu". No-one gets a cold any more, let alone claims one a reason to stay home. This perennial favourite can easily be stretched across several days, especially if used during a genuine outbreak.
5. "Back problems". The ideal chronic illness, because it's almost totally unprovable either way. Helps if you generally look miserable at work, which should be easy, since if you're happy there, why are you pulling a sickie?
6. "Dentist's appointment". Usually requires advance notification, and generally only good for half a day, but has the benefit that you're not expected to be in the house.
7. "Allergies". I know someone who sniffed the family pet to enhance her sicky with streaming eyes and wheezing. Find your allergy and be ill at will; just avoid peanut-style anaphylactic shock.
8. "Stress". Implies you're working too hard, which may or may not be credible, but the symptoms e.g. high blood pressure tend to be nicely internal. Develop a facial tic to bump up people's pity. More advanced pupils may also care to test the theory that the more severe the complaint, the less likely anyone is to risk of contesting it, in case you actually are...well:
9. "Cancer". Only if you want a lot of time off. Everyone has dodgy moles, and even a lame melanoma is near sacrosanct. Shave your head badly before you return, and blame chemotherapy.
10. "A funeral". While not strictly your affliction, Oscar-caliber practitioners can find out at work, and break down sobbing. Who'd dare probe such histrionics? Don't claim dead parents too often...

LONG LIVE THE QUEEN!

by Andrew M Collins

ANOTHER TALE OF THE PERILS OF PYROTECHNICS .....

A thousand people surged against me, some trying to snatch my flaming torch, some trying to push around me, over me or through me. Tribal drumbeats sounded across the cold night air, rhythmic, sensuous, mysterious. Strangely dressed apparitions whooped and cavorted nearby, some crawling, as if deranged, upon the dew laden grass, slithering along, hauling themselves towards two figures sat under a decorated tree on some kind of wicker seat. Some of these bedeviled red men were being whipped with branches, whilst others belched flames up into the sky which scorched the retinae for several seconds. Bonfires roared in the distance, seemingly alive, beacons amidst this frenzied maelstrom of barely contained activity. Several girls removed their tops, and danced as if possessed. Beer and wine flowed freely, and the rising dawn sun did little to quell the frenetic nature of this gathering. I looked across at the other torch bearers, and they seemed, like me, transfixed by this bewitching spectacle, oddly uniform, slightly sinister with their blackened faces adorned with gold and silver runic symbols. Suddenly, our cordon broke, and the hundreds of people behind us poured into the area we were protecting. Cries and screams of ecstasy and partial oblivion added to the heady cacophony, fueled by fresh drumbeats and powerful sensations. I put down my dwindling torch, not needed now, and joined the writhing throng.



This was my first appearance and attendance at the now legendary Beltane festival in Edinburgh. Once a medieval traditional gathering to celebrate the transition of Winter into Spring, on May eve, the practice was stopped as the Industrial age swept in, and grim rationale replaced any spiritual or ritualistic necessities.

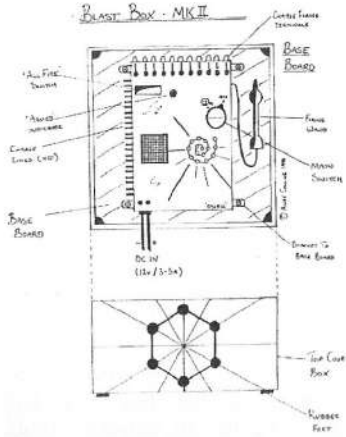
However, in 1988, Angus Farquhar, from the band *Test Department*, decided to resurrect the festival for the city and the people. Collaborating with dancer/choreographer Liz Ranken and performance artist Lindsay John, they created a contemporary annual event, strictly rooted in, and faithful to, the ancient Beltane ritual. They set about making authentic costumes, and planning the route the procession should take. It was decided that the entire event should take place on Calton Hill, which overlooks the whole city. This was believed to be an ancient site of power (it does seem to have peculiar qualities). The May Queen (played by Liz) and her attendant White Women would process along a specific path. On the way, she would have to 'overcome' the four 'elements' - separate performance pieces indicative of the struggle with the four natural earth elements. The mischievous 'Red Men' would threaten the procession at strategic areas - barely clad, red painted fiends, who tumbled, leapt and spew fire in all directions. Finally, she would overcome the figure of Winter, and transform him into Spring. Rejoicings and much festivity would then ensue.

The occasion has grown in popularity and scale each year, and now commands audiences of up to twelve thousand people. I was invited to take part, and provide a dawn pyrotechnical display. Richard Stanley, the enigmatic director of *Hardware* and *Dust Devil*, had met Liz's boyfriend Mark at Glastonbury, and learnt of the antics of the Beltane Fire Society. Intrigued, he stayed in touch with the organisers, and went up to see for himself, detonating a pyro laden wooden goat 'sacrifice' at dawn for the crowds. I had constructed this four legged 'creature' for him, and wired in all the charges, but could not attend the particular day, so sadly missed the chaos.

When the next festival came around, I did not hesitate. Richard and I decided to up the ante - so asked the Beltane Society in Edinburgh to build a large Stag. I constructed two dedicated firing boxes for the pyros - one for sequential detonation and one for fast sequence firing. I planned the order of explosions, fireworks and effects perfectly (is this sounding familiar?!). It would be spectacular. By dawn, I was told, survivors would be in, how shall I say, an advanced state of merriment. How to announce the expected dawn sacrifice? Luckily, I managed to get my hands on a military flare - went up a thousand feet up, gave a half-million candle light, then descended on a wee parachute. *Platoon* in Scotland, I fondly imagined! It might well attract the attention of any light aircraft/shipping in the area, but this would just add to the fan base. With the equipment stowed, Harvey Fenton (editor, *Flesh and Blood*) drove us up. It was my first time in Scotland, and besides getting to blow the shit out of something fairly large, in front of a captive audience of five thousand remaining revelers, I would also get to paint my face black, daub strange runic symbols on it, and carry a large iron flaming torch around. What more can a man want?

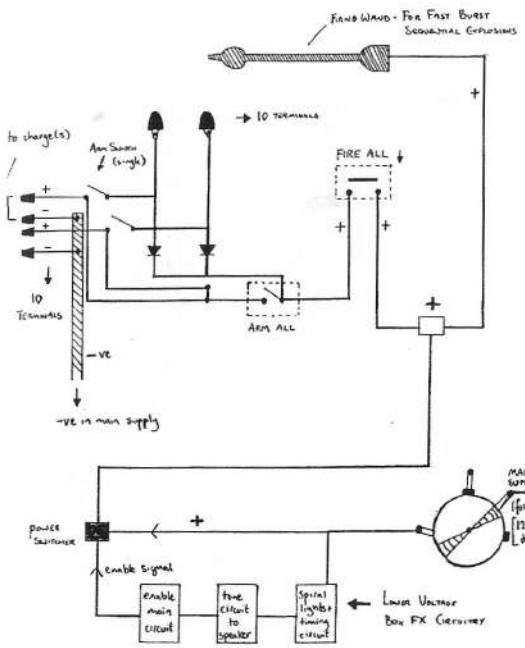
We stayed with the costume designer of *Sleepy Hollow*, who, amongst other things, had an outstanding collection of aviator/film prop goggles. I went *Mad Max* with these for a while before we left to rig up the wooden stag. The Beltane crew had constructed an impressive beast. (*see picture*) To remain worthy contributors, we had bought along an impressive amount of explosive material - this was definitely to be a non smoking afternoon! I wired them into the structure according to my design, whilst everyone busied themselves for the coming festival. Wiring charges takes a surprisingly long time, as each one must have two wires leading to the firing box, and be properly placed and fixed. Once again, we gave the creature a formidable appendage - a three stage flaming dong consisting of various firework effects - much to the amusement of bystanders. The stag was to belch fire, spray fiery streamers, flash, pop, fizz and bang, then burst into flame before violently exploding and tearing itself to a thousand pieces. Even *then*, the fun wouldn't end, as Richard and I had cunningly concealed fearsome secondary charges, which would only explode when the remains of the

stag were on the floor, burning - low down dirty shock tactics, I know, but it was May Day after all. I was beginning to get profound sexual excitement from the thought of setting it all off ..... (er, I mean the excitement from the anticipation of the display grew within me...). Finally, hours later, it was ready. It stood there crazily, a mare's tail of wires leading away, each labeled for its effect. I whispered in its paper ear that everything was going to be OK, and not to worry. It's all in a good cause, so don't get any ideas about running away, I sternly warned it. Primed for action, it was safely stowed away. Then, it was off to make-up.

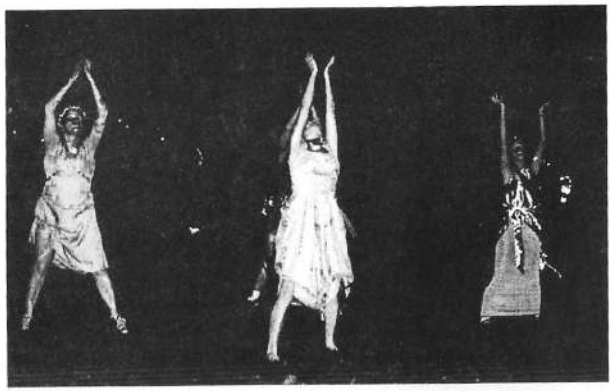


There were some twelve of us torch bearers, from all over Europe it seemed. We blacked up our faces, then applied generic runes to each other. As I was tracing out ye old Celtic shite onto one guy's face, I was filled with the urge to do him up all Steve Strange - but instead settled for some kind of Middle Ages 'Adam Ant' look, which he seemed to approve of. (some Eighties fans just *won't* move on .....) When all were done, we stared in bewilderment and amusement at each other. The effect was not comical, but pretty unnerving - like the German *Black Peters*. Our job, we assured each other, was to protect the White Women from harm - we were the goddam pagan secret service! Thus imbued with righteous fire in our belly, we climbed the hill to prepare for the festivities.

Around us were the jubilant masses, and we lined up in our fenced off enclosure with the other performers, ready to start the procession. A bloated, sensuous full moon burnt overhead, casting a strange hue on Calton Hill. To quell our nerves, a bottle of whisky was passed around. For many of us, it was a completely new experience. The drumming started and our stomachs leapt. We trooped off into the thousands of spectators, to wild cheers, sporadic camera flash bursts and pockets of wild partying. We ascended the huge steps of the 'temple' - five looming Greek style pillars and ledges. The torch bearers fanned out on each side, standing some ten feet above the crowds. It seemed unreal, a bizarre dream - truly a rush of excitement, trepidation and an odd sense of belonging. A burning torch was passed down the line so we could ignite our own torches - I had one of the heavy iron poles. Then the hypnotic, pagan drumming started, reached a crescendo, and we were off. Barely knowing what I was doing, I followed the procession, fending off drunkards, some trying to steal the torch, some trying to join in the march. On several occasions I had to physically haul people from our processing trail. But I was too swept up in the energy of it all - as the May Queen did ritual performance art at each of the four 'elemental' areas, as the 'Fire Spirits' leapt and cavorted, taunting us and the White Women, in mock threat, spewing sheets of fire into the night sky, tumbling over the hill, swinging flaming metal balls - dervish like, mystifying,



alluring and potent. Finally, it was over. The lead players took up their 'Throne', drink flowed, drummers belted out new, primal rhythms. Beltane is primarily a fertility festival, and the year previous, four of the White Women had fallen pregnant! It was not a night for Christians. I have never experienced something so authentic, dedicated and passionate - Mark and Liz, the organisers, were rightfully proud.



As numbers dwindled, and the cold seeped in, Richard, Harvey and myself whiled away the early hours, taking in the deranged spectacle, gearing ourselves up for our dawn display. We had secreted the Stag behind a large wall, part of the enclosure for the Royal Astronomical Society grounds, also situated on the hill. My bag containing the all important firing boxes, tools and military signal flare was hidden under bushes within this enclosure. As the first light touched our still blackened and wearied faces, we went to ready the 'sacrifice' - our own particularly noisy dawn chorus. I found it first. The Stag had been thrown to the ground. The paper skin had been mostly torn away. The main wooden supporting structure was wrecked. One leg was hanging limply off the main body. My carefully placed charges were shifted violently out of position. Some wires hung loose, and most painfully off all, its pyrotechnic dick was ruptured. It had been *killed*. And, to make matters much, much worse, my bag was missing. Who would do such a thing? Only ourselves and the organisers knew where the Stag was.

Then I remembered. Earlier, when I returned to make the final adjustments to the display beast, an old guy from the Astronomical Society bellowed at me for trespassing, even though we had been told that permission had been given. "You! Get the hell outta here, pal! And tek yer stinking Stag with ye!" The bastard star gazers had wantonly wrecked our precious creation! Hours of work ruined - and some filthy thieving scumbag had walked off with my fantastic blast boxes - the jewel in the *Shadow Theatre* arsenal, one of them already a veteran of Beltane! All those hours into the early morning spent struggling to remember basic electronics, solder flying, drill whirring, voltage flowing! Swearing as circuits wouldn't work, even testing a charge in my room at risk of personal injury! I cursed the person responsible a thousand times! And his mother, and his mother's mother! All three of us fell into a deep depression. "This always happens!" lamented Richard, before rambling off on some paranoid conspiracy theory. "We've been sabotaged!" he cried. "Motherfuckers!" I added, needlessly. Harvey hung his head in spiritual pain.

We went over to the remains of our creation. It sagged painfully, pyros protruding like eviscerated organs, wiring exposed like veins. As the dawn light grew stronger, and the sun threatened

to appear, thousands waiting in anticipation of the expected display, all seemed doomed. Mark joined us, and was as shocked as we were. The Astronomical Society? A jealous pyrotechnician? Earlier, we had had a spat with one of the effects guys from the Edinburgh contingent. Christian rebels? The Scottish Firework Police? Or, more worryingly, perhaps God himself? I remembered my Bible for an instant – Fawkes 8, Verse II – "*Thou shalt not indulge in gratuitous explosions.*" I trembled in fear. Then, something in me screamed. We would not be beaten by the evil forces we imagined were against us. "Fuck it!" I cried. "Fuck 'em! We'll still blow it up! Whatever's left, we'll blow the shit out of it!" The others just stared at me, part sympathy, part concern. But Mark rushed off to get a car battery. I would just have to connect whatever wires came to hand, and see what happened. The four of us lugged the sorry looking Stag over the wall, and through the remaining crowd. It was a little embarrassing, as of course they would be thinking that the Stag was *meant* to be in this state! Ha! Any derision would soon be quashed as the gunpowder went to work. We managed to get it to stand on its own on the path below the festivities. I fed out the tail of wires, and plonked the battery down, some distance away.

All eyes were on me now. I could feel the rising sun on my back, and the soft dew between my fingers as I crouched down. I would not fail them! Swallowing hard, I touched the first pair of wires to the terminals. Nothing! The collective disappointment of the crowd smashed into me like the charge of a fierce animal. I had thoughts of just setting fire to the thing's arse and running away. Quickly. But then - a hiss! A piffle of smoke! BOOM! The flamer in its mouth erupted and sent a blast some feet in front of it! Cheers! Applause! Joy! Spurred on, I grabbed another bunch of wires ..... KABOOM! Five charges detonated with some ferocity, and I had to duck as pieces of wooden Stag flew towards me. Then more! Its dangerous dick ignited, spewing flaming particles into the ground. Its 'antlers' shot fire and brimstone into the sky. The watching people loved it! Secreted devices triggered deep within the thing, blasting more pieces all over, coloured fire, spectacular, mesmerising effects.

Then, the finale - a 'gerb' situated within the Stag set fire to the whole thing. I joined the others to watch the final demise. As we all stood looking, entranced like children, I saw some fool walk towards the exploding carnage. "Get back! Back I say! There's still charges left in it!"

"Fuck you!" the mad man cried. I turned to the others, and shrugged. Well mate, it's your life! Just as that thought percolated through my hazy mind, a awesome explosion occurred, sending the man scampering backwards, frantically trying to brush flaming pieces from his person. How we laughed! It was done. We walked down to the remaining embers - burning copper wires giving a mysterious green hue to the fire. "Hey! You!" a fearsome voice said. We all turned to see two battle scared geezers walk towards us. I noticed, as they got closer, each sported serious scars to their faces, with noses that veered off at odd angles. Ears that looked like uncooked pastry. Several teeth missing. Oh shite, I thought. "You!" he pointed at me. *I have a black face which is covered with silver runes*, I thought. That possibly makes me a target ..... "Ur, me?"

"Yeah, you!" His thick Glaswegian accent struck fear into my soul.
"Are you the violent cunt that did this?" Richard and Harvey backed off slightly.
"Ur, well, I might have been involved. Slightly."
"Did you fucking do it or not?"
I looked furtively around. Everyone looked bewildered. And a little scared.
"Well, ur, well, yes. Yes, I did." There was an uncomfortable silence. "Did you enjoy it? Or...not?"

He said nothing, but walked towards me purposefully. His friend tried to grin, with what was left of his face. I suspected imminent violence. "You violent cunt!" he cried, before grabbing me, then hugging me "It was fucking great!" His friend's grin echoed his sentiments.

I just smiled knowingly.

Andy Collins

That was then...

The Incredibly Bad Film Show: *Tammy and the T.Rex*

"We got two more squished bodies and a one-legged girl over there; she's still kinda good-looking".

The early careers of famous actors and actresses are usually the most fertile ground for Incredibly Bad movies, because once they're stars, their agents would rather they churn out banally mainstream work – straightforward "bad", rather than "incredibly bad". Thus, we have Kevin Costner in *Sizzle Beach*, Demi Moore in *Parasite* and Nastassja Kinski in the sublime *Passion Flower Hotel*. But to find two future stars in one of the most ill-conceived movies ever is a rare find indeed...

I have to admit that, for the moment, we are really talking only one star, and a proto-star. The former is Denise Richards; opinion on her aesthetic appeal is radically divided in the TC camp, some regard her as cute, while others refer disparagingly to her as "The One-Eyebrowed Wonder". But after *Starship Troopers*, *Wild Things* and *The World is Not Enough*, there's no denying her position. Co-starring - for the first quarter at least - is Paul Walker, who has come up through *Pleasantville*, *She's All That*, and most recently, *The Skulls*. A great future beckons. Or at least, something better than *Tammy and the T.Rex*, certainly.

There is probably no connection to the "Tammy and the..." series of films starring the likes of Carrie Fisher's mom, Debbie Reynolds, that ran in the late 50's and 60's. Instead, imagine a triple-tag match between *Robocop*, *Jurassic Park* and *King Kong*, and you'll be a good way towards knowing the plot.

Specifically, though: Tammy (Richards) wants to go out with Michael (Walker), but her current jealous boyfriend arranges for an "accident" in a safari park. In hospital, Michael is kidnapped by a mad scientist, who implants his brain in an animatronic tyrannosaur (of wildly varying size, depending on which prop they are using). Inevitably, he escapes, goes on the rampage against his killers, then seeks out Tammy, who turns out not to be averse to some lizard lovin', even if DinoMike is by this stage a mass murderer. The police and mad scientist, however, are less happy...

Good news: it starts off on the right foot, with Denise as a cheerleader. Bad news: she's stuck behind the titles. This schizophrenia is characteristic of the movie overall, with ideas which you could see working, spoiled by quite hideous execution. It's both so juvenile you feel it ought to be a Disney film, yet clearly wants to be a Troma pic too. Even its rating occupies that uncomfortable PG-13 middleground. Had it gone either way, it would have been better.

...and this is now. Denise Richards smirks gently as she recalls her early starring role in *Tammy and the T.Rex*

The dinosaur effects, too, range from the numbly pathetic, to the quite decent. Cleverly, it's allowed to look animatronic, since it is and, when not moving, is by no means unconvincing. However, any attempt to show the whole thing in motion will provoke hysterical laughter as its legs move up-and-down like pistons. Worse still, the front legs are clearly played by arms in socks; half the time, they stick out from completely the wrong angle. This is important for scenes in which the T.Rex is, for example, required to make phone calls, the sheer pointlessness of which convinces me *Tammy* must have been sponsored by AT&T. There's another moment where Tammy's father *phones her bedroom* to find out what all the noise is. It's good to talk, but...

That whirring sound you hear is Willis O'Brien turning rapidly in his grave,

With Michael out of the picture (Walker gets off lightly, only having to appear in the first twenty minutes or so), Tammy is assisted by unthreatening best friend Byron. He is a) black, b) the son of the local police chief, and c) bent as a nine-bob note. This is about as good as it gets with regard to comedy in the film. Well, actually, that's a bit cruel: there are two decent jokes:

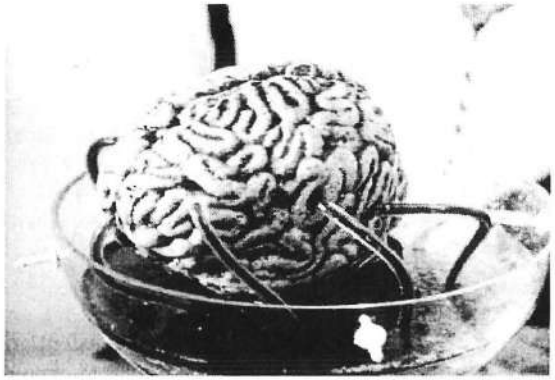
- the squashed T.Rex victims can be rolled up like wrapping-paper
- as Tammy and Byron prepare to surrender to the cops; Byron says, "We need something white – besides you."

Well, I laughed. OK, only a bit...

Other tricky issues appear to relate to Michael's "accident". The bad guys go to a safari park to dump him off, driving open-top convertibles: this is amazingly brave, or dumb, given it takes predatory animals about five seconds to notice Michael. And the only visible effect of the lion attack is to give Michael a black eye, yet this gets him into intensive care. Mind you, medical care in the city is a bit relaxed anyway; the morgue is in a building of its own, unguarded and with a convenient *Morgue* sign outside.

Denise considers a role in something more worthwhile than *Tammy*. Such as kiddie-porn.

That's significant, as the very resourceful Tammy needs a new body into which DinoMike's brain can be placed, his old one having gone a bit off by now. She has great adaptive skills too. After she finds out her beau's brain has been borrowed by a bad boffin, and is now inside a pneumatic dinosaur, virtually her first comment is, "I missed you so much". She discovers the plot basics via DinoMike charades: watch for some deeply pathetic hand-in-sock gesturing.



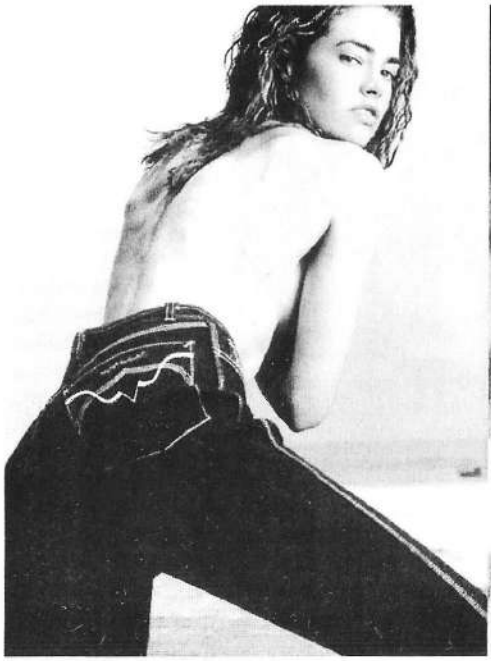
Readers can have fun making up their own captions for this picture. Perhaps something along the lines of: "I hear Denise Richards gives good head"?

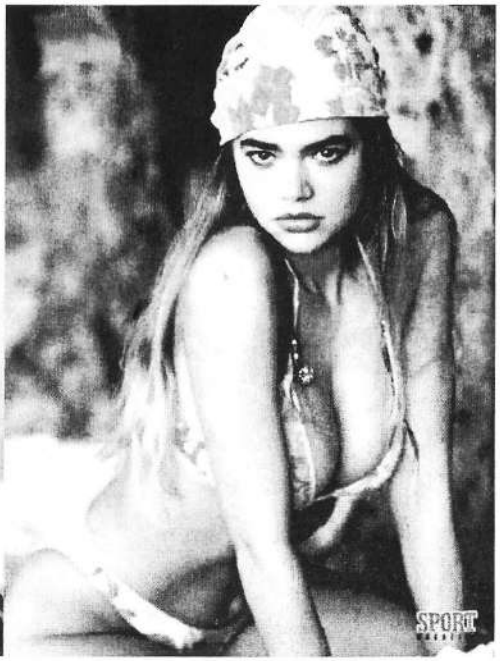
The local cops finally notice a truck sitting outside the morgue with a dinosaur in it; Tammy + Byron are forced to flee in the truck, until a low branch clothes-lines DinoMike. We then get to see Denise Richards riding off into the sunset on the back of an artificial Tyrannosaurus Rex, which has to go down as a canonical image in bad cinema. But it's to no avail, as the police find them again, and take DinoMike down in a hail of bullets.

While I'm usually reluctant to give spoilers, in this case I'll make an exception, for reasons which will become apparent. There's a happy ending: Tammy saves Mike's brain, and keeps it in a jar in her room, video camera and so forth attached for sensory input. She pours alcohol into his jar, and does little strip-teases in front of him to keep him amused, though the editing is so bad, one is left yearning for an R-rated version. The sight is sufficient for Mike's brain to start frying gently – after 82 minutes of the film, this is something with which it's easy to feel sympathy.

As a movie, it's hard to find any facet which is not completely inadequate, and one can only assume it was done as some kind of amusing tax write-off. No matter what they may do in their careers from here on, if Richards or Walker ever merit career retrospectives from the British Film Institute, it's probably safe to say that *Tammy and the T.Rex* will not be heavily featured.

And what do we have here? It's a blank bit of space at the end of the page. Wonder if I can find anything appropriate to fill it. Oh, look – what are these…?





Killing For Cult-ure

"A Timely Message from Heaven: The End of the Present Times"

All of you living on the planet, listen to what I'm going to say: When the year 2000 is completed, the year that will follow will not be year 2001. The year that will follow shall be called Year One in a generation that will follow the present generation; the generation that will follow will have few or many people depending on who will repent.

The Lord told me that hurricanes of fire would rain forth from heaven and spread over all those who would not have repented. They would burn them but would not die immediately... This fire will also reach inside the buildings; there is no way one can escape. Those who had repented were told to go in hiding to the houses they had built for this purpose. These houses are called 'Ark' or 'Ship.'

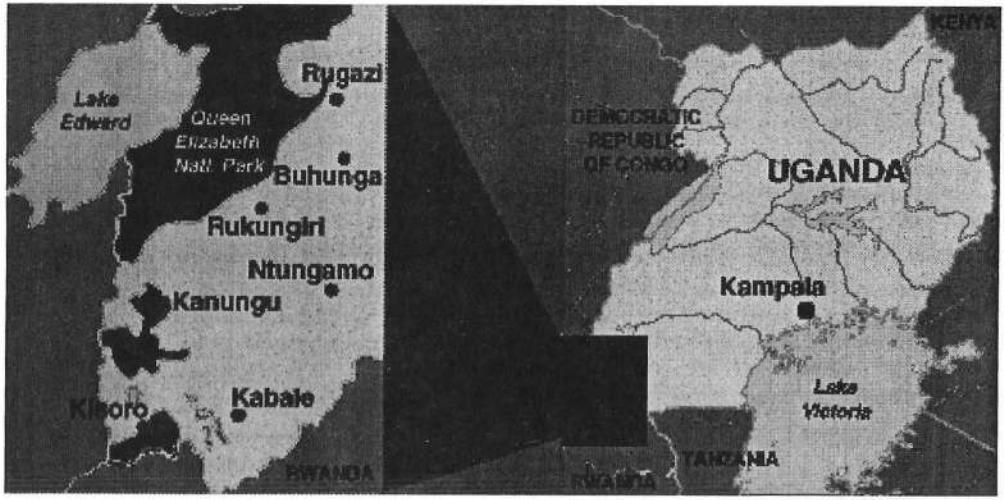
We are definitely taking you to Jesus through the Blessed Virgin Mary, who have *(sic)* commissioned us, and through the Pope. Since the Ten Commandments of God have been abandoned and are being broken, those who go to hell are very many...Those going to heaven are few. Ours is not a religion but a movement that endeavors to make the people aware of the fact that the Commandments of God have been abandoned, and it gives what should be done for their observance.

A great number of youths now move about more or less naked. They move about putting on slit-skirts, see-through dresses without any under-clothing. Some move about half-naked putting on back-show dresses. Girls prefer wearing men's trousers to wearing their own dresses...All these are symptoms of an urge to violate the Sixth Commandment. Our Blessed Mother Mary says that we, the youths, are like simpletons or fools because of having allowed Satan to dwell in us and make us do all sorts of shameful actions

AIDS ... is a disaster that has befallen the world. AIDS is a punishment that has been released to the world due to its disobedience. The sole cure is repenting our disobedience, and the restoration of the Ten Commandments of God.

"Body no. 47, infant, gender unidentified, with rope round neck". The naked, decomposed body of a baby is dumped on a growing pile of month-old corpses. After a cursory examination by a doctor, an entry is added in his colleague's notebook. Moments later the tiny corpse, one of many discovered in the garden of Father Dominic Kataribabo, a leader of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, is thrown into a fresh grave, another victim of the biggest cult-related disaster since Jonestown.

Even in recent times, Uganda's history of grinding poverty, rampant AIDS and regional conflicts make fertile soil for fanatical or extreme religious sects. Perhaps the most famous was Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement which sprung up in northern Uganda in 1987. While her own bodyguards preferred AK-47s, hundreds of her followers marched to their deaths believing magic cooking oil would protect them from bullets. While eventually suppressed by cutting off supplies of weapons - and cooking oil - her cousin Joseph Kony still fights on as the Lord's Resistance Army, saying he wants to run the country on the basis of eleven Commandments: Moses's ten plus "Thou shalt not ride a bicycle" (on the grounds that cyclists might speed into town and warn Ugandan forces that Kony's men are around). More recently, the government raided an illegal camp in the Sambabule district run by a prophetess said to eat nothing but honey, while leaders of another doomsday sect, the 1,000-member World Message Last Warning, were charged with rape, kidnapping and illegal confinement when police broke it up in September 1999.



Joseph Kibwetere, the 68-year old self-styled bishop of the "Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God", had been a prominent member of the Catholic-based Democratic Party in the 1960s and 70s. When his political career ended abruptly after a controversial general election in 1980, Kibwetere took refuge with an Anglican bishop in Kabale; seven years later, at a time when many people reported seeing visions in the area, he claimed to have overheard a conversation between Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, and recorded it on tape. "There is a lady's voice on the tape which says the world is suffering because the people are not following the Ten Commandments," said Sister Stella Maris, a Catholic nun living near Kanungu. "She says the commandments must be enforced or the world will end."

Was the "lady" ex-barmaid and prostitute Gredonia Mwerinda? She teamed up with Kibwetere in 1987 after allegedly also receiving a calling from the Virgin Mary. Along with excommunicated Catholic priest Dominic Kataribabo, they moved to Kanungu, in Uganda's south-western hills. Father Paul Ikazire, who claimed he was among the sect's leaders before leaving in 1994, said Mwerinda was the power behind the throne. "She used to bring in messages from the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Michael...things like, the Virgin Mary wants you to bring more money." Cult members were required to sell their possessions and hand the proceeds to the church. "They gave all their money to the leaders who filled sacks with banana fibres in imitation of currency notes and burned them," claimed local government official Paul Kwesigabo. It's not clear where the money went, but her uncle, Marsiali Baryeihahwenki, said Mwerinda travelled frequently around Africa, as well as owning a huge farm, vehicles and several shops.

This lifestyle was in marked contrast to the austerity and depressingly-familiar brainwashing techniques enforced on followers, who were told to live strictly by the commandments; disobedience was punished with canings or food deprivation. Dressed in robes which designated rank (white for leaders, green for those who gave generously on recruitment, black for the rest), they toiled in fields and workshops without payment, communicating with each other only by gestures. Men and women, including married couples, slept in separate dormitories, and no children were ever born to any members of the 13-year-old cult. According to Baryeihahwenki, families were split up when they joined the cult and members were shifted frequently between several different sites in the impoverished region to stop them forming attachments. "They would come with a pick-up and tell people to get in with no warning," he said. "They were moved around all the time." Any children that new recruits brought in were also put to work, fetching water and firewood. A primary school run by cult leaders was closed down in 1998 by local authorities, who said in a report that children were malnourished and made to sleep on the floor without mattresses or blankets.

"Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it."
– sign over the altar at Jonestown

November 18, 1978 - U.S. pastor Reverend Jim Jones, leads 914 followers to their deaths at Jonestown, Guyana, by drinking a cyanide-laced fruit drink. Cult members who refuse to swallow the liquid are shot.

December 1991 - Mexican police blame a minister's fervent belief in God for his death and that of 29 followers who suffocate when he tells them to keep praying and ignore toxic fumes filling their church.

April 19, 1993 - At least 70 Branch Davidian cult members die after fire and a shoot-out with police and federal agents end a 51-day siege of the compound near Waco, Texas.

October 1993 - 53 hill tribe villagers in a remote Vietnamese hamlet commit mass suicide with flintlock guns and other primitive weapons in the belief they would go straight to heaven. Officials say they were victims of a scam devised by a blind local man Ca Van Liem, who received big cash donations in return for promising a speedy road to paradise.

October 1994 - Police find the burned bodies of 48 members of the Solar Temple, an international sect that believes death by ritualized suicide leads to rebirth near Sirius, in a farmhouse and three chalets in Switzerland. At the same time in Quebec, five bodies, including that of an infant, are discovered in a chalet in Morin Heights, north of Montreal. In December the following year, 16 members are found dead in a burned house outside Grenoble, in the French Alps. Two French police officers were among the dead. In March 1997, police in Saint Casimir, Quebec, find the bodies of three women and two men inside a house owned by a sect member. Death toll (for now): 74.

March 20, 1995 - The Aum Shinri Kyo (Supreme Truth) doomsday cult disperse nerve gas in the Tokyo subway, leaving 12 dead and injuring thousands.

March 26, 1997 - Police find the bodies of 39 men and women in a mansion outside San Diego. The victims, who belonged to the Heaven's Gate cult, committed suicide in the belief that a UFO, shielded behind comet Halle-Bopp, would take them to heaven.

Grace Kibanja of Makerere University's Institute of Psychology said, "These people were poor with no hope and saw salvation. Attaching themselves to a man who promised a better life has to be understood in this context." Murindwa Rutanga, political science lecturer at Kampala's Makerere University and an authority on cults in this region, agrees: "these were desperate people – landless, unemployed and probably sick. The community provided a home and some basic services like medicine that the state and church had failed to provide."

Some blame reputable religions. "Anglican and Catholic churches have to admit their past mistakes", Pastor Alex Mitala, Ugandan representative for the Christian Men's Network stated. "When ordinary Ugandans question religious doctrines taught by foreign pastors they often turn to the question: Which way to God? In such situations they fall prey to charlatans and other such misguided individuals." Driving his point home, Mitala pointed out that until recently, mainstream churches taught rural Ugandans that if you touch a woman's breasts outside of wedlock, they will fall off. "Once this is patently not so, Ugandans begin to doubt the sincerity of all religious teachings," he adds, rather unnecessarily.

Cult members were told the world would end at the beginning of the new Millennium, and they would be delivered to heaven only if they gave up all their earthly goods and followed the cult. One theory suggests that when Kibwetere's prediction of December for the end of the world proved wrong, he and his associates came under increasing pressure from a now destitute congregation to repay their money. "All along they had said that this (church) is the boat of Noah," alleged a local villager. "This is the ark and they were told that at the time of calamity they would come here. They were told that at a certain time this year, the world would end and so the leaders made it happen and perhaps the people there believed it had happened," she said.

For several days before the carnage on March 17th, members made their way to the compound, in buses, pick-ups and lorries. Only those in the church would be saved, they were told; the rest of the world would face God's wrath. Local officials said the cultists slaughtered a cow and ordered 70 crates of soda the night before – in a nearby dormitory, chicken bones and millet bread bore witness to the last supper. Meanwhile, police believe Kataribabo purchased 40 litres of sulphuric acid days before the tragedy, telling a local storekeeper he wanted to use it in car batteries. While these were not found in the church compound, the acid would be highly inflammable and explosive if mixed with petrol, as well as forming a poisonous vapour when burnt.

With the doors and windows nailed shut, they sang and chanted for hours, wearing their finest robes, before the fire was lit. By dawn, hundreds of charred corpses lay in the burned-out shell of the church as rain fell through the collapsed iron roof of the building. Some of the bodies, with hair and clothes burnt away and features obliterated, stretched out their arms in what looked like an appeal for help while others lay face down or balanced on their elbows with their heads back. Still more seemed to be huddling together against the flames. One baby was curled up like a foetus on the ground.

Yet the horror was only beginning. Investigators found several pit latrines covered in fresh cement and, when they opened the first one, discovered new corpses. "We found five bodies on the surface and when we shone a torch there were more underneath," said public health officer Richard Opira on March 20th. "They haven't been wounded so we think they were strangled or maybe poisoned," he said. In the end, 153 cadavers were found buried under a house used by the cult in the village of Buhunga, a further 155 corpses in the house and garden of Dominic Kataribabo in Rugazi, 81 more in Rushojwa and 55 in the capital, Kampala. The final death toll, announced on July 20th, was 780. It was apparent that the fire was merely the climax to an orgy of slaughter; most of the dead appeared to have been murdered less than a month ago, and some still had ropes around their necks, indicating they had been strangled.

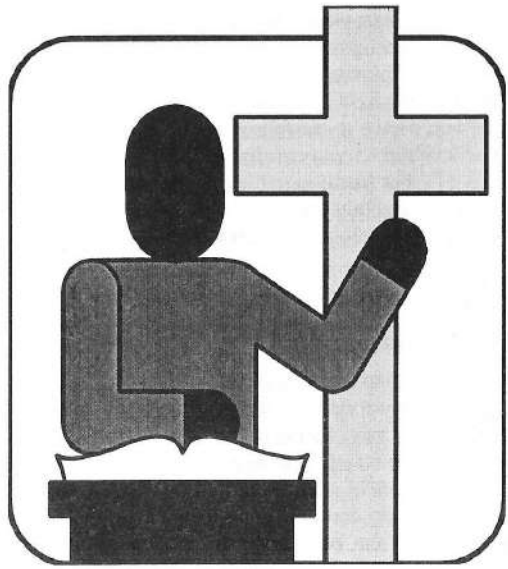
Setting new records for monumental ignorance, neighbours said they knew Kataribabo had been digging in his back garden, but never suspected the purpose of his exertions. "He was a good man, good to his followers, good to his family and good to people in general," Kataribabo's nephew Bagambe Apex said. "There is no way we ever expected something like this could happen." According to Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni, the group's religious nature explained why authorities in the heavily populated area did not notice the disappearance of hundreds of their followers, which also falls into the category of dubious explanations. Completing the turning-a-blind-eye trilogy is local police official James Byaruhanga. "These people were very good taxpayers. They had permission to operate from the authorities, so we had no reason to stop them."

On the other hand, some people claim to have had suspicions, although this could be mere hindsight. "As time went on we started getting more and more scared of them," said Kisembo Didas, a farmer in Rugazi. "We thought they were dangerous, a cult of Satan. They used to behave abnormally, suddenly becoming paralysed in the street and then talking nonsense." Those of a conspiratorial bent may also wish to note that an assistant district commissioner in south-west Uganda was arrested for allegedly suppressing an intelligence report that suggested the cult posed a threat.

Alternatively, ex-President Milton Obote of the banned Uganda Peoples Congress claims that the bodies are not cult members at all, but government political enemies, killed in large-scale, extra-judicial massacres by the Ugandan security services. "How can five people kill over 900 persons without some escaping?" he questions, while pointing out that many government critics have mysteriously disappeared in recent months. In a strident e-mail message sent from Kampala to various reporters, opposition supporter Yoswa Nkalubo (claiming to be on the run from government security agents) states that more bodies are buried in latrines all over the Ankole and Kigezi districts and that these are opposition members eliminated under the guise of having been killed by the cult leaders Whatever the truth in such theories, few families have come forward to report missing relatives.

Nor is anyone sure what happened to the leaders. Uganda's New Vision newspaper said Kibwetere sent a letter – his first in three years – and several books to his wife, Theresa, so that she should go on "with what we have been doing because we are going to perish." But a young member of the cult, a 17-year-old named Ahimbisibwe, told the paper he had seen two of the leaders leave the compound before dawn on the day of the fire carrying small bags. "Kibwetere and Gredonia prayed for us on Thursday night and they left the camp," said the boy, whose mother and sister were among the victims. The area's member of parliament, Amama Mbabazi, said he believed the leaders had survived. "My gut feeling is that Kibwetere and his colleagues are on the run," he told New Vision. While Kataribabo's and Mwerinda's bodies were at first officially identified by police at the site, they later admitted they had not been able to recognise them. and issued arrest warrants for six leaders, including Kataribabo. With the remaining corpses bulldozed into a mass grave, destroying any remaining evidence, it seems the truth will never be known...

This kind of thing is disturbingly common. Across in Kenya, a different brand of religious fanaticism is on the rise. Tens of thousands are joining a new wave of born-again Christians, whose leaders claim to speak in tongues and deliver miracle cures to cancer, AIDS or deafness. Some may be run by genuine believers, yet others are shaped by opportunists who seek power and financial reward by manipulating the hopes and fears of the region's poor. In Uganga, the results were more lethal than usual, yet it's scarcely unique, or even rare. For example, on July 2nd, seven Peruvian family members were found dead with Bibles by their sides after poisoning themselves in a religiously motivated suicide at their shantytown home. What happened in Kanungu may have been larger in scale, but it's sadly common: just another case of the lives of ordinary people getting screwed up in the name of organised religion.



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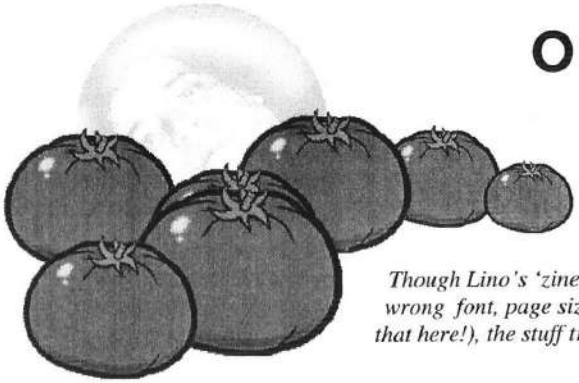


Of Tomatoes and Home Shopping

Though Lino's 'zine reviews turned up a little long (and with the wrong font, page size, spacing and margins, but let's not go into that here!), the stuff trimmed to make it fit was too good to waste.. So here they are...

OK!! Stop... I've got to tell you about this before I forget. Bear with me because I do like going off at bizarre tangents but the payoff...wow, you'll love it. My mother recently returned from a trip to Italy, and being the typical mad Italian brought back a whole load of insane things. Among these were a cake dish and an ice cream tub full of fresh tomatoes – tomatoes being almost impossible to find in this country, as you know. Now, the cake tin was dented in several places, but (and this is where it gets interesting) none of the tomatoes were even slightly damaged. Hmm, you may be thinking, what's your point?

Here's my plan. We construct all aeroplanes out of tomatoes. Genius! Now, if a plane crashes, everyone will be unharmed, as the strength of the tomato covering will keep everyone alive. This also means that if the plane crashes on a mountain in the middle of nowhere (see *Alive,* or better still, see *Survive*. No, better than that, copy the first 15 minutes of *Alive,* then add the last 60 minutes of *Survive* for the ultimate movie), you won't have to eat fellow passengers because you can eat the plane. Or if you fancy the look of stewed stewardess you can flavour the pot by chucking in some tomatoes. I've not looked at the pros or cons of other fruit/vegetable plane construction techniques yet, but I do know that making a plane out of tomato ketchup just won't do. Too much glass, you see? Mark my words, this time next year, some enterprising aerospace giant will be launching the Tomato 747 and you'll be able to say, "I heard it here first".

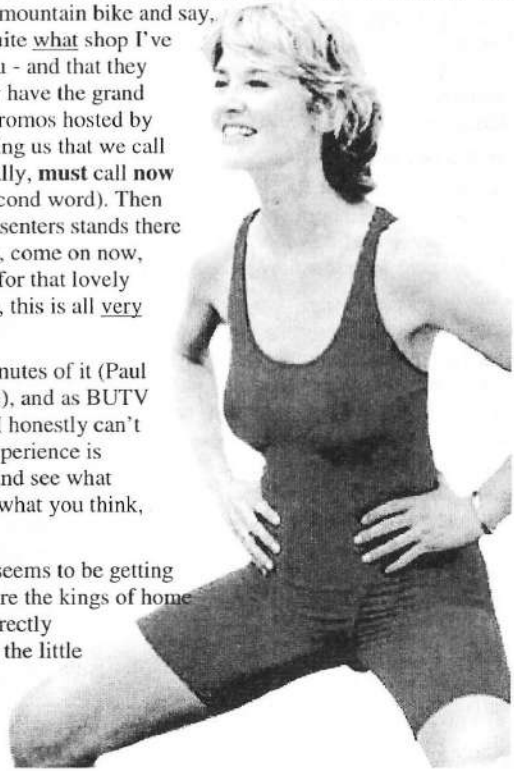
Before we continue with our Mansplat orgy, I feel it only fair to point out the following facts.

1. I have never spoken to a French man and enjoyed it.
2. I have never spoken to a white South African and not wanted to punch his face off (smug fuckers)
3. I lied about number 2, there was one, Stephen, but I've not talked to him since he went back to South Africa so he could have turned into a wanker.
4. I actively look forward to the return of soap opera *Crossroads* to our TV screens.
5. I can give it out, but oh boy – I most certainly can't take it.
6. I can take an instant dislike to anyone, but, perversely, they must all love me for the god I am.
7. Nick, Nick, Nick. There, see I told you I'd shoehorn your name in again somewhere.
8. When Jim moves to the States, will there be a bloody power struggle between himself and the lovely Chris as to who becomes the "Official Trash City American correspondent"? Yes, I know, that's not a fact, but I'm waiting for my coffee and you're not really caring are you?
9. I give it approximately 2 weeks before every lame 4th grade British comedian starts pathetic "Wazzzzzzzup?" skits or comedy routines.
10. While I enjoyed the movie version of *Oliver*, I don't like slicing tiny pieces off my ears.

Right, don't you feel closer to me now?

Let me tell you a little something about the crazy world of television home shopping. That was the plan, until last night anyway; channel hopping, I found a channel that all-out, balls-out headfucked both QVC and Ideal World (the pretender to QVC's throne – I'm not going to mention Shop! in the same breath for reasons I'll go into later). The channel I'm talking about is called, wait for it, wait for it: Bid-Up TV. Broadcasting from 8pm till midnight on Sky digital channel 647, BUTV as I shall call it, is an insane mix of the worst home shopping channel presenters, Paul Ross and 60p a minute premium rate call madness.

How does it work? Well, from what I can work out, BUTV's extensive line up of three presenters will show you a product, and again, from what I can work out, the products consist of bottles of wine, Dunhill watches (as was made clear last night, these are *real* Dunhill watches, not those dodgy ones you get from the market) and mountain bikes. The presenters will wheel out a mountain bike and say, quite proudly, that is costs £400 in the shops - quite what shop I've not been able to work out yet, I'll get back to you - and that they will open the bidding on this bike (of which they have the grand total of two) at £200. Then we get one of three promos hosted by wacky Paul "I wish I was my brother" Ross, telling us that we call the 60p/minute phone line with a bid, and we really, **must** call **now** (I think they get paid extra for shouting every second word). Then there is a surreal 5 minutes, where one of the presenters stands there looking off-screen saying arcane things like "Oh, come on now, Steve, you'll have to bid a little more than £201 for that lovely bike – show them the seat again Linda" and "Oh, this is all very exciting".



I've not been able to watch any more than 10 minutes of it (Paul Ross every two minutes is too much even for me), and as BUTV only ever seems to sell 2 of any particular item, I honestly can't see it lasting very long. Somehow though, the experience is hypnotic (even as I type this I want to go home and see what they've got next). Check it out and let me know what you think, **but hurry**!!

Elsewhere on the shopping channel front, QVC seems to be getting attacked from all sides. For a long while they were the kings of home shopping, essentially having stolen the format directly from their American cousins (although dropping the little counter in the corner of the screen that lets you know how many of the "Hand powered steam cleaning diet carpet cleaning night lights" they're selling). Things started to change

around a year ago when Shop! - yes, with the exclamation mark - started. Owned mainly by Granada, this poor excuse for a shopping channel (or should that be Shopping! Channel!) is still limping along, presented by all sorts of fourth-grade (QVC employing third-grade or higher only) ex-local news presenters and, quite frighteningly, Anthea Turner for a while, trying to get rid of some awful clothes line – no, not for washing, but a line of clothes she'd designed. Romper suits and split crotch panties, I think. It was, and still is, no competition to QVC.

Then, in April, Ideal World appeared. For those who didn't see the fascinating documentary on Channel 4 a while back, it's the brainchild of a couple who run a company which shoves those shonky mail order catalogues through your door (you know the sort of thing: sub-Sharper Image type stuff, plastic winter shoes etc). The ace up their sleeve though, was to poach some of QVC's more popular presenters, namely Paul Lavers (kind of like the Uncle who scared you slightly), Debbie Flint (loud woman) and most interestingly of all, Steve Watley, who used to present on QVC until he was dumped from the channel just after Lady Diana's death. Why? He tried selling a ring by saying something along the lines of "It's just the sort of thing Lady Di used to wear" which was considered bad taste. They've also poached some other minor presenters, an annoying ginger fellow, etc.

The most frightening face on Ideal World is not, surprisingly, Steve Watley – though he is the most amazingly camp presenter on any television station, even if he does mysteriously mention his "wife" occasionally. It's the DIY "expert" who they've called Bill the Drill. This man is truly the stuff of nightmares, a huge 1970's German porn star moustache and an evil cravat-type deal, which obviously hides some sort of nasty DIY accident. Bill does nothing more than *scare* people into buying items.

Highlights of the products they've sold so far? Let me see: there was the Audi TT sportster they tried selling in their first few weeks on air (no, not a model – the actual car, a snip at £34,000. I bet the phone lines were burning up at that one); the plastic toilet roll holder; and only yesterday, the Dracula fancy dress outfit (good, we were told, for Christmas and New Year's Eve parties as well as Halloween) for a low, low price of £50.

I do believe that Ideal World (channel 642 on Sky Digital) is the best in "road accident" television: no matter how bad it gets, you just can't keep your eyes off it. So much so, I think it's taken over as my number one shopping channel choice. Other pretenders to the throne have also recently appeared, being nothing more than infomercials strung together, or in the case of "Shop America" having the worst in "self improvement" products sold by the worst in plastic presenters – nothing quirky enough to keep me watching there.

There you have it, all you need to know about the fabulous world of TV shopping. Or your money back. Please note this offer is not available to people living... That's it – just living people, basically...

Bug Wars

As Hollywood technology advances, it trickles down from the blockbusters – the morphing seen in *Terminator 2* can now be found in many a cheaper film. *Bug Wars* is thus of note, since it takes the computer-generated insects of *Starship Troopers*, and incorporates them into a film made on a smaller scale.

I think it's fair to say much smaller scale, almost a one-man show from director/writer/editor/effects man Timothy Hines, with, effectively, two characters (others turn up on video monitors, etc.) – the last survivors of the human race, who had the luck to be cryogenically frozen shortly before the war which wiped out everyone else. As if life wasn't hard enough, they then have to contend with an invasion of alien insects, intent on colonising Earth.

Which is where the computer graphics - and lots of them - kick in. There's no denying the impressive volume, with more than 32,000 special effects composite elements as the bugs attack, and the heroines fend them off before taking the war to the invaders. On their own, these aren't bad - I was particularly impressed with the computer-generated backdrops, which are excellent. The major problem is a lack of interaction with the human characters. They just don't appear to inhabit the same plane of existence, and the results are pretty feeble, with the insects looking as if they'd been stuck on to the screen. Never mind *Starship Troopers*, *Jason and the Argonauts* did it better. There's only one sequence of note where...well, let's say the prospects of survival for humanity grow somewhat dimmer.

This is a shame, as it detracts from a film which isn't lacking in good ideas, climaxing with a beautifully downbeat ending. This leaves the viewer with a wonderful sense of doom and futility, and also helps explain earlier inconsistencies, such as how the aliens are able to navigate interstellar distances but, as soon as they open fire, couldn't hit a barn if they were standing inside it. Darlene Renee Sellers and Corree Dibble, the last people alive, are credible enough, and Hines (with his director's hat on!) gives a fine sense of the loneliness and hopelessness which the situation would inevitably provoke.

I appreciate it's hard to sell anything other than feature-length films, but wonder if the makers would have been better off going for a short, higher-quality film, and using that as a show-reel to get funding for the full version. Instead, their technical resources look somewhat over-stretched, and while there's no doubt that *Bug Wars* points the way forward, showing how future movies will be made, it seems like an idea whose time has perhaps not quite yet come.

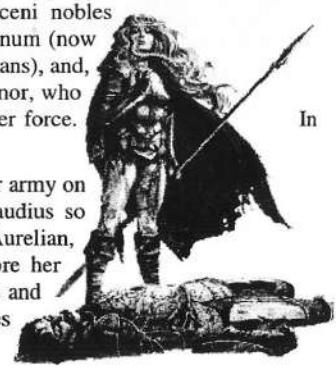
Visit http://www.prescriptionfilms.com for info.

The Top 10 Real Warrior Princesses

Myrene – queen of the Hesperian Amazons. Originating in the Canaries, they conquered parts of Syria, Egypt and Turkey, as well as the islands of Sámos, Lesbos, Patmos and Samothrace. Their military power was written of by Herodotus in the 6th century B.C. Several cities bore her name, including Smyrna (now Izmir). The earliest account of troops riding horses into combat is a North African battle in which she led a cavalry of 30,000 women

Trung Trac and Trung Nhi – Vietnamese heroines. In A.D. 39 the Trung sisters, widows of local aristocrats, led 80,000 peasants into battle to defeat Chinese ruler, To Dinh. Having taken over 65 fortified towns, they trained 36 women, including their mother, as generals. Eventually defeated by the sheer weight of Chinese reinforcements, they chose suicide to capture. They became a symbol of Vietnamese nationalism and the anniversary of their deaths is still commemorated with a festival. "Trung" has the same undertones in Vietnam that "Amazon" has in the West.

Boudicca – queen of the Iceni. On the death of her husband, Prasutagus, the Romans seized her territory: Boudicca was tortured, her daughters raped, and the Iceni nobles enslaved. She gathered an army, destroyed the colony of Camulodunum (now Colchester), sacked Londinium and Veralamium (London and St Albans), and, according to the historian Tacitus, killed 70,000 Romans. The governor, who had been in Anglesey, advanced against the queen and destroyed her force. In despair, Boudicca killed herself by taking poison.



Septima Zenobia – governor of Syria (about A.D. 250-275). Led her army on horseback wearing full armor; whipped the Roman legions of Claudius so badly that he retreated from much of Asia Minor. His successor, Aurelian, sent his best troops to conquer her – it took almost 4 years before her capital, Palmyra, fell. Zenobia was paraded through Rome in chains and exiled to Tibur. However, her daughters married influential families and her line was important in Roman politics for centuries.

Jehanne la Pucelle – Maid of Orleans. Somehow, this 16 year old peasant girl convinced the French Dauphin to give her an army, vowing to reclaim Orleans from the English and have him crowned king at Rheims. Insane? Perhaps. But in July 1429, he became Charles VII as promised. Captured by the Burgundians, she was sold to the English and charged with heresy, blasphemy, idolatry, and sorcery. Originally sentenced to life imprisonment, after "relapsing" by wearing men's clothing, she was burned at the stake in May 1431.

Margaret of Anjou – the White Rose. Wife of Henry VI, she led Lancastrian armies during the War of the Roses, defeating both the Duke of York and the Earl of Warwick. In 1471 she landed at Weymouth expecting to join up with Jasper Tudor, but he was delayed and Margaret's greatly outnumbered forces were beaten. She fled the field on foot carrying her infant son and escaped to Flanders. She returned to England with a new army, but was captured by the Yorkists; they let Louis XI of France ransom her, after obtaining her oath that she would cease fighting.

Mary Frith – "Moll Cutpurse". One of the first highwaymen (or women), and possibly also the first female to smoke tobacco. Originally a pickpocket, she decided a solitary career would pose fewer risks, and switched to robbery, but only ever attacked Roundheads, and others opposed to the King, with Hounslow Heath, west of London, her main haunt. After her arrest and liberation (in those days, almost any prisoner could buy freedom), she settled down as a fence of stolen goods – then a relatively legitimate profession. Her life became a successful play, *The Roaring Girl*, and she died in 1659, aged 75.

Marie-Angelique Brulon – defender of Corsica. Fought seven campaigns between 1792 and 1799, at first as a man, but by the time she was discovered, she was so valuable in battle she was allowed to remain, fighting openly as a woman. The male troops she commanded drew up a testimonial: "We, the garrison at Calvi, certify that Marie-Angelique Josephine Duchemin Brulon, acting sergeant, commanding the attack on Fort Gesco, fought with us with the courage of a heroine", and commended her skill with a sword and in hand to hand combat. Promoted to lieutenant in 1822 and personally presented the French Legion of Honor by Napoleon III.

Flora Sanders – Englishwoman abroad. Fought in the trenches with the Serbian army during World War I, while in her forties. Had risen to the rank of corporal in charge of a platoon when she was severely injured by a grenade in August 1916. She was hospitalized, given Serbia's highest military decoration, the Kara George Star, and promoted to sergeant-major. Returned to the front after recovering from her wounds.

Nancy Wake – the "White Mouse". Born in New Zealand, she married a Frenchman, and joined the Resistance during World War II. Parachuting into France in March 1944, she took virtual command of the *Maquis d'Auvergne*, a 7,000 strong resistance group. A comrade said of her, "She is the most feminine woman I know – until the fighting starts. Then she is like five men!" Took part in a raid on Montlucon Gestapo headquarters, which left thirty-eight Germans dead, and also killed a man with her bare hands. Her George Medal citation said, "Wake's organizing ability, endurance, courage and complete disregard for her own safety earned her the respect and admiration of all". She was also awarded the *Croix de Guerre* by France no fewer than three times.

Daughter of The Last Action Heroine

A is for **American Angels** (Beverley and Ferd Sebastian) -

"C'mon - twist him, twist him! Make that little midget squeal!"

From the creators of such classics as *'Gator Bait II*, this is standard Rocky-type fare in the world of women's pro-wrestling, enlivened by gutsy portrayals from actresses who are mostly in the business – fans of GLOW should recognise quite a few. Rookie Jan McKenzie incurs

the anger of reigning champ (and actual full-contact martial arts title holder) Mimi Lesseos by encroaching on her man. This leads to the inevitable final showdown, but on the way there are a number of interesting diversions: one wrestler is trying to escape the gang life she led, another's family has trouble accepting her career, while even the token midget comes across as about the least sleazy male character. Special praise to Sue Sexton as the trainer who'd put R.Lee Ermey to shame; overall, this is a small-budget film with a surprisingly big heart. **B**

B is for **Body Count** (Talun Hsu) -

"An assassin to die for"? Oh, please...

The publicity guys here had a better handle on things than the director, putting Brigitte Nielsen front and centre, when in reality, her role is little more than support to Sonny Chiba, an escaped hitman out for revenge on those who put him behind bars, led by Robert Davi. Chiba looks more like a salaryman than the *Streetfighter* of 25 years ago, yet there are flashes of fluid grace that impress. While the plot also contains some unusual twists, it keeps them back for so long that they end up being rushed out and misplayed. It's hard to care by that stage, despite Davi and Nielsen's best efforts, in character and tough-babe modes respectively. A film that is a great deal less than the sum of its parts. **D**

C is for **The Chosen One** (Lawrence Lanoff) -

"Classic film for the evolution-challenged. Tits, tits, more fake tits, very tight catsuits, babes with guns, very tight catsuits, sex with milk, women who behave like sluts and don't care who they fuck as long as they can drink out of the bottle, high-heeled string-up fighting boots, spike bracelets, tits, catfights, Playboy centrefold classically trained "actresses", trailer trash townspeople with Jerry Springer guest etiquette...Did I mention the tits?"

Thus ran Chris's report - need I say more? Well, it's a bit hyper: she plays down the all-too plentiful cinematic cleavage i.e. what you get *between* the tits. This includes the plot - as in "thinly disguised *Crow* ripoff" - which has Carmen Electra's murdered sister (Lorenzo Lamas's wife, with half a liquidized cow in each lip), passing on a mystical amulet that turns Carmen into an avenging angel, after rising from the grave. The only interesting touch in it, sees the bad girl similarly energized, so you know where we're heading! Could also have skipped all the mystical Indian mumbo-jumbo, and the overfrequent narration suggests someone doubted the script's and/or actors' ability to get the story over. I see their point. A film not without appeal, but badly in need of the courage of its convictions. **C-**

D is for **Decoy** (Victor Rambaldi) - *"She's the nuts-and-fruit type."*

While it's rare for any action pic to be more fun standing still than in motion, that's the case here, with Robert Patrick and Peter Weller as Travis and Baxter, two bodyguards, respectively brain-damaged and merely weird, assigned to protect an industrialist's daughter from Charlotte Lewis, a mercenary with a penchant for black combat gear and Really Big Guns. However, things ain't what they seem – the title gives the game away, to a certain extent. The characters are great, much more so than the rather tedious running through forests and much shredding of innocent, bystanding foliage which passes for action. Still, Lewis cuts a dash, and is particularly impressive when firing off her RBG without so much as a blink. Though going by her cleavage, one can only assume Wonderbra now also make fatigues. **C+**

E is for **Excessive Force II: Force on Force** (Jonathan Winfrey) - *"Once you cross this special agent, you've crossed the line."*

I suppose the forces of the title might be the police force and renegade special forces who face each other in this pedestrian actioner; that's showing more intelligence that the rest of the movie manages. Stacie Randall is Harly Cordell, an army special agent hunting an ex-colleague who has been hired to kill an informer. Just to slow things down, there's an an unneecessary medical subplot, since Cordell was left with a bullet in her brain which causes her problems, albeit only at suitably "dramatic" moments. Randall kicks arse with an adequately terse style, although her dramatic range makes Cynthia Rothrock look like Meryl Streep, and indeed Randall's blonde looks seem distinctly inspired by Rothrock. Some cheerful digital pyrotechnics briefly trigger a mild lifting of apathy; regrettably, not for long, and this one is severely forgettable. **D-**

F is for **Five Lady Venoms** (Cheng Chi Chiu) -

"More venomous than the male..."

I think it's safe to say this wasn't the original title, but who am I to turn an "F" down, even if for the first half-an-hour, it's merely extremely poor 70's kung-fu fodder. Only when Angel and her team of female warriors enter the scene do things perk up a bit, though the story never gets beyond wearisome revenge despite a hefty body-count. The "lady" bit of the title is easily the most accurate, since their numbers vary wildly, and it's hard to take the "venom" part seriously after seeing them train: the bikinis are okay, it's the swimming caps which are difficult to accept. Entire scenes are thrown in for no reason, making it the sort of movie where you can doze off without missing much; odds are you will, with kung-fu which reaches average on occasion. While rating well for sheer *quantity* of female action heroines, once you get beyond Angel herself, the quality leaves way too much to be desired. **D**

G is for **Girlfight** (Karyn Kusama) – *"Prove them wrong."*

This world is filled with many examples of violence, and nothing works better than violence with a purpose. Diana Guzman's violent world breeds school dropouts, juvenile delinquents and substance abuse, crooked low-lives who couldn't find a straight path if it were handed to them on a silver platter. Instead of succumbing to that lifestyle, she finds an outlet in the gym, as the only girl boxer, and develops confidence in her abilities, becoming a force to be reckoned with. Michelle Rodriguez plays Diana, and has probably the most intense gaze I've ever seen; she looks tough and I certainly wouldn't want *her* mad at me. I enjoyed the gritty, realistic view of life and the ethnicity; the background dialogue is excellent, despite the director not having a trace of Latino in her, though this may be less apparent to viewers not raised in that atmosphere. I was also awed by the boxing scenes: I backed up a couple of times to avoid getting hit by the power punches. Still, a strong, impressive and motivating film, especially for a first-time director, and many first-time actors as well as a tiny budget. This is definitely not *Rocky*. It's all about the amateur world and their dreams. Of taking the violence to a different level. And mastering it. *[Chris Fata]*

H is for **Heavy Metal 2000** (Michael Coldewey + Michel Lemire) -

"How do you 'lose' a six-foot bitch with a talking rock?"

The problem with this film is that it hasn't realised that things have moved on since the original: after fifteen years of anime, breasts and blood are no longer sufficient in themselves, and too much of the story is hackneyed cliché, borrowing equally from bad SF, and bad martial arts films of the "You killed my father..." school. Mixing good CGI and poor cel animation in an uneasy blend of styles, it pits Julie Strain (who provides her character's name, voice and figure model) against Michael Ironside (voice only, I presume!), after the latter does the parental-murder thing as part of his quest for immortality. There's enough here to keep you just about interested, with both Strain and Ironside putting in worthy effort. However, the rock soundtrack works better as a CD than as an accompaniment, and they should have spent more time on the script, instead of animating Strain's breasts. Replacing the anthology approach of the original with one solid lump, was only ever going to work if the story was a good one. It isn't, and it doesn't. **D+**

I is for **I Spit On Your Corpse** (Al Adamson) -

"They're dying to love her!"

Originally known as *Girls For Rent*, the new title and tag-line conceal a decent little film from Adamson (who'd end up buried beneath a jacuzzi), and an excellent performance from hardcore icon Georgina Spelvin as Sandra, a nasty thug broken out of prison to act as an enforcer for a mob boss. With slightly-less brutal associate Erica (Rosalind Miles), she has to hunt down a fleeing murder witness. Save the lack of huge breasts, it's reminiscent of something like Russ Meyer's *Faster Pussycat Kill Kill*, with a similar white-trash aesthetic and cruel females: Spelvin and Tura Satana could be cousins. The main weaknesses are a tame ending and long spells when there isn't a great deal happening; Adamson doesn't have the skill to make mundane but necessary exposition interesting. However, Spelvin and Miles are a good couple, the former rejoicing in cruelty to an extent that certainly put me off seeing *The Devil in Miss Jones*. **C**

J is for **Joan of Arc** (Luc Besson) -

"Let's go torture the bitch!"

With too many dodgy accents, both English and French, and a lead actress from the "deer caught in headlights" school, this wants to be *Braveheart* but ends up nearer *Holy Grail* territory. There's a desperate lack of character: Messrs Malkovich, West and Hoffman do well, but their roles are tiny, and you're too often left with nothing but interchangeable blokes in armour. As portrayed by Milla Jovovich, Joan herself comes over as little more than a religious loony, and while the battle scenes are undeniably impressive, with some excellent exploding heads, you're left with little or no understanding of how this girl could command armies. Sadly, no better than the recent TVM with Leela Sobieski – clearly Equity rules demand Joan can only be played by amusingly-named actresses. Luc Besson has worked with both children and animals before, to good effect, but it seems that his (now ex-) missus was a bitch too far. **D**

K is for **Killing Time** (Bharat Nalluri) -

Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Nikitas

British action heroines are a rare breed; Helena Bonham-Carter is far more comfortable with a parasol than a pistol. Which may be why the hit-woman here is Italian; those hot-blooded continentals, you know. The Newcastle location pays tribute to the classic *Get Carter*, and the set-up is elegant: cop Craig Fairbrass hires the assassin to kill the psycho who tortured his partner, but can't afford to pay her. So he orders four thugs to do her after she's finished;

unluckily, they're complete incompetents, vague on the meaning of "after", and her hotel bedroom soon looks like a mortuary as she waits, with her Linguaphone English tape, for her target's return. The action is pretty lame; for once, that doesn't matter; the black humour is what makes this work. Fairbrass, veteran of some truly dreadful movies, is too bland, but the cast are generally excellent, even Kendra Torgan as the assassin, who gets few English words. Obviously cheap, but cheerful and quirky, it beats *Notting Hill*, any day. **B-**

L is for **Lady Ninja** (Masuru Tsushima) - *a load of balls...*

The plot here is fairly generic: a Japanese shogun wants to get rid of some potentially embarrassing enemies, so unleashes the four titular babes on them. And, indeed, the acting is dead straight and po-faced, with everyone taking it very seriously. The exception is a narrator who seems to have wandered in from an entirely different movie, or perhaps *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. However, it's almost as if someone also let said narrator loose on the script for twenty minutes, because odd sequences are well beyond odd, and can only be described as bizarre. The ladies' special attacks, for example, which include the vaginal squirting of coloured balls, and the firing of breast milk – needless to say, this leads to far more nudity than is strictly necessary for an otherwise traditional swordplay pic. Moments like these will keep you watching, but only once, and beyond the pure shock value, there is insufficient imagination, or indeed content of any kind, to make it worth a permanent place on the video shelf. **D**

M is for **Model By Day** (Christian Duguay)...*and a severely daft costume by night*

As mentioned last time, Famke Janssen was one of the best Bond girls of recent years; here, she gets the lead as a supermodel who turns vigilante after her flat-mate is assaulted. Sporting a remarkably silly-looking costume (you'd think a catwalk girl would have better dress sense), all goes well until someone takes her identity and uses it for nefarious ends. Janssen looks the part (both of them), the Oriental hitman with whom she teams up is nicely laconic - "That's why I don't bother with the kung-fu shit" - while Shannon Tweed and Sean Young lurk helpfully in the background. Unfortunately, the action is neither frequent nor well-handled enough to carry the movie, and the fashion world scenes are merely irritating. Clearly hoping for a spin-off series; that it never materialised tells you all you need to know. **D-**

N is for **The Next Karate Kid** (Christopher Cain) – *"Just monks having fun."*

I have a sneaking regard for this one, which manages to hang on just this side of sickly, despite heavy-handed metaphors including a bird with a broken wing; like Angelina Jolie in *Cyborg 2* (see Film Blitz), Hilary Swank would go on to be an Oscar-winner. She is plausible and genuine enough to work as the rough diamond taken in hand by Pat Morita, who resembles Yoda both in English proficiency and fondness for philosophical gems like "Never trust a spiritual leader who can't dance." Yet he is far from irritating, and the Buddhist monks who assist him are not as po-faced as they at first seem. Action-wise, there isn't much until the final confrontation with the bullies who are ruining the heroine's life - not to mention that of her wimpy boyfriend - under the control of Michael Ironside, warming up his character for *Starship Troopers*. This is more about the *philosophy* of violence rather the act itself: on that basis, it proves to be effective without ever over-moralising. **B-**

O is for **Operation Pink Squad** (Jeff Lau) - *"You robbing a bank or starting a war?"*

In common with some of his other films, such as *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*, Lau tries to cover all the bases here, with lowbrow comedy, action, romance and drama all significantly represented. The results vary from good to painful, in what is inevitably a very busy movie. The titular squad are a bunch of female policewomen who get hurled at cases in the hope they'll screw up and can be fired: the main focus here is surveillance of a blind musician who may be holding stolen diamonds. One of the cops (again, inevitably) falls in love with him, but who is using who? As the film progresses, Lau tones

down the comedic aspects - to good effect, with a couple of excellent set-pieces and a finale which is actually hugely bleak, in contrast to much of what's gone before. Credit to Sandra Ng as the cop torn between duty and devotion, who handles even the dumb humour with good grace. **C+**

P is for Prisoner Maria: The Movie (Shuji Kataoka) - *"I am God!"*

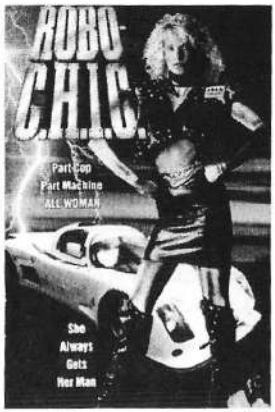
Another *Nikita* clone, this Japanese series turned Maria from a jailbird into a hit-woman, albeit a kinder, gentler assassin who only does it because the government has her kid. Starting with her hunting a politician's serial-killer son, this spirals off into roughly equal parts of organised crime and mad science, the latter being the source of the above quote. The action is competent, with Maria's fight against a Triad boss particularly good; it's a lively little film, and the effort put in means there's usually interesting stuff going on. Heroine Noriko Aota's short and/or tight costumes should tide most viewers over the other bits... **C+**

Q is for Queen of Swords – *"Let's see who she is!"*

The new season of shows in the States include a couple which could fit in here – foremost is probably *Dark Angel,* which has the *tech-noir* you'd expect from a James Cameron-produced show. Looking less secure is QoS: the track record for action series set in the past is wobbly, for every *Xena* there's a *Sinbad.* And just as New Zealand stands in for ancient Greece, a lot of the North American-set QoS is shot in Spain, a process assisted by good exchange rates. The results so far have been mediocre. Comparisons to *Mask of Zorro* are inevitable; early episodes even use the same "secret mine" plot. The action is poor and, while Tessie Santiago cuts a dash, her mask is so minimal, she'd be better disguised with a thong on her head How long it will be before the producers have to adopt this approach, only time will tell.

R is for Robot Wars: RoboCHIC vs. Running Delilah - *"It isn't that men necessarily think women are their inferior, it's just how badly they behave when they encounter one who might be their equal. "*

RoboCHIC (Ed Hansen + Jeff Mandel) parodies the robotic-crime fighter genre, best known through the itself-satirical Robocop; this works well for the first half, before running out of steam and descending to the tedious heroics it had previously skewered effectively. Burt Ward plays a nerdy terrorist (one demand is "I want girls to like me") who finds his atom bombs taken over by far worse bad guys. Only RoboCHIC (Kathy Shower) and her amazing android superpowers can save the day. Nice touches include everyone getting their skills from 'How to...' manuals, and Ward's nervous bomb warning while a line of cops behind him wait for the phone. Special



praise to Rita Considine as bimbocaster Bambi Doe, but a bland hero and irritating scientist slow things down terribly and the great promise drains away to very little. In **Running Delilah** (Richard Franklin), Kim Cattrall is the titular government agent, brought back to life - or a mostly cyber-version thereof - after being shot by arms dealers. Billy Zane has to coax her through the trauma and turn her into an even more effective resource, in a cross between *The Bionic Woman* and *Nikita*. While this takes a while to get going - the best part of an hour before she's sent on her first mission - Cattrall is good, and you get an idea of the angst incurred when you discover three-quarters of your body isn't you any more. Its origin as a TV movie is always apparent, however, both with the limitation on how tough it gets (check out the modesty patches during the operation!), and the obvious advert breaks. Plenty of production values help this bounce pleasantly enough along though. **C-** and **C**.

S is for **Sweet Justice** (Allen Plone) - *"Seven. Magnificent..."*

Plays like it ought to star Cynthia Rothrock, with Finn Carter (the heroic geologist of *Tremors*) riding into town to find the truth behind her sister's death, when sheriff Marc Singer (of *Beastmaster* fame, doing a convincing Kevin Bacon impression) refuses to investigate. She contacts her former army babe buddies, including Kathleen Kinmont, who are now working in jobs ranging from lawyer to go-go dancer, and take on the bad guys. As alleged former special forces soldiers, they're extremely unconvincing, and the first half is relentlessly talky. The martial arts range from adequate to pretty good, however, and there's certainly no shortage of action, once it starts, even if poor editing wrecks the fluidity. The plot is unoriginal - I resorted to picking my toenails - and there's not a vast amount of acting to keep you going until things pick up on the fisticuff front. Adequate, and only barely. **D+**

T is for **Terminator Woman** (Michael Qissi) -

"I am not unoriginal! I'll have a vodka martini, shaken not stirred."

Having seen Karen Shephard giving fine support to Cynthia Rothrock, it's good to see her getting a movie of her own, and this isn't too bad. She and Jerry Trimble play cops sent to South Africa with a witness vital to bringing down crime lord Gatelee (played by director Qissi). The obvious sexual tension angle is fortunately played down, as Sheperd has to fight her way out of the bush after being captured, while Trimble tries to break in from the other side of things. This all builds exactly to what you'd expect - two climaxes, Trimble vs. Qissi, and Sheperd vs. the delightfully evil Ashley Hayden. If the cross-cutting between the two fights does leave things a bit disjointed, there's no shortage of action overall, and everyone seems to be fully committed to giving of their best. **C+**

U is for **Undercover: Martial Law 2** (Kurt Anderson) - *"Some would call it impossible. They call it martial law"*

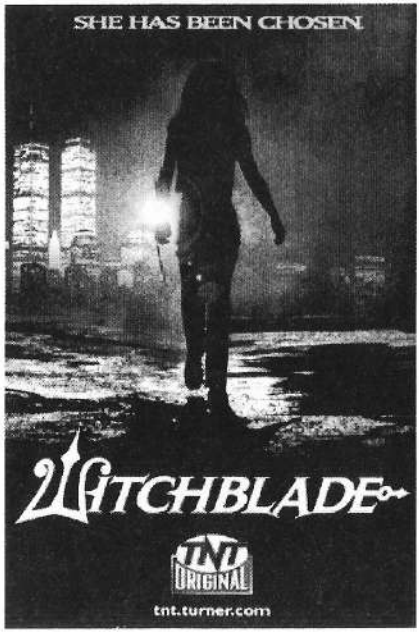
And lo, from pseudo-Cynthias at S+T, to the real thing, as for the second time, our 'U' movie stars Ms. Rothrock, enough to override qualms over whether this is really an M... She performs pretty well here, though the likes of Jeff Wincott and Billy Drago aren't exactly competition in the acting stakes. Wincott and her are former partners who uncover departmental corruption linked to a night-club

chain; while he gets attacked repeatedly, she gets a job in the bar and, actually, does a far better investigative job. There's not much to remember here, save perhaps for Rothrock's fights being surprisingly brutal, with more limb-snapping than you'd expect. I was looking forward to her facing off against the villain's female bodyguard at the end, and was sadly disappointed – most of her final opponents seem to hurl themselves off high places in lemming-like fashion. **D-**

V is for **Vendetta** (Bruce Logan) -

"Did it bring Bonnie back?
You have the rest of your life to think about that."

I was torn whether this one should go into the women-in-prison piece, but the alternative was *V.I.Warshawski*. And despite the shower scene, sex-crazed guard and other staples of the WiP genre, it has more in common with the likes of *Death Wish*, as stunt-woman Laurie Collins (Karen Chase) gets sent to jail to take on the scum who killed her sister. If you can get past the heroine's huge hair, which effortlessly nails this down as mid-80's, it's effective, backed by good supporting performances from genre stalwarts such as Roberta Collins, and with the odd surreal moment of beauty – Logan was cinematographer on *Tron*. It's interesting to see Collins fall apart as her revenge destroys her too, with the ending being somewhat uncomfortable. Trivia note: all-girl group the Screaming Sirens chalk up a second WiP assist, their cameo adding to their appearance on the *Reform School Girls* soundtrack. **B**



W is for **Witchblade** (Ralph Hemecker) -

"Use it or lose it."

This long-running comic series from Top Cow, loved by hormonal teenage boys everywhere, has been somewhat de-mammaried for this filmic incarnation, in which Yancy Butler becomes the latest in a long line of women owned by a gauntlet with mysterious (but largely cool) powers. I use "owned by" advisedly: it seems far more aware than her of what's going on, as she looks for those who killed...well, pretty much everyone she's ever known by the end of the film. Visually, it's good, with effective little touches and nods to other films, such as borrowing music from *Run Lola Run*, a movie whose hyper-kinetic style it sometimes also uses. Butler is pretty good, but it feels less a film than a TV pilot, concerned more with setting the scene than any story of its own beyond the painfully evident. If a series does materialise, however, the potential is certainly there. **B-**

X is for X-Men (Bryan Singer) - *and the X-Women.*

Though no more than a cheerful popcorn muncher - where's the threat when the hero can repair any damage to his body? - X-Men was notable from the action babe point of view. It provides no less than four superheroines for us to enjoy - this kind of equal opportunity quota I can deal with. Here's the TC report-card on the four-pack, in Miss World styled, reverse-order:

- **Rogue** (Anna Paquin) - the Jar-Jar Binks of the film, there to appeal to the kids. Seems perpetually on the edge of bursting into tears. **D-**
- **Storm** (Halle Berry) - controls the weather, though never does anything particularly interesting with it. Michael Fish in a blond wig. **D+**
- **Jean Grey** (Famke Janssen) - good, no-nonsense attitude. Moves things with her mind, so could have ripped Magneto's still-beating heart from his chest. But where's the challenge in that? **C+**
- **Mystique** (Rebecca Romijn-Stamos) kicks butt in a variety of forms, blue-hued and more regular. Excellent fight with Wolverine. R-S is now filming the *Rollerball* remake, under John McTiernan. You go, girl... **A-**

Y is for Yes Madam 5 (Lau Shing) -

"Damn your pee!"

Christ, this is dreadful. It may be the worst Hong Kong film I've ever had to endure – it's certainly the worst of Cynthia Khan's career, despite her treating the material with far more seriousness than it deserves. She is Lydia Lee, leader of the A-Team, whose boyfriend stumbles across the Filofax belonging to an evil crime boss, who is hugely keen to get it back. A reasonable set-up for an action flick – but this is a *comedy*, thanks to the presence of the Crap Physical Comedy family, for whom no vegetable, piece of underwear or Samantha Fox poster is too low for comic mugging. The villain also plays for laughs, a ginger-eyebrowed loon called Brian with painted-faced henchmen, and there is precisely one funny moment – a drug deal staged as if by the Peking Opera. Ignore the cover which promises much Cynthia and much action. Wrong on both counts, you will be praying for death before half-way. **E**

Z is for Zero Woman: Assassin Lover (Masahide Kuwabara) –

Heroic bloodshed dark chocolate, with a cherry-liqueur centre.

This is the third entry in the *Zero Woman* series, and it does go counter to our earlier reported assertion regarding part threes, since it represents a significant advance over the first couple. There is a pleasing symmetricality about the plot, which sees the characters divided into those who want female assassin Rei (Kumiko Takeda) dead, and those who want to keep her alive. The former include Rei herself, and villain Daidohja, while in the latter camp may be found her boss, and Katsumura, the counter-assassin hired by Daidohja. The two assassins end up working together as their respective bosses struggle to control them, with somewhat variable results, shall we say. Takeda is excellent, and the film has a murky and sweaty intensity which helps it to stand on its own, without knowledge of the previous entries. Oh, and as for the cherry-liqueur...this is the kind of Japanese film where, when people get shot, they don't so much bleed as *gush*... **B**

Non-stop Violence

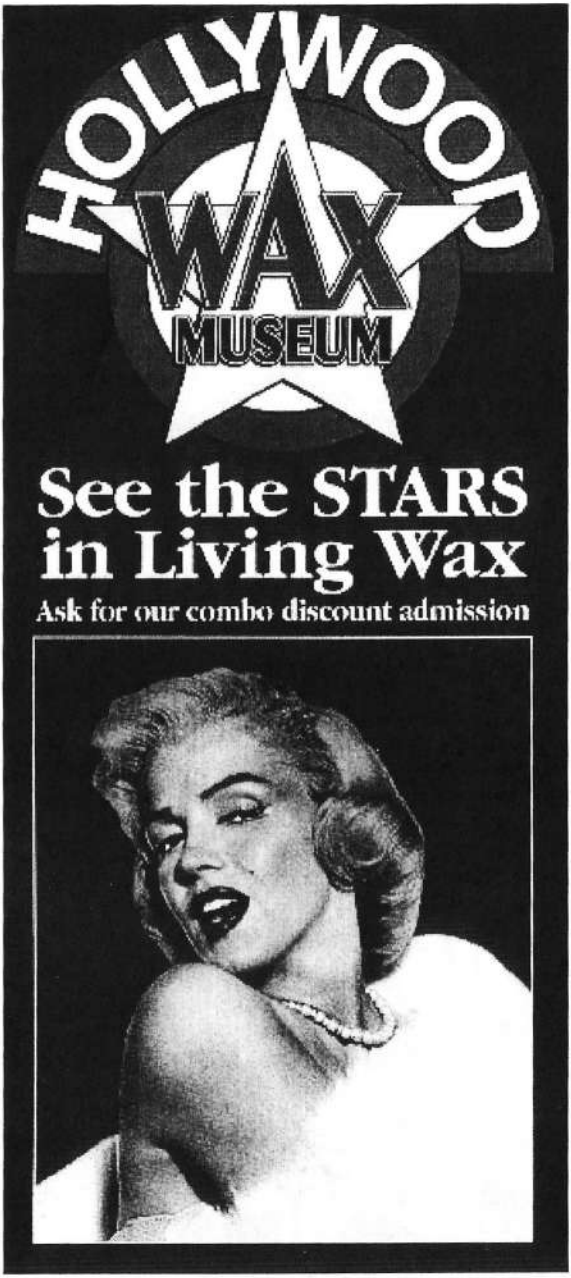
$25.99, Mayhem Productions, Inc.
P.O. Box 334, Antioch, CA. 94509, USA

I'm having to review this from memory, since it got 'borrowed' the first time a TC contributor saw it. I guess though most would be loathe to admit it, there's something about the sight of trailer trash slapping the shit out of each other which appeals to everyone. For that's what you have here: five (technically six, but one is so brief it resembles a Mike Tyson pay-per-view bout) knock-down, hair-pulling, scratching, clawing cat-fights – imagine *Jerry Springer* if security guy Steve had the day off.

The battles don't appear to be fake, or at least seem rather more real than you'd expect (and a good deal more so than the WWF). A couple are painful to watch, and the general impression is that these are girls you do not want to piss off. I do wonder about the set-up: you can occasionally glimpse in the corner of the shot, that still photos are also being taken, so you could acquire the entire multi-media experience if you wanted. It looks like the fights take place in a room, with white sheets hung on the walls. This is slightly disappointing: there'd be something appealing about a fight that rampaged through an entire house, knocking tables over and using convenient vases.

But the genius element on this tape is the presenters. The 'Boone Brothers' are two beer-swilling, bong-smoking, foul-mouthed rednecks who introduce each bout, detailing the contestants' grudge with each other and giving the backgrounds. These are, I hope, wildly fictional - if "getting through high school with only one abortion" really is someone's finest achievement, the human race is doomed. Their equal-opportunity offensive commentary (no social group left unstoned!) is spot-on, as they award beer ratings to each contender, based on how many they'd need to shag them. It's refreshingly straightforward to see a cheerful acknowledgement that no-one here will win any beauty pageants, save perhaps Miss Inbred 2000.

This is the kind of tape that sucks you down with it: you start off wincing, and end up placing bets on the fights. With no socially redeeming features at all, morally, it's probably about two steps above the torture of small animals. In all likelihood, you will go to hell if you watch this tape. See you there.



Postcards from California

Hollywood Boulevard

What are the rules governing who gets a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame? Is it purely a commercial, pay-for-play decision, or are certain artistic considerations also taken into account? There were long stretches of sidewalk where I'd never heard of the people commemorated, though Chris assures me they are quite famous in America. This may explain why Paula Abdul has a star, yet neither Rutger Hauer nor Chow Yun-Fat does. But why was Big Bird's star all but destroyed? It's not because he isn't "real" (*The Simpsons* have a star nearby) - was he caught masturbating in a cinema or something?

Highway 1

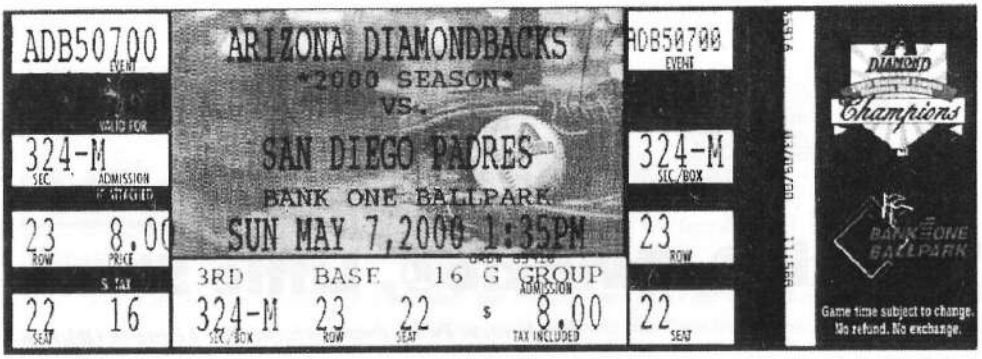
Heading North from LA, this road takes you along the coast, with any number of interesting little side-routes to divert down, and towns to explore (Ventura) or drive through at top speed (Oxnard). There is something intrinsically American about cruising down the freeway, the top of your convertible down, stereo pumping. There is something intrinsically British, however, about the scarlet red colour you turn by evening, because the cool breeze blowing through your hair makes you forget that the sun is bearing down as relentlessly as ever on your chalky-white European skin...

International House of Pancakes

Despite its name, this chain only appears to operate inside America. Go figure. It definitely appears to be a case of them keeping the best for themselves, and comes highly recommended to seekers of an artery-clogging breakfast experience. The pancakes are perhaps the highlight, but you can't ignore the omelettes, sausages, gravy or hash browns. The diet-conscious can opt for sugar-free maple syrup if they want - personally, I'll be forced to severely restrict visits when I move out there, or else it won't be long before I can no longer reach the keyboard.

The Olympics

The 18-hour time difference between LA and Sydney meant hardly anything was shown live, defusing much of the tension. Add in competition with the climax of the baseball season, and early NFL games (both going on here and now), and you had a struggle to overcome apathy. Still, none of this was going to stop a startling degree of favouritism being shown by the American commentators. I watched one 110m hurdles race which went from preview, through the event itself, to post-sprint interviews, without once mentioning the seven non-American competitors.



Baseball

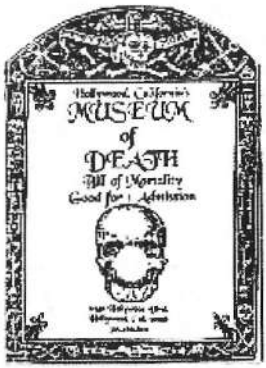
Though I'm an Arizona Diamondbacks fan (as above – their stadium has not only a retractable roof, it also has *air-conditioning*), I enjoy watching it even as a neutral, hence the trip to see the LA Dodgers play San Diego. LA won 2-1 – if they had stopped San Diego from scoring altogether, every fan could have swapped their ticket for half a dozen donuts. Given the crowd (40,000 for a meaningless game between two out-of-contention sides), that's a lot of donuts. Still, they can afford it: the Dodgers pitcher that night, Kevin Brown, only plays one game in five, yet still makes $15 million a year. It works out at about four thousand bucks for every time he throws the ball.

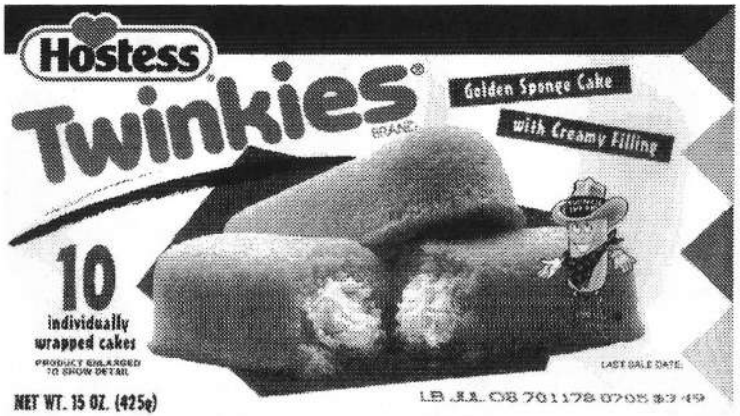
Shirt shocks

One night, as we headed out for a drink, I wore a hockey jersey I picked up while visiting Montreal for FantAsia in 1998. The results were startling: inside twenty minutes, a guy driving on Sunset Boulevard had stopped to congratulate me on my choice of shirt; two complete strangers in the bar struck up conversation as a result of it, and drinks mysteriously appeared on our table from another, still unknown, source. Is there a tight-knit community of Canadians located in Southern California? While the attention was all entirely friendly, I was somewhat freaked out: leaving the pub, I took the shirt off and didn't wear it for the rest of the trip.

The Museum of Death

Despite the cheerful, tattooed attendant, this was an infinitely depressing place which proves, beyond all doubt, that no amount of cinematic violence will desensitise you to the real thing. I think the crime scene photos were the grimmest - the Black Dahlia pics probably surpassed the Manson ones, the only saving grace being that the former were in b&w. Possibly worse still was the *Traces of Death* video playing in one room, showing people leaping from burning buildings, and being hacked apart. Much-needed light relief came from the Dr. Jack Kevorkian gift-certificate, and the black humour with which the Heaven's Gate suicides were depicted. However, it was an undeniable relief to escape out into the bright light of a sunny September afternoon...





Twinkie®, Twinkie®, Little Star...

"You Hostess Twinkie motherfucker!" – Living in Oblivion

As TC-trips to the States become more common, people ask us to bring stuff back for them – y'know, things you can't get in Britain. But what do you suppose is the most common request? Cheap CDs? Uncut videos? Jeans? No. More popular, even than duty-free booze, is the humble item of confectionery known as a Twinkie. The above quote shows that, while Steve Buscemi may have a lot to learn about directing recalcitrant actors, there's no denying he's aware of the iconic status possessed by this particular sweetmeat in America. Come! Celebrate with us the joy of the Twinkie!

"Yeah, just trying to handle some year old Twinkies. Yuk. What do they put in these things?" – Die Hard

Good question, Bruce. On one level, it is merely a sponge cake with a cream filling – 68% air, and 32% solids by volume, to be precise. But rarely has an item of junk food been more eloquently described than by its ingredients. They form a parade of unnatural goodness which reaches near-poetic levels, and which truly does speak for itself in eloquent support of the joys to be found in chemo-industrial confectionery.

Ingredients: Enriched Wheat Flour [Flour, Niacin (A "B" Vitamin), Ferrous Sulfate (Iron), Thiamine Mononitrate (B1), Riboflavin (B2)], Water, Sugar, Corn Syrup, High Fructose Corn Syrup, Partially Hydrogenated Vegetable and/or Animal Shortening (contains one or more of: Canola, Corn, Cottonseed or Soybean Oil, Beef Fat), Eggs, Dextrose. Contains 2% or less of: Modified Food Starch, Whey, Leavenings (Sodium Acid Pyrophosphate, Baking Soda, Monocalcium Phosphate), Salt, Starch, Yellow Corn Flour, Corn Syrup Solids, Emulsifiers (Mono and Diglycerides, Lecithin, Polysorbate 60), Dextrin, Calcium Caseinate, Sodium Stearoyl Lactylate, Cellulose Gum, Wheat Gluten, Natural and Artificial Flavors, Caramel Color, Artificial Colors (Yellow 5, Red 40), Sorbic Acid (to retain freshness).

"As you can see, Genghis greatly enjoys Twinkies because of the excellent sugar rush!" – Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure

The Twinkie celebrated its 70th anniversary this year, since it was in 1930 that Jimmy Dewar, bakery manager of the Hostess bakery in Chicago, came up with the concept. Named after the "Twinkle Toe" brand of shoe, they were two for five cents, and Twinkie v1.0 had a banana-cream, rather than vanilla-cream filling. The switch was made during World War II, due to a shortage of bananas, and the result proved popular enough to prevent Hostess changing back afterwards, save for a brief period in 1999.

"I got a Twinkie in the car. It's all yours, if you get me out of this mess." – Excess Baggage

Nowadays, Twinkies are about $3.49 for a box of ten (though prices rose during a recent haulage strike, with boxes even being auctioned off on Ebay). Hostess produces more than 500 million Twinkies a year, and you could wrap the world up one and a half times with the cellophane used to package them. They were selected last year by the White House Millennium Council to be included in the Nation's Millennium Time Capsule, representing "an object of enduring American symbolism."

"Let's say this Twinkie represents the normal amount of psycho-kinetic energy in the New York area. According to this morning's sample, it would be a Twinkie 35 ft long, weighing approximately 600 lbs." ***– Ghostbusters***

That's a big Twinkie – unfortunately, it's an implausible one. In preparing for the 70th birthday of the Twinkie, Interstate Bakeries Corp. wanted to celebrate with a huge Twinkie. But engineers brought in for the project found that you can only push sponge cake so far. "The structural integrity of the Twinkies didn't allow us to make a 25-foot edible Twinkie cake," said Stuart Smith, director of communications at Ellerbe Becket. "It would have collapsed." Also shot down was the idea of just piling Twinkies to the sky. "We actually did tests," said project leader Doug Brown. "We found that Twinkies aren't very structural and can only be stacked 6 inches high."

"I deal in the real world, Agent Mulder. You begged onto this case as part of the solution. All you've done is hand our only suspects the Twinkie Defence." – The X-Files

It may be the only junk food used successfully as a defence against a charge of murder. In 1978, former police officer Dan White walked into San Francisco City Hall and shot dead Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk. At his trial, White alleged his actions were caused by eating an excessive number of Twinkies on the morning of the incident; he claimed this caused a change in his brain chemistry, making him act on an "irresistable impulse", and so he could not be held responsible for his actions. The jury accepted this; White was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter instead.

"That is such a Twinkie defence. Shylock should get over himself." – Buffy the Vampire Slayer

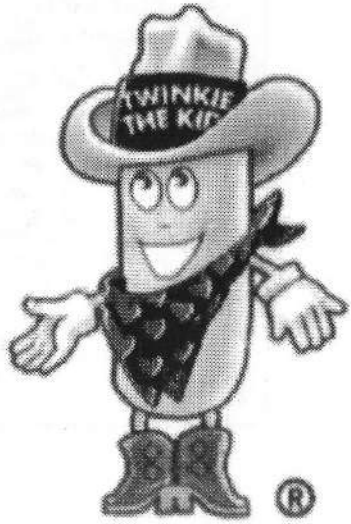
Rarely has a pseudo-dessert been the subject of so many urban legends, ranging from the true (yes, there really were chocolate iced Twinkies) through the inaccurate ("Twinkies aren't baked – they set, like jello"), to the wildly implausible. My favourite is the idea that they have an infinite shelf-life, aided by an ability to "eat" mould: if any grows on a Twinkie, the Twinkie is alleged to digest it. This may or may not be the case: experiments in TC Towers have shown they do tend to grow hard rather than going off.

"Silly customer. You cannot hurt a Twinkie!" – The Simpsons

Finally, there is one mystery which still surrounds the the Twinkie: it is a curiously North American foodstuff, one which has never been marketed over here. My attempt to find out took me to the Hostess corporation itself – though I might as well not have bothered:

"Thank you for bringing your disappointment with Twinkies to our attention. Customer feedback is a valuable asset in improving our products and we appreciate your taking the time to share your concerns with us. We will forward your mailing address to the bakery serving your area and they will follow up with you as soon as possible."

Can we spell "form letter", boys and girls? I think we can. Needless to say, nothing more was ever heard, and the mystery behind the lack of Euro-Twinkies remains unresolved...



"Twinkies and wine! Oh, that's real classy..." – Grease

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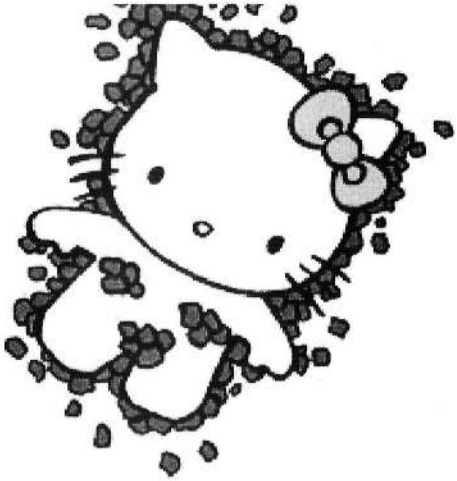
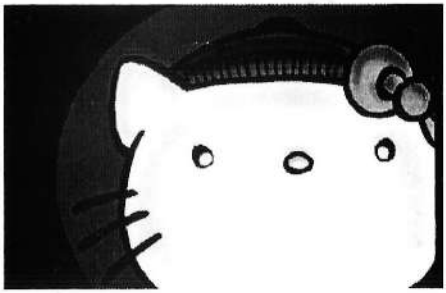
Hello Kitty Goes to the Movies

(and the TV studio...and the record shop...)



American Kitty

Kitney Spears



The Blair Kitty Project

Hello Gimpy

Reservoir Kittys

Kitty, Warrior Princess