

Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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EDITORIAL:

by alasdair stuart

Find Your Own Fun

Every now and then, as Bonnie Tyler never sung, but maybe should have, the internet is massively depressing. Over the course of the last three or four weeks I've lost count of the amount of times I've seen something dogpiled, people scrabbling to see who can be cruellest about something without once stopping to see if they should be cruel about it. It's repellant at best, pathetic at worst and it's getting more prevalent. Even worse, after a while, it gets under your skin. Should I like that TV show? Should I read that blog? And the question that follows hard on their heels;

Am I wrong?

Of course not. Neither am I and neither, to a point, are they. Here's why; Blade Runner.

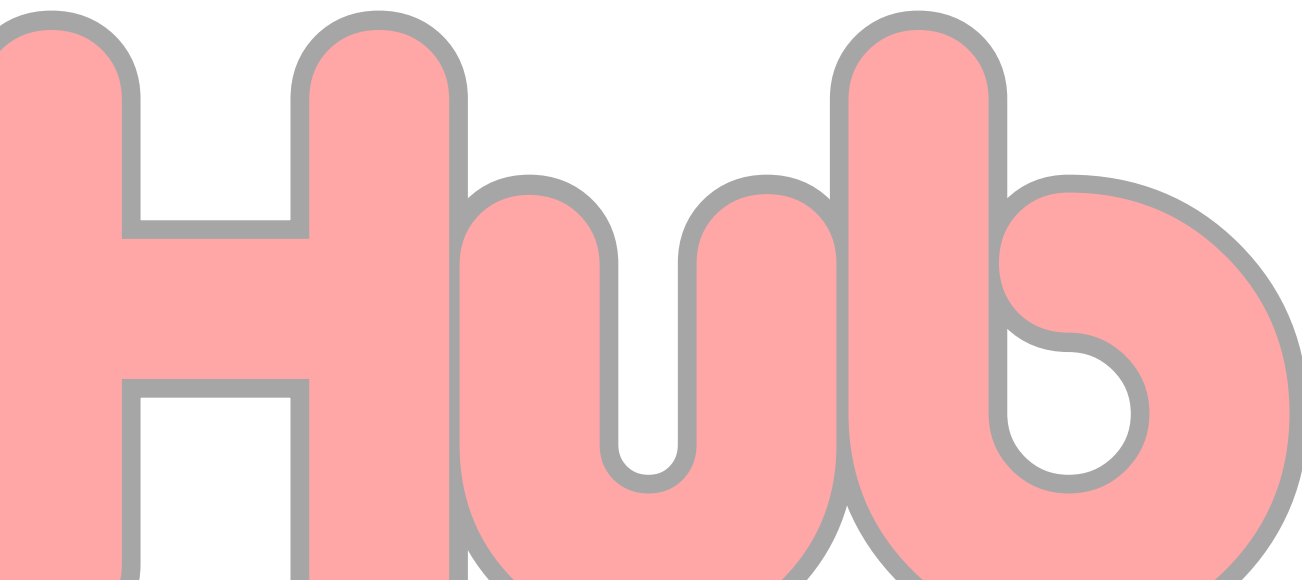
I saw Blade Runner for the first time at 10 and hated it. It was dark, there was a flying car and nothing happened for an hour and a half. I played with my Transformers and thought no more of it. I saw it again when I was 16 and it hit me right between the eyes. The faded, broken future, the film noir trappings, the staggering music, 'It's a shame she won't live! But then again, who does!'. I watched the copy my local video store had so many times I lost count and I always, always found something new. I saw it again when I was 28 and it felt...different, bedded in, distanced. It felt like we'd travelled past Blade Runner and whilst it's still relevant, it's no longer vital. Three different takes at three different times on one film.

We communicate with every text we encounter whether it's a book, a film, a piece of music, a comic or anything else. We pull it apart and search for meaning even as it triggers emotional responses in us and we do that in the knowledge that those responses are themselves mutable. You change, you bring new things to the party every time and every time, every single time, you see something different when you do. Times change, you change and the text changes too.

We're all right, because we all see what we want or need to see and that brings with it a two fold responsibility. Firstly, to be open to new experiences and questions, to welcome the evolution that comes with

them and secondly, to be courteous. You don't have to like everything, God knows I don't but show a little respect and a lot of self awareness. If you're calling for the career of a writer to be crucified because you didn't like the last thing they did? Consider hitting 'delete' before hitting 'send'. Likewise if you happen to think that a thoroughly average blockbuster is one of the worst films you've ever seen? See more films. Trust me, bad movies are out there, waiting for you. I've seen more than enough of them.

When it comes down to it though, find your own fun. If something works for you it works for you and there's nothing wrong with that, whatever the internet, or Bonnie Tyler, may say.





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FICTION

The Walker

by adam christopher

When I looked back I could still see him, the walker, in the farmer's field below. I had stopped at this, the halfway point on my trek towards the summit of the hill, but to my dismay — although not my surprise — he had not. The black figure staggered onward, arms flailing as he pulled himself across the paddock with some apparent difficulty.

I could not frankly discern from where he had come. For myself, it had been a relatively short journey over the last cobbled streets of the village and through the small woodland that crowded its edge, finally towards the open sky as green fields unrolled before me. As I emerged from the tree-line, the grassy side of the hill rose up sharply on my right; it was the tallest and the steepest in the valley, and upon its flat top sat a stone folly painted entirely in white. It was for this object that I had decided to climb.

But the walker was coming from open country, his shambling black frame making a line directly towards me across a farmer's field thick with grass and thistle. This was no coincidence. He was making for my hilltop. This made me less than happy, although I had no right to feel so, for it was most certainly not *my* hilltop. But I savoured the solitude of a country walk, and had looked forward to today more than most. Annoyed, I turned away from the field and back to the steep hill path. The path in question was merely a rough collection of slate slabs inset into the hillside, and while an easier road than the bare grassed ground itself, it was inclined at something of a severe angle. I hefted my stick and pulled myself upwards.

The top of the hill was a natural plateau and I therefore was unable to see where the path actually ended. But I could see the top of the folly, the softly rounded cap of what I knew was a squat, toy-like minaret. Since moving to the valley in recent months, I had discovered the small building was visible from nearly every point in the village; indeed, so iconic was the structure that it appeared on any and all literature, signage, and other such miscellany, printed or otherwise, connected with the area. It was therefore not of a little intrigue that most villagers, when questioned, were somewhat reluctant to discuss their famous landmark. I knew of course that I was the 'other', the outsider and newcomer, but to be on the one hand so proud of their unique monument and on the other to respond to questions concerning it with temperament bordering on very malevolence was something which both puzzled and fascinated. It was the extraordinary reaction to my enquiries that led me to undertake my own private research at the library of the larger town nearby.

What I found was of moderate interest but nothing of particular remark. The monument had been constructed to celebrate final victory in the Napoleonic Wars, in 1816 or thereabouts, as an extravagant summer playhouse for the children of the local landlord. Alas, it was not to be, as shortly after completion the landlord's two children vanished, along with their mother, caught (it was presumed) in a terrible accident while out walking what was then a very rough and isolated hillside. The father, understandably, shunned the place thereafter, bricking the entrance to the summerhouse up and turning it into a solid impenetrable monument, a memorial to his lost loves. And there for the intervening ninety years it had remained, sitting in solitary vigil upon the hilltop, casting its morbid shadow long over the village below.

I stopped again. The folly was getting closer but my breath was getting shorter. I had underestimated the incline by some considerable degree, and turning again to face the downward slope and the spectacular vista of fields, woods and valley now a fair distance below me, I noted that the hour was also later than I had anticipated. The sun was low and its circumference pierced by the woodland to my left. For a moment I marvelled at the yellow-red orb as it began to disappear, and when I looked away to the valley, purple and orange dots danced before my eyes. There, through their hallucinatory splashes of colour, the walker

strode.

He was bogged and his progress was slow, but it was sure. He would be at the hillside path very soon and would then make quick progress towards me. His shadowed outline was thrown large and ragged by the setting sun, the wide sweep of his arms back and forth and long jagged stride stretching horrible and black across nearly half the field.

I frowned, and breath regained recommenced my ascent. Absently I began to whistle a happy strain but after a minute I found it had drifted to a tuneless, hollow piping which filled my heart with unease and seemed to echo oddly out across the valley, advertising my presence to my slow pursuer.

I stopped walking and stopped whistling, and risked a look over my shoulder. Ever onwards the walker came, so I quickened my pace although my legs throbbed in protest. I took my mind away from illogical fears about phantom strangers and refocused on my destination. It was ridiculous. If the innocent walker and I were to meet upon the hilltop, as it appeared we were destined to do, I hoped he would find my tale of twilight terror an amusing one!

The spacious and level hilltop formed the perfect foundation for constructions of a monumental nature, and indeed, it was during the construction of the Napoleonic celebration that the workmen had removed a number of upright stones that had formed a Neolithic circle. The removal was incomplete, however, abandoned after one of the larger stones toppled and killed a worker as the team attempted to shift it. I understood this stone remained where it had fallen, the irretrievable corpse *in situ* beneath it. To my mind, this particular tale was more fairy than factual, but I was keen to see what ancient stone scraps were still present.

When I had announced my intention in the local inn to walk the hillside path just two nights before, I was met with the usual murmur of disapproval that generally followed any mention of the folly or the hill, although this time not for reasons that I had come to expect. A man and a youth, both villagers, had gone missing on the hills or in the woods nearby just a week before, and a stranger had been seen patrolling the edge of the farmer's field. The locals feared a killer on the loose, and the local magistrate had even made a public appearance to update the village on the status of the manhunt. I remarked that this was new information to me, but perhaps my trips to the town library had left me preoccupied over recent weeks and out of touch with village life. But on no account, I was informed by Old Benjamin and Young Sally and Mr Williams from the butcher's store and many others gathered by the fire, should I attempt to visit the folly at dusk or dawn until the ruffian had been apprehended.

It was now that the realisation struck me like a physical blow. For the third time I stopped on the hillside path, and this time I whirled about in terror.

The walker. The stranger in the field. The *killer*, it had to be. He was there now, not a half mile distant, freed from the wet field and accelerating towards me at an alarming pace. The sun was almost set and the sky was orange and purple. I had tarried, and about my feet an evening mist was forming. I had misjudged the hill and mistimed my walk. Panic rose in my throat with the hot and bitter taste of bile.

The murderer — for I knew it to be he — was waving now, his silhouetted arms too long in the dusk light. He bounced left and right as he ran, crablike, towards the hill path, and I saw that it was not his arms that were long but the object they were holding. The shape was near impossible to identify, but it was wide at one end and thin at the other, and had protuberances and something that flashed silver among the shadows. A gun perhaps! Or worse, a machete blade! I had to be prepared to fight. My perch upon the hillside was precarious despite the stone path and in the gathering darkness a suicidal slip would be all too easy. The plateau and summerhouse was my best and likely only chance for a stout defence.

I still had near to a third of the climb to make, but pulsed with adrenaline the frightful incline appeared much less dramatic. I thrust upwards, two steps at a time, towards the top.

So intent was I on making safe footfalls that I did not see the shapes ahead of me on the hill until I was very close indeed to the summit. Solid against the velvet blue sky three figures waved me onwards. Two small and short, the third tall, triangular and bulky. I stopped and gasped and blinked in the half-light.

They were two children and a woman in an old, wide dress, each frantically waving at me, urging me to resume my climb and join them. For a moment I was perplexed but as I allowed myself a pause to suck cooling night air into my burning lungs, I realised that there was safety in numbers. The party on the hilltop

were surely not an afternoon's picnic trip for the children, as it was now far too late. An evening walk gone astray, perhaps, a family making the same mistake I had to climb this dangerous hill. I thought perhaps that the father was just over the crest, out of sight, keeping a watch on the walker behind me, maybe flexing his strong walking stick in both hands, testing its strength and preparing to make a stand.

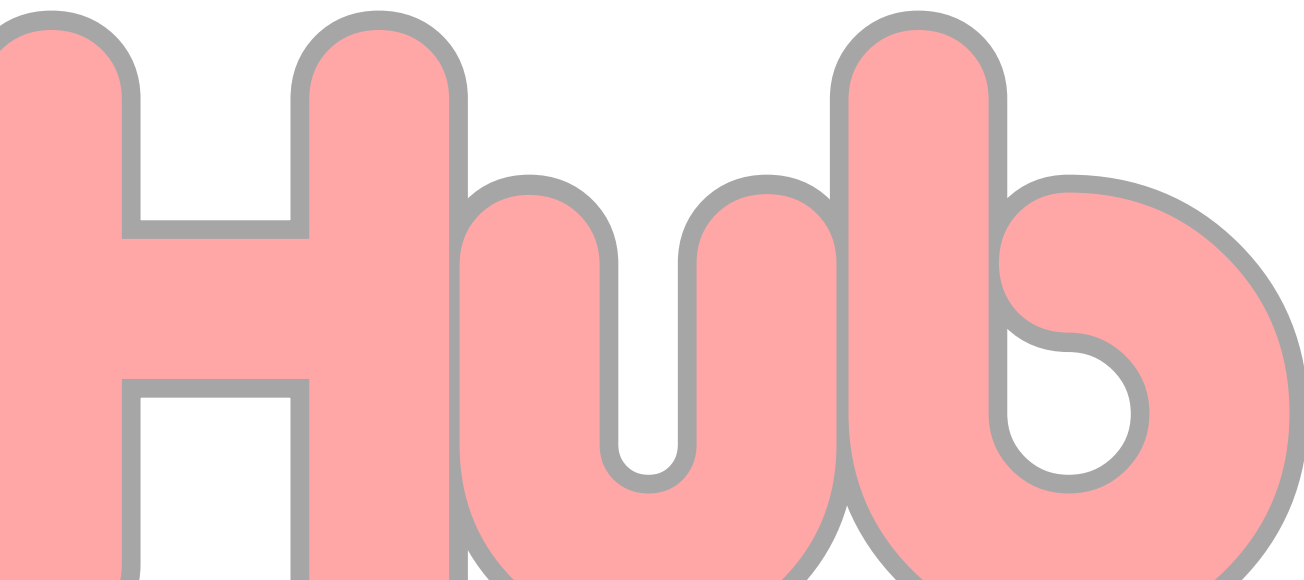
I could hear them now too, calling me by name. If this was strange I did not notice, desperate as I was to reach them. I drew closer, the final steps curving slightly to my left as they negotiated the final few yards to the plateau, and could now see them more clearly. The children were a boy and a girl, he dressed in odd breeches and stockings and wearing a tunic in blue, she in a dress of a matching colour with a strange, old-fashioned bonnet upon her platted hair. The woman, very young herself, was attired in much the same manner, her dress impractically full for the countryside. Each of them waved with vigour, and each of them called my name and urged me to hurry as best I was able.

Alas. Too late I heard the walker cry out behind me, calling for me to stop and turn back. Too late the walker, the farmer himself who owned the field, stopped and fired his shotgun into the air, scaring nothing but sleeping crows. Too late I saw the door on the side of the folly now open somehow, a sickly yellow lantern within.

Now I turned to flee and saw the walker also running, tripping back down the hillside path, driven by primal horror. I felt the cold hands of the boy and girl and woman grasp me by trouser and waist and collar, and spinning back around to face them I had a moment to catch their faces dissolving into endless night, their six eyes swirling spirals of distant stars red and terrible.

And behind them, further along the plateau, hands rough and thick and white clutched at the cold edge of the fallen stone, heaving it aside like the lid of a primaeva sarcophagus. In the black hollow between stone and Earth more eyes red in the dark, another wraith hungry for the curious and the foolhardy and those who underestimate the night and take walks when they shouldn't.

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The Age of Odin

reviewed by jared shurin



by James Lovegrove
Solaris
rrp £7.99

The Age of Odin is the third in Lovegrove's sequence of modern mythological updates. It began with 2009's *The Age of Ra*, continued in 2010's *The Age of Zeus* and, now, in 2011, Lovegrove travels to Viking territory with *The Age of Odin*. All three books have a similar construction – the deities of "x" pantheon have returned and are doing their divine thing in our modern day world. A military or paramilitary hero, generally some sort of outsider, gets drawn into their schemes and champions the human perspective.

The Age of Odin is no exception. Gideon Coxall, pensioned-off soldier, is having a hard time fitting into the civilian world. His wife has left him, he can't see his son, he drinks too much and, much to his own disgust, the only job he can find involves him selling refurbished printer toners. When the chance comes up to do a little (probably dodgy) mercenary work, Gideon pounced. Ostensibly, he needs the cash. But deep inside, he knows that he *belongs* in combat.

The story kicks off with a car crash. Gideon skids off the road on his way to meet his mysterious employer and, when the dust (or the snow) settles, he finds himself in an armoured encampment filled with lunatics pretending to be Norse gods. Odin is a crabby old man, Thor is a drunken brute and Freya is an Amazonian dream-girl. Gideon makes some token efforts to escape, but a few close encounters with frost giants and trolls make a believer of him.

Unfortunately for Gideon, he's signed up to a noble cause on the eve of Ragnarok; the ancient Viking myth of Armageddon. The first half of the book involves Gideon finding his place alongside the friendly (if feisty) Nordic gods, the second half is nigh-on continuous battle. For those familiar with Norse mythology, the sequence of events is a verse by verse, tongue in cheek translation; generally swapping enormous RoboTech-style tanks for mythical creatures. Why bother housing and feeding the actual Midgard Serpent when you can kitbash together a burrowing Destructicon with a sonic cannon on its nose?

As fun as the book's over-the-top violence is – it would make a fantastic video game – Lovegrove's good enough to sneak in a bit of themin' with the shootin'. Like the other books in the sequence, *The Age of Odin* is a fiercely humanist text. The gods and monsters may have the advantage of height (and big hammers), but humans have true authority. The mythological creatures are stuck in their paths – they are controlled by fate and, ultimately, the power of storytelling. By contrast, we remain the authors of both our own destinies *and* those of our collectively appointed deities. Lovegrove is vigorously carving out a godpunk subgenre – rebellious underdog humans battling an outmoded belief system. Guns help a bit, but the real weapon is free will.

If that runs a bit heavy for you, don't worry – *The Age of Odin* is packed to the brim with girls, guns, gods and even (for old times' sake), a bit of power armour. Lovegrove wisely continues to keep reader entertainment first and foremost, with an explosive and cheeky science-fiction interpretation of age-old archetypes.



by Tim Waggoner
Angry Robot
rrp £7.99

I've recently come to discover and love a new sub-genre: sentient zombie novels. I should hasten to add that this is not a genre of book that is itself sentient and hungering for your brains. No, this is a genre breathing fresh life to zombie tales by making the zombies self-aware and, for me, much more interesting. I'd been aware of such books as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* sparking a new wave of RomZomCom novels, but, to be honest, they held no appeal (despite my love for *Shaun of the Dead*). Making the zombies self-aware, and, more importantly, aware of their condition, is a new and much more interesting move.

Having been introduced to this concept, then, I was very eager to get my hands on the first of Angry Robot's novels in this vogue, *Nekropolis*. The setting is the dark world of Nekropolis, a city state in its own dimension to which the creatures of the night have fled from humans to live in peace and depravity. The zombie is Matthew Richter, an ex-cop from Cleveland who entered Nekropolis and earned his new undead state in pursuit of his last case. Now he does 'favours' for the locals in exchange for 'dark stones', which buy him the preservative spells that stop him from rotting away to nothing.

Tim Waggoner's creative capacities are richly displayed. *Nekropolis* is a wealth of imaginative invention, both in terms of its many and varied inhabitants, and with the twists and turns via which he moves the plot along. The vampire librarian who parts with information in exchange for a page from the book of your soul is a wonderful idea, beautifully realised. Fade, the socialite who only exists to the extent that she is known and witnessed by others, is equally interesting. The many devices that Richter draws from his pockets to get him out of scrapes are ceaselessly inventive. Moreover, there is a good story here, with a fast pace.

That said, as a work intended to be humorous, I found I was too often led through a joke by the hand. I was often told directly that a character had been making a wisecrack, but the joke was either too obvious, or had been carefully explained in a way that robbed it of its fire. Similarly, despite the rampant inventiveness and originality in many areas, it often fell back on clichés in a way that felt oddly jarring. Gothtown and the manners of its vampire inhabitants are presumably meant to send up a certain type of over-serious velvet or leather wearing person with gothic pretensions. But that ground is too well-furrowed, and it falls a bit flat. Other areas of Nekropolis – such as The Sprawl – are rich with originality, and I would have loved to see more of that flowering in the domain of the vampires, too.

Similarly, there is too much exposition in some places and not enough description in others. There are several moments that have the potential for real power and interest – moments of poignancy and angst – which are glossed over far too quickly. The resolution of the central enigma of the story is led up to in a thoroughly gripping manner, but then, as the chapter ends on a cliff-hanger, the tension dissipates with a thump. The next chapter goes on to tell what happened, in dialogue, one character recounting events to another, rather than showing me the much anticipated description of the actual event. Possibly the author didn't want to dwell on the moments of angst and poignancy because this is intended to be a darkly humorous romp. Which is fair enough, but it's a difficult balance to pull off, and I did feel the execution wobbled at times.

That said, the book *is* great fun – a thoroughly enjoyable read that did keep me gripped and wanting to know what would happen next. I was impressed by the rich world that Waggoner wove for his readers, and I found his zombie detective to be engaging. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone interested in a light-hearted romp with zombies.

Castle Ravenloft / Wrath of Ashardalon

reviewed by phil lunt



Wizards of the Coast

rrp £49.99

It's all about online play nowadays, isn't it? I'm talking massively multiplayer online role playing games, or MMORPGs, obviously. Well the folk over at Wizards of the Coast, current custodians of the *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) brand, are trying their hardest to show folk just how much fun more traditional role playing games (RPG) still are.

It's been a loooong time since I last played an RPG. I went through the progression of *Heroquest* and D&D via *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* back when I was, erm, about 11-ish. Anyway, as is usual in these stories, I hit my teens and got into video games, music and girls. The RPG stuff got dusty and eventually made its way either into the loft at my parent's house or on to car-boot sales.

Time passed.

I then dabbled with *World of Warcraft* (WoW) in 2005 but it wasn't for me. Whenever I wasn't playing WoW I was always thinking "I'm paying money for a game I'm not currently playing..." because of the monthly subscription fees. There were also *strange* goings on at *The Lion's Pride Inn* of a Friday night... So I quit.

Fast forward to late last year. I was looking for something along the lines of a board game based RPG, similar to what I'd experienced with *Heroquest* but newer. I did some snooping around online and stumbled across *Castle Ravenloft* and a new venture from Wizards of the Coast; *The D&D Adventure System, Co-operative Board Game!*

I managed to grab a copy of *Castle Ravenloft* and played through it with friends. Recently, in February, Wizards of the Coast released the second game in the series, *Wrath of Ashardalon*, and I grabbed a copy of that one, too.

Whilst not strictly being a "dice and paper" or "paper and pen" RPG in that dungeon tiles, playing figures and item cards are provided, these games give an extremely streamlined and easy to pick up entry point into RPG gaming in the world of D&D.

Both *Ravenloft* and *Ashardalon* are very similar; 1 to 5 players can participate, each one picking an already created hero character to play through a series of 13 set adventures. Where *Ravenloft* acts as the introduction to the system, though, *Ashardalon* further expands on it, adding more adventure specific items and treasure along with basic campaign settings and new dungeon tiles. Specific rules such as Chambers represent climactic scenes from adventures involving all manner of serious beasties. Rules for using doors are also included in *Ashardalon*. This last one may seem a bit obvious but, for some reason, doors were omitted from the dungeons in *Ravenloft*. However, because the games are compatible, there's nothing stopping you playing *Ravenloft* and including tiles and treasure from *Ashardalon*. It's all good.



My merry band of adventurers for playing through both games was made up of two experienced-yet-lapsed RPGers and two people who had never played anything like this before. Everything about the games is fairly straightforward. All fights and encounters are dealt with by the throw of a d20 (one twenty-sided die). Every hero and monster has an "Armour Class" (AC), you roll the die, add any weapon or magic bonuses and if the result is equal to or higher than the AC amount then you've hit.



Simples! Traps and encounters are dealt with by rolling higher than a set number to disarm. All nice and easy!

However, what was a bit unusual for both myself and the other experienced player in the group at first, is that these games aren't played with any "Dungeon Master" (DM). In regular games, the DM controls all the monsters and, generally, settles any arguments. Here, the players control the monsters and villains themselves at the end of each of their hero's turns. Each monster has set tactics so there can be no "ganging up" on certain characters. In fact, there's no point in doing that, anyway, because if anyone dies then it's game over!

The games are co-operative experiences and if just one character in your party dies at any point then that's it. Game over. Obviously, there are health boosts and bonuses and magic that can replenish hit points but most things are limited.

On our very first quest we were swamped by monsters early on which frustrated the two newbies of the group. We lost heavily with 3 characters dying in quick succession. Before any serious arguments broke out we went back to the rulebook and realised we'd forgotten a few things, like the fact that experience points can be used to disarm encounters and traps for starters, and we quickly got back into it. The second and subsequent games went much smoother. Like a lot of games of this nature I feel you have to play them more to allow things to flow easily. Repetition breeds familiarity and you stop referring back to the rules and just get on with things.

We played through the games and enjoyed them once the snags had been ironed out but, admittedly, that was probably because we were a bit rusty. Having a DM to lay the law down would've helped in some circumstances but we muddled through.

One thing *Ravenloft* and *Ashardalon* have certainly done for me has, again, piqued my interest in RPGs and perhaps more importantly in the new D&D 4th Edition system which is the natural progression from these co-op games as the game system employed here is based on the 4th Edition game.

These board games *could* be considered as pricey to the casual gamer, though. RRP is £49.99 but recently various Amazon sellers had them for sale from £30 upwards and last October, when everywhere else had sold out, copies of *Castle Ravenloft* were on offer for up to £100 on Ebay. However, you *do* get loads of items in each box. *Castle Ravenloft* includes 42 plastic figures, including a huge "Dracolich" and 41 dungeon tiles as well as numerous other cards and counters. *Wrath of Ashardalon* has the same number of items but different monsters, heroes and dungeon tiles. The games are totally compatible with each other, and other D&D games, so the possibilities are, potentially, endless... Also, each quest is randomly generated to an extent, with the exception of adventure specific dungeon tiles, villains, treasure or traps. Dungeon tiles are shuffled before each adventure and placed turn by turn as each hero discovers a new section and the monsters are also picked randomly using a deck of cards. Repeat the same quest and it'll be different each time.

I did feel on some occasions, though, that some harder to defeat monsters should've been excluded from earlier missions. However, just because this isn't specified in the rules doesn't mean that, as a group, you can't just agree to do that anyway. It's an RPG after all and the rules/gameplay can be as flexible as you want them to be.

As a lapsed RPGer I found these games to be fun to play and easy to pick up and run through. If you could only pick up one of them then I think the extra rules may give *Ashardalon* the edge over *Ravenloft* but then *Ravenloft* has vampires, ghouls and zombies! *Ashardalon* has a more traditional pick of Orcs, Duergar and Grell. Oh, and a ruddy great Dragon. Pick your poison. I think the system as a whole is a winner.

Another game in the series, *The Legend of Drizzt*, is slated for release later this year and I'm certainly looking forward to seeing what Wizards of the Coast add to the game system then. In the meantime, I have the new D&D 4th Edition Starter Set "Red Box" to play with...

FEATURES

Interview: James O'Barr

with richard whittaker



The Crow was never supposed to be successful. The first issue was only published because indie publishers Caliber Press needed something to fill out their print order. Now its tragic romance has become a mainstay of independent comics and goth culture. The trade paperback has sold over 250,000 copies and been translated into a dozen languages, making it the most successful English-language black-and-white comic ever. Creator James O'Barr wrote the tale of eternal love and remorseless vengeance as a cathartic expression of rage after personal tragedy. Yet over two decades after its first publication, and 17 years after the beloved film adaptation, it has become a cultural touchstone whose power is not diminished by bad studio cash-in sequels. Hub Fiction recently caught up with the former U.S. Marine and ex-automotive mechanic to talk about *The Crow*, his new film project *Frame 137*, his new digital comic *Sundown*, and exactly why Robert Mitchum was such a bad ass.

Hub Magazine: There aren't many comics that have had *The Crow's* durability and impact.

James O'Barr: It's become like a rite of passage for every teenager. You have to see *The Crow* and you have to own at least two Cure albums. It's been 21 years since I did the book, and every couple of years I get a new generation of fans. 'You weren't even born when this book came out, how did you hear about it?' And their parents show it to them or their friends tell them about it. It actually sells as good today as it did ten years ago. I'm definitely blessed, and I don't feel like that book is a curse to me because it's my baby. If it was *Spiderman* and I felt like I didn't own it and it was a work for hire thing, I would definitely be resentful. But I wrote it, penciled it, inked it, lettered it, I did everything but print the thing. It's like my first child, and my fans have allowed me to do what I really love for a living. I worked on cars 'til 1995, and went home and drew at night. Now I could paint virtually anything I want and people would buy it. Granted, it's going to be dark and violent and romantic, but that's just me, that's what I'm attracted to.

HM: That's a pretty enviable position for an independent artist, to have that creative and financial freedom.

JO'B: I hardly know any artist or musician that doesn't have a day job. I love my life. I get up at six o'clock and I start working every day and I'm excited. I've learned my craft, too. I've never had any art lessons at all, so I learned things little increments at a time. And I'm finally to the point where, if I can think of it, I can draw it. So it's a really exciting time for me. I have a bunch of new books in progress, I have another film in progress, not a *Crow* film. The horizons are wide open for me and I'm in a good place in my life now I'm out of Detroit. I'm healthy now. Shot, stabbed, and run over by Sanford and Son, it's time to leave. I can take a hint.

HM: What's the new movie project?

JO'B: Right now I'm working on a film called *Frame 137*. It's a reference to the Zapruder film. Frame 137 is the frame where Kennedy's head explodes. There's a bar in the story called Frame 137 and they show the Zapruder film on a loop. It's a cyberpunk story. I actually wrote it 15 years ago when cyberpunk was the fad, but William Gibson told me that technology is changing so fast that by the time your book is in print, everything will be obsolete and kind of laughable. But the director [Judd Tilyard] is using that to his advantage. The whole thing is set in an alternate universe, and I just met him in Detroit two weeks ago, because he's thinking about filming it in Detroit where the original story was set. He wants to shoot the exteriors in Detroit because it's a readymade, post-apocalyptic thing, and then the interiors in Australia because he has the sets built. It looks really good and I'm really happy with it, and he wants to work really closely with me. It's more like we're partners than I'm hired help. I just did a lot of pre-production drawings

for that. The way these independent productions work, they'll do a 30 minute 'coming attractions' thing and they'll show that around to get the financing for the rest of it.

HM: You're also doing a new 10-part digital comic for Motionworks called *Sundown*.

JO'B: I'm working on this Gothic Spaghetti Western, which is a pet project of mine. The main characters are vampires, but I never call them that by name. They have a blood disease and a skin disease, and so they have to keep themselves covered in the day. These are actual diseases. I researched all that stuff. It very much has a Sergio Leone look to it, so I'm painting it all in these wide Panavision panels, just to keep that look. I think it would make a really exceptional movie. There's three main characters – Joan Jett (Lucy), Robert Mitchum (Roy), and this seven foot creepy guy (Krait) that you never see his face.

HM: Have you ever heard Mitchum's singing? His *Ballad of Thunder Road* for the movie *Thunder Road* is pretty bad-ass.

JO'B: Robert Mitchum is my hero for that era of films, because he was just the ultimate bad guy, and he just didn't give a shit. He was an exceptional actor, even though he didn't get a lot of exceptional roles. Plus, he didn't shy away from playing the bad guy. He wasn't John Wayne. He didn't always want to be the good guy. *Night of the Hunter*, *Cape Fear*, he's just evil in those movies, and he's scary in *Cape Fear*. And if you're going to use actors in your comics, it's best to use dead actors, because they can't sue you. And Joan Jett's actually a friend of mine.

HM: Speaking of music, you used to play with the band Trust Obey: Are you still performing?

JO'B: I'm playing with a few bands in Dallas. It's more of a hobby for me, because I've never had any music lessons, I've never had any art lessons, but I love being creative and I know what sounds good and I know what I like. I go into these studios with these bands that have recorded ten albums and I feel like a monkey at a keyboard. 'No, no, James, the next chord is an F-minor,' and I'm like, 'Can you show me that?' But I know they like my lyrics and the passion that I bring to it.

HM: Indie comics can always be a crap shoot, so how quickly did you know that *The Crow* had become successful?

JO'B: I got really fortunate, because *The Crow* was more referenced to music than it was to comics, so it ended up getting into a lot of record stores. They picked up on it right away with all the musical references, and you have to remember that this was '88, '89, way ahead of that goth curve. It didn't even have a name back then. It was just alternative, although alternative to what I don't know. It was that post-punk thing of Comsat Angels, Wire, that sort of bands that were really influential, but it took 15 years for it to catch on here. I was well ahead of the curve on that, but I knew that if I liked that kind of thing, there was an audience out there for it. Granted, it took a few years, but I had no idea it would become assimilated into mass culture. I'm still astonished when I'm watching *Law & Order* and there's a *Crow* reference on there. It's almost so distant that it doesn't have anything to do with me. Or talk shows, where kids are saying, 'I'm in my *Crow* phase.'

HM: You were pretty overt in your musical references and, especially for an American audience, it definitely helped define the iconography for that musical scene.

JO'B: I actually got a thank you letter from New Order. Out of all the musical people that have stolen from them, they thought it was a guy who did a comic that really got it. Initially I used Joy Division lyrics without permission because it was a little independent comic. 5,000 copies, they're never going to see it. It was a little flattering that, ten years later, I get a thank you letter from them for introducing Joy Division to American audiences.

HM: The other side of creating something as culturally significant as *The Crow* is that you get a lot of imitators and lot of works that reference your work.

JO'B: I get stolen from repeatedly, is what you mean. Actually, I just find it flattering. I think everyone knows

where it came from. When people saw the *Daredevil* movie, everyone knew, 'Oh, that's from *The Crow*, that's from *The Crow*. The two flaming d's? That's from *The Crow*.' And actually I have to give credit to Steve Johnson, the director, because he gave credit in the commentary. 'I swiped this from *The Crow*, this is an homage' – which is the pleasant way to say 'I stole this.' But there are other films, and I think the worst *Crow* rip-off I have ever seen is *Max Payne*. Marky Mark, you know? And I couldn't believe they were getting away with this. The very last line, Marky Mark says, 'I believe in angels.' That was the frigging tag line from the poster. And the director, Stephen Norrington, the guy that fucked up *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, he was slated to direct the new *Crow* film. And once they announced that at San Diego [Comic Con], and they literally got 2,000 boos from the audience, they thought, 'We have to win back this goth crowd.' So they hired Nick Cave to come in and do a rewrite, and Nick never called me, and I was kind of hurt by that because I thought we were friends.



HM: You have some history together?

JO'B: When Nick Cave came to Detroit, I used to get his heroin for him. Because nobody wants to see a performer going through withdrawal on stage. Unless that's part of the act. So I thought Nick was my friend, and granted I haven't spoken to him in years, and actually I liked his writing more than I cared for his music. I thought Birthday Party was a phenomenal band.

HM: The original film captured lightning in a bottle. It just seems like a bad idea to try to replicate that.

JO'B: Just for the record, I only worked on the first film and had nothing to do with the rest of them. I'm tickled to death that Stephen Norrington just got fired off the new movie. When they initially announced that they were going to remake *The Crow*, they got this overwhelming negative response. I don't think there was one positive response from anybody. Everybody was just, 'Leave it alone, leave it alone.' That first movie is a \$10 million movie. An episode of *ER* is \$13 million, so that gives you some frame of reference. No matter how much money you throw at it, bigger explosions or car chases, you're never going to top what Brandon [Lee] and Alex Proyas did. And I also have to give credit to Alex McDowell, the production designer. He did the *Watchman* film, he's a really talented guy and a real sweetheart too.

HM: It also launched Alex Proyas as a feature film director.

JO'B: Alex has really matured. His other properties, I didn't care for that much, but you can tell he's technically brilliant. He just doesn't have the right material to deal with. And hopefully I'll get to work with him again. He's said in a few interviews that he'd like to work with me again, because of our visual, cinematic sense. And he loves the idea of having a comic book that is like pre-made storyboards to work from.

HM: Any word on the current state of the *Crow* remake?

JO'B: Norrington announces that he wants Marky Mark Wahlberg to play *The Crow*, and I think that was the last straw. So he's been fired. But I hear they already have so much money invested in this remake that they're not going to just abandon it. They're just going to find a new director. And it's going to happen, regardless of what a calamity it is when it comes out. I think there are some really exceptional directors out there who could do something with it if it's scripted right, if they don't try to re-do the first film, if they take it in a different direction. When they told me they were going to do a sequel, I went, 'No, just leave it alone,

that's Brandon's legacy.' But when this \$10 million film makes \$100 million at American theaters alone, there's no way to stop this.



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