

# Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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## EDITORIAL:

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**by phil lunt**

How did I miss *Daybreakers*? I mean, okay, I knew of it but it still slipped through the net and under the radar. We didn't even cover a review of it here, in Hub, and it hit the cinemas last January and came out on DVD in May but still nothing was said... or written, rather.

I watched it recently and liked it. In my opinion, in a world currently swamped under with emo-teen vampires that sparkle and just want to be understood in psychological allegories of real world situations, *Daybreakers* gives something different to the mythos of *Das Vampyre*... Fine, I've said before that I like my vampires preferably old skool but this film 'is' good and somewhat original in it's take on the myth... or legend, or reality, whichever you choose to believe. It's not highbrow, just a fun waste of 90-odd minutes. This isn't a review so I won't go into it in too much detail but the main thing is that it just got me thinking;

*What else have I missed recently?*

A few weeks ago I finally got to see *Children of Men* on the same day as I finally got to read *Phonogram* - both were released in 2006. Some folk might view this as a crime. It's not so much that I missed both of those, just that I didn't catch them at the time, for one reason or another, life happens and they just slip down the priority list and newer, more sparkly, things fall in our paths. It's easy to do. The sci-fi, fantasy and horror genres cover a lot of ground, we can't all be looking in the same places at the same time.

So, what have we all missed, or allowed to pass us by? Answers on a postcard in the comments section...

# FICTION

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## Jump

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by jennifer williams

By the time Sorrel got to the tree blood had started to seep through the canvas bag, and he was being followed by a hazy cloud of swamp insects.

"No doubt it's good smelly meat," he said under his breath, trying not to swallow any bugs. "Just wish they'd wait a bit, is all."

The fat bog flies were the most bothersome, their slow heavy bodies buzzing around his ears and settling on his hair, his bare skin, the bag. They were exactly what he was after of course, but he didn't need them until the tree. It didn't stop them zooming in to taste his sweat.

Sorrel knelt at the base of the tree, where the wide hole in the trunk met the ground. The remains of his last offering had been washed away in the recent rains, so he quickly opened the canvas bag and tipped the large slabs of pig meat into the hollow. They glistened pinkly before they disappeared into the shade, and Sorrel fancied the buzzing of the insects got a little louder.

"Dinner time,"

He turned to the standing water by the tree and rinsed the sticky blood and fat from his hands. The Dorse Tree, *his* dorse tree, rose a good twenty feet behind him, the branches with their clusters of leathery black leaves poking intermittently from the trunk, all the way up. Dorse trees only grew in the swamps, with the flies and the frogs, and somehow they suited their surroundings. They had squat, wrinkled trunks peppered with holes, and off white, green tinged bark. The trees looked a little like something that had been lying dead in the water a long time, and recently been propped upright again.

Sorrel stood up and began inspecting the holes in the bark. The sun was only just starting to go down, so he was a little early, but he began to set out his Jump collecting equipment anyway. The frogs would start appearing soon, and tonight he wanted to have all the collecting done and out of the way before Ann's visit.

Flattened sticks for the scraping, a towel to hold the frogs in so he wouldn't damage their delicate skins with his hot fingers, and several small glass jars with stoppers, for the pure Jump. He laid it all out on a small towel by the roots of the tree, and checked on the meat's progress. It had already attracted a large number of tiny midges, and four big fat bog flies, who were tasting the flesh with their long tube-like tongues. Soon, they would begin to lay eggs.

It was an elegant process, or at least, that's what Sorrel would have said if anyone cared to listen. The flies would lay eggs in the meat, which would hatch into maggots, which would become more flies. The maggots and the new, drowsy flies provided food for the small colony of frogs that lived in the tree, and from them Sorrel would harvest the Jump. Easy, simple. Beautiful, even. By providing a busy population of food, he encouraged the frogs to stay and grow fat and healthy.

The frogs themselves were a marvel- bright, shining indigo, with eyes that were faceted and glittered like jewels. Not one of them was any bigger than Sorrel's thumb, but there were around a hundred living in the tree; more than enough to keep his small business going. He'd found the tree after months of searching the swamp, a dangerous and unpleasant task that few people were prepared to take on, but Sorrel had done it, and now the tree was his secret, his own. He guarded the secret well and had told no one of its location. Well, all save Ann, but she was his love.

Smiling at the thought of Ann and her soft blonde curls, Sorrel was startled by a low musical croak to his right. The first of the frogs had appeared, and it was time for him to work.

One by one, tiny blue frogs appeared at the many holes in the bark, ready to make their way down to

the swamp for one of their regular swims. Swiftly, Sorrel plucked the closest one from the bark and, holding it carefully in the towel, ran the flat stick down the creature's back. A purple sludge built up on the stick's edge, which Sorrel wiped on the inside lid of his first jar. Then he put the frog down on the muddy ground near the water and plucked another one off the tree. And again, and again, and again, until all the frogs had made their way down to the water and Sorrel had collected as much Jump as he could for that evening.

The drug gave you dreams. Wild, waking ones that caused spirits to walk in front of you and the colours of the sky to bend and change, until you understood the secrets of your ancestors and your place in the tribe. Or at least, that was what they said. Sorrel was an infrequent user, and although he had certainly seen some very strange things whilst taking Jump, he couldn't have claimed that he was any wiser. Normally what it gave him was a headache, and a sick feeling in his chest, as his heart beat wildly for hours afterwards. Sorrel did not push his luck with Jump, no matter what wisdom he was missing out on- it was very easy to overdose on Jump, very easy indeed. You were to be careful with the purple gift, they said, or the spirits would decide to take you with them when they left. He had seen it happen often, but it didn't seem to stop anyone taking it. The purple dreams were just too delicious.

And that day he had gotten a good harvest, it appeared. Good, rich meat produced healthy fat flies, and supposedly this meant healthy fat frogs that gave good Jump. Sorrel was pleased. The pig meat hadn't been cheap but it appeared to be worth it. The Jump would get his coin back in no time.

Just as he'd screwed the cap on the final jar, he heard a distant splashing and the faint sound of someone cursing under her breath. Ann! It was that time already.

He called her name, telling her to come towards the sound of his voice, all the while running his fingers through his hair, hoping he wasn't covered in too much swamp grime. The splashing grew louder, and Ann appeared through a thicket of tall willowy trees.

To Sorrell, she was a vision. True, her face was screwed up into a frown as she waved impatiently at insects, and her legs were flecked with swamp mud, but none of that spoiled the soft gold of her hair, or the generous curves beneath her light blue dress.

"Sorrell? Is that you? This had better be worth it, my shoes are ruined,"

Sorrell rushed to help her across the last of the bog, taking her slim white hands in his.

"You're just in time," he said. "The frogs are beginning to come back to the tree,"

"Wonderful," she said, in less than enthusiastic tones, but Sorrell took no notice. She would be won over by the chorus, he had no doubt of that.

"Here it is," he gestured expansively at the Dorse tree. Around their feet, the swamp waters were beginning to teem with the tiny indigo amphibians.

"This is where the Jump comes from?" Ann peered with interest at the pocked bark.

"It is. Sit here," Sorrell laid a towel on the ground, "And wait. It'll start any moment now."

The very last of the sun's light was soaking through the trees, lazy and pink. The sky above them was dark already and the deepest blue. Here and there the earliest stars were beginning to burn. And the frogs returned to the tree.

Tiny and glittering they hopped up the trunk and along the branches, some finding holes to settle in and others crawling out to bunch between the leaves. Settled all together they look like some odd blue fruit, ripe and glistening. Sorrell lit a small lamp from his pack and set it by Anne; there wasn't enough room on the towel for them both, but he was happy to stand. There was silence, as there always was just before the chorus, and he could hear the buzzing of flies and the calls of night birds just waking.

"What is that smell?" said Ann, but at that moment, the frogs began to sing.

To Sorrell they sounded like a thousand glass bells, all chiming at different times but complementing each other. Tiny voices from crystalline throats were turned to magical notes at sunset, so that they filled the swamp with music. There might be wisdom and beauty in the Jump, but Sorrell thought it was all here, in the chorus at sundown.

After some minutes it ended, and the frogs crawled back inside their tree again. Sorrell turned to look at Ann, to see how this secret gift had affected her. There were tears in his own eyes, but he didn't think she would mind.

But Ann wasn't looking at him or the frogs, but at the hole at the bottom of the tree. Her mouth was turned down at the corners.

"What is that in there?"

"That? It's the meat I use to feed... Well, it's how I look after the frogs and collect the Jump. The flies that grow out of the maggots feed the frogs, and when they are healthy and fat I can harvest the jump from them."

"Oh," she wrinkled her nose. Sorrell thought her nose was delightful. "So, do you have any Jump then?"

"Of course," Sorrell went to his pack again, a little uncertain. He was confused by her reaction to the frog's song, as it were as if she hadn't heard it at all. Frowning slightly he took a jar of purified Jump from his bag, along with a wrap of the meat paste that most people ate it with, and a small pile of crackers. "Did you enjoy the music?"

Ann took the jump from his hands eagerly.

"Yeah, it was nice," she unscrewed the cap and began to apply a thick layer of jump to a cracker.

"How much of this do you have?"

"Lots. Listen Ann, this place, I haven't shown it to anyone else..."

"Mmmhf," said Ann, her mouth full of paste and Jump.

"And I've brought you here because you're special."

Ann nodded, and then shivered, the first sign of the Jump taking effect. Her full red lips spread into a smile. "This is good."

"Ann, I brought you here to tell you... I love you,"

Ann stopped dead still, her hand halfway to her mouth with another cracker. The smile disappeared.

"You what?"

Sorrell tried to ignore the way she was staring at him and forced himself to continue.

"I love you, Ann, I've always loved you. I've never laid eyes on anyone more beautiful, more luminous. Your smile lights me up, and every moment with you is a treasure. I brought you here to show you the frogs and their song- a moment as special as you are to me. I want you to know..."

Ann held up the hand not holding the cracker.

"Stop, Sorrell, please. I... I'm sorry but I don't feel that way about you. Oh gods, how embarrassing. Look, you're... very nice and everything, but I just don't like you that way. We barely even know each other,"

Sorrell's chest felt very tight, like two huge hands were slowly squeezing his heart.

"Then why did you come here?" he said in a small voice.

"You said you had Jump," Ann flashed a sudden smile, as if this made it all right. "And you do, so let's just have some and enjoy the night,"

"You didn't care about the music?"

Ann rolled her eyes, and for the first time Sorrell did not find it delightful.

"Course not. They're only frogs,"

In silence, Sorrell removed all the jars of Jump from his bag, even the fresh stuff collected that night, and placed them in front of Ann. Since the initial upset of his baring his feelings, Ann had cheered up considerably, and was now munching on cracker after cracker of Jump. It was dangerous to have so much, but Sorrell found himself unable to tell her so; the squeezing of his heart had constricted his vocal chords too it seemed, and he could not trust himself to talk without saying anything bad. So he sat next to her, and watched.

Ann had laid back in the driest part of mud, propped up on her elbows. From time to time she giggled at nothing, and her eyelids began to droop. When they had run out of crackers she began to run her finger around the edge of the jar and ate it straight. Sorrell wondered if she would do that if she knew it had recently been mucous clinging to the back of a tiny frog.

That's what I am to her, he thought. Frog mucous.

Soon she was laying flat on her back, looking up at the stars with purple smudges all around her lips. Her eyes were unfocused, looking at the purple dreams no doubt, dreams Sorrell could not share.

Sometimes she would speak, half formed sentences and random words.

"The mud runs in your blood. In our blood. The trees dance,"

"A thousand stars are crying, because they can't eat our bread. Isn't that funny?"

Eventually the words became noises and small, happy cries, and her eyes rolled up to the whites. A thin line of purplish drool ran from one corner of her mouth and disappeared into her hair.

Sorrell watched, silent, in the dark.

In the morning, Anne was cold and stiff, her mouth open in an unlovely vacant expression and her fingers curled up into claws by her side. Sorrell could not recall sleeping, or seeing her take her final breath, but he supposed both had happened.

The frogs were croaking their morning greetings to each other and hopped past the two humans towards the waiting waters. A few of them hopped and crawled over Anne's body, as unmindful of her as she had been of them. Sorrell watched it all with dull eyes. At some point he would have to think and move, but for the moment the weight in his chest was holding him down.

In the late afternoon, as the sun was burning orange and the swamp was at its loudest with bird calls and the hums of insects, Sorrell finally stood up and stretched. His legs were tingling with pins and needles, and he was ravenously hungry, but he had work to do before he left the tree.

"The finest, richest meat," he told the frogs and the birds and the insects, "It makes the best Jump. The very best."

From his pack he took his longest, sharpest knife, the one he had once used to cut the thick pork into chunks, and began to cut the flesh from Anne's bones with quick, precise strokes. It fell from her like butter, blood soaking into the thirsty mud. When he was satisfied that he had the best of her, he gathered it up and placed it in the hole at the base of the tree. The flies that had already settled on the pork buzzed angrily for a few seconds, but they soon settled again on the fresher meat. There was more than enough to go round for all of them.

Sorrell bound together what was left of Anne and weighted it with rocks, so that when he dropped it into the deepest part of the swamp it sank into the shadowy depths at once, with only a line of pinkish bubbles to show where it had gone.

When that was done, Sorrell went back to sit in front of the tree. It was time for the frog's music again, and he would sit and enjoy it alone. He understood that now; it was only for him, the secret music of the Dorse tree. Such things couldn't be shared.

The tiny jeweled frogs came out onto the branches, glittering in the last light, and added their voices to the hungry flies.



## Predators

reviewed by richard whittaker



**Directed by Nimrod Antal,**

**Written by Alex Litvak & Michael Finch**

**Starring: Adrien Brody, Topher Grace, Alice Braga, Walton Goggins, Oleg Taktarov, Laurence Fishburne, Danny Trejo, Louis Ozawa Changchien, Mahershalalhashbaz Ali**

In the annals of movie history, the *Predator* movies have become the little franchise that could. At the world premiere in Austin, Texas on July 8, producer Robert Rodriguez made it clear that, like many sci-fi and action buffs, it somehow has carved a soft spot in his heart. Now his reboot/revival of the ebbing series is his chance to get the gore back, and he and director Nimrod Antal undoubtedly do so with a blood-splattered gusto.

"[*Predator*] is where my love of mixed-genre movies came from, because it started as a commando movie and it became a sci-fi movie." - Robert Rodriguez

First pitched to the studio by Rodriguez in 1996, this is far more of a direct sequel to the 1987 jungle warfare/space horror classic than 1990's urban hunter follow-up, the imaginatively-named *Predator 2*. Unlike the original's highly disciplined special ops team, *Predators* (Rodriguez has admitted that he took his title inspiration from James Cameron and *Aliens*) drops a disparate band of killers into an unknown jungle. There's mercenary Royce (Brody), Israeli sniper Isabella (Braga), a condemned murderer-rapist (Goggins), a Spetsnaz heavy gunner (Taktarov, wielding a chain-fed mini-gun in tribute to Jesse "I ain't got time to bleed" Ventura), a Mexican cartel enforcer (Trejo), a Japanese gangster (Changchien), a Sierra Leonean death squad member (Ali) and Topher Grace as this film's Dante Hicks ("I'm not even supposed to be here today.") They all find themselves waking up, plummeting towards the ground of an unknown jungle, saved only by weird parachutes of a strange design. Once they hit the ground, they discover that they're being pursued by everyone's second-favorite xenomorphs, the crab-faced trophy-takers themselves. Once the motley crew start getting picked off by the universe's deadliest hunters, character development is pretty much restricted to the "do they die or not?" school of script writing.

"[Arnold Schwarzenegger] said, 'We have to take it back to the jungle!'" - Robert Rodriguez

Where *Predator 2* was a city-bound reaction against the first film, this movie embraces its heritage. After all, what people want from a *Predator* movie is guys with big guns facing an eight foot tall semi-invisible death-dealing monster with a face like an explosion in a pincer factory. From that point of view, this is a simple, old-fashioned success. The obvious question is, where does this stand in the *Predator* canon (now three headliners, two crossovers, and counting.) Rodriguez has been quite dismissive of 2, which seems a little harsh for a film that gives Bill Paxton such a great death scene and includes a great spine removal sequence that is homage here. It's a lot better than either *Alien Versus Predator* flick, and that all comes down to director Antal.

"Most people don't give a dude called Nimrod fifty million bucks." - Nimrod Antal

Originally pitched as a Rodriguez picture, he's slipped sideways into the producer's chair to make American-born, Hungarian-resident Antal the eye behind the lens on this project. While his first feature, 2003's *Kontroll*, was a festival smash, his US career to date (2007 motel horror *Vacancy* and 2009 heist flick *Armored*) has pigeonholed him as a reliable and somewhat imaginative B-movie director. *Predators* defines

him as someone that can walk the tightrope between balls-out violence and a grasp of the screen as canvas. Rodriguez has compared him to his long-time film-making buddy Quentin Tarantino, and while he doesn't have the *Inglourious Basterds*' directors narrative audacity, he has a similar grasp of composition and set pieces. In fact, the one-on-one blade fight between a predator and Changchien may be the best sword fight on a Western screen since *Kill Bill*'s showdown at the House of the Blue Leaves.

Keeping the squad-based feel of the original, he manages something that the technically intriguing *Alien Vs Predator: Requiem* never managed, in that the audience is interested to find out who lives and dies – or, considering that much of the plot is pretty cleanly laid out from frame one, at least what order in which they die. He also takes the wise step of keeping the Predators as men in suits. Kevin Peter Hall was the one that really created the character in the original, and trying to replicate that combination of bulk and aggression through CGI would be a risky proposition. Antal brings back the original design and adds a new class of bigger, nastier critturs, whose long snout leaves them looking suspiciously like Arnie's nemesis did the nasty with the Kothoga from 1997's museum-bound creature feature *The Relic*.

"I made you believe I was big" - Adrien Brody

There's no monster without a good monster killer, so the film hangs on Brody making a plausible action hero. As a noted art-house actor who last real brush with big-budget adventure was staring at a green screen for Peter Jackson's inessential *King Kong* remake, it's not his natural domain. He also runs the risk of being measured up against pre-politics Arnie at his most muscle-bound. So while he undoubtedly bulked up from blow-away-in-the-wind to lean-and-wiry, he lets his speed and his machine-fed shotgun be his trademarks. Growling with a *Dark Knight*-esque subdued grumble, he's less "If it bleeds, we can kill it" and more duck, cover, run and leave the weak behind.

"Royce is essentially a villain" - Adrien Brody

In hindsight, Schwarzenegger's Dutch is kind of an awful character, a 'rhoid huffing expression of American imperial ambition in Latin America. At the time, he looked like the good guy, but times have changed. Brody's overcomes his inherent likeability just enough to make Royce a plausible hard-ass, but turns it back on just enough to get away with some pretty horrible actions. It's an interesting performance that keeps him just the right side of total bastard.

"[Danny Trejo] said, 'Hey, man, the script calls for a Danny Trejo-type. Well I'm a Danny Trejo type'" – Robert Rodriguez

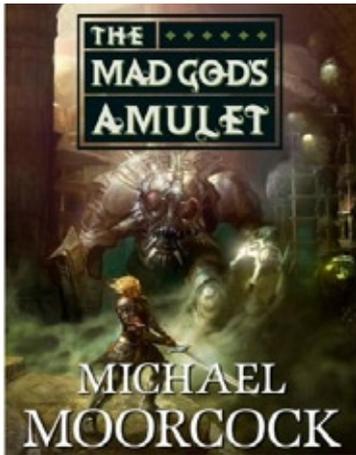
The rest of the cast are blithely left to play very much to type. Goggins, best known as weasely Shane Vendrell in TV's *The Shield* and for getting his head blown off in *House of 1000 Corpses*, is a bundle of jittery energy: Trejo barely wipes off the grime from headlining Rodriguez' upcoming Mexploitation flick *Machete*; And Grace goes back to his *That 70s Show* purpose as "the awkward one." It's left to Fishburne as the film's Ben Gunn, the sole and now very crazed survivor of another hunting trip, to really chew the scenery, which he does with apparent glee.

The characters are let down a little by some plot-hole logic. In part, that may be because the plot is a little too inspired by the first film. It was alright for Arnie and his squad to waste ammo, because they knew they would be rescued soon – the predicament of this rag-tag squad would make them a little less gun-crazy.

Yet all that can be asked of *Predators* is that it skins the franchise down to what it should be: Human versus hunter with some memorable fight scenes and some serious decapitations. That it does so with more than a little visual flair and an ensemble cast that remains distinct means it should be allowed to keep whatever skulls it collects.

# Hawkmoon: The Mad God's Amulet

reviewed by keith harvey



by Michael Moorcock  
Tor Books  
rrp £9.28

Tor is re-releasing Michael Moorcock's Hawkmoon tetralogy with exquisite illustrations by Vance Kovacs. The first volume, *The Jewel in the Skull*, is out and the second, *The Mad God's Amulet*, appears soon. Not only are these editions a thing of beauty, they also have the power (sorcerous power) to carry the reader back to the heady days of pulp fiction, which means, to me, a return to the feelings of my youth and the joy of discovering the multiverse.

Implicit in Moorcock's multiverse is a metaphysical underpinning that raises these books above the level of pulp fiction and marks them as classics of the fantasy genre. Irrespective of their serious undertone and philosophical themes, however, the genius of these books is that on one level they can be read (perhaps a better word would be *experienced*) as picaresque pulp fiction, similar to the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Raphael Sabatini, or Robert E. Howard, while on the other they offer up a meditation or theodicy on the workings of fate and the machinations of modern man. The parallel between the history of twentieth-century Europe and the action evolving within the plot of these novels is thinly veiled, if not explicit. Additionally, the appearance of the Warrior in Jet and Gold, at pivotal moments within the plot, expresses the workings of a power much more potent than any army of Granbretan.

In the first volume we meet Count Brass, ruler of the Kamarg, Dorian Hawkmoon von Köln, a German nobleman, his boon companion, Oladahn, and his love, Yisselda. These characters are the last hold-outs against the forces of the Dark Empire and its vast armies and infernal machines.

The plot of the first novel involves the ingenious plan of Baron Meliadus, commander of the Clan of the Wolf, and general of the armies of the Dark Empire, to employ Hawkmoon to assassinate Count Brass. To facilitate this plan and to control Hawkmoon, he embeds a Black Jewel in Hawkmoon's skull that has the power to destroy him if he does not do the Baron's bidding. Eventually, Hawkmoon overcomes the jewel in his skull and defeats Meliadus.

In the first novel we have intimations of the workings of the Runstaff but in the second these themes surface and pre-dominate. Fate (or the Runestaff) reveals itself, although Hawkmoon refuses to acknowledge its power or his role within the multiverse.

Although the second novel, *The Mad God's Amulet*, develops the serious themes of the Runestaff, it also reflects a move to pure adventure reminiscent of the novels of Raphael Sabatini with a bit of horror thrown in to season the pot. Where the first novel dealt with great armies moving across large battle fields, the second novel seems more intimate, closer to the Saturday morning adventure serials.

Two early episodes in the second novel demonstrate the workings of the Runestaff and the plight of those who serve it. Hawkmoon and Oladahn on their way home to the Kamarg are ambushed by Huillam D'Averc, the new general sent to find and capture them. D'Averc is a brilliant creation, similar to Doc Holiday but probably modeled on the character, Athos, in Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*. D'Averc is ill and his maladies become a running theme throughout the rest of the tetralogy. He is also a romantic, like Athos, whose love (his fate) will eventually lead him to his doom.

In one of the initial scenes of the novel Oldahn is captured by D'Averc and the general uses him to draw Hawkmoon out of hiding. Refusing to be used to betray his friend, Oladahn jumps to his death. However, the Runestaff refuses to allow him to die because he has an essential role to play. Another scene,

just as poignant, involves D'Averc. He chases after Hawkmoon in one of the empire's elaborate ornithopters and crashes. Instead of dying like the pilot, he survives to be found days later, floating in the sea, by Hawkmoon.

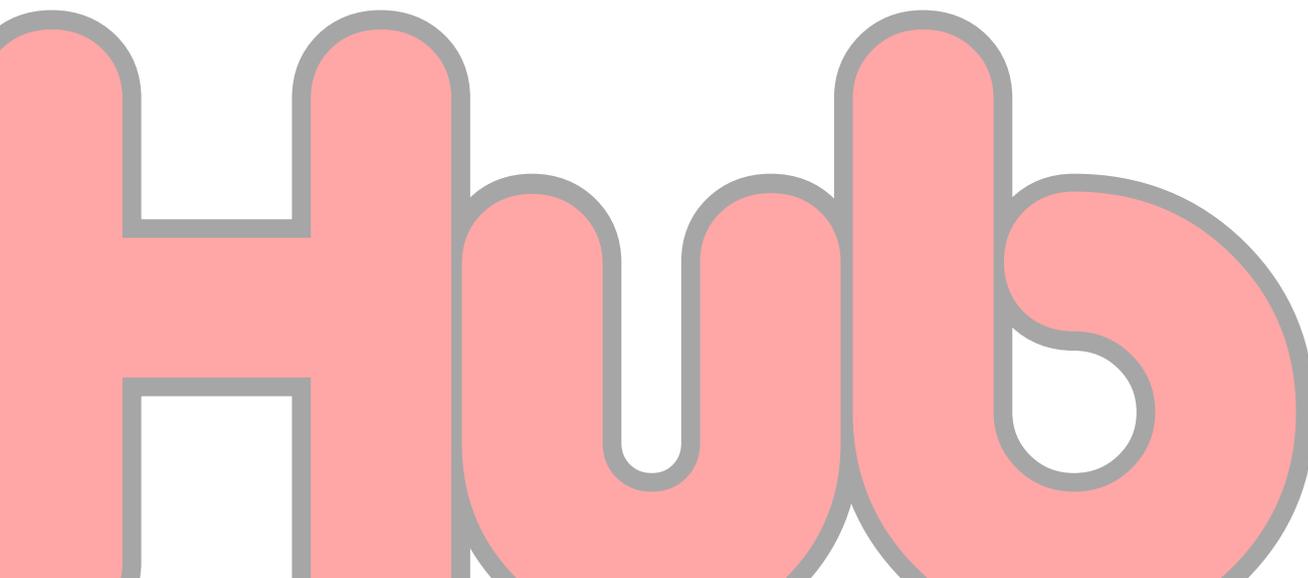
These scenes, although perfectly installed in the plot and exciting to read, support a more important apparatus: the overarching plot of the tetralogy. And this is where Moorcock's genius lies. The novels move like greased lightning with battle scenes equal to anything in Sabatini or Dumas but there is always a sense of control and a reminder that a greater story is running in the back ground.

However, as I said the novel also contains pulp fiction elements that in themselves are highly entertaining. Oldahan and Hawkmoon after escaping D'Averc set sail on the high seas with a dysfunctional crew of dissipated sailors and it is here that they encounter D'Averc, floating alone on a raft, the mad pirates of the Mad God, and Yisselda's ring, alerting them to the fact that she has been kidnapped and fallen into the hands of the Mad God.

The pirate scenes are worthy of an Errol Flynn movie but they serve to lead us to the horror of the Mad God.

It is probably important to note that there is a certain Gothic quality to Moorcock's work. In the first novel these elements are illustrated through the descriptions of Londra and the King-Emperor. In the second, the Gothic threads are exposed with the terrifying Mad God and the melodramatic sub-plot of the hero rescuing the damsel in distress. Contained within the Gothic elements are the mechanical monster of the Wraith-Folk and the Mad God's beasts.

In the final analysis, no matter the profundity I might find in *The Mad God's Amulet*, the novel is fun to read. Moorcock, with a jaundiced eye on prospective critics, wrote of the tetralogy: "As with rock and roll, I was attracted to this form because, originally, it did not absorb the interest of the critics. The books were written in the hope that they would help readers pass their time without feeling they were wasting it, in much the same spirit as I performed on stage." I must agree that although I find a certain seriousness in the novels, the author did succeed in producing a rollicking good read.



# FEATURES

## ***Life in the Shadows: Joan De La Haye***

by *alasdair stuart*

What do you do when you're faced with absolute proof that the tragedy in your life isn't your fault? What happens when you face down the cause of that tragedy and, seemingly, win? What do you become? This is one of the ideas that drives Joan De La Haye's *Shadows*, following Sarah as she struggles to cope with the tragedies of her past, her role in the murder of her boyfriend and the mysterious Jack, a demon who may be responsible for it all... I talked to Joan about what scares her, the way female protagonists have changed in modern horror and what draws her back to horror fiction.

### **Hub Magazine: What scares you?**

Joan De La Haye : Big, nasty, poisonous Spiders.

And on a more rational level: intolerance, the kind we've experienced here in South Africa in the past and more recently. It's that kind of intolerance that causes people to do the most horrific things to each other, the kind of things that we, as horror writers, couldn't even imagine.

### **HM: And the other side to that question, why horror fiction?**

JDLH: I fell into Horror fiction. While I was growing up, I'd always thought I'd be a crime thriller writer. I didn't read horror. I read the classics like Jane Austen and Alexander Dumas. I also mainly read thrillers and mainstream novels. But when I was introduced to horror, a copy of Stephen King's *Misery* found its way into my hands, I was hooked.

When I started work on *Shadows*, it wasn't a struggle to write. The story and the words just flowed. I'd found my home.

### **HM: What were the inspirations for *Shadows*?**

JDLH: The first scene in *Shadows* was based on a nightmare I had. One of my main inspirations is probably the things that people do to each other on a daily basis. It is something that both fascinates and shocks me.

### **HM: What challenges did you find in writing a horror novel set in the present day, given the genre's occasional fondness for period pieces?**

JDLH: I don't think writing in the present day is a challenge. It makes it more realistic. Period pieces are great, but I think that horror set in the here and now is also a form of social commentary. What tells you more about a society than it's fears?

During the Victorian era it was Vampires and Werewolves, but now they've become more of a sex symbol than something to be afraid of.

In our modern age, we've got so many different fears to choose from, including other people.

### **HM: That's an interesting point. Do you think there's more diversity in horror tropes and plots now?**

JDLH: Yes! We can now add cloning, advances in technology, and Aliens, to name but a few. Granted, some of those would also fall into Science Fiction, but they're great fodder for horror stories. There are so many things happening around us on a daily basis that could go so horribly wrong. Horror writers are picking up on those fears and turning them into nail biting reads.

### **HM: There's an unfortunate tendency in some horror for the female characters to be victims more than protagonists. How did you work around that?**

JDLH: In real life there isn't going to be some guy riding in to save the day, so I tried to be true to that reality. I made Sarah as normal as possible. She has flaws like everybody else. In the beginning she is a stereotypical

victim, but since there's no-one who can actually save her, except herself, she has to deal with it as best as she can and rescue herself.

**HM: I love that idea of taking a character people think will go one way and turn it on its head. Were there things you could do with a female protagonist that you couldn't with a male?**

JDLH: Now that's an interesting point. I've never actually thought about it. But I don't think that's necessarily true. Male protagonists are usually portrayed as being tough and ready for action and women are painted as the victims. It's all very stereotypical. But it's not the way it has to be. We can do so much more with both sexes. Fear is a great equaliser for both genders. We never know how a man or a woman will react when faced by their greatest fear. And horror is all about fear.

**HM: Is there anything you would have liked to include in the book but had to be cut?**

JDLH: Not that I can think of right now.

I must admit, I write rather sparsely. I'm not one of those writers who has to cut out, I invariably have to put in

**HM: How did you come to run Demon Friday on your website?**

JDLH: One of the main characters in *Shadows* is a Demon and while I was writing it, a friend of mine gave me a copy of *The Goëtia* for research purposes.

When *Shadows* came out, everybody was fascinated by Jack and I was bombarded with questions about demons in general. So *Demon Friday* was born.

**HM: Do you have a favourite?**

JDLH: Jack will always be my favourite demon!

**HM: You've stepped across to crime recently with *Requiem in E Sharp*. How easy was the transition?**

JDLH: Actually, *Requiem in E Sharp* was the first book I wrote. It's been languishing in a bottom drawer for a few years. My editor, Jayne Southern, convinced me to dust it off and breathe new life into it. But I think I'm definitely more of a horror writer than a crime thriller writer. There's more freedom in writing horror. When writing crime you have to stick to certain rules and you have to have the facts and procedures right. Whereas with horror my imagination can have free reign.

**HM: The two genres tend to be associated quite closely. Why do you think that is?**

JDLH: They both tend to be thought of as being darker, more violent. Let's face it, neither genre is fluffy or romantic.

We're all fascinated by darker aspects of the human psyche which can be found in both genres.

**HM: Where do you think that fascination comes from?**

JDLH: It's human nature, I guess. We all want to pretend that the darker aspects of our nature aren't there, but when we read a horror or a thriller novel we get to explore that part of ourselves at a safe distance. It's also a part of our nature that is fascinating and shocking at the same time.

**HM: Is there one you prefer?**

JDLH: I'm a proud horror girl! Through and through.

**HM: What's your dream project? Limitless budget, limitless opportunities. What would you do?**

JDLH: That's tough one. I think I wouldn't mind being a gypsy for a while. Pick a country and spend a year there just working on a book set in that country. Canada could be fun, all that snow ... and after that spend a year in another country, maybe some tiny European country with loads of scary myths and folk tales ... Now that could be fun!

**HM: Who would you recommend to readers just getting into horror?**

JDLH: Obviously *Misery* by Stephen King, that's what got me into horror.

But there are also a lot of new voices coming up that would make for a great introduction.

For example, my mother hates horror, but I recently got her to read *Old Man Scratch* by Rio Youers and she loved it.

And then there's *Shadows*! Always a good place to start. ;-)

Joan De La Haye's *Shadows* is available now through Amazon, amazon.co.uk, itunes, Barnes and Noble and more. Her website can be found at: <http://joandelahaye.wordpress.com>

