



Dark Space is not really dark.

Neither is it empty.



The new space opera by Marianne de Pierres - in all good bookshops from May 2007 / www.mariannedepierres.com / www.orbitbooks.co.uk

Hub

Issue 8
May 25th 2007

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Published by *The Right Hand*.
Sponsored by Orbit.

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HELP! Comic Store Recommendation Needed

As many of you know, *Hub* started out as a print magazine. We were carried by a number of comic stores across the country. One of them carried us in multiple branches, and sold a goodly number (for a small chain). Unfortunately, though the first batch of magazines was delivered to them at the beginning of December they have continually chosen not to pay their invoice. The invoice is for a miniscule £115. I used to spend more than that with them every month! I say "used to", as I have naturally cancelled all orders with them and instigated county court proceedings. This leaves me with nowhere local to purchase my regular fix of 4-colour fiction. If any of our UK readers have recommendations for mail-order shops that you would recommend, please let me know over at www.hub-mag.co.uk/wordpress. Your recommendations are appreciated.

About Hub

Every week we will be publishing a piece of short fiction, along with at least one review (book, DVD, film, audio, or TV series) and we'll also have the occasional feature, too. We can afford to do this largely due to the generosity of the people over at Orbit, who have sponsored this electronic version of the magazine, and partly by the generosity displayed by your good selves. If you like what you read here, please consider making a donation over at www.hub-mag.co.uk.



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One in a Million by Kate Kelly

Matthew dragged his stick along the metal railings, satisfied by the loud rattle it made, and feeling the vibrations in his hand travelling up his arm. He glanced over his shoulder. The three girls were still following him.

It was because he was different. He had always known that he wasn't the same as the other children at school. Most of the time he didn't let it bother him. But recently things had started to change and they wouldn't leave him alone. He pulled a face and quickened his stride. He hated this game.

The girls were whispering among themselves, and one of them giggled. He wouldn't have minded so much if Fiona had been with them, but these three always took things a bit too far. What started out as a game would soon become a torment.

He stopped dragging the stick and let it fall to the ground, leaving it lying on the pavement. Behind he could hear the girls starting to run, laughter on their breath as they came. But he reached the gap in the railings and darted through. He knew they would not follow.

On the other side of the railings was a patch of wasteland, stunted shrubs and wizened grasses. He followed an uneven muddy track that led towards the old forest, the stumps and trunks and branches of the long dead trees stark against the putrid sky. He glanced back once. The girls were pressing their faces against the railings and he could just hear their voices rising and falling with the wind.

"Scaredy-cat, scaredy-cat..." they chanted. He laughed and started to run, relishing his freedom now that he was no longer pursued, splashing through the puddles of yellow slurry that had accumulated wherever the ground dipped. It splattered onto his trousers, but he didn't care. He knew it would rot the fabric and make his mother fume, but they were only trousers.

When he reached the forest he slowed to a walk. The ground here was more uneven, and the path skirted round broken branches and fallen trees, their roots jutting out of the barren soil. In places the rain had eroded the surface soil, forming gullies that cut down into the bare rock beneath. Matthew shivered. The other children said this place was haunted and dared not come. But for him it was a welcome refuge.

The ground began to drop steeply downhill. Here the erosion was more intense, the gullies deeper, and fewer trees still stood. He scrambled over the fallen trunks, feeling the rotten wood crumble beneath his hands and feet. Soon there would be nothing left to show that there had ever been a forest here. And now he could smell the stink of the sea, and see its greyness where it merged with the horizon, in the yellow fuf of smoke that was spewing from the chimneys of the factory across the bay.

He scrambled down a steep slope of loose earth and stone, onto the coarse shingle at the top of the beach. To his left a jumble of rocks jutted out into the sea, and there a lone figure sat hunched over a fishing rod. Matthew smiled and set off carefully over the beach, stepping over the empty bottles and patches of oil that marked the tide line. The air was stinging the back of his throat and caught at his breath, and the old man turned towards him at the sound of his cough. He waved and Matthew waved back. Then hastened over to join him, sitting on the tarpaulin sheet that the old man spread to protect him from the dampness of the slime coated boulders. Matthew looked at the waves braking gently against the rocks and the brown scum trapped in the eddies that formed between the boulders. The fishing line disappeared into the viscous water without a ripple.

The old man smiled and ruffled his hair and Matthew pulled away.

"Oi Gramps!"

Gramps laughed, his voice cracked with age.

“So what brings you here, those girls pestering you again?”

Matthew pulled a face.

“They keep wanting to play Kiss-Chase.” He grimaced. “Yuk!”

The old man laughed again.

“Guess you’re just going to have to get used to that sort of thing.”

“Gross!” said Matthew, thinking of the three faces jeering at him from behind the railings. He looked at the fishing line, stretching out into the sea, unmoving.

“Would you like to stay out here tonight for a cook up?” said Gramps. “I’ve got my stove and some food.”

“Cool.” Matthew turned back to him. “Have you caught any fish?”

Gramps laughed again and ruffled Matthew’s hair.

“I haven’t caught a fish in years!” he said, and Matthew could see the tenderness in his eyes as he spoke. Matthew grinned at the old man. He liked being the favourite grandchild. He knew it was because he was different, the only boy. And that made him special.

“Matthew.” The old man’s voice sounded soft. “You’re one in a million.”

#

Matthew glanced over his shoulder and smiled, rubbing his chin as he walked, feeling the soft down that was beginning to grow there. Fiona was still following him. That was good, although she didn’t look particularly pleased.

He picked his way carefully over the rotting tree stumps and skirted round the bramble thickets that had started to grow here over the past few years. They were particularly thorny with barbs over a centimetre long, and the scratches tended to fester and took ages to heal.

Fiona didn’t know this place as well as he did, and he slowed his pace so that she would not fall too far behind. Ahead he could see the ocean, stained green with an algal bloom, and beyond, the factory, brown smoke pouring upwards before flattening out in the still air.

He rounded the last of the brambles and scrambled down onto the loose shingle and scattered litter of the beach. The rocky headland was still there, and Matthew looked towards it, half hoping, half expecting to see the hunched figure leaning over his fishing rod, waiting for a fish to bite that would never come. But Gramps was gone and Matthew missed him. People just didn’t seem to live so long these days.

He heard stones sliding as Fiona picked her way down the bank to join him on the beach. He grinned and turned towards her, but her eyes were narrow and she did not smile.

“You bastard!” she snarled, sweeping her dark hair back from her face.

Matthew stepped towards her, reaching out to touch her, but she pushed his hand away. Her brow furrowed as she glared at him. Matthew laughed.

“Fiona! What’s the matter?”

“What’s the matter? Do you really need to ask?”

Matthew grinned at her and shrugged. She was being silly. “Yes. I do.”

“I saw you...with *her!*” Fiona’s voice seemed to catch in her throat and Matthew could see that her eyes were now brimming with tears. He reached out to touch her face again, wiping away a salty drop that was trickling over her cheek. Then he took her hand and pulled her towards her, embracing her gently. She pushed him back.

“You bastard,” she said again, wiping the tears roughly away.

Matthew sighed.

“Oh Fiona. You know how silly you sound?”

She didn’t reply and he could see that the anger had returned to her eyes.

“You don’t own me you know,” he said.

Fiona took a deep breath and he could see that she was shaking.

“I know. It’s just that when I saw you, with her...kissing...”

“Shh.” He stepped forwards, placing his hands on her shoulders. “You know those other girls mean nothing to me. You’re the only one I really love.”

Fiona nodded. “I do know. It’s just I don’t like sharing you, with anyone.”

Matthew didn’t reply. Instead he leaned forwards and kissed her gently. For the smallest fraction of a second she seemed to resist, but then her arms were around him, pulling him close, and he could feel her breasts pressing against his chest, and he kissed her as hard and as passionately as he could.

After a few moments they paused for breath and he looked deep into her eyes. She still appeared serious although the tears had gone.

“I wish you were mine and mine alone,” she said.

Matthew smiled and gently touched the side of her face. He ran his fingers through her silky hair.

“I know. I don’t want to be with anyone else. It’s just the way things are.”

He turned then, and taking hold of her hand pulled her round to stand beside him, staring out at the sea. The viscous green waves were breaking against the slimy pebbles, which clattered in the swash. The sky was overcast, mustard yellow clouds, the horizon obscured by haze; and the brown smoke of the factory, where most of the townspeople worked. He waved his hand in the general direction of the scene before him.

“You know, Gramps had a theory about all this.”

“He did?” Her eyes were wide as she looked at him.

“Yes. He reckoned it was the factory, at least, not just the one here, all the others, all over the place. He reckoned that they were what caused it.”

“Oh? How could that be?”

Matthew waved his hand at the chimneys. “It’s all the stuff coming out; all the chemicals, all the dust. He reckons that’s what caused the seas and the forest to die. He reckons that’s what made me different from most other people.”

“I think your Gramps was a crazy old man who spent all his time fishing in an ocean where nothing lives.”

Matthew turned towards her and laughed at her quizzical expression. “Maybe he was,” he said and squeezed her hand. “But Gramps was special too.”

Fiona didn’t reply at first. Matthew felt her sliding her arms around him once more.

“I suppose he was,” she said after a while. “Just like you.”

Matthew kissed her, tasting the sweetness of her lips, the softness of her mouth, one hand holding her close and the other stroking her long hair. When they paused she held him tightly and rested her head on his shoulder.

“Oh Matthew,” she whispered in his ear. “You’re one in a million.”

#

Matthew stared out towards the factory, the grey walls and the chimneys. For the first time that he could remember there was no smoke rising, billowing into the festering sky. The factory had closed.

He glanced towards the headland and thought of Gramps, all those years ago, sitting on those rocks, waiting for a fish to bite that would never come. The sea was red now; red with a soup of microplankton and dynoflagelates and where the waves broke against the rocks they left a dark smear like blood. He took a deep breath and the pebbles crunched beneath his feet as he moved. He glanced back along the shore, and paused. Someone was coming.

The figure was small, hurrying towards him, half walking, half jogging. He recognised her and running a hand through his thinning hair started towards her. The air stung the back of his throat and the pebbles and litter slid in their scum of oil beneath his feet as he hastened along the beach.

He was gasping for breath when he reached her. She held out her hand towards him and he took it in his feeling how soft her skin was and how small and delicate the clasp of her fingers. And he thought how precious his children were.

“It’s time,” she said softly, and her eyes were piercing blue, just like Fiona’s. Still holding her hand he led her back the way she had come, striding over the pebbles as she scurried along beside him. The old forest was an impenetrable jungle of barbs and thorns, so they would have to go the long way round. He hoped that there would be enough time. He had been with Fiona for the birth of all their children. He didn’t want to miss this one.

Lucy was so like her mother, and all the more precious to him for that reason. Fiona had always been his favourite. And of all the children he had fathered, it was the six daughters Fiona had borne him that he loved the most. It was always her house he returned to in the night, whoever he had been with. He always wanted to wake up next to Fiona. If things had been different there would only ever have been her and he would never have bothered with any of the others. But it wasn’t his fault he had been born special.

At the end of the beach a flight of stone steps led up to the lane to the village, and there, tucked away between the shop and the cemetery was the cottage. Matthew ran in through the half open door dragging Lucy behind him. His mother was sitting in the lounge with the rest of the children watching a film on the viewscreen and she gestured upstairs with her head when she saw him.

He ran up the stairs two at a time and burst into the bedroom. Fiona was kneeling on the bed, her arms around her sister, and she smiled when she saw him and sat back down. A midwife, grey of hair and skin was fussing nearby.

“You’re just in time,” Fiona’s sister said, stepping aside for Matthew to take her place beside Fiona. Fiona smiled at him. She was sweating and her grey hair was damp and limp, but her eyes were bright.

“You cut this one fine,” she said.

Matthew laughed gently. “I haven’t missed one yet.”

He kissed her as she sank back against the pillows and took her hand, squeezing it tightly as she screwed up her eyes.

“Just one more push,” said the midwife.

And then it was there, the room filled with the cry of a newborn baby, pink skin and white vermix, wet from the birth. The midwife wrapped it in a blanket and handed it to Matthew. There were tears in her eyes.

“It’s a boy,” she said.

Fiona strained again and a second son was born. She clasped the babies to her chest and looked up at Matthew, eyes shining, and he felt the emotion choking in his throat.

“Twin boys,” she breathed.

The midwife was weeping openly and Fiona’s sister seemed lost for words.

“I haven’t delivered a boy in thirty years,” the midwife said dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief. “Not since you were born.” She looked at Matthew and he could see that she was smiling beneath her tears.

He looked at his sons. They were both so special. They were the future. He reached out and touched their soft heads.

“They’re two in a million,” he said.

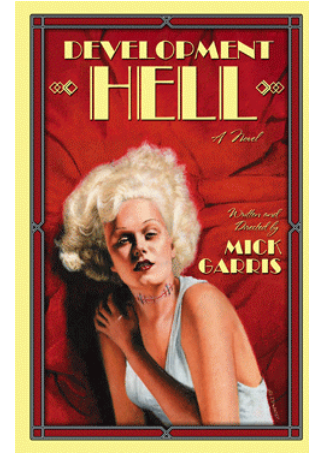
REVIEWS

Development Hell reviewed by Paul Kane

DEVELOPMENT HELL By Mick Garris

Published by Cemetery Dance (www.cemeterydance.com)

Hardback Limited Edition: \$40, Lettered \$200



The name Mick Garris should be very familiar to fans of the genre. He is, of course, the acclaimed director of such movies and TV mini-series as *Sleepwalkers*, *The Shining*, *The Stand* and *Desperation*, as well as being the driving force behind top US show *Masters of Horror*. He's written prose before, most notably a collection called *A Life in the Cinema*, in which his 'Chocolate' story – later adapted for *MoH* – appeared. But *Development Hell* is his first full-length novel, a really sumptuous looking hardback, complete with Les Edwards cover artwork depicting Jean Harlow with Frankenstein stitches in her neck. If that doesn't make you want to pick up the book and read, I don't know what will...

Told in first person, our story begins with the discovery of a mutant baby belonging to a Mexican woman in downtown LA. Rewind slightly, and we get the back history of the person telling the story – a young director who's come up through the UCLA film-making courses and cut his teeth on a student movie called *Words Without Voices*, which got him noticed. Unfortunately, his first big gig, *Expiration*, bombs and we catch up with him as he's looking for a project that will see him rocketing to great heights again. He thinks he's found that with the freak baby, and embarks on a mockumentary shoot which includes the hideous baby's birth. Little does he know, the creature will become a part of his life thereafter.

Lesser story-tellers might leave it at that, but Garris continues to give us a chilling account of a night spent with the re-animated corpse of Harlow, for the right price, naturally, the protagonist's spiral into despair and into TV soap directing – though which is worse, he leaves you to decide – and his affair with a Hollywood princess, which results in tragedy for all concerned, not to mention the reality show to end them all. There is even the possibility of transcending death, as the book deals with the subject of body jacking in an effort to court the whore that is Lady Hollywood; one minute teasing, the next turning her back on you...

More than just a horror director and author, Mick Garris shows here that he is also quite a cunning satirist and social commentator. His bird's eye view of the movie business has allowed him to make notes and weave all of his observations into the book, which features guest appearances from everyone who's anyone in La-la Land: Spielberg, Cameron, even the ghost of Hitchcock, all are wonderfully and more realistically rendered than people might expect. If there's one thing Garris doesn't do, it's pull his punches.

That's not to say there aren't elements of horror and the supernatural present – they're here in spades. I dare you to read about the sick exploits of that baby without wincing (what else, from the guy who penned *The Fly II*?) or be chilled by Harlow's question, "Do you believe in life after death?" There's also versatility in the layout of the novel, reading more like a series of connected shorts that, once you've devoured, can be dipped into again and again.

Like Stephen King, Clive Barker, Richard Christian Matheson and Frank Darabond on the back cover, I can't recommend this book enough, especially if like me you have an interest in film history in general, as well as horror. It's appropriate that this should say 'Written and Directed' by Garris on the front, as it's extremely visual and would make a great mini-series in itself (no doubt the prolific writer/director is already on the case!). Hellishly good, this is a book that Develops into a sure fire classic.

Coming Next Week: Fiction: *The Boy at the Gate* by Barry J House

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