

Hub

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Issue 7 Contents

Page 2 *Wings of Night* by Allyson Bird
Page 6 Reviews: *The Witch's Dungeon* and *The Killing Floor*

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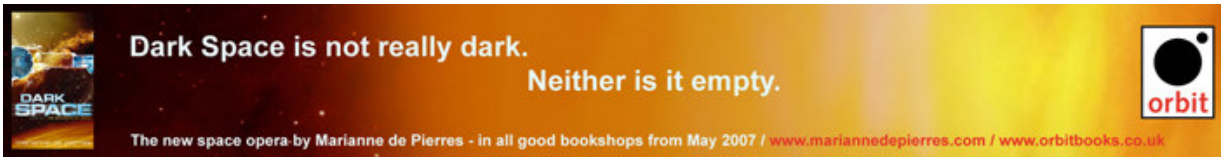
Feedback from last week

Last week's feature on the two new SF magazines in the UK garnered more feedback than anything else we've published, including feedback from the magazines themselves. What is clear from the messages we have received is that each of the magazines featured in the article are run by people with absolute passion for what they do. The second issue of SciFi Now hit the news-stands this week, and looks to be a considerable improvement on the first. What is clear is that both SciFi Now and DeathRay are worth keeping a very close eye on over the next few months.

About Hub

Hub is published 52 times a year! No, that wasn't a typo.
Hub is also now free to read! (Neither was that).

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.



Wings of Night by Allyson Bird



It occurred to Elena that perhaps she wasn't living the best possible life, in the fact that she was never moved to extremes anymore. She had been afraid to think too deeply and act accordingly. In banal activity and thoughtless repetition she barely existed, treading water, hesitant to join the others who called to her from within. Elena was aware of them all, a small army of malcontents who were trying to build a bridge bound together from the fresh hewn bones and rotting sinews of the dead. Reluctantly Elena stayed away from the darker corners of her mind where the dualists dwelt and where former selves waited in quiet expectation.

Elena worked as an usher at the Royal Exchange Theatre on Cross Street, in the city centre of Manchester, on a Thursday and Saturday evening. She showed people to their seats, sold programmes and was given a clip-board with a list of directions for opening and closing the doors for the actors.

8.22p.m. Open for entrance of Hamlet, then close door.

8.25p.m. Open for exit of Hamlet, then close door.

8.26p.m. Open for entrance of Ophelia, close door and so forth.

Those were the kind of duties expected from Elena. At the interval she was required to sell ice cream or coffee and use the antiquated till which never worked properly, that made her look a complete fool when it jammed. The queue would build up with frustrated theatre-goers who simply wanted to be served and take a quick pee before the curtain went up for the second half of the performance.

Still there were always the perks. Elena had seen Romeo and Juliet, in fact many of Shakespeare's plays, also Leo Tolstoy and Arthur Miller amongst others. She had met actors in the Green Room and received free tickets for each performance. There was always Thursday night at the Press Club where the actors and theatre staff would wind down, listen to the singers, laugh at the bawdy, bad jokes of the comedians and occasionally dance. Some actors would get up, sing and tell jokes too. Elena had met a few famous names; Vanessa Redgrave for one, who was an excellent actress, if not a little befuddled sometimes. When Elena said hello to her she couldn't help but think about that crazy award speech Vanessa had delivered once, that must have gone on for around ten minutes, until the audience slow clapped her off the stage.

Sure, Elena had slept with one or two of them, (the actors, not the playwrights and certainly not Vanessa Redgrave or the audience.) Elena had taken great delight, only last Thursday during a performance of *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins, in leaving the door opening until the last second for an actor. He had continued to ignore her after a one night stand, being an usher, she was only the hired help after all. It was quite clear to her that to him a blow job didn't constitute full sex, so he hadn't really been unfaithful to his girlfriend, who was playing Desdemona, in *Othello*, in York. The ushers were supposed to open the doors for actors to exit well before they reached the end of the aisle. Elena smiled with pleasure as she watched the beads of sweat roll down the one night stand's face, when the tip of his golden slipper touched the bottom of the door, as he tried to make his exit. The door was opened the instant his nose touched the small round window in the door. His red satin turban threatened to fall off, he was shaking so much, when Elena didn't open the door quickly enough. He swore at her under his breath and over his shoulder as he made his way back to the dressing room.

In the Green Room she chatted to fellow ushers sometimes but was content to make paper men, cutting them out, then holding them up and staring intently at the way they held hands and were joined together. The actors just smiled indulgently at her, nothing really odd in her behaviour they thought.

Everything went on okay for awhile in her attempt to connect to people. She'd only got into trouble the once that week when she had signed two drunken boys, (drunken prawns, drunken boys – same difference,)

into the Press Club, one of which had followed her into the ladies – thrown her against the wall and tried to get her to have sex with him there and then. The bouncer had sorted that one out.

One evening she had left the theatre and was making her way down to the Press Club just off Deansgate when she met two boys in leather jackets who persuaded her that she would have a better time in Rock World. So she went, dumping them just inside the entrance, when she felt the first rush of excitement as Nirvana pumped through the building. Elena had the choice of Jilly's downstairs or the main club above. The glam rockers mixed with the bikers, the students with the heavy metal gang, everyone was cool. No fights, no arguments, just people hanging around, dancing, boozing and having a great time. Elena had to wear black as an usher so she fitted in just fine at Rock World, although she removed her blouse in the heat of the club, to reveal a clinging black body stocking underneath. Many girls were wearing tight black corsets designed to reveal more than conceal, so Elena felt suitably dressed. In the ladies she brushed up half her shoulder length brown hair in the style of Attila the Hun and painted her eyes like Cleopatra. She didn't care what others thought. Elena liked what she saw in the mirror and no other opinion mattered.

Now this was fine for a while but then as the weeks passed she became more adventurous. Elena became Marion, played by Solveig Dommartin, from the film *Wings of Desire*, directed by Wim Wenders. High above the sweating bodies of the dancers she could see herself on the trapeze, wearing a white leotard and the faded wings of a broken angel. Then, jolted from her reverie she would dance and wander the rooms on her own until the final half hour when she would choose a boy. No one gave one night stands a second thought but Elena was looking for more, much more, which she never found. Not with the Swede, who looked at her in a funny sort of way and said repeatedly that she was Irish, nor with the chef who was leaving soon to work his way around the U.S. and certainly not with the Hell's Angel, Steve, who said he cried when he watched *On the Waterfront* and claimed that he was an immense Brando fan but ironically disliked *The Wild One*. Actually, Steve also blubbed when he talked about *It's a Wonderful Life*, his huge shoulders shaking when he described the euphoria of James Stewart, when he came running back home through the snow. Steve was way too sentimental for Elena. She drew the line at going home with the kind hunk of a man called Bob who smelt like he cleared decayed remains from old houses. And still she did not find what she was looking for.

The next week she coloured her hair blonde, was Marilyn with bubble hair and she would drink beer through a straw in the bottle so as not to smudge her red lipstick. These little cameo roles went on for weeks. She became Mia Wallace from *Pulp Fiction* and Kate Fuller in *From Dusk Till Dawn*. And still nothing really pleased her.

The weeks flew by and she continued to take someone home on Thursday and Saturday nights. She never had them in her large double bed upstairs. The downstairs room had a sofa that converted into a floor bed. She would gather blankets for it and one in particular, the woollen, leopard throw. Her mother had given her that and if her mother had known, she would not have been keen on the fact that various bodily fluids would be smeared all over it.

On Fridays Elena was understandably tired and would pick up a baguette, some brie, queen olives and a bottle of Merlot. On Saturday afternoon she would go over to her mother's flat and they would curl up with a video that Elena had chosen, perhaps a thriller with Ray Milland in it or a Fred Astaire movie. She adored her mother but could only spend a few hours at a time in her company because she had heard her mother's memories many times before and although she had once enjoyed them, they didn't hold the same resonance anymore. Elena was hungry for adventure and to spend time alone, to wander around the streets of the city and see what kind of trouble she could get into.

One night she had met someone, got very drunk and had tried to bounce his phone off a car showroom window. The boy, naturally enough, had decided that Elena wasn't for him but had dropped her off in a gentlemanly manner, on her own doorstep and then pushed her face into the doorstep, causing her all manner of confusion the next day about - had she tripped or was she pushed before she decided, she had been pushed.

She went out with someone for two weeks once. He was a social worker, older than her, about thirty five. He wore a black pony tail and dropped her relatively quickly, over an Italian meal, declaring she was damaged goods. She had simply commented that perhaps he wasn't cut out to be a social worker, as he was recovering from a nervous breakdown. The list of boys and men seemed endless. Sometimes she would chuck them but mostly they would ditch her. Elena was attractive enough but she always picked the worst of the male species - the ones that were as equally fucked up as her.

Elena continued her pursuit of pleasure and love. She would continue to change her appearance subtly or drastically - do anything, as long as she didn't have to think about who she was - if she was anyone.

Sometimes she lost herself in her old theatrical haunt, The Press Club and went home with Charlie, the singer. He was married but she loved his voice. Charlie, when he saw her enter the club would stop singing and begin a special song for her. What was the song?

“There was a boy . . .

A very strange, enchanted boy.”

Perhaps the boy in the song was who she was looking for, if he was Elena never found him either and somehow she suspected that he didn't exist except in the lyrics. After a few beers, rather a lot actually, the depth of the Press Club with its blue green light began to look like a vast cavern filled up to the ceiling with water and on more than once occasion she felt herself gasp and try to come up for air. After one late summer night she walked home. As a silent dawn approached, the rage in her head subsided for a time and to her delight she could actually smell pine trees and the various summer flowers in the gardens, before the cars would come along and leave their trails of smog.

The next Saturday she was out on the pull again. The outfit she chose that evening was a backless sea green dress that clung indeed like seaweed on a rock to mid thigh over coal black leggings. She was ready again. After the theatre she would change out of the all black usher clothes and change into her dancing rig. As she flew down the stage door steps she knew she could do anything.

The first time she killed a man it had been quite accidental. It was the tall Swede. She had thought it a shame as she had quite liked him. They had been down by the canal bank and been fooling around. She hadn't meant to push him away so hard – she had been trying to be coy. He hadn't got a condom, she neither. He had insisted on going ahead, she had refused. He had stumbled backward and into the canal. She couldn't understand why he wasn't moving. He just seemed to be spread out over the water as if he was floating. Too stiff – too rigid. Then, peering into the night and as a cloud shifted from the full moon, she saw the metal protruding out from his chest and a darker stain upon the oily water. At that point she started to run.

In the taxi home the orange glow of the street lights hurt her eyes and she was surprised at her lack of feeling for the Swede who had come to such an unfortunate end. She felt flush with excitement as she realized that although an accident, she had contributed to his death and that gave her a thrill. The morning paper had the story way in the middle, away from the front page news of an Uzi submachine gun murder of five in Moss Side under the heading,

FOREIGN STUDENT FOUND DEAD - IMPAILED IN CANAL

Elena felt a little pissed off. For some strange reason she wanted it to be front page news. *She* wanted to be front page news. It had been something *she* had been involved in. Men – boys always let her down. As a young teenager she had read all about romance and she still kept on looking for love but always through sex and she had always failed. You would have thought that she would have learnt something from her past experiences but she was a dog or rather bitch chasing her own tail and hadn't learnt a thing. Here she was now, week after week; different identities and still she couldn't find what she was looking for and then along came Maurice.

It was the voices that had already told her about him. They whispered into her ear in the darkest part of the night and then they rose to the surface, survivors from some underwater wreck, bloated corpses, whose skin had burst, revealing an infestation of blind white worms that slid back into the vacant eye sockets of the hosts. The corpses pinned her by her bleeding wrists to the bed until she promised that she would return with them to the corners of her mind where they would continue to corrupt and tell her what to do next.

Maurice appeared at Rock World. He was six foot tall, slender, shoulder length brown hair and grey eyes. He wore a blue waist length military style jacket and looked pretty good to Elena. She would go home with him. Maurice lived on the north side of the city and shared a house with two other students. Naturally they had formed their own band and shared this hobby, the rent *and* Elena. He told her that if she really loved him she would do anything for him. After Elena had drunk too much alcohol, but not enough so she didn't know what she was doing, she let each one of them penetrate her, to her that was all it was - penetration. Elena, through alcohol, had numbed herself down so that she didn't feel much at all. All three boys laughed and joked but were slightly nervous about the whole thing. They told her to sit across them and *do* something but she simply shrugged her shoulders and closed her eyes. It was as if she could let them do this *to* her but not participate in it. It was enough for them as they silently slipped in and out of her in turn, like the slugs they were.

Later she drank more wine with them and pretended that she had meant it all to happen, which she hadn't. Elena even warmed to one of them when he strummed his guitar and sang of the lost girl with the grey eyes. Lost in time and space – that was her. One even took her home in a taxi but when she had refused to give head had pulled out a knife and now she had a cross stitch of knife wounds on her shoulders, as he had jerked his body against her face. Elena was learning to hate. What she had done before was of her own volition. This was different.

And learn to hate she did. The other ushers noticed a change in her. She looked even more distracted than usual and now rarely spoke at all, just was polite to the theatre goers, did the door openings and closings quietly with no sense of fun and never went to the Press Club anymore. She preferred rock music and the dark corners of the club which were like the black corpse ridden places in her mind. In those organic folds and creases lay the creatures she had avoided for most of her life and now? Elena spent most of her waking and sleeping time there. Where – the terrors of her mind were forming themselves into crimes against mankind. It wasn't all smoke and mirrors.

IT WAS REAL TO HER.

It wasn't hard to get hold of the rohypnol. Getting hold of it? She knew someone who knew someone who knew someone – simple. She had the money to pay for it too. It had been colourless and tasteless but drug companies had now added a blue dye – still, street stuff didn't have the dye in. The boys would be needing to get into her so she would have to work quickly. She didn't know whether to just drop a tablet in a drink or what? Elena had never used the drug before. She decided that she would grind all the tablets up into a powder with her oversized quartz ring, which she would wash carefully later, not because of any fear of being caught but because she hated drugs, except of course for alcohol.

After the theatre on Saturday night Elena went to the rock club. She drank with the boys again, and they were all for taking her back to their place after the beer and dancing. The music gave her a headache and she didn't want to get too drunk so she only had the three beers. A few of her old one night stands saw her leave with the boys. She didn't care that she was seen with them. It didn't matter to her. She was intent on her plan. They caught a taxi to the student house. The rooms were just as untidy as usual. It wasn't difficult to get the stuff into the beer bottles. Powder in a bottle when a boy was in the toilet, some more in another when Maurice was rooting about in the fridge for something to eat, and the last of it when the third went upstairs to throw all his junk off the bed onto the floor in preparation for her.

Within ten minutes and as the first student was entering her, they all passed out within seconds of one another. She pushed the boy with the dirty hands out of her; one slumped to the floor from the bed. The last tried to stand up, his knees gave way beneath him and he crumpled like a string puppet she had let go of, to the floor. The first part of Elena's plan was complete. The hardest part was trying to drag them all onto the bed in the right position but she managed it. Soon – there they were, all in a row – like the paper men she often cut out but the paper men had all been joined together. One boy was naked from the waist down so she took off his shirt. One was completely naked already and the last was still dressed. When she had removed his clothes and they were sleeping like little butcher's dogs – that is how she now saw them – she began to carry out the next part of her plan. From her bag she removed a large, black wrap around pouch and placed it onto an old bed side table. From it she removed the sharp knives. As she withdrew the first she wondered if it would be sharp enough. It was. With careful precision she cut across the abdomen of the first boy, not too deeply at the first attempt. He groaned a little and shivered on the low bed. Elena sat back on her heels, pursed her lips a little, shrugged her shoulders a little more, sprang forward and drove the knife straight through his heart and then quickly through the hearts of the other two. She then proceeded with her work carefully, cutting and pulling the slippery, pink - grey guts out of each of them, arranging and rearranging them until they looked just right. They would be hers forever.

Then she stood up, smiled, admired her handiwork again and used the boy's clothes to wipe her red hands. The boys were perfect. All lined up in a row like the paper men she liked to make – and – all joined together.

Allyson Bird can be found online at www.birdsnest.me.uk

REVIEWS The Witch's Dungeon and The Killing Floor reviewed by Paul Kane

THE WITCHES DUNGEON: 40 YEARS OF CHILLS

Directed by Dennis Vincent

Featuring: Christopher Lee, Dick Smith, Tom Savini, Bela G Lugosi.

Colourbox Studios. www.preservehollywood.org

The story of 'The Witch's Dungeon' is an amazing one, and definitely deserves telling in this new documentary from Dennis Vincent. The first ten minutes or so set the scene, giving us some idea of how it all came about: basically the brainchild of the young Cortlandt Hull, who used to watch horror movies in his bedroom and make models of the creatures... We've all been there, right? Only difference is that he wasn't satisfied to leave it at that, and wanted to make bigger, life-size wax models. This expanded into a museum which featured replicas of such monster greats as *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. Supported by some of the most influential names in the genre, the collection swelled and became *the* place to visit at Halloween, where Cortlandt would open the doors for three weekends and let people have a look around. It also expanded to include movie screenings in 1966 called 'Hollywood at the Bijou', introduced by the people involved and often – if silent, as was the case with **Metropolis** – would include live scores played by an orchestra.

Little wonder, then, that this non-profit project came to the attention of people like Dick Smith, the Oscar-winning make-up artist on **The Exorcist**, Tom Savini, Christopher Lee, and the families of Lugosi, Karloff and Lon Chaney. Vincent Price, who became a close friend of Cortlandt's, even defended the museum when legal action was threatened by the studios for using likenesses of their creations – and now they even donate material to it. Here, in this lovingly-crafted documentary, you will find interviews with some of the stars and their relatives, talking about their careers, but also about how *The Witch's Dungeon* has been a major part of their lives and how they want it to continue and actually expand further with the 'Silver Screen Movie Museum & Archive'.

There are some true gems of interviews to be found in the two-hour DVD. Savini is on first chatting about how he met George A. Romero, and about how he designed that infamous spear through the neck for Kevin Bacon's end in **Friday 13th** (we even get to see the blueprint drawings!). His mentor Dick Smith then tells how he used to make himself up as Quasimodo to frighten people when he was younger and reveals how Jack Palance's Mr Hyde make-up was based on a Satyr. Movie experts and collectors such as Bob Burns and Richard Sheffield share their love of **The Creature from the Black Lagoon** (whose true colour is green, no matter what the posters might make you believe) and **Dracula** (we get to see one of the original capes and find out more about the 'Dracula Ring' that was made for Lugosi, although Chris Lee has a copy).

Speaking of the Hammer legend himself, probably one of Lee's most candid interviews is included, where he talks about the fun he had flinging women into graves as the pointy-teethed one, though he had significantly less fun when he dislocated his shoulder breaking through that door as *The Mummy*! It's also quite poignant when he speaks of Peter Cushing: "I miss him very much." Basil Gogos' poster artwork is the focus of another section, with the highlight being his Phantom portrait. And in a rare treat, Bela G. Lugosi talks about his grandfather's career – plus the joy of visiting the set of **Abbott and Costello Meet Dracula**; Sara Karloff drives home just how much of an impact Boris had on actors' rights in his time, to the extent of forming The Screen Actors' Guild; and Ron Chaney is filmed introducing some of his famous family's legacy on the big screen.

But all that's just the tip of the iceberg really. Tributes from such notables as Elvira, Caroline Munro, Zacherley (who bookends the show), Rex Reason, Dee Wallace Stone (who, strangely, talks about E.T. rather than that famous werewolf flick she once made...), **Final Destination**'s Don Roebuck (whose singing has to be seen to be believed), and June Foray (the voice of the witch in those original Chuck Jones cartoons, and the museum's witch, Zenobia, who graces the front of the DVD box) all contribute to make this an essential item in any genre-lover's collection. All profits go towards the running of the museum and archive, so order your copy today and prepare to be bewitched!

THE KILLING FLOOR

Directed by Gideon Raff

Featuring: Marc Blucas, Shiri Appleby, Reiko Alesworth

Revolver Entertainment. £12.99



Where do you go when you've been in a successful genre TV show, but now it's finished? While Sarah Michelle Gellar and Jason Behr have ended up in major Hollywood productions like **The Grudge**, Marc Blucas (Riley from **Buffy**) and Shiri Appleby (Liz Parker in **Roswell**) have fared slightly worse than their co-stars in terms of high-profile projects. But then, sometimes you find it's the smaller, lower budget end of the scale that comes up with more interesting subject matter, often allowing actors to play against type. **The Killing Floor** is a case in point; it might not have come out to a trumpet fanfare of a thousand horns, but it's a riveting psychological thriller in the Hitchcockian vein that isn't afraid to take risks.

Blucas plays David Lamont, a literary agent who has been dubbed 'The King of Fright' because of his list of horror writing clients (although in this day and age, realistically I doubt whether he'd be doing as well as shown here unless he had King, Koontz, Barker *and* Herbert on his books). Lamont is looking for a new place, and falls in love with a three-storey penthouse in a building built in 1879. Moving in, he comes into contact with the mysterious Audrey Levine (Reiko Aylesworth) which sets him at odds with an old client, Garret Rankin (Derek Cecil). There's also a stranger claiming that Lamont is living in the house illegally, and that the property belongs to him – to the extent that cop Det. Soll (John Bedford Lloyd) is called in to make enquiries.

It's then that things start to become a little strange. Photos of a murder which has taken place in the apartment are waiting for him when he gets home one night, but he can't find any record of it by trawling the internet. The tiles in the bathroom have been replaced for some reason, and Lamont receives the knife that the killer apparently used. Windows are left open, he's getting bizarre phone calls, and an intruder even breaks in and films him while he is sleeping. As his relationship heats up with Audrey, much to the chagrin of his PA Rebecca (Appleby), he suspects his neighbour might not be everything she claims to be. There are plenty of other suspects for who might be trying to drive him out of his mind, though, and in the end events spiral out of control, leaving him a man on the edge, desperate for answers.

If **The Killing Floor** had been a novel, it would have been by James Patterson or even John Connolly. The plot twists and turns, leaving the audience just as alarmed as the main protagonist – and I really love movies that isolate leads so that no-one knows which way is up or down any more. The acting from all concerned is very good, with Blucas and Appleby leaving behind any traces of their former personas, and there's even a hint of spiciness to liven things up part way through, when most thrillers sag. Lloyd is terrific, however, as a creepy policeman who you know right from the start isn't quite on the level, while Aylesworth smoulders in the traditional femme fatale role – but, again, with a twist.

The suspense is built up well, with some moments of genuine fright – teaching the more gory movies a thing or two about subtlety. But it is for the ending that **The Killing Floor** will be remembered, one that I personally didn't see coming and is just the right mix of bittersweet. You have to wonder why it didn't get a wider release, as it's definitely better than some of the dross you see on the big screen, but then maybe it would have spoilt the whole thing anyway to have made it bigger. I'd recommend this one in a heartbeat, just watch out that yours doesn't beat too fast – or even stop completely. This one will floor you.

Coming Next Week:

Fiction: *One in a Million* by Kate Kelly

If you have enjoyed this week's issue, please offer your support by commenting at www.hub-mag.co.uk/wordpress or by throwing some of your hard-earned shekles at us. We pay our writers, and your support is appreciated.