

Journey Planet



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Dedication

Chris and I dedicate this issue to Randy Byers, our excellent friend, whose enthusiasm for fanzines drew me right into the mix. We lost Randy to cancer, and thus Worldcons, Corflus, and Potlatches will never be the same. Thanks to him, I possess several special fanzines, including one celebrating Art Widener's eightieth birthday. I'll miss Randy's writing and Hugo Award winning editorial input on *Chunga*.

Goodbye, Randy. Our conversations and short association will affect forever how I fan-write and fan-edit. I can only hope to inspire others as you've inspired me. Too soon, buddy. Way too soon.



~Editorials~

2017 is winding down, and that means *Journey Planet* is ramping up.

Because we're busy people. James is getting the Dublin WorldCon worked up. Me? I've got two rug rats who I am fairly certain are trying to figure a way to eat my face. Our wonderful team of co-editors are all doin' stuff.

And people keep dying.

Last week, we lost Randy Byers. I loved Randy, who I called J. Randrew Byers, because if you gave him a monocle, he'd have been a late 19th century plutocrat! I always looked forward to seein' him at a con. He was a great human being, and one of the reasons I love CorFlu, even if I can't make it to one these days. Wherever you are, Randy, I'm hoping you're havin' a good time with all the folks we'd talk about in fanzine lounges. I'm gonna miss ya.

In other news, this issue is a three-sided sword. First, it's about Bob Wilkins, a fine human being who I had the honor of hanging out with a few times over the years. When he passed, John Stanley, who was the host of *Creature Features* I most remember, sent me a message, something like an hour after Bob passed. I had been

chatting with him for articles for *The Drink Tank*, and I had a good cry. The second edge is the fact that Bob is a Ghost of Honor at the up-coming WorldCon 76 in San Jose. It's a fine and fitting tribute to a guy who had such a massive impact on those Bay Area fans who came of ages in the 1970s and early 1980s. The third is that I love me some *Creature Features*, both the old show, and the films that they'd show. From the classic Universal Monster movies (and the package that was offered first in 1958, with *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Mummy*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, and *The Raven* as I understand that first package, enabled the creation for *Creature Features*-like programs) to the B-films that would appear. From *The Milpitas Monster* to *Plan 9 from Outer Space* to *The Giant Brine Shrimp* to *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*, these films were nearly as beloved in their terribleness as the classic Universal Monster flicks. When I did my 100 Science Fiction Classics series for *Klaus at Gunpoint*, I was channeling a love I found for those kinds of films through *Creature Features*.

One of the films I'm writing about, *Freaks*, which I am fairly certain I first saw on *Creature Features*, and when I found it on VHS, I devoured it over and over again. I loved it. It led me to many other films, and on and on. It was a big part of my coming to the world of film history. The idea that Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror as genres all have a place in the discussion of film is not at all novel, but it is important to realize that it isn't as long-lived a philosophy as you'd think. While never as dismissed by the mainstream as literary critics and academics have been about genre, it was always up to the non-academics, the enthusiasts, the zinesters, and the folks like Stanley and Wilkins, to promote genre film history, to make it respectable, at least through the 1980s. By the 1990s, it had come fully into view that films in Sci-Fi and Horror were on equal footing with Noir and Westerns (Noir never had a B-picture phase, and while Westerns did, it was also where you had your epics up until the 1960s), and that meant we could take them seriously.

This issue deals with Bob Wilkins, with genre films, and with loving them both. It's one that is close to my heart, and one I'm glad we finally got to do!

~Christopher J Garcia



Editorial: The Virtual Babysitter

By Chuck Surface

During the 1970s, my strictly middleclass neighborhood in Campbell, California stood on the brink of becoming a Silicon Valley bedroom community. A prune orchard dominated the land later developed into the housing tract surrounding San Tomas Park. Old man Bianucci owned the barn around the block, and the Round House Delicatessen sold the freshest Italian cold-cut sandwiches in town. Our parents were furniture movers, electrical engineers, and machinists who gathered on Saturday nights to play cards, to drink beer and wine, to bitch about their bosses, and to generally connect in ways neighbors don't anymore.

Quite the ritual ensued. Who was hosting the adults this week? And where were the kids going to watch *Creature Features* after an evening of outdoors hide-and-seek? Our mothers would fill enormous grocery sacks with popcorn prepared in old-fashioned oil poppers. Our refrigerators were stocked with whatever soda was on sale at the local Mayfair Market. Cash seemed more available back then, even if our fathers hadn't earned the advanced degrees

now necessary to inspire Human Resources to even pass gas in your direction. Certainly they saved a small fortune on babysitters, since Bob Wilkins performed that task virtually as we lay on our sleeping bags, completely entranced while he schooled us in the esoterica of classic horror and science fiction. Although never in the room per se, he was the best damned babysitter ever.

Bob essentially kept us in line with films, interviews, serials, featurettes, and we watched intently in those pre-VCR days without rewind. We shut the hell up to avoid missing important lines in movies or behind-the-scenes facts offered by Boris Karloff, William Shatner, Forrest J. Ackerman, or whomever Bob was interviewing that week. Damn it, this might be the only time ever that Bob will play *Reptilicus*, so pipe down and cool your shit. I'm in church, you bastards! Now you can watch actors chew scenery and victims on any number of platforms, but not back in the day, whippersnappers. Talk about a nerd's version of walking ten miles in the snow. I waited decades to see *Equinox* and *The Amazing Colossal Man* again, and did so when they finally became available on DVD or for free on Youtube. Neither has aged well, of course, but the point is everything is available everywhere, anytime now. No more waiting and hoping, no more perusing the stills in Denis Gifford's *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies*, and wondering with great pain, "Oh, when's Wilkins going to play that one?" Bob had us hooked, and being the only candy man providing the weird goodies we craved, he served as our virtual babysitter.

Now I possess six DVDs containing highlights from Bob's heyday, and now Worldcon 76 in San Jose, California is honoring Bob Wilkins, longing to educate younger generations about his important place in Bay Area fandom. How happy I am to have co-edited this special issue dedicated to him, to *Creature Features*, and to horror in general. I'm still in the old neighborhood. If you've got an ancient oil popper, come on by. Bob the sitter doesn't charge for larger groups.



Thank You, Bob Wilkins by Kimberly Lindbergs

Two men have changed my life and got me hooked on movies, my dad and the Bay Area horror host, Bob Wilkins. I talk about my father a lot. My dad is responsible for turning me into a cinema junkie. He loved movies and passed that love on to me when I was just a very young and impressionable kid. What I haven't mentioned is that my dad and I didn't have much time together because his life was cut short by a drunk driver when I was only eight years old.

Eight years may not seem very long, but by the time I was eight I already knew most of names of the major stars in Universal and Hammer horror films thanks to my dad. He also taught me to appreciate great TV shows like *The Avengers*, the original *Star Trek* and *The Wild Wild West*, which he watched religiously. We saw many classic monster movies, disaster flicks and low-budget science fiction films together at the local drive-in and on our tiny black-and-white TV at home.

After my dad was killed unexpectedly, my world turned upside down. My mom moved my younger brother and me to the San Francisco Bay Area to be near her family, and I didn't have anyone to watch horror movies with me anymore. I desperately missed having my dad sitting next to me on our couch in front of the TV every Saturday. He used to be able to answer any question I had about how to kill a vampire or a werewolf, and he loved making jokes while the movies were on so we would laugh together a lot at the bad makeup or terrible acting found in some low-budget films. He was also there to hold my hand if I got too frightened by a movie and tell me everything would be fine and that the horror on the screen was all just "movie magic."

After my father died, the films I loved watching took on new meaning for me and for a short while I was too frightened by the very real horrors I had experienced to enjoy the scary movies I had grown to love.

That all changed when I discovered Bob Wilkins' fantastic *Creature Features* show on television. Bob Wilkins was the Bay Area's premiere horror host in the seventies and he had a great sense of humor about the movies he showed. He played lots of terrific films, but he also played lots of terribly fun B-movies and he often opened his show by reminding viewers that there were probably better movies being shown on other channels.

In some ways watching movies with Bob Wilkins was almost like watching them with my dad. Unlike many other horror hosts Bob didn't dress-up in any costumes, and he would casually sit in his rocking chair smoking a huge cigar while cracking lots of jokes about the movies he was playing. Bob couldn't hold my hand when the movies got really scary, but I could rely on him to make me giggle during the next commercial break and remind me that I was only watching "movie magic."

Bob's *Creature Features* show had one of the best theme songs ever that ended with the great line, "The creature's gonna get ya tonight!" which somehow managed to scare me silly when I was a kid. The song was really funky and very '70s, and you can enjoy it yourself by checking out the original *Creature Features* opening, which Bob posted himself on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhPBs4tZaAQ>

With Bob Wilkins as my guide I was introduced to some terrific films and low-budget B-movies. Some of the movies shown on *Creature Features* include *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Godzilla vs. Mothra* (1964), *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Homicidal* (1961), *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957), *Village of the Giants* (1965), *Mark of the Devil* (1970), *She* (1965), and lots of other Hammer and Universal horror films.

Bob Wilkins taught me that no matter how bad a movie was, you could still find things to enjoy about it. At the very least, the worst movies he showed were often filled with lots of unintentional laughs that he seemed to enjoy pointing out. His way of looking at low-budget films helped shape the way I saw them, and he made me appreciate movies that most film critics would probably find intolerable.

On *Creature Features*, Bob often interviewed great celebrity guests like Christopher Lee, Ray Harryhausen, George Romero, Leonard Nimoy, and Forest J. Ackerman. These interesting interviews with the people behind the movies and TV shows I loved gave me a whole new appreciation for what I was watching. Thanks to Bob's show, I started understanding what directors did and how special effects worked. *Creature Features* was always lots of fun to watch, but I almost always learned something new from watching the show as well.

After the huge success of *Star Wars*, Bob Wilkins created the fantastic *Captain Cosmic* show in 1977, which I also watched regularly when I was a kid. On *Captain Cosmic*, Bob would dress up in a poorly fitting superhero costume and introduce a parade of Japanese science fiction movies and television shows with his trusty sidekick, Wonder Robot 2T2. Thanks to *Captain Cosmic* I was shown great shows like *Ultraman*, *Johnny Sokko and His Flying Robot*, *Star Blazers*, and *Thunderbirds*.

Sadly for Bob Wilkins' Bay Area fans, he decided to retire early, and he left *Creature Features* in 1979 and then *Captain Cosmic* in early 1980. The *Captain Cosmic* show came to an abrupt end, but John Stanley took over hosting duties for *Creature Features* until the show was finally canceled in 1984. I also really liked John Stanley and

appreciated his own take on movies even though it was probably hard trying to fill Bob Wilkins' big shoes. I continued to enjoy many great movies with John Stanley as my host.

The golden age of horror hosts may be over but they are remembered fondly by fans like myself who grew up with them and were introduced to countless movies thanks to their entertaining shows.

It's safe to say that without Bob Wilkins and his terrific shows, Creature Features and Captain Cosmic, I may have forgotten what movie magic was all about and Cinebeats would have never have been created. In some ways Bob unknowingly helped me work through my dad's sudden death, and he taught me to enjoy spooky movies all over again.

For more on Bob Wilkins, visit his tribute site at <http://www.bobwilkins.net/>

THE BOB WILKINS SHOW

The beautiful people are out on Saturday nights. Others watch the Bob Wilkins Show right after Newsbeat.



PETALUMA ARGUS-COURIER

"94.5% OF THE CHICKEN POPULATION WATCHES CREATURE FEATURES"

LAFAYETTE SQUIRE

"NO COMMENT"



CREATURE FEATURES

HOST BOB WILKINS

TONIGHT/9PM

"THE VULTURE"





Bob Wilkins Interviews Forrest J Ackerman
on Creature Features
Transcribed by Christopher J Garcia

You didn't think I wouldn't find a way to shoehorn Forry Ackerman into this issue about Bob Wilkins, did you? Forry appeared on *Creature Features* several times, and after Bob's death (or maybe it was Forry's), the Psychotronix Film Festival opened by playing an interview with Forry that Bob had done in 1978, I believe.

Fans now appreciate horror hosts as never before, and an impressive amount of material is being found. One group has managed to discover a complete copy of the *Creature Features* episode *The City of Death*, complete with commercials and including the interview segment between Forry and Bob. This interview centers on talk about legendary monster actors, and Bob and Forry talking, and talking, and talking . . .

I will not lie. I shed a tear or two transcribing this. I just miss those two dudes so much.

Bob: Forrest J Ackerman is back with us again this evening, and I thought we might reminisce about your some of your experiences with some of the greatest horror stars of all time. How well did you know, let's say, Bela Lugosi, for instance?

Forry: I knew him the last three years of his life. I'm wearing his Dracula ring and have most of his scrapbooks and his cape. The first time I met him, I was able to bring back a portion of his past back to him. As a kid, I had corresponded with the President of Universal Studios and so in 1932 I think it was Lugosi had made the Edgar Allan Poe film, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. I was a collector even then, and I had managed to get -- in those days instead of sound on a strip of film, it was on huge disks -- 33 1/3, but oddly enough it started in the center and worked its way out. I went to see Lugosi, he was about in his 70th year when I met him, and he was quite deaf, and I brought his voice back to him across about forty years, and he listened to it there, and he heard himself say something like "My name is Doctor Morocco, and I am no sideshow charlatan. So if you're looking for the usual hocus-pocus, just go to the box office and get your money back." Now, time went on, he dreamed of making *Dracula* in one definitive version in 3-D, the bats could be flying out in the air, in color and stereophonic sound. That didn't materialize, made his final film, it had a Hollywood premiere. It was called *The Black Sleep*. Oddly enough, it was just a few weeks later that he entered the final black sleep and was at his funeral, but I remember that night quite clearly, at the premiere of his picture. He liked to smoke heavily, so it was necessary to sit up on the mezzanine, and I was with him together with a young chap who had been quite an aid to him in the last three years of his life. We came down the stairs with him, and as most motion picture personalities, he was a proud man, so he disdained wearing any glasses, and it was rather a perilous descent for him. He was kind of an old brittle man then, had no idea that

the eyes of the world were on him just at that moment until some television news people called and said, "Oh ,Mr. Lugosi, would you come right here we'd like to interview you." so he sorta whispered in our ears "Boys, point me in the right direction," and I said, "Well now, Bela, you just walk right straight ahead into the camera," and we got him set up, and it was really remarkable to see what a thorough Thespian he was, because here was kinda of a broken desiccated old man but when he knew the world wanted him one more time he just straightened right up there with the cape, and once again he was the proud tall figure of Count Dracula, and he strode right towards the camera and thrilled his millions of fans. Quite a delight the way he performed right up until the end of his life, and Karloff too. He was the master.

Bob: How did you come by Lugosi's ring, and you have one of his capes?

Forry: Yes, a cape and many memorabilia. Well, it's rather a long story, I don't know quite how I can sum it up. It was rather a matter of inheritance. There was a young fellow who had looked after him, and we both did what we could for Lugosi, and as a result when it was all over, bit by bit, I came into possession of his phonograph records, and the albums. He had kept remarkable track of his own career. You know he was scheduled to play the Frankenstein monster before --

Bob: Yes, I understand that.

Forry: -- before Karloff.

Bob: And what about Karloff? What was your relationship with --?

Forry: Well, there are two magic moments in my life with Karloff. I saw him perhaps nine times all together, but this very pen is quite meaningful to me because Karloff signed a photo for me right after he had spent one hour making a phonograph album and every word that had come out was one I had put into it. I had little

dreamed that in San Francisco on Christmas day 1931 when I went to see *Frankenstein* and a star was born, a new horror personality. Karloff and I went on to write a script and he would narrate it, and after he did what is called *An Hour With Boris Karloff and His Friends*, we were all clustering around him and congratulating him and someone said, "Well, Mr. Karloff, we're aware of your advanced years," I believe he was about 79 at the time, and he had just performed here remarkably for an hour. He made no flubs, an incredible performance, "To what do you attribute this?" and he looked in the air pensively for a moment, he said, "Well, I don't know gentlemen, I guess just good clean living . . . up to the age of six." He had quite a sense of humor, and I guess he really needed it, because he put himself through the agonies of the damned in the last year of his life. In five weeks he made four films. I was on the set a good deal of the time. The last motion picture he ever made was called *The Incredible Invasion*. And he would arrive in an automobile, get directly into a wheelchair, as Lionel Barrymore had to do before him, to act. He an oxygen tank by his side at all times, the pictures were to be made in Mexico, but his doctors wouldn't permit it due to the altitude, so he would sit there in obvious agony, memorizing his lines, but when the cameras called, he'd be on his feet and do his scene, and since none of us were familiar with the script, I recall we almost rushed into the picture and ruined the shot because he was called upon at one point in the script when apparently everything was going along just fine, and he was supposed to clutch his heart and fall against a door, and it could have been real, but I think it was right after that that there was a mother present, and she had brought one of her four children with her. Incidentally, she had checked out monster movies with some psychiatrists and instructors and so on and had got the green light on it, so it was okay, and she did a feature on it called *Monster Movies Are Good For My Children*, so she had brought along her one young son, Ricky, he was about 8 I believe at the time, and it was just as though he was being taken to meet Santa Claus, and Karloff finally finished his scene, and the mother brought the young boy toward him, fear and trembling, he held out his little hand, "Oh, Mr. Karloff, I've waited for this moment all

my life!” Karloff was just great. He put his arm around him and said to the photographer, “I want to have a picture taken with this boy.”

Bob: A very gentle man.

Forry: Yeah, and he took off the mask of the monster, and there was Santa Claus behind it.

Bob: You recently heard from Lon Chaney Jr. He called you up?

Forry: Talked with him on the phone. Yes, I had called to the attention of the monster lovers of the world who were particularly fond of him because of his role of the Wolf Man. They know him as Larry Talbot the lycanthrope, and he’s been in and out of the hospital. He’s had an operation on an eye and generally not been in good health at all, so I called that to the attention of his fans and created a kind of Frankenstein of my own. One day there we had fifty five letters for him. It peaked for a week. It was hovering right around fifties, and two and a half months or so later there’s still letters coming in every day, so his wife called me the other day, and she put him on himself, and actually this would be an excellent time to let his fans know exactly how much he’s appreciated those letters.

Bob: They can just write to the show.

Forry: Just write to Lon Chaney care of the magazine or to this show if you like, forward ‘em to me and I’ll see that they get to him.

Bob: Is he suffering from the same ailment as his father?

Forry: He’s been cured of something I believe rather rare in modern times, beriberi, something I thought only sailors out at sea contracted, and when I spoke with him, he was very optimistic that toward the end of July he’ll be going back to Warren, Ohio, and

appearing in the famous horror spoof, the play *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

Bob: So he is going back to the theatre, so he must be --

Forry: If he feels sufficiently recovered, yes.

Bob: How about some of the other folks, Peter Lorre comes to mind. Christopher Lee.

Forry: Well, I'm carrying around and telling the time by Peter Lorre's last wristwatch.

Bob: Is that right?

Forry: Let me . . . well, Vincent Price, and Lorre, and Karloff were all together in the spoof that was made on *The Raven*. And you know, Lorre was the smallest of the lot, so he had to do a little something extra to call himself to the attention of the audience. And I recall there was one scene that was simplicity itself. It required nothing out of Vincent Price, Boris Karloff, and Peter Lorre, except to walk across a bridge. That was the way it was written. But he made sure that the world was aware of him above and beyond the others, because he would go walking across the bridge and take a few steps, and he'd manage to get a little stumble into there.

And at first, I took that to be just a mistake, but by the time they've gone through the scene three or four times, and each time a little stumble is in there, you know --

Bob: He stole the scene.

Forry: Peter Lorre is an old scene stealer.

Bob: Do you think some of the stars coming up today in horror films will ever replace the greats?

Forry: Oh, that's --

Bob: Pretty hard to say at this time.

Forry: Well, Christopher Lee I'd say is well on his way, and Peter Cushing. They have a firm hold on the hearts of their fans. And Vincent Price, definitely too, he's made . . . well, he's beyond his one hundredth film now, going strong. A real tour de force in that recent *Theater of Blood*.

Bob: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Forry: I would sort of look to the pages of my own magazine, and people who are growing up. Oddly enough, one of my readers cast me in a film lately called *Schlock*.

Bob: Schlock?

Forry: That'll probably show up here someday. That's short for "Schlockthropus," a kind of a missing link that gives everybody --

Bob: You made *Queen of Blood*, you were in *Queen of Blood*.

Forry: I was in that with . . . I played Basil Rathbone's assistant. I couldn't possibly wind up on the cutting room floor on that, because I'm the climax. If you cut me out, the picture has no ending.

Bob: You were in *The Time Travelers*.

Forry: *Time Travelers*, yes. And, actually, I did a day's work in George Pal's last picture, *The Power*, but that one did end up on the cutting room floor, and Pal was rather upset about that. He swore a mighty oath that he would give me a part in his next picture. Now, the problem is that his next picture, *Logan's Run*, a story of the twenty-first century; there isn't one single character in it who is older than 21.

Bob: Uh oh.

Forry: And that's gotta be kind of a miracle of make-up if they can make me.

Bob: Maybe you can deal into the make-up that you have in your house there.

Bob: I want to thank you for being with us. We have to join our feature in just a moment. And when you're in the Bay Area again, for another science fiction convention, perhaps you'll give us your honor and drop by?

Forry: Yes. Happy to.

Bob: I'd hoped that Forrest J. Ackerman would open up a little bit. He's a rather shy and reserved man, and . . . but he had a few things there to say this evening.





on Todd Browning's *Freaks*
by Chris Garcia

The most important thing about the film *Freaks* is that it was never a big hit until it got into the right hands, and part of what was needed was a counterculture that didn't exist in the 1930s. The most powerful aspect of this film is that it was either incredibly exploitative of its cast or it was one of the rare times when people outside the norms of society were given an actual chance to tell a story where they were the heroes, and the "normies" were the heavies. The best part may be the documenting of the side show acts of the little person Angelo Rossitto, of the Half-Boy Johnny Eck, and the conjoined Hilton Sisters, all types who were huge, important parts of the sideshow scene of the 1920s and 1930s. The classic Human Torso moment where he actually lights his own cigarette (Supposedly in the extended version, he rolled his cigarette, which he did on stage for years) and the pinheads all appear giving the taste for their long-running acts. Having those moments documented in a feature film is key, because it allows us to know what happened in the past through an approachable medium, and with sideshow

performers, these are widely-known individuals because there's been a lot of studies and research into the history of the sideshow.

At the same time, *Freaks* contained a story that was being told within that document. The idea here is that a trapeze artist, Cleopatra, a gold digger basically, seduces the sideshow's lead little person, Hans, because she finds out that he has a large inheritance. Our trapeze artist is actually conspiring with the strong man, Hercules, to kill Hans and take all the money. She poisons his wine and other people in the sideshow are doing their thing, and they're trying to keep her from taking advantage of him, but they also fear her because she is an outsider to them. She is a normal among a sea of sideshow performers. There's the classic moment where she's married Hans and they have this sort of initiation ceremony and they're passing around wine and they're saying "We accept her, we accept her, one of us, one of us, gooble gobble, gooble gobble, one of us, one of us." And she freaks out, which leads Hans to basically realize that she's a beast, and now he's starting to get sick but gets better because of various things. Here's the key to it: when it is revealed that Cleopatra is the bad guy, really what it comes down to, the freaks attack and they transform her into the human duck and it is a grotesque, practically Hieronymus Bosch like image. But the moment when they're pursuing her and Hercules is just insane. There's a moment where we see Angelo Rossitto coming at Hercules with a switchblade, and it's with an overwhelming sense of lust for vengeance. An amazing moment.

And again, in a scene included in the extended version, the original ending had the freaks castrating the strong man and that's just, wow, but alongside all of this, we have the interactions, "slice of life" instances, about what goes on off-stage, in the sideshow, in that environment, when you're living in it. This is an area that is not widely presented, though I recommend the marvelous documentary *Gibtown*, about the winter home for many of these performers. Moments like the Bearded Lady who has a baby and a really funny little bit, the Stork Woman is actually the one who informs everyone that the Bearded Lady has delivered her kid. We have the Hilton Sisters doing this great romance bit, which they pull off because they were actually solid actors, and the two of them have

two separate marriages going on and the interaction between their bodies, sharing physical sensations and the like. We see little things, like Frances O'Connor, the Armless Wonder, brushing her hair and getting on her make-up, and Eck doing his routines. All these things that are presented in a way that just shows them living their lives, even if the Hilton Sisters' story gets a little more dramatic, but really it's mostly about people who have been forced to have come to a mobile enclave where they are accepted for who they are, even if it is formed as a way to make money for the circus owners who hawk them as freaks. It's the realization that in that society they have created around this shared job that they have created is an actual society, a regular society with rules, friendships, families, and rivalries. It's a really interesting view because we don't get that, particularly in horror films.

And yes, this was marketed as a horror film and if you trace the path of the film, it absolutely is a horror film. There is no doubt about that, but why it's a horror film is an interesting question, because I think MGM saw this as a horror film because people were being confronted with the freaks. I think what they saw as the element of horror was the collection of people outside of society living as if they were a real society, in a way buying into the expectations of the viewer for what a society is supposed to look like. I think that that's what MGM brass saw as the horror aspect. Whereas to me, the aspect of horror here is about the levels of which we, we as the normies will sink to get ours. This shows us how we treat people who are different than us, and how violently that they can come back on us and frankly should. The view from the MGM heads must have been "We're presenting the horror of freaks" and Browning seemed to be trying to say "I have seen the freaks, and they are the ones in the audience."

The end image is insane and frightening. The way that we are presented with these characters is super impressive, but at the same time, I feel as if they are not necessarily being exploited. I'm also not 100% sure they're being celebrated. I feel as if here you have a film that was seen by Browning, Todd Browning who had directed *Dracula* and basically kicked off the entire universal monster concept, saw this as the horror of the invasion, that the

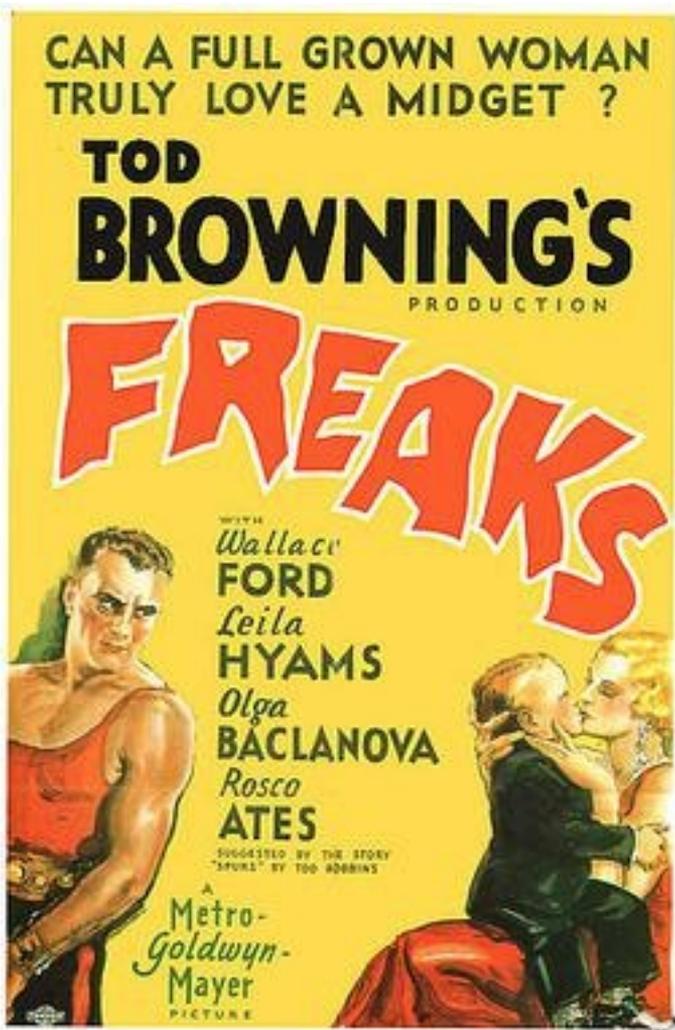
trapeze artist and the Strong Man's incursion into the world of the side show, of the freaks. They are obviously the villains, but Browning is making them pay for their indecency, their greed, their murderous intent. I think he saw it as these are people who are not of the other, who are attempting to make themselves a part of the other's community to take advantage of what they have made for themselves. MGM saw it as, everyone likes to stare at the freaks, so let's give them that and the creatives can make a story around it. They saw that the villains are still the normies though the horror would be found in the fact that these characters we go to see in the sideshow are capable of turning into a murderous horde. Browning's horror is in the inhumanity of humanity; MGM's is in the danger of those who are different. MGM's version of this is an exploitative film. I don't think Browning made this an exploitation film, and I think that aspect is very difficult to do with a film like this. Browning was sympathetic towards the Freaks, and probably making a pretty stern commentary on the general exploitation of sideshow performers by circus and carnival owners, none of whom would ever be a part of the society of sideshow performers.

The story they made was great, and the way it was told was great. The cinematography is incredible, and while it suffers the same problem that a lot of the early sound films suffer, it is much more watchable than most of those era.

Freaks earned a place on the National Film Registry in 1994, and deservedly so. I think the National Film Registry was created for films like this - films that survive and thrived after their initial release, because while it bombed, an absolute failure, once the '50s came around, and the advent of TV, it could have a second life. By the '60s, it started to get aired on shows like *Creature Features* and once that you got that, you started to find new appreciation. Once MGM sold the rights to it, it actually made the cult film circuit in the '70s and '80s; it lived with *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, *Monster-A-Go-Go*, and many others on college campuses and in second-hand movie theatres. The counterculture, and particularly the '60s counterculture like the one that grew up around San Francisco, took it in, and it makes sense why viewers would come to this film. It is a film about what happens when normal society inserts itself where it doesn't belong.

What story would have been more appealing to the hippies? They hated the tourists of flooded into Height-Ashbury, those that would come in to slum among the great unwashed.

Audiences should view *Freaks* with the idea that this is a view of a world we don't normally see, and we might not understand what's going on beyond the surface story, but we must know that it is there. We must look at how the film is given to us as the horror element, whether it is a horror film about what happens to "us" when we encounter "them," or if truly it is "us" who are the monsters when we impose ourselves on to "them."





Plan 9 from Outer Space by Christopher J Garcia

“Don’t let Ted Turner deface my movie with his crayons” -- Orson Welles

Rarely, if ever, are the colorized versions of films better than the original. In fact, I can think of only one presentation of a colorized film where it feels right: *Things to Come*. Ray Harryhausen argues that the filmmakers would have made this film in color if they’d had the budget. The color version, made available alongside the original black and white, is much richer, and with Harryhausen supervising the colorization, it felt both natural and right.

Now, there have been many great films where the process seriously damaged the enjoyment, like *Topper* and *It’s a Wonderful Life*. The colors never feel right, the visual interest built by the cinematographer in black and white is often lost, completely buried. But what if the movie being colorized was, in fact, terrible to begin with? That’s the situation with *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, and it was converted into 3D to boot!

Cinequest premiered the newly 3Ded, colorized version of *Plan 9*, and I was there, man!

The original is a film of little quality, though not entirely without its charms. The effects are cheap, the flying saucer suspended from fishing line that you can practically see. The acting is Charlie McCarthy-level wooden. The story is nearly nonsensical, what I could ever make out of it. It's a disaster, but director Ed Wood did something amazing: he made it undeniably watchable. There is an incredible amount of joy to the filmmaking, and even the acting. Everyone seems to be having such a good time, as if they've always wanted to do exactly what they were doing. There's actually a fair level of visual interest to the way it's shot, though the camerawork is not at all fluid. The lighting has something going for it, and the judicious use of fog is kinda spooky. Hell, even some of the costumes are awesome!

But it's still a garbage movie; it's a fun garbage movie, but garbage nonetheless.

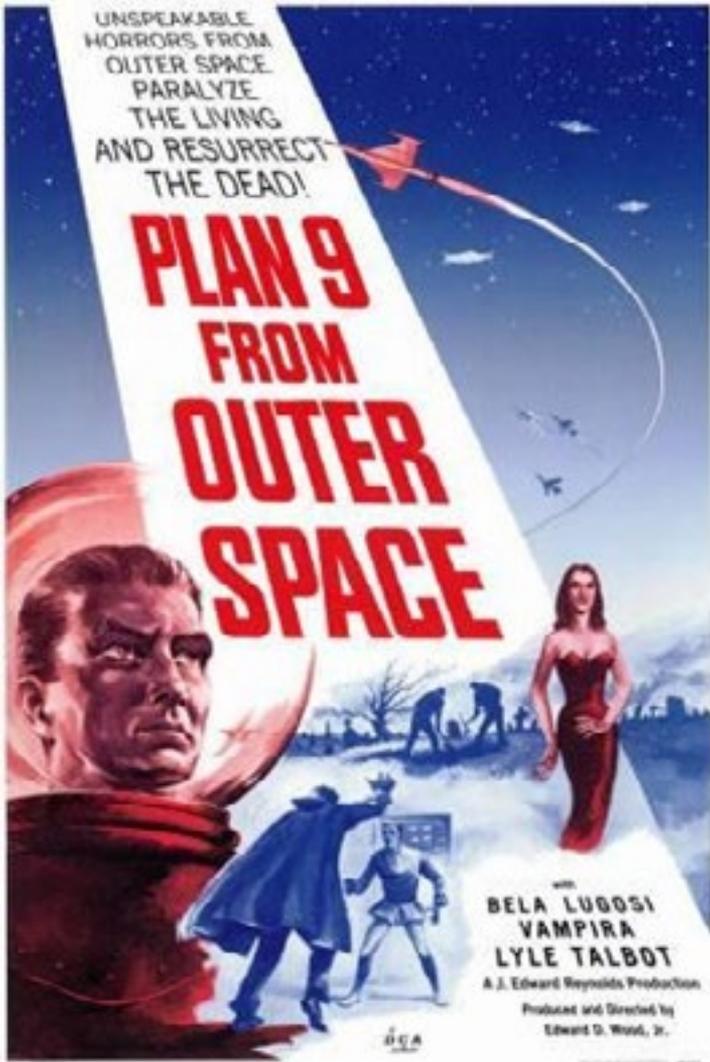
And thus, there is the question: is it okay to colorize such a film, much less make it into a 3D spectacle?

I 100% argue that it was not only okay, but the exact right thing to do with *Plan 9*.

It's not a question of the original vision, because Ed Wood's vision was so much grander than what he could ever have given us. He would have 100% gone for color, and if he could have pulled it off, would almost certainly have done it in 3D. The era was right for it, certainly, but with the amount of money and talent he had, he was incredibly limited. The idea that he would have passed up a gimmick that would have certainly made his film better is silly, but what's more, he understood color very well, and when he could get a bit of money together later in his life, he made color films. There is a lot of precedent to this getting a color version.

Now, what of the newly 3D version? It is an absolute blast! You see, you know how I said there was some visual interest, how the camera wasn't fluid? All that plays beautifully into the idea of 3D, and the colorization also gives depth to the set-ups, actually drawing more interest out of the static shots. That alone makes all the post-processing worthwhile, but there's more. It really does make it accessible to a younger generation, which is something that gets overlooked. I can't show black-and-white cartoons to my kids,

as an example. They'll watch the color Mickey Mouse cartoons, but I tried *Steamboat Willie* and they were completely tuned out. It was a shame, and maybe they'll outgrow it, but Evelyn never took to black-and-white either, so there's that. Color, and to a lesser degree 3D, renews these films, it brings them to a new audience that can accept them, and as long as the original versions are still available, I don't see anything wrong with doing so, especially with a turd like *Plan 9 from Outer Space*!



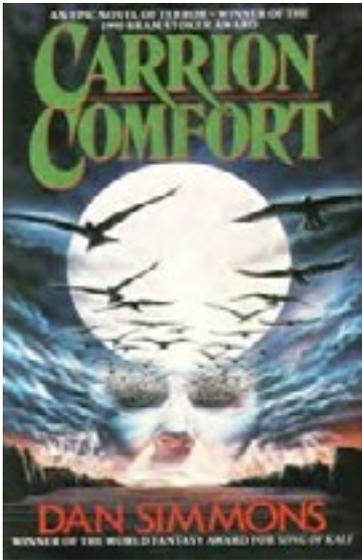


Paperbacks from Hell by Grady Hendrix: A Review (of Sorts) By Chuck Surface

When not watching Bob Wilkins or his peers, fans were reading. Novelist Grady Hendrix, most noted for *Horrorstör* and *My Best Friend's Exorcism*, casts a nostalgic eye to his forebearers with *Paperbacks from Hell: The Twisted History of '70s and '80s Horror Fiction*. This was the generation that spawned Stephen King, Dean Koontz, John Saul, and Clive Barker. Hendrix doesn't spend much energy on those gentlemen, however. Instead he concerns himself with those who haven't survived the decades, but who haunt out-of-print memories and send twisted aficionados scouring used bookstores, Amazon, or eBay for cheap but passable copies.

Hendrix's tongue-and-cheek plot summaries of novels in subgenres ranging from the satanic, to real estate nightmares, to creepy kids, to splatterpunk spur continued reading, but interested parties will revel in the abundance of schlock covers from the day. This one's going on to my coffee table, right next to *The Art of the Brothers Hildebrandt* and *D'Aulaire's Book of Norse Myths*. To celebrate,

I present ten novels of the kinds appearing in *Paperbacks from Hell*, whether Hendrix discusses them or not. A few I might read again.



***Carrion Comfort* by Dan Simmons**

“Imagine that among us lives...,” starts many a horror tale. Perhaps among us are a species masquerading as people, or humans with special powers who may or may not wish society well? Simmons’s spiritually hideous band is psychic vampires who can possess the bodies of others, devolving them into slaves. The most powerful congregate once a year for a chess-based combat operating, of course, through their slaves.

Carrion Comfort sticks in my mind, because here I first encountered Kohlberg’s Scale of Morality. In short, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. earn high marks, occupying the highest category on Kohlberg’s scale, those concerned with universal justice for all with scant thought for self. At the other end of the spectrum we find the completely self-absorbed, those who use power only for selfish gain -- welcome to the realm of sociopaths. Guess which end Kohlberg would place Simmon’s psychic vampires?

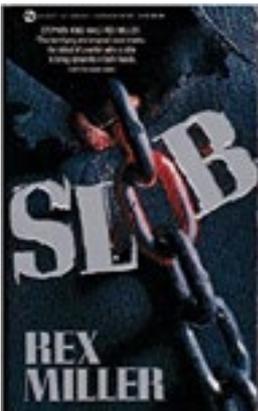
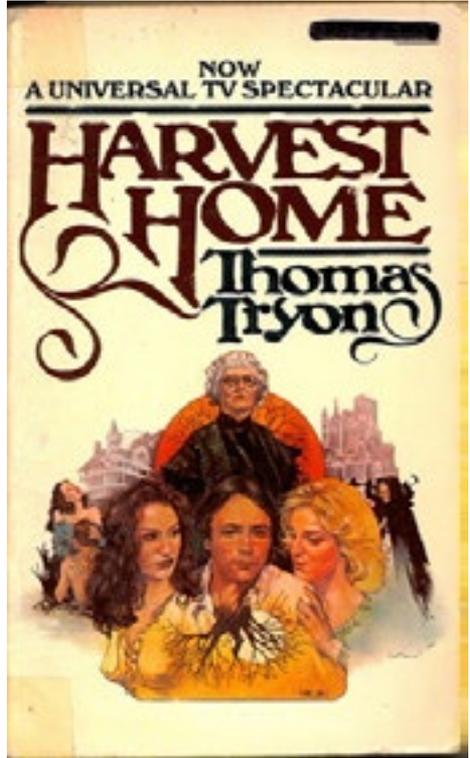
Simmons says much about politics and power that remains glaringly relevant given our current situation in Washington, DC. He does include individuals immune to the vampires, but even these inspire dread. Due to Simmons having won several major awards, *Carrion Comfort* remains in print.

“...welcome to the realm of sociopaths”

Harvest Home by Thomas Tryon

Remember the television mini-series starring Bette Davis? Ned Constantine moves his family to Cornwall Coombe where the villagers follow the old ways, rituals surrounding nature, especially corn. If *The Wicker Man*, *Children of the Corn*, and *The Lottery* come to mind then you understand the subgenre in question.

The New York Book Review Classics imprint has reprinted Tryon's more famous for *The Other*, also adapted to film featuring a very young John Ritter. I wish they'd reissue *Harvest Home* as well if only because I'm sentimental for stories with pagan themes. I question, however, how well the story might have aged given an increased tolerance for paganism in contemporary society, and hence a sensitivity to negative portrayals. We still read and watch *Children of the Corn*, so why not *Harvest Home*? Get it back in print!

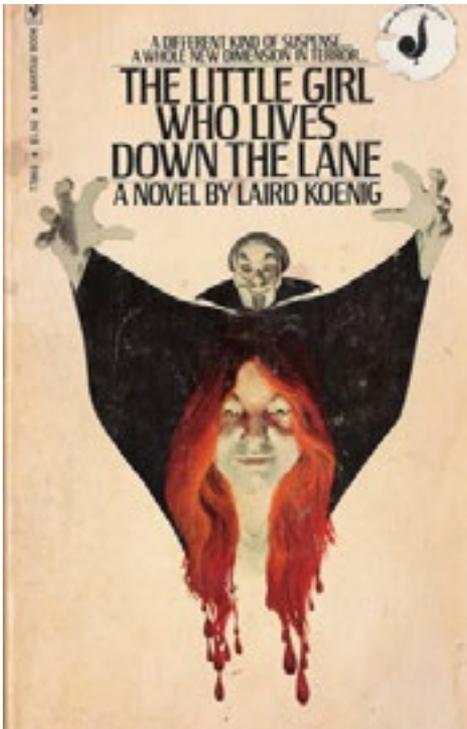


Slob by Rex Miller

I read *Slob* while on winter break during my senior year at San Jose State University. A straight-up splatterpunk escapade featuring a 500-pound anti-hero on a killing spree, *Slob* has survived as a cult classic, even if out of print. Our “hero,” Daniel “Chaingang” Bunkowski, murders, rapes, and cannibalizes with abandon. Miller draws from the same well as Tobe Hooper

before him and the makers of the *Hostel* series after him. Let's just call it torture porn, a subgenre that angers and disgusts rather than provoking the thoughtful dread inherent to other brands of horror. Given that I only lasted ten minutes with *Hostel*, I wouldn't read *Slob* again. I can't watch *Animal House* anymore either, but that's an entirely different article. In either case, hello, Suck Fairy.

I don't understand the widespread allure of slasher films. *Psycho* and *Silence of the Lambs* work wonderfully for me, but most leave me feeling depressed and questioning the human race. That Freddy Krueger, a child molester, has achieved anti-hero status and returns in film after film to torment former victims and to prey on new ones challenges my sobriety. I can't celebrate this trend in horror that in the 1980s we began calling splatterpunk. I'm not so sensitive to the gore, but the attitude, the consequence-free air toward those practicing our deepest fears, kind of pisses me off. Should Leatherface come at me with that chainsaw I'd punch him in the face. I need deeper fare, significance beyond wicked depredation for shock value alone. Sorry, Wes and Tobe. That's how I roll.



***The Little Girl Who Lived Down the Lane* by Laird Koenig**

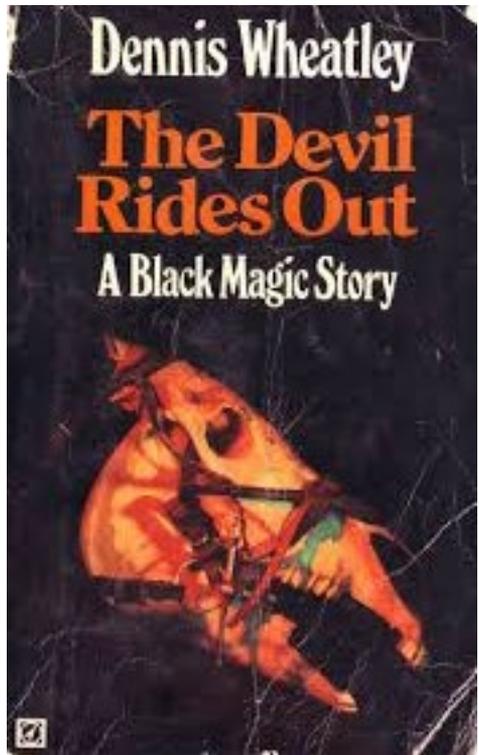
Unlike with *Slob*, the controversial elements in *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane* move beyond debased spectacle to considering the relationship of adolescents and adults in society. According to Koenig, this relationship isn't a good one. Thirteen-year old Rynn Jacob's father dies, but to avoid living with an unwanted guardian, she pretends he's still alive. Frank Hallet, the son of her landlord and a sexual predator, hones in on her, and

other adults treat her abusively. Being precocious, however, Rynn survives well, better than many adults I know, in fact. No doubt she'd live admirably, completely able to care for herself even surrounded by such awful adults.

Jodie Foster portrays Rynn in the film, with Martin Sheen playing creepy Frank Hallet. How unsettling to remember that Foster went from *Taxi Driver* to *The Little Girl Who Lives down the Lane* to *Bugsy Malone* before doing a 180-degree turn to star in Disney's *Freaky Friday*. I love *Freaky Friday*, and I never could understand why my mother's unease when watching it with me. Years later, after viewing Foster's earlier work, I understood her predicament. Nonetheless, all three make for an interesting triple feature.

***The Devil Rides Out* by Dennis Wheatley**

By now you may have gathered that I have a soft spot for satanic stories. From the late 1960s to around 1980, entertainment media exploded with films, television shows, books, and comics that employed Satan directly or played off related demonic elements. *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist* stand as premiere examples in both literature and on the screen. When the Comics Code Authority loosened its rules for comic content, Marvel introduced



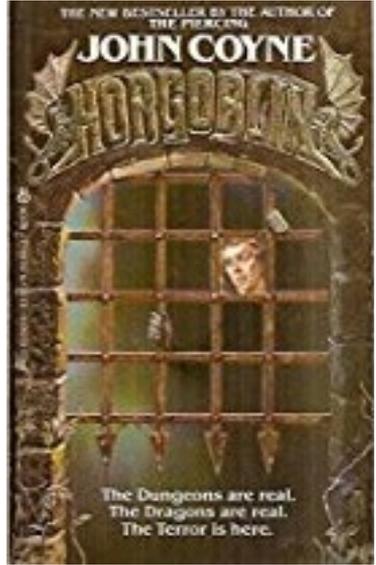
Daimon Hellstrom, the Son of Satan, to the world. Satan himself also appeared frequently in that company's *Tomb of Dracula*.

Enter Dennis Wheatley and his Duke de Richelieu, a tireless campaigner against Satanists and dark happenings. Wheatley's among

my favorite authors handling these themes, and today interested parties can procure omnibuses containing *The Devil Rides Out*, *To the Devil a Daughter*, and others. And, yes, we have screen adaptations. Christopher Lee awesomely brings de Richelieu to life in *The Devil Rides Out*, a Hammer era classic.

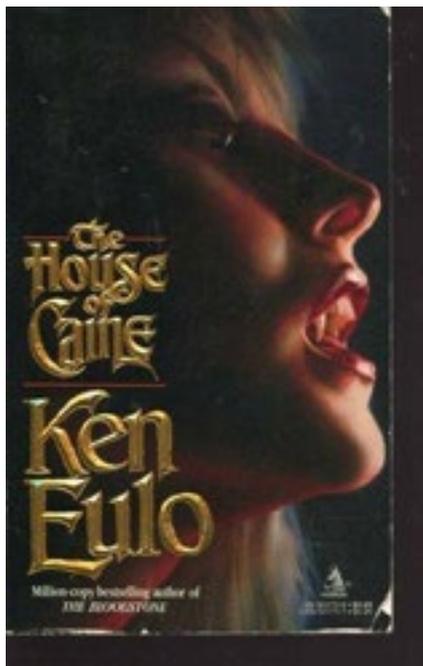
Hobgoblin by John Coyne

Hobgoblin first appeared in 1981, during the heyday of Dungeons and Dragons, and Coyne's plot explores what happens with fantasy and reality begin to combine for a role-playing game devotee, Scott Gardiner. Does Scott suffer from schizophrenia or a neurosis stemming from his need for such games? Table-top role players and LARPers everywhere could cringe rightfully at the implications here. The merging is real, of course, so matters progress beyond the psychological. The book cover says it all: "The dungeons are real. The dragons are real. The terror is here."



From age twelve to seventeen I played *Dungeons and Dragons* regularly until my group split apart to distant colleges and jobs. Coyne's work leaves me cold. I much preferred reading inspirational sources for *Dungeons and Dragons* -- Tolkien, Moorcock, Howard, Leiber, Lovecraft, for example. James Fink, our dungeon master, once crafted a reality based on the *Nights of Wundagore* arc that appeared in *Avengers* (1963) #181-187. We understood reality and why we wanted to escape into fantasy, with creativity and a skills-building approach that later would help James pursue radiology and me to... well, we're figuring that out.

"From age twelve to seventeen I played
Dungeons and Dragons regularly..."

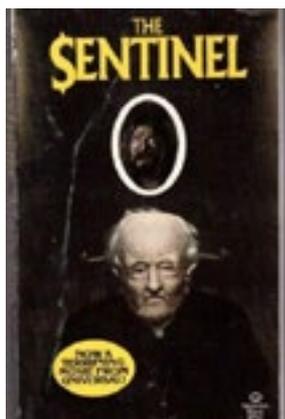


The House of Caine by Ken Eulo

Whatever happened to Ken Eulo? With his *Brownstone Trilogy* so popular among the masses, I thought he'd pull past the hordes and rank up there with King, Koontz, Straub, and Barker. With a little poking around Wikipedia, I learned that Eulo moved from writing novels to writing teleplays for *Small Wonder*, *Marblehead Manor*, and, no kidding, *Benson*. Then he moved to Orlando, Florida where he formed and still artistically directs the New York Ensemble, a repertory group that

writes and produces shows for tour.

The House of Caine is good old-fashioned vampire fare, like *Salem's Lot*. How I miss nasty vampires who never sparkle or initiate romantic relationships with their hunters. Bring back the evil bastards hiding in the shadows! Away with frilly-shirted existentialists pouting their way across the centuries. More recently, *30 Days of Night* represents what I mean: outright bloodsucking pillage and ultimately symbolic triumph over evil with no invitations for wine spritzers and Percy Bysshe Shelley readings.



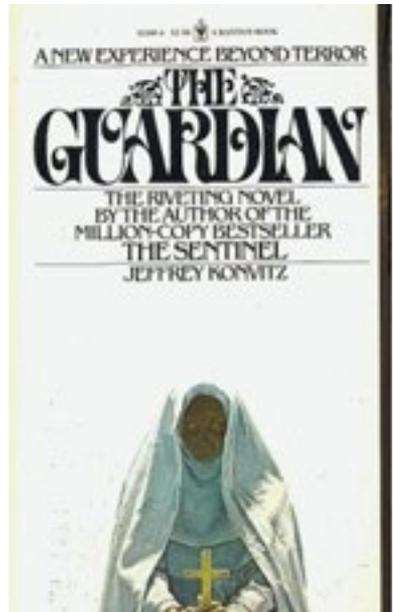
The Sentinel by Jeffrey Konvitz

Mixed reviews of *The Sentinel* abound. Truly the old saw “people either love it or hate it” applies emphatically. I read *The Sentinel* as a teenager while accompanying a truck driver delivering desks and office equipment to a warehouse in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. After we finished unloading, the driver would wander off to meet his buddies at the local bar. Since I was only 16, I

stayed with the truck at the truck stop, bundled up with Konvitz and explaining to prostitutes who banged on the driver's side window that I was too young and had no money. Maybe associating this novel with an adventurous period has heightened the experience for me? To clarify, I need to reread *The Sentinel*. That movie though. Where else can you see Ava Gardner and Burgess Meredith acting together? I may regret my decision. But, hey! *The Devil!*

***The Guardian* by Jeffrey Konvitz**

Then Konvitz decided to write a sequel, *The Guardian*, the worst book ever. The author's religious exposition would sedate a Cardinal, and toward the end readers confront the most vile plot twist before thudding against the worst ending. I don't have enough negative adjectives for this turd floating in a bowl. Thankfully, I paid no money for my copy. Upon hearing that I'd read *The Sentinel*, our office secretary gave me her copy, exclaiming, "I can't believe you didn't know about the sequel!" A nice woman, but thankfully



I only worked summers, and so never participated in the office secret Santa program. I'm not sure my gift would have pleased her, revenge being such a chilly concept. Will thinking about this now alter my decision to reread *The Sentinel*? I'll consider my options.

“...toward the end readers confront the most vile plot twist before thudding against the worst ending.”

The Exorcist by William Peter Blatty

Demonic possession dominates any discussion, but so much more defines *The Exorcist*. The green-pea soup, the blasphemous religious imagery, the bodily contortions and defilement of a 13-year old girl – merely window dressing for what lies at the heart of this story: three individuals representing particular stances toward faith. First, Lankester Merrin the priest whose absolute faith rattles the demonic force inhibiting young Regan.

The entity bellows, “MERRIN! FEAR THE PRIEST!” Second, Damien Karras, the younger priest, but also a man of science, a psychiatrist grieving for his recently deceased mother, guilt-racked over her dying alone in a state facility. His faith bangs along like an engine held together with duct tape and binding twine. Lastly, Pazuzu, Satan, whichever evil force has overtaken Regan, a sociopathic manipulator exploiting its enemies’ weaknesses with glee. Without this struggle between three figures occupying different places on the spectrum of faith we’d have base shock, exploitation without topical meat. No splatterpunk exists that can lay a finger on *The Exorcist*.

Blatty’s dialogue shines. The demon’s repartee sparkles with false logic and barbs, passive-aggressive innuendos and taunts. The battle resides more on the mental and emotional planes, although physical entanglements dot the landscape. For me, this novel epitomizes the best satanic tale, one that extends over shock to engage our emotions, particularly our fears about existential vulnerability, universal malevolence, and a God who doesn’t seem to care. At the very core lies faith. Both the novel and the movie strike thematic gold in this regard.

