

Hub

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A Few Changes

Well, that was a bit of a hiatus, wasn't it! Apologies to those of you who were eagerly anticipating your weekly fiction fix over the past few weeks – much-needed reorganisation has ensued, and we struggled to keep up with the weekly issues while we made some changes, backstage. We're back on our weekly schedule this week, and many thanks to those of you who have sent us kind wishes in the intervening weeks.

Alt.Fiction

April 26th sees the 3rd alt.fiction event in Derby. It's a great one-day literary genre event, attended by some of the very best writers the genre has to offer! There are discussion groups, readings, panels and much merriment (there's a bar, too!). *Hub* editor, Lee Harris, is appearing on one of the panels – "Writers and The Internet" – alongside well-known online lumaries Darren Turpin (The Artist Formerly Known As Ariel) and Simon Spurrier. The event grows in popularity every year, so be sure to get your ticket early! More details at: <http://www.derby.gov.uk/LeisureCulture/ArtsEntertainment/Alt.Fiction.htm>

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About *Hub*

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Gritty Candyfloss

By Simon Fay

“Ah Christ me neck...” I wake up propped against the cracked plaster wall of my flat. Well, “It was just for a laugh,” I say it out loud, a way of explaining me using the Lords name in vain. God can come at you with his entire wrath for all your many sins, if you have any at all that is, and I still think it’s worth a shot saying it was all just for a laugh.

I’m looking about the room expecting to see blood but there isn’t a drop. Not a speck of the red anywhere about me. On the floor across from me I see a fractured syringe. I haven’t shot up in months. I was sleep walking again and this is where I’ve ended up; the sitting room on the cold wooden floor. I always seem to wake up in the hellest of places; never on a couch, me bed or even the tattered rug, always beside a rubbish bin or in a damp corridor. I never remember how I get there and I don’t ask myself why, not this time, not never.

* * *

I’m meeting her for the first time. She’s sitting across from me in the crowded night time fast food hole. We’re both eating taco fries. Is that a sign? If that’s whiskey she’s slipping into her drink then I’m taking it as a sign. I’m already walking over to her by the time she’s twisting the cap on the hip flask. I pop the lid off my drink and slide it over by way of asking for a shot of her brown friend.

She looks in my eyes and asks me, “Where’d you get the halo?”

I role my eyes up to see what the hell she’s talking about and I duck when I see what it is. A bloody halo hanging over me...I don’t mean to say it’s bloody, there’s not a speck of the red on it, it’s black like ink, but “*Christ*,” I shout, “how the hell did *that* get there?”

“Yeah”, she say’s, “looks like you need some alright,” and she taps that warm hard goodness into my drink.

I’m swiping my hand at the halo, kinda careful-like on account of for some reason I think it might shock me or burn. It doesn’t though, it just feels cold and wet like a dog’s nose. She’s pushing my drink closer to me as I’m sliding my hands around the hoop, pulling on it I feel some force pulling my head along with it.

“There’s a halo on my head!”

“Well I didn’t put it there!” She answers in a slurred and cynical voice. She’s the kind of cute you want to squeeze till her eyes water. I forget about the inky circle above my noggin and I roll my drink around in the disposable cup as I try to figure her out. I want to hold her close.

“I want to hold you close.”

“Well I don’t want to be held.”

“Married?”

“I’m eighteen.”

“Divorced?”

“Yeah, asshole of an ex-husband got the boat, the dog and the holiday home in Spain. All I got was this damn hip flask and the whiskey that was in it.”

“Not enough?”

“Not *strong* enough.”

“Well you got *me* now...” There’s a pause and I don’t know if she’s really considering what I just said, but she’s definitely considering something.

“I always thought I’d end up with a guy that had a devils tail.”

“What are you nuts? Where you going to meet a guy like that?”

“Yeah...” her voice trails off and I can practically see the dot, dot, dot in her smile. It’s the smile that lets me know she’s onto something I don’t know and she isn’t going to tell me what it is. I’m hooked. She’s mine. However this ends, she’s mine. Her name is Gracie.

* * *

I'm looking in the mirror. The light is buzzing above my head, it struggles and blinks. I have wings now. Angel wings I guess, but I've never seen any angel wings like these, not that I've ever really seen another angel. The wings, like I said about the halo, are black as ink. There's no shades of black or any light bouncing off them, no shine or visible texture. Just plain black, like I'm wearing wing shaped shadows. I don't think anyone else sees them or the halo, just me and Gracie. I'm meeting her in the park on the swings later. She feels like talking. It isn't often she feels like that so I'm pretty worried. Probably something to do with that drunkard of a dad she has.

I think about Gracie more than the blackness that's growing out of my body. Even when I'm not thinking about her she's mixed up in my head somewhere, a reflex, a life giver, like the automated breathing of my lungs she is just there, keeping me going.

* * *

"You know one time a few months back, when I was still pretty hooked on the drugs, I robbed an old lady...I know, sounds so...obvious. I'm a big enough guy so I'm used to that feeling you get walking behind old ladies, when you can smell their fear. They know there's a big guy stomping behind them and they know he's catching up, but there's nothing they can do but keep their head down and plod along at their own pace. Sometimes sensing their fear would make me feel sick, I just felt so guilty for what they were afraid I wasn't going to do. But not that day...all I saw was the purse that day. I was down the road and around the corner before I noticed the blood on my hands. I didn't even remember how I did it, one minute I was running at her back, the next I was behind that corner with the money and the blood congealing in my mind keeping me from remembering what happened...how'd I find that shark in me?"

"Why are you telling me this?"

"So you know I'm not an angel Gracie...I've been messed up."

"Yeah? At least you had a laugh..." that cynical slurred voice of hers.

"You think that line will get me past the pearly gates?"

"Nah, something else, you don't have a halo for nothing."

"You think there's something I gotta do?"

She laughs sadly and shrugs.

"When I was sleep walking before I used to see a figure move towards me as I was laying down. She'd set her hand on my forehead and pull me upwards, leading me to where-ever I'd end up resting for the night. These past few days...it hasn't been just any figure...its been you Gracie." She doesn't say a thing and I don't mention it again. "How's your Dad been treating you?" I ask it, feeling like I'm hitting on something important. She pulls up her sleeve to reveal the bruised and battered skin. That's when I know. That's when I realise why I'm her angel.

"Same old, same old," her matter of fact voice more heartbreaking than any cut or bruise she could show me.

"Where does he drink?"

"At the Cat Dragged Inn."

* * *

I'm sitting in the drab and foggy pub waiting for the old man. I'm thinking about all the crap he's done to Gracie and I don't even second guess what I'm going to do for a second, it gets so I'm not really thinking about it at all, I suppose the shark in me is taking over again. But then I'm looking around at everyone and I feel how different I am. Not just because of my halo or dark wings, those are just what *highlight* how different I am. All these old guys drinking around me are like a different species. They've gone down their roads of innocence, ignorant of me crawling alongside them in the thorny ditch. There I was thinking if I crawled up out of that mud I could be just another one of them strolling toward that light. But I got the scars from the thorns all over me and I got black wings and a ring above my head to remind me even of those.

The old man walks into the pub, says a few friendly "Hellos" to those around and then settles into a stool at the bar with a newspaper sat in front of him. He looks like anybody else. If you saw him you wouldn't see how he ties his kids to radiators if they get out of hand, you wouldn't see the abuse he gave his wife on long winter nights, you wouldn't see the ways he violated Gracie. I do. I don't just know the stories

Gracie told me, I *see* everything he's done. I don't know how and I don't question it, I just let the shark take over. He steps from the bar at the end of the night and I follow him as he stumbles outside.

It's a scary thing when I stalk him. All of a sudden he knows he won't be coming out the other end of the alley and it's like our existence is one. Two men walked into the alley, two men saw themselves in one another, and one man severed their connection. With a pipe in hand I ended his terror. With a strike to his head he was gone, like flicking the off-switch on a grinding factory machine.

There wasn't a speck of red on me, just black. I got caught of course. Angels aren't above man's law I guess. I'm in prison. In the mirror I can't even see myself anymore, I'm just a black shadow with that dog nose wet halo. No-one else in here sees me like that. I wonder how many other men in here are like me, dark Angels walking like shadows, never seen for what they are, the saviours they can be.

It makes sense. When a soldier comes back from war he isn't a man anymore. He's the shell of a weapon. When dirty work needs to be done why taint an innocent when there's a ready made stained person to do the job? I was broken, I just gave away what was left of me to save the girl. That's the kind of story this is, not brave and not for love, just the logic of a cruel world.

I talked with Gracie before I got locked up.

"So it's over," I said.

"For me I suppose."

"Hey...you sure are going to have a lot of laughs now."

"Yeah..." and she smiles with that dot, dot, dot of hers that only leaves me wondering.

If you enjoyed this week's tale,
and the non-fiction that follows,
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writers and to continue to bring
you your weekly dash of Hub.

REVIEW

Planet Terror reviewed by Marie O'Regan

Written and directed by Robert Rodriguez.

Starring Rose McGowan, Marley Shelton, Jeff Fahey, Freddy Rodriguez, Michael Biehn, Josh Brolin, Bruce Willis.

Momentum DVD 2 discs, £17.99. Released March 10th.

Planet Terror is the second feature from the Tarantino/Rodriguez theatrical release, **Grindhouse**. It's a wild ride from the opening moments, with Lt Muldoon (Bruce Willis) and his men being exposed to some sort of toxin, DC2, whilst fighting its creator, Abby (Naveen Andrews), for control. Cue the release of a horde of flesh-eating zombies, transformed by the gas – and the scene is set for an effects-filled, thrill-a-minute monster movie.

Doctors Block (Josh Brolin) and Dakota (Marley Shelton) are having a very bad day – Dakota is about to leave Block for her lesbian lover (Fergie from the Black Eye Peas), but Block suspects. Intent on keeping her out of harm's way until he can deal with (kill) her, he injects her hands with her own anaesthetic – yet, somehow, when the zombies plague is in full force, she manages to escape. She even manages to drive her car, unfazed by a broken wrist she can't, after all, feel.

Go Go dancer Cherry Darling (Rose McGowan) is fed up with her lot, and wants to start again as a stand up comedienne. When she accepts a lift from ex-lover El Wray (Freddie Rodriguez), little does she know they're driving straight into the middle of zombie town. A short while later, minus a leg, she becomes a killing machine – aided in the battle against the zombies by the machine gun El Wray has fitted to her stump.

Add to the mix a brilliant turn from Michael Biehn (**Terminator**) as the sheriff and Jeff Fahey (**Lawnmower Man**) as his brother, owner of a barbecue restaurant in search of the perfect sauce, plus such figures as Dakota's father and the crazy babysitter twins, and you can see why this film isn't big on quiet moments. Displaying Tarantino and Rodriguez's trademark mix of humour and violence, this movie isn't subtle. It is, however, one of the most entertaining zombie films I've seen in a long while.

Extras include commentaries, trailers, and several featurettes, such as '10 Minute Film School', 'The Badass Babes from Planet Terror', 'The Guys of Planet Terror', 'Casting Rebel', 'Sickos, Bullets and Explosions: The Stunts of Planet Terror', and 'The Friend, The Doctor, and The Real Estate Agent.' All highly informative, as well as a lot of fun to watch.

As zombie flicks go, this won't rank as one of the all time best – but it should rank as one of the most crowd-pleasing.

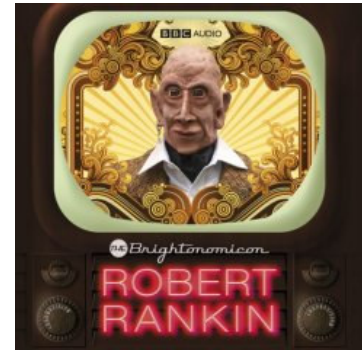
The Brightonomicon - part 4 of 4: Episode Guide.

Warning – may contain ~~spaniels~~ spoilers.

By Neil Gardner, Producer, Director, Co-Adaptor, Edwardian Dandy

[i] *The Incredible Encounter with Hugo Rune*

In which Rizla is thrown from the pier and drowns – Rune rescues Rizla – Rizla signs a contract with Rune – a fine tweed suit is acquired – fine dining ensues – the Chronovision is invented by Father Ernetti – Rizla learns of The Brightonomicon – the Pope plays football – Mrs Janet Orion sends a message – the first case is undertaken – Rune encounters a rat bone – Rizla & Rune travel by cab to Hangleton – the Chevalier Effect takes effect – Rizla gets shot at



[ii] *The Hound of the Hangletons*

In which Rune & Rizla meet Neville Orion – the rope is examined – Rizla takes tea with Mrs Orion – driving lessons cause concern – Rizla leaves Rune's service – we meet Fangio the bar lord – toot is talked – Hubert the Tramp tells a secret – the Spanikov is found – Rizla takes Rune to task – the case is solved

[iii] *The Curious Case of the Centenary Centaur*

In which Rizla meets a mysterious monk - Rune takes Rizla to the pub – Danbury Collins talks universal truths – Rizla is accused of being a CIA spook – a riot occurs and a centaur is unleashed – the monk informs Rizla he is in a coma – we meet Dr Proctor & Nurse Hearse – the Dr has a fairy-theory – the Queen Mother & Winston Churchill create the NHS – Rizla is body-snatched – chap-removal is interrupted – Rune rides to the rescue – Rizla learns the fate of his meat 'n' two veg

[iv] *The Monstrous Mystery of the Moulsecoomb Crab*

In which we learn the history of Moulsecoomb from some American actors – Rizla encounters a bog-troll – Rune & Rizla take on the case of the crab costumed corpse – our heroes travel to Moulsecoomb – strange occurrences occur at the abode of the bog-troll's twin – Rizla experiences Rune's power – the General Electric Mini-gun makes a guest appearance – Rune & Rizla head forth upon the Sussex Downs – we trespass on secret Government property – the evil Dr Proctor reappears – a spaceship lands – our heroes are captured – Ahab the Space Crab reneges on the deal – the Moulsecoomb Militia attack – Rizla loses his mind (again)

[v] The Lark of the Lansdowne Lioness

In which breakfast is experienced – Rizla watches a Ministry of Serendipity information film - a miracle occurs in Lansdowne – Rune encounters the local police – a riot ensues (again) – Rizla retreats to Fangio’s pub – much toot is talked – Rizla visits Professor Nessor – we learn about The Golden Order of the Illuminated Sprout – Earl Grey is confirmed – Rune & Rizla prepare for the arrival of evil – Rune explains the past – midnight brings Victorian robotic death – Count Otto makes his move - a chase takes place

[vi] The Curious Case of the Woodingdean Chameleon

In which Count Otto is most certainly back, and on the attack – Captain Moulsecoomb makes a GPS error – the Saucy Spaniel returns fire – Count Otto is defeated – Lazlo Woodbine is introduced – Rune leaves Rizla in charge for a case – Rizla becomes Lazlo Woodbine and heads for the bar – Fangio becomes dyslexic – we watch the croquet from Lourdes – Rizla learns about Father Ernetti from a violent Scotsman – a sniper is spotted – Rizla heads for the roof – Woodbine faces the Colonel in a rooftop showdown – Rizla reveals the truth to Rune – Lazlo makes a guest appearance

[vii] The Scintillating Story of the Sackville Scavenger

In which our heroes learn of a new restaurant opening – Fangio loses his opening night tickets – a cabbie meets a stout stick – the police hold back the inevitable protestors – Rune & Rizla experience Eat Your Food Nude – dead rock stars proliferate – Rizla meets Robert Johnson – the Devil does a dastardly deal – Rizla is taken to the future – we meet President Hendrix – nuclear Armageddon inevitably occurs – Rune & Rizla enjoy much good food in the nude – a rat bone, compensation, the paparazzi and protestors cause Rizla embarrassment – Fangio gets more than he bargained for

[viii] The Fantastic Adventure of the Foredown Man

In which Rizla is dead – the monk demands answers - Rune reveals his lordly status – our heroes use a cab and pay – Cutler the Butler causes mirth – a garden party is in full swing – Rizla falls in love – Fangio pleads for help – Kelly-Anne Sirjan plays easy-to-get – Rizla experiences the frozen death of Sir Jeffrey Primark – a mystery begins in the Library – we meet many Brighton toffs ‘n’ swells – Rune interrogates Rizla in the hallway – a Lord is flushed away – panic ensues – confusion and contempt cause catastrophe – a riot kicks off (sigh) – death comes quickly to the terrible toffs – our heroes survive & Rune explains all – the monk loses his cool – Rizla chokes - Count Otto finds a nut

[ix] The Baffling Business of the Bevendean Bat

In which Inspector Hector comes calling with a cat conundrum – Rune & Rizla travel to Bevendean – Rizla is verbally abused by a long-dead archaeologist – the Bevendean micro-climate makes its mark – we visit a really small pub – Fangio can stand the noise no longer – a uniped explodes – Rizla solves the case – Captain Moulsecoomb & his pirates are called in – Rune explains all – Count Otto pulls a gun on our heroes – the pirates mutiny – Rune confounds Otto – Rizla saves Rune’s life – The Bevendean Bat takes a dive – the minibus is hotwired

[x] The Sensational Saga of the Saltdean Stallion

In which Rune & Rizla travel to Lewes – an urban myth is considered - we explore The Hotel California – Fangio reveals his usefulness – we watch the floats and parade – the Chiswick Townswomen’s Guild make their appearance – our heroes follow on behind – Count Otto is summoned – Rune & Rizla are captured (surprise surprise!) – Rune has a heart attack and dies –

Rizla steals the map and runs – Norris Styver & his Morris Minor rescue Rizla – a high speed chase ensues – Norris becomes a murderer – Rizla discovers the horror of the Lewes one-way system – Norris reveals the horrific truth – Sam & Bill say hello – an ethereal tyre is punctured – Rizla does the dirty – Fangio saves the day – Rune reappears to confound and confuse – our heroes are stuck in Lewes forever

[xi] The Bizarre Brouhaha of the Birdman of Whitehawk

In which our heroes escape from Lewes – we take a cab to Whitehawk and listen to local radio – Rizla does the business to a cabbie – a Big Black Car makes chase – the reinvented ocarina opens a portal – The Forbidden Zones are opened and explained – Rune & Rizla discover the Chronovision – Rune smites Rizla – Rizla awakens in a startling tepee – Rune admits to tampering with time – Chief Whitehawk talks toot and asks for help – our heroes experience an angry chef – Rune meets Rune – a movie deal is struck – a ghostly rat bone makes its presence felt

[xii] The Wondrous One-Off Wiseman of Withdean

In which our heroes move to Hove – Rizla gets dragged-up – Mario makes a proposal – Rune causes Rizla's downfall – we discover the truth behind heavy metal – Rune & Rizla head to The Albion – Fangio has zipper trouble – Lazlo Woodbine makes a return – tuna sandwiches and bar nuts feed the crowd – Rizla meets Rune's followers and fans – heavy metal nights kicks off – Rizla is propositioned – Tobes de Valois is here one moment and gone the next – Rune meets a mysterious man – a gunshot is fired – Rune lies dead in the gutter – Rizla acts like a real girly and cries

[xiii] The Concluding Chaotic Conundrum of the Coldean Cat

In which Tobes realises his full potential – Rune is resurrected – the Chronovision is stolen by Count Otto – our heroes are carried into the Brighton underworld – Rune sets a bomb – Tobes & Rizla save the pussy cats – Rune, Rizla & Tobes are captured (once again) – the witches & pirates flee & Count Otto escapes – we re-enter The Forbidden Zones – Nathaniel the homing spaniel makes himself useful - Atlantis is discovered, and Tobes finds a pub – Fangio points the way one last time – the final showdown between Rune & Otto occurs – Count Otto loses his head – Fangio & Tobes say farewell – our heroes are pursued by cloned cabbies – Rizla is thrown from the pier again – we are back in Brentford – everything is explained by the monk (sort of) – Rizla learns who he really is (kind of) – there is a multitude of endings

The Brightonomicon Audio Adaptation is available from all good outlets – online, offline and underline.

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