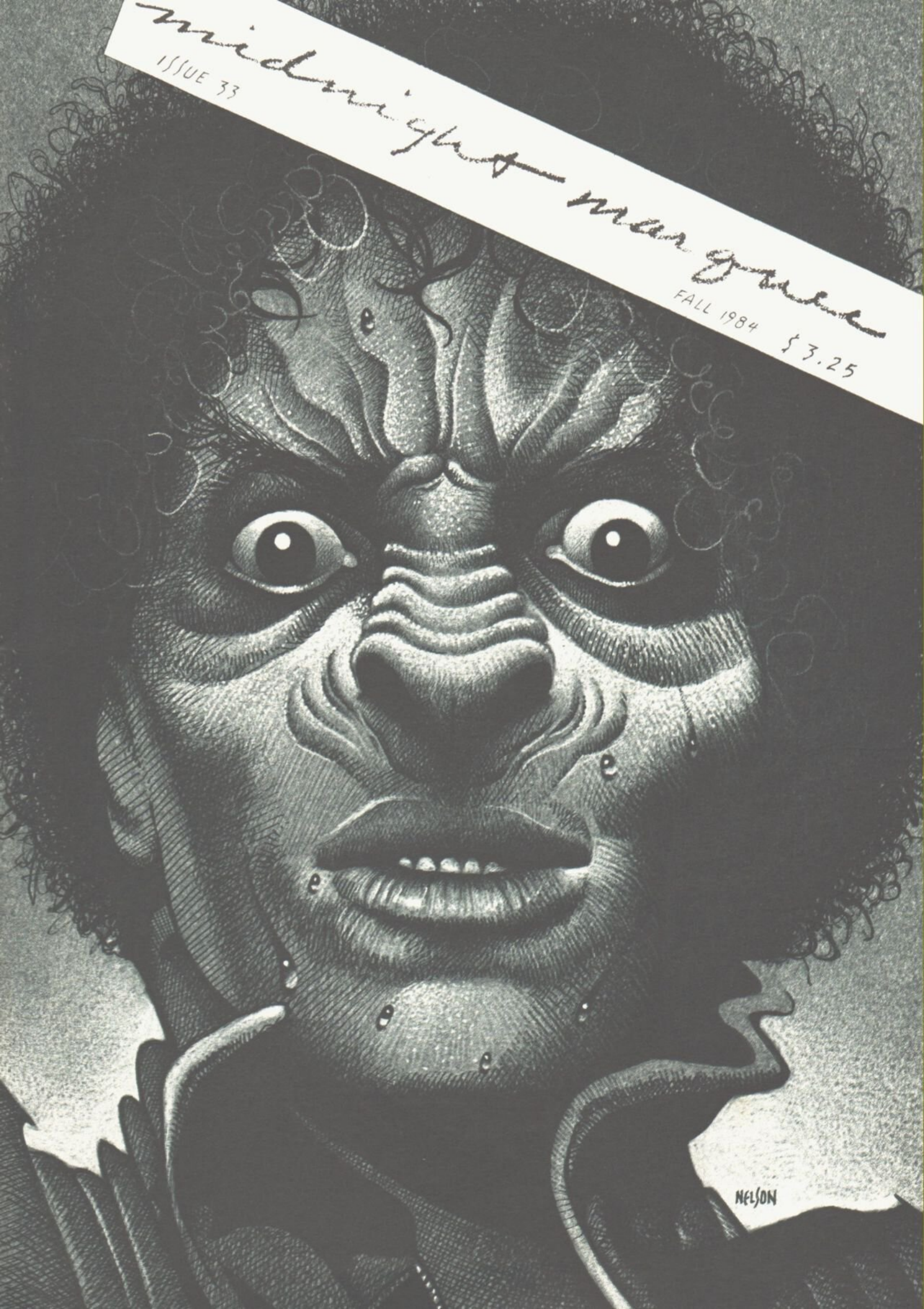


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FRONT COVER: Bill Nelson takes liberties by incorporating some of Rick Baker's disfigured makeup concepts into his portrait of Michael Jackson from *THRILLER*.

INSIDE FRONT COVER: David Daniels softly renders a mischievous family portrait from *GREMLINS*.

INSIDE BACK COVER: Mark Robinson captures the tortured countenance of William Hurt as he regresses into *ALTERED STATES*.

BACK COVER: Allen J. Koszowski captures one of makeup artist Rick Baker's finest achievements, the transformation sequence from *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*.

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DEDICATION: To my heart-throb, best friend, and now my wife - Susan - for understanding that my obsession and love of horror movies, though existing longer, is not as strong as my obsession and love for you!

Welcome to the 33rd issue of MIDNIGHT MARQUEE, celebrating our 21st year of publication. First of all, to everyone out there who supported FANTASY FILM EXPO/FANEX 84, I personally thank you. The horror/science fiction film convention, scheduled for August 17-19, 1984, at Baltimore's Hyatt Regency Hotel, had to be cancelled for two very simple reasons. First, because of the over-abundance of people flying coast to coast during Olympic August, we were told by travel agencies that we had to book our guest's flights (transporting West Coast people here to Baltimore and back again) no later than late April. Our expenses would be in excess of \$5,000 which we didn't have in the kitty. Secondly, the response to our ads, especially from dealers, was pathetic. We needed to make a specific amount of money from selling Dealer's Tables in order to finance our other expenses. However, we only sold four or five tables meaning we had no working capital. The bottom line is that we needed a sponsor with big bucks that could front us the money we would probably later make back. When all the money had to come out of the pockets of two modestly-incomed couples, FANEX 84 died. All of us involved are sorry. Maybe in another year or so FANTASY FILM EXPO might return. Keep watching the skies.

On a happier note, Sue and I were married June 30, 1984 (three months earlier than reported last issue!) The wedding itself was a fiasco - literally everything that could go wrong went wrong. We planned an outside garden wedding and it rained. We rented a small rural lodge as backup and discovered four hours before the wedding that the lodge did not have indoor plumbing, instead two out-houses were in back! The band cancelled the evening before the wedding. Sue and I, with some help from her relatives and grandmother, made all the food (25 pounds of potato salad and 15 pounds of meatballs, among other things). We were fortunately able to rent the local firehall at the last moment for our reception (thus squeezing 70 plus people into her aunt and uncle's small kitchen/living room area for the ceremony itself) - the out-houses were out! But that meant that Sue and I, three hours before the wedding, had to help decorate the hall, set up tables and chairs, blow up balloons, etc. During the sweltering wedding ceremony the reverend forgot lines to prayers, confused our specially written wedding vows, dropped the ring, and forgot to tell the groom to kiss the bride. Sue and I both agreed that a quick visit to the county courthouse would have

(Editor's Remarks continued on Page 31 . . .)



In Hollywood, in the 1930's, studios frightened audiences with the creation of a new monster mythos - Frankenstein, the Invisible Man, the Mummy, and Dracula - amid off-beat acting (of the James Whale directed variety) and studio set-piece designed mood. During the 1940's studios frightened audiences by further developing and refining what it had created ten years earlier. By visually adding color, explicit blood, and a touch of sexuality, the 1950's and 1960's, best exemplified by Hammer Film Productions of England, made audiences scream and squirm by making the visual depiction of horror more graphic. Big budget special make-up effects and increased reliance upon visceral gore and violence kept the chillers fresh and gripping throughout the 1970's with exceptional cinema fare such as THE EXORCIST and TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE ripping through the clenched fists of the white-knuckled audiences. But what about the 1980's!? Hollywood and Europe have O.D.ed on slasher/fiend movies, zombies who return from the dead to tear out and eat delicate organs; ultra-gore has reached its logical extension propelling state of the art gore effects into hum-drum tedium. Other than at neighborhood video shops where they prosper, horror movies in the 1980's are becoming less inspired and far less visible than they were in the hey-day of the over-saturated late 1970's.

But there exists one breed of horror film that is flourishing today artistically if not financially: the new-breed independent movie-maker who, having been a fan of the genre since his childhood, graduates to 16mm Bolex or perhaps even 35mm after doing a few shorts or industrial films (the route George Romero took in the 1960's). We are talking about filmmakers in their twenties who have no studio backing, have a limited budget, and literally must stretch the filming of their weekend horror films over a period of months so that investors can be solidified to raise the money to continue the production. In this specific case we speak of writer/director Fred Henenlotter (BASKET CASE) and Sam Raimi (THE EVIL DEAD) whose respective films happen to be among the best horror films of the decade thus far. This article will attempt to analyze what exactly these two filmmakers are doing right on minimal budgets that large corporate studios such as Universal, Paramount, and Warner Bros. no longer are able to do. The lessons taught by Henenlotter and Raimi must be heeded to rejuvenate an over-saturated, repetitious, bland, and uninspired film genre that all of us still love and wish to save.

From the beginning it must be made apparent that this article is not necessarily a defense of the modern ultra-gore movie because explicit

eye-gouging, chest-puncturing, or flesh-ripping is only one means to achieve an ends. Modern horror movie classics such as CARRIE, HAL-LOWEEN, THE HOWLING, or even THE EXORCIST feature visceral make-up techniques as a means for making an artistic statement, telling a story, revealing something about human relationships (admittedly, superficially at times - but most people would agree that the essential message inherent in horror films can be summed up in one word: Boo!). Films such as the wretched MANIAC or the over-ripe FRIDAY THE 13TH series feature mutilation for gore's sake. We have no story or relationships developed between people; instead, we have one visually effective gore/murder sequence tied loosely onto a tissue thin plot as an excuse for another gore sequence. The sin is no worse than the science fiction film genre when it too forgets about human motivation by over-playing meticulous special effects technology (however, technology is never as offensive as gore, but in the long run, it can be just as dehumanizing and destructive) for its own sake. Both BASKET CASE and THE EVIL DEAD utilize ultra-gore (remember, both are at heart exploitation films which must conform to a set criteria of rules for financial survival), but artistically they both transcend such genre trappings making the use of blood and guts essential in making a statement. Thus, in these two films, ultra-gore becomes artistic statement which develops far beyond the genre's requirements of icing on the corpse bloodshed.

Frank Henenlotter's BASKET CASE is a perverted gem operating successfully on many different levels. The true horror of BASKET CASE does not result from the gruesome, blood-drenched murders but from the strange, twisted relationship which exists between Siamese twin brothers, Duane and Belial. Typical Siamese twins these brothers are not, because Belial, as Duane once drunkenly describes him, resembles "a squashed octopus" with a normal sized monstrous human head connected to a dwarfish mass of misshapen flesh housing two over-sized arms with fiendishly clawed hands. Belial is connected to Duane at his side near the waist. Their mother died while giving birth, and the bereaved father only wants an operation performed which will separate Belial, considered by him to be almost like a large tumor, from the body of the normally shaped brother Duane (resulting in the probable death of Belial). The operation is performed when the boy's guardian aunt is away from town (a strangely odd character, the aunt lovingly cares for both brothers accepting them for what they are - human beings) by three doctors, at least one of whom is a veterinarian! The screaming Duane is bodily forced onto the dining room table

where the make-shift operating room has been arranged. Belial is drugged into unconsciousness and literally cut from Duane's side as blood spurts everywhere on everything. At first blood-flow Duane screams then lapses into unconsciousness. The brothers, who share telepathic communication with each other, are drawn back to each other after the operation when the healing and heavily bandaged Duane goes in back of his house where the garbage cans are located only to see a tied plastic garbage bag wiggle. Apparently the doctors wrapped what they thought were the dead remains of Belial in the garbage bag ready for the morning trash collection; however, Belial is still alive and his brother Duane keeps him alive in a wicker basket which he pad-locks for protection. After the death of the guardian aunt, the young, naive Duane and his freakish brother Belial head out to the city to avenge the attempted murder of Belial by the three doctors. Just from these proceedings, told via flashback in the middle of the movie, the viewer can recognize obvious tongue-in-cheek intentions. The idea of a vet operating upon a human being on a dining room table is absurd, but Henenlotter makes these proceedings seem matter of fact. The sequence where Duane finds Belial in a plastic garbage bag is hilarious - imagine how the garbage men would have reacted when they unloaded their daily haul! But with one fast image of the trash bag wiggling as one claw cuts through, Henenlotter allows our imagination to run wild. Similar examples of black humor abound.

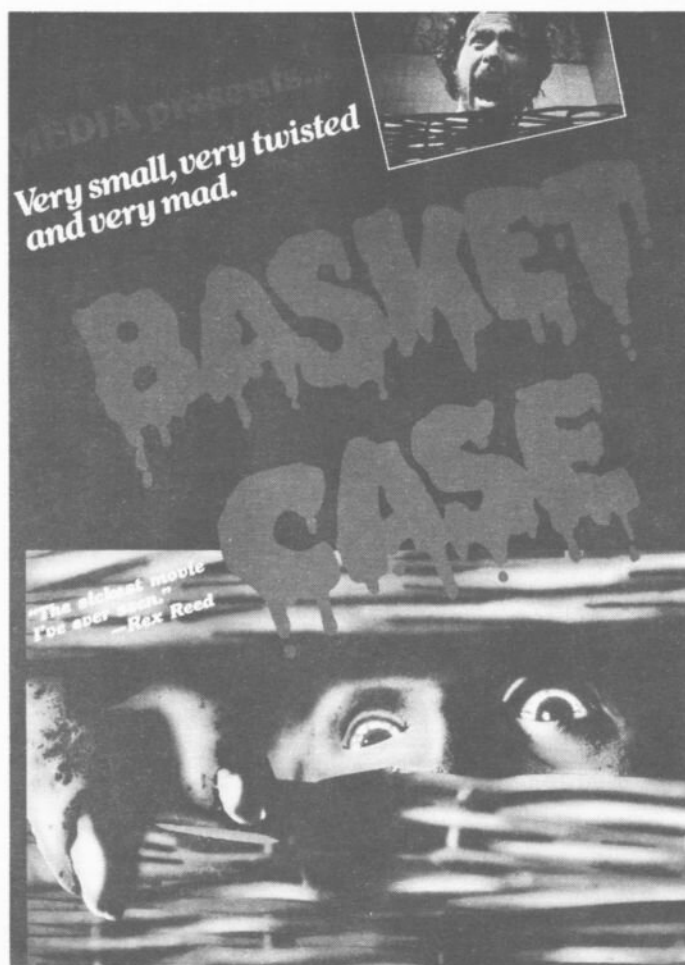
The major setting of the movie is Hotel Broslin located off 42nd Street in New York City whereby the innocent tragic hero comes looking for sanctuary, always protectively carrying the wicker basket housing his brother, who instantly displays a large roll of bills in front of the hotel manager and a few of the occupants, as he asks for a room. The hotel manager (a balding, squat man) is a true delight, adding some inspired humor to the sleazy proceedings. "You want a room for a couple hours or a couple weeks! Give me a hint!" The strange occupants add local color to the tenement hotel - old derelicts stagger zombie-like, over-the-hill black hookers hurry "johns" into the rooms, and cheerful bag ladies walk past forcing the manager to exclaim at one point, "Is this the nut house or a hotel!" Almost from the beginning, the viewer is allowed to know and care about this sleazy white underbelly of human dregs. By casting a slightly humorous aura around this hole in the wall of society, these people and situations become more easy to accept and appreciate.

When Duane brings a bag of hamburgers up to room #7 for his brother and himself, the resulting eating sequence does more than remind the viewer of Corman's *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS* with Belial, not yet visibly seen by the audience, making loud, over-exaggerated munching and smacking noises similar to the sound of Saturday morning cartoon characters sloppily eating away. To add to this effect, the basket jitters and shakes as Belial eats. You almost expect Belial, who never speaks verbally, to yell, "Feed me!" Afterwards, when Duane is lying restlessly in bed in the middle of the night, he is awakened by the constant "conversing" of his brother. "I'm not going to stay up half the night talking. You aren't going to pace all night! You always wait til I'm asleep to start a conversation!" Of course, the viewer only hears what Duane says because after the operation Duane lost the ability to communicate telepathically with Belial, but Belial can communicate telepathically with Duane.

After the first of three doctors is murdered at the very beginning of the movie, Duane and Belial prepare to plot the destruction of the second doctor, Dr. Needleman. While waiting in his office, Duane becomes friendly with the beautiful blonde receptionist who offers to be Duane's tour guide. Duane, shy with other things on his mind, rejects the offer at first, then agrees to an all-day date Wednesday when the receptionist, Sharon, has the day off. For some ironic reason, the stranger Duane becomes, the more Sharon seems to be attracted to him.

Dr. Needleman recognizes Duane from the past and telephones the female Dr. Kutter, a bitchy 40-ish shrew, who is wining and dining a very young man in her apartment whom she calls Cuddles, and therefore, she doesn't have the time to talk to Needleman or heed his warning. Duane returns to Needleman's office after Sharon leaves, lets loose Belial, tells him to hurry up, and warns him not to forget the address book (the means to contact Dr. Kutter). As was true with the first on-screen murder but is developed more thoroughly here, the cinematographer employs a shaky hand-held camera technique cutting between close-ups of the frenzied face of the terrified doctor and subjective shots of what the doctor sees. Before we perceive Needleman, the sequence begins with the over-exaggerated, heavy breathing of Belial and subjective shots of what he sees. Once we cut to the face of Needleman, the breathing ceases to be heard because our perspective is from the point of view of the frightened doctor, not the deformed beast. When Needleman turns the office lights on, the viewer has the first prolonged clear shot of the monster hanging on the wall. His throat, mouth, and eyes move as the creature jumps and attaches itself to the neck and upper chest of helpless Needleman as Belial's mouth chews at the human's neck and claws tear at his face and later his chest. As the doctor succumbs and slides slowly to the ground, the doctor's face is a canvas of red pulp with blood streaming from his mouth. As if this gore is not enough, the claws of Belial rip open the doctor's chest, and as the viewer watches the doctor's dying face, small rivulets of blood are thrust upward from below the bottom frame line of the screen further drenching this man's face in a torrential shower of crimson as he screams and strains to be free.

This scene playfully cuts to the next morning as Duane feeds Belial (once again hidden safely inside his basket) raw hot dogs as he again makes cute, cartoon eating sounds - in direct contrast to the more maniacal aspect of his personality. Duane, who does not want Belial to know he has a date



with a beautiful female, presents his brother with a used portable TV set and a newspaper to amuse himself while he is gone (telling Belial he is spying on Dr. Kutter preparing for the third murder). After Duane leaves, the arm and claw of Belial protrude from the basket and attempt to turn the TV knob; however, the awkward size of his hand only manages to knock the selector knob onto the floor. As Duane's date continues and the twosome hit things off spectacularly, the moment of truth arrives: Sharon and Duane kiss. Physically, Belial perceives exactly what is occurring and the editor instantly cuts from the kiss to Belial's jealous screams back in the basket. The creature shoves the TV set on the floor and climbs down onto the floor. Once there, Belial continues to pull out drawers in anger, knocks chairs over, and generally wrecks the room. This entire short sequence is shot using stop-motion animation for Belial. While the budget limitations are readily apparent, this shaky animation sequence is oddly effective. Finally, in direct parody of *THE EXORCIST*, the stump-like Belial sits at the end of the bed taking the rear leg in his hand and shakes the bed rapidly up and down. Because of all the racket, the degenerate landlord investigates, finds the room a mess, but finds nothing else. In frustration, he mutters to himself, "I only run the place. Why should I know anything!" When one derelict tenant, Donovan, silently sneaks back into Duane's room to steal the wad of money he saw lying on the shelf, he unfortunately peeps into the mysterious wicker basket and is torn apart by Belial. Far away in more beautiful territory, Duane intuitively senses that something is wrong and deserts his confused date running back quickly to his seedy apartment. Once they both arrive at the scene of the murder, Duane pushes Sharon away telling her he doesn't want anything to happen to her.

After the police are finished investigating the apartment for clues and questioning Duane - at one point a policeman opens the wicker basket to find it empty - one monstrous arm of Belial protrudes from the toilet bowl where he has been hiding uncomfortably for some time (another allusion to *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS*).

From this point onward, things really grow weird - but also poignant! Holding a psychic conversation with Belial, Duane screams, "I'm not deserting you. I need time for myself!" And this odd human relationship forms the core of the movie elevating it far beyond trite exploitation fare. As is true with many horror thrillers, the destruction or disruption of the basic core family unit forms the heart of the conflict, the source from where the creation of the "horror" begins. Who could ever love this squat, deformed freak except a loving brother (and earlier, a rather wiggy aunt). If Belial loses Duane he loses everything - and Duane's growing interest in this pretty female threatens his relationship with his pathetic brother. Duane finally mutters, "We'll always be together."

Attempting to drink away the pain and isolation and unresolvable problem that both draws him to and alienates him from Belial, Duane goes



Belial, the human toad, brutally rips apart another helpless victim in Frank Henenlotter's *BASKET CASE*. Notice the over-use of blood and gore.

to a bar where he soon becomes drunk sharing more than a few drinks with Casey, the friendly black hooker who rents a room in Duane's building. In the midst of drunken abandonment after Casey asks what's in the basket, Duane seriously answers, "My brother. We're Siamese twins." Casey, thinking this to be the intoxicated ravings of a jokster, retorts, "You don't look Oriental!" Duane then briefly shares his entire life story, to which Casey laughs hysterically not believing a word. Duane finishes, "We're both of us messed up. I don't know which of us is worse."

Later, when Casey returns to her apartment after putting Duane to bed, she voyeuristically undresses for bed wearing a "smiley face" tee shirt. Once she is sprawled out in bed, Belial, who has been hiding beneath one of Casey's pillows, starts to slowly fondle the "smiley face" tee shirt only to awaken Casey who screams holy living terror. Obviously, Belial is curious to understand the ever more apparent sexual urges which have been awakened in brother Duane. He too desires sexual fulfillment. One final cut shows Belial feverously sniffing at Casey's long-abandoned red panties.

The murder of the third doctor, Kutter, becomes the most outrageous and cleverly conceived of the movie. The sequence begins with Duane sitting quietly in the vet's waiting room, wicker basket on his lap, as this playful large dog faithfully sniffs away at the basket as other patients continue to wait unconcerned. When Duane and the basket are admitted to see Dr. Kutter, Belial savagely pops out of his basket going for the jugular as Duane quietly looks on. In an outrageous tribute to gore master Herschell G. Lewis, Belial animalistically rips Kutter's tongue from her mouth as rivers of blood flow. If this were not enough, Belial opens a medical drawer which is full of scalpels and other sharp instruments. He forces her face down into the drawer, and when her pin-cushioned face is pulled back up, the screen is filled with one of the oddest, sickest, and most hilarious scenes ever perpetuated on celluloid. Kutter's head fills the frame as her receptionist looks on. Kutter is bloody, wide-eyed, and has five strategically positioned scalpels ridiculously sticking out of her face. Near death, Kutter appears to take the biggest breath she can muster, screams hammy trying to stretch out the pain, and finally, when she is out of wind, just as unrealistically, she all so carefully faints slowly dropping out of frame as her exhausted screams fade to a whimper. Even though such a scene is visually gratuitous and over-stated, it becomes wildly humorous and most carefully choreographed.

In one of the most terrifying scenes of *coitus interruptus*, Duane is ready to go for the deep meat as Sharon implores, "Take me!" when Belial rears himself from his basket screaming fanatically. Duane instantly covers Sharon in a blanket and throws her into the hall without explanation. Later as Duane attempts to sleep, Belial, sensitively, extends his hand toward the unconscious Duane almost as though to apologize. Then in frustration, the pathetic human toad jumps onto the window ledge and repeatedly screams (in sad, short bursts) out all his pent-up pain to a non-listening world. This sequence, very short, is emotionally charged. Duane, in the meantime, is having a dream where he is running completely naked and reaches the bedroom of the sleeping Sharon who is nude beneath the covers. Using subjective camera point of view, we, the audience, become the sexually frustrated Duane who pulls down the covers and strokes Sharon's breasts, legs, and feet as she lies sleeping. His hands, the central image of the sequence, act haltingly as though the hands embody the internal shyness and inexperience that Duane possesses. Suddenly, as if awakening from a nightmare, Duane's body suddenly sits upward. When we return to Sharon's bedroom, we hear congested breathing as we now subjectively see the creature's deformed hand stroke Sharon's nude body. Unfortunately, she awakens, screams; and Belial, in fright, chokes the life from her body. In one of the most weirdly twisted scenes ever put to cinema, in medium long-shot, the deformed body of Belial straddles the nude, fully exposed, and quite dead body of Sharon. The pathetic creature quickly mounts and rapes the corpse as blood slowly flows from her genital area. The outraged Duane enters throwing his brother into the wicker basket. Duane yells teary eyed, "She was good; she was pure . . . The first girl I ever kissed

and you destroyed her!" Hoping to destroy the aspect of Duane that has separated the sexually inquisitive brother from himself, Belial grabs Duane in the gonads hoisting the pain-ridden boy several feet in the air. Employing outrageous logic, perhaps Belial feels that by castrating his brother, by destroying his sexual urges, that Duane once again will only care for Belial. However, the two brothers struggle and fall sideways outside the hotel window. Belial is on top, one claw hanging onto the Broslin Hotel sign, the other claw wrapped around his brother Duane's neck - in this case ironically trying to save his life as he slowly chokes the very life from him. Once Duane expires from the fatal choke grasp, Belial's grip fails and the twosome both fall to their death on the hard concrete below. Sleazy onlookers scream and gather around.

During the early 1970's, films such as *BUTCH CASSIDY* and *MIDNIGHT COWBOY* developed the concept of male friendship and the brotherhood that sometimes does exist between males. Scores of other films have illustrated the relationship between brothers and the sibling rivalry which can result. *BASKET CASE* is not the first horror film to deal with these concepts, but it does artistically explore these thematic considerations on a very sympathetic level compelling the viewer to ask to what extent are we our brother's keeper? While *BASKET CASE* may admittedly be viewed on this more serious level, its primary purpose is to be exploitative, perverted fun - so any analysis of this film dare not become too heavy-handed or pretentious. But any film that can be so repulsive, so perverted, so sick, so thought-provoking, and so hilarious cannot be all bad. *BASKET CASE* is a refreshing anomaly!

In quite a different vein we now turn to Sam Raimi's *THE EVIL DEAD*, probably the superior of the two movies discussed by virtue of its deadly serious tone, its artistic expression and technique, its innovative camera work, and its grim resolution to scare the audience at any cost! If *BASKET CASE* is weirdly, amusingly perverted; then *THE EVIL DEAD* is one filmmaker's nightmare brought to terrifying life. And on this level *THE EVIL DEAD* may be one of the most terrifying movies ever made.

The primary aspect where *THE EVIL DEAD* deserves merit is in its exceptional fluid cinematography. The film begins and ends by using Raimi's economic answer to Steadicam (a gyroscopic means of producing long, smooth, tracking shots through space). "Shaky-cam," whereby the camera is mounted on a 15 foot two-by-four with two volunteers running like hell over hill and dale. This initial use of "shaky-cam" involves a moody tracking shot through the fog, over a haunted looking stream, under and over dangling tree branches and logs, ultimately leading to a high-angle position following the car of "victims" toward the cabin where all the horror will occur. Such a moody beginning - meshed with the kids avoiding a head-on collision and a near fatal fall through a decaying wooden bridge - immediately puts the audience on edge.

Once the college-age kids arrive at the cabin, various stereotypes are developed (the total extent of character development). Cheryl, the quiet and easily frightened artistic type, attempts to sketch a dangling pendulum clock. As could be expected, the pendulum abruptly stops, the gong sounds (not even on the hour!), and a gush of wind blows terrifyingly in through the window as a trap door with two chains and shackles mounted on top suddenly begins to lift itself up and bang several times. Seemingly terrified and withdrawing into a trance-like state, Cheryl begins to scribble violently a square-shaped demon face that cuts through several layers of drawing paper. This square-shaped face, representing demonic possession, will be a recurring image.

Soon the people are toasting each other at the dinner table ("party down!") as the trap door flies open revealing a flight of rickety wooden steps that lead to the cellar below ("probably just some animal down there!"). Scotty, the more "macho" of the two males, volunteers to investigate solo. When he descends and minutes pass without any sound from him, Ash, the other male, armed with a lantern, climbs down the stairs to investigate accompanied by the sound of dripping water pipes. Once again the visual fluid camera adds to the eeriness with many long pans and moody, sometimes hand-held, tracking shots. "Boo!" Scott suddenly rushes out in jest, "I want to show you some stuff!" (In tribute, a dirty one-sheet poster to Wes Craven's *THE HILLS HAVE EYES* lies in the background.) What Scotty has found is the Sumerian *Book of the Dead*, bound in human flesh and written in human blood, which contains incantations which resurrect demons who possess the bodies of the living. Also found is a tape recorder with spoken explanation by an archaeologist who happens to read these all-powerful incantations aloud. Of course, the young people play the tape that night. Everyone feels all this is a joke, but as the tape is played the camera cuts outside as unearthly fog permeates from rotting leaf covered wooded ground. In fact, mounds of this soil mysteriously begin to push upward and outward. Suddenly, a tree branch snaps and breaks a cabin window as Cheryl, the only person personally touched by the evil, pleads, "Shut it off!" Someone remarks that Cheryl acts like a three-year old.

As mentioned in the analysis of *BASKET CASE*, the bond of love between human beings, the strength to be found in relationships, can both be the cause and the cure of "horror." This theme is explored in a somewhat different manner by writer/director Sam Raimi here in *THE EVIL DEAD*. Ash, the ultimate hero/victim, wants to give his girl friend Linda a necklace as a present, but he also wants to tease her. He pretends he has fallen asleep with the box on his lap. Linda, on pins and needles with anticipation, constantly checks Ash's eyes to make sure he is asleep before she tries to snatch the box. This game of cat and mouse ends when Linda discovers Ash with opened eyes. She claims her prize and wears it immediately. This same sequence will be replayed later with horrifying effect.



Ash, the final victim of Sumarian evil released by *The Book of the Dead*, here tries to attend to his good buddy Scotty, soon to die, from *THE EVIL DEAD*.

In a familiar horror film cliché, Cheryl senses she is being watched by a presence outside the cabin, so she tightens her robe and goes out there to investigate alone. "I know someone's out there!" But from this cliché something novel develops. The entire woods themselves, every tree and every branch, appear to be possessed by something evil. The over-exaggerated soundtrack is filled with magnified effects of trees falling, branches snapping, and footsteps crunching twigs. Once again unseen evil takes the shape of the subjective "shaky-cam" where an ominous presence begins to stalk Cheryl by smoothly flowing through rough terrain. Soon the sound of whips cutting through the air increases as twigs and small branches start to reach out for and lasso Cheryl. Branches surround her neck, tie her hands in front of her, as creeping vines grab her legs, stroke her thighs, and tear her clothes off. One exposed breast is modestly covered by the palm of her hand when the vines snap that hand to the soil alongside her, almost as though she were being drawn and quartered. The branches separate her bare legs as one thick branch from overhead violently snaps down ramming itself between her legs as she screams, being totally immobile. Soon all the branches become dormant, no longer possessed by evil, and Cheryl's continued struggle results in her snapping all the twigs, vines, and branches as she frees herself and runs back toward the cabin subjectively being pursued by our invisible menace. As the subjective evil rushes the cabin door, Cheryl - who has been yelling and crying, fumbles for the set of keys lying above the door - is let inside at the last possible moment. "It was the woods . . . they're alive." Tree rape seems absurd on paper, but as executed by Raimi, it becomes a horrifying violation of the human species by nature itself.

Fulfilling another cliché, Cheryl demands that Ash drive her to town this very second. Of course the car will not start until Cheryl shouts, "It's not going to let us leave," then the headlights abruptly flash as the engine starts. However, the duo only cuts through the fog-shrouded woods as far as the wooden bridge which has now completely rotted out - the kids are trapped! In tribute to *CURSE OF THE DEMON* (in itself a tribute to Val Lewton's horror classics), as Cheryl tries to catch up to Ash, who is not to be seen in the dense fog, she feels her way through the woods as one long branch suddenly snaps into place directly in front of her.

Returning to the cabin, Cheryl hopelessly gazes outside the window as Ash listens to more of the tape to learn that dismemberment is the only way to destroy the demons. The others, who are playing cards, state the suits of various playing cards aloud. Soon, Cheryl's voice, which is changing, growing resonant, repeats these same suits of cards. She whips her head around to reveal the extent of her possession - her face now gaunt white, her features withered and distorted, her eye-balls totally white. Her body, now a shell without a spirit, writhes and convulses as she is hoisted upward by forces unknown. As she floats a disembodied voice startles the assemblage, "Why have you disturbed our sleep! One by one we will take you!" Cheryl's body then suddenly drops and returns to unconsciousness. Her face now looks normal, but her hand, unnoticed by spectators, is decayed. She reaches for a sharpened pencil which she thrusts into Linda's ankle grinding the stick into her further and further. Easily, she flings human bodies across the room who, at first stunned, quickly recover trying to overtake the crazed Cheryl. One of the men, using the handle of an axe, beats her down into the cellar and locks shut the trap door with chains. Although safely contained within, Cheryl, now horribly demonized, can lift the trap a few inches - enough to free part of her arm and expose her face and to deliver frenzied wails and accursed laughter.

It is not long before Shelly, the dark-haired girl, is the next victim of demon possession. She stands inside the lighted cabin looking outward feeling the eerie presence of invisible evil lurking afoot. Once again the viewer becomes this subjective force of Sumarian evil as the viewer, looking in from the outside, rapidly rushes the window where Shelly looks outward. As her presence rushes toward her, she recoils in horror, the window glass shatters, and her screams reverberate throughout the cabin. In one of the moodiest and most carefully sculptured terror sequences, Scotty rushes to investigate, closely examining the broken glass, the area outside the

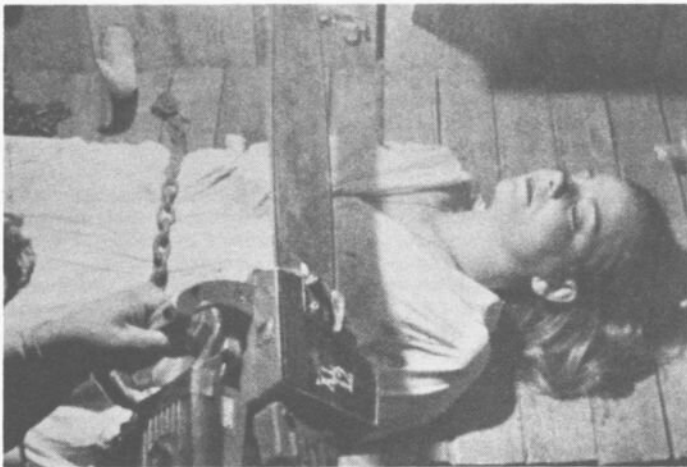
cabin window (whereby the viewer expects anything to attack from anywhere at anytime - we are ripe for a fright!), and the dark cubbyholes behind the closed doors. After checking out the bathtub which is empty, Scotty turns as sharp red fingernails grasp his throat and tear open the right side of his face drawing blood. The hand-held camera helps to deliver the ultimate shock payoff after building up and stretching out the suspense for well over two minutes. Here we have atmosphere with a minimum of gore.

When Shelly is knocked over and falls into the fireplace catching fire, something interesting occurs relating to our "intimate relationships" theme mentioned earlier. When Scotty sees his beloved Shelly afire, he instinctively grabs her feet and pulls her to safety. She demonically utters, "I don't know what I would have done if I would have remained on those hot coals, burning my pretty flesh!" Something unusual is happening here. The woman whom Scotty loves has become a fiendish demon intent on killing him. He fights to save his life by destroying her, but as soon as he sees his babe in physical peril, he instinctively saves her life without concern for his own welfare. Immediately, Shelly rises up still possessed by intangible evil and tries to ram a small sword down his throat and force his head down into the very same fireplace. Scotty, luckily, is able to free his sheathed knife and stab the hand which holds the sword. Utilizing ultra-gore, Shelly starts gnawing and chewing at her useless hand biting through muscles and tendons until the hand is severed with bloody sinews dangling. Wisely, this sword is rammed into Shelly's back (with the hand still attached) as white froth forms at her mouth after which she vomits forth buckets of demonic pus. Her corpse lies motionless. Not surprisingly, as Scotty walks past this putrefaction, Shelly's hand grabs him. Scotty sees an axe in the hand of petrified standerby Ash; Scotty grabs the axe and immediately hacks the struggling corpse to pieces. After the grisley deed is completed, each individual piece of corpse quivers and struggles to move. These pieces are quickly buried.

Justly shaken, Scotty claims he is getting the hell out of here, that a path must exist allowing escapees to bypass the bridge. Ash, visibly concerned, shouts that Linda is still injured and cannot be moved. Scotty coldly claims he doesn't care what happens to Linda - she is his girl friend.

Just when the viewer thinks he might have a breather, Ash goes in to check on Linda who is lying peacefully asleep. He uncovers her ankle, investigates her ankle wound, and in utter amazement watches as the small wound grows spider-web-like up her entire leg. She jerks awake to a sitting position, white-eyed, demon possessed, and laughing hysterically like a senile grandmother. In horror Ash backs out the cabin where the half-dead body of Scotty stumbles and collapses on his shoulder. "Cheryl was right . . . it won't let us leave. We're gonna die!" Linda watches this spectacle sitting cross-legged on the side steps. Her haunting hysterical laughter prompts Ash to repeatedly punch her in the face with little effect - her laughter continues. Quickly producing a shot gun aimed directly at her head, Ash momentarily pauses as the body of Linda assumes its regular appearance. The pathetic victim now pleads, "Ash, help me please!" then, from down in the pit, the trap door for the first time closed shut, the similar pleadings of the now human-voiced Cheryl implore, "I'm all right now. Please unlock this chain." Foolishly, Ash goes for the keys, lifts the trap door, and peers down into the darkness. Suddenly a decayed hand grabs him but he escapes. In a childish sing-songy chorus, both possessed women now chant, "We're gonna get you!" As Ash speaks with and feeds water to the motionless mouth of Scotty, Ash finally realizes that Scotty is dead - but in this movie perhaps not for long. Linda abruptly stabs Ash in the arm, but he seemingly destroys her by forcing a sword into her back as she vomits forth her life force and then lies motionless. Immediately chaining her body to a work table, Ash hoists a gas-driven chain saw (alluding to another horror classic once again) above her motionless corpse remembering that dismemberment is the only way to keep the dead at rest. However, he sees before him the body of the woman he loves, and most touchingly, he sees the necklace he recently gave her. He cannot mutilate the body; instead, he carries it outside for burial. Then in a macabre reversal of the cat and mouse manner in which Ash pretended to be asleep when originally giving Linda her present, Cheryl, who use to be fragile and vulnerable and artistic, is now reduced to being demonically evil, locked away under the trap door, in *THE EVIL DEAD*.





Top: An eerie publicity shot, used as the basis for *THE EVIL DEAD*'s poster publicity campaign, was never utilized in the movie itself. **Bottom:** Linda, Ash's girl friend, here lies dead. Alluding to Tobe Hooper's classic *TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE*, Ash prepares to dismember the corpse, which he cannot do.

the lifeless eyes of Linda open and watch Ash as he digs a grave. Whenever he pauses to look over her body, she plays dead. Once buried, her hand thrusts upward through the soil to grab the startled Ash ripping the flesh from his shin and leg. He immediately produces a heavy wooden beam and commences to break every bone of her undead body. She only laughs refusing to stay dead. Utilizing her super-human strength, she grabs hold of the beam forcing Ash to the ground. She flings her body through the air to pounce atop her lover when Ash quickly reaches for the shovel and decapitates Linda in mid-air. Her headless body falls on top of his, her arms clenching for his throat. As her disembodied head twitches and makes nasty faces, the body violently spews hydraulically pumped blood directly into Ash's face as he flees inside the confines of the cabin. Linda's head continues to titter.

Once inside the cabin, all hell literally breaks loose. Several corpses from the vicinity charge the barricaded fortress as Ash, near a state of utter shock, savagely forces doors and windows shut on decaying corpse hands (shades of Romero's *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*). Soon in the cellar, blood freely flows from wall sockets as lit light bulbs screwed into sockets fill internally with blood and pop. A movie projector automatically turns itself on projecting images of dripping blood on the wall behind Ash who is blinded by the bright light. An old record player starts to play a 1930's 78 rpm record which is festive and jolly. Soon the record player slows down and stops, the projector blows up as blood slowly drips from the end of the lens, and when Ash looks at his image in a wall mirror extending his arm outward to convince himself that he is still alive, his hand passes through what has become a liquid pool of blood. As Ash withdraws his hand from the gore pool and stares downward at it, he can only scream.

Without ever letting up, the climax of the movie features Ash standing with his back against the wooden door, holding the cherished necklace he gave Linda, as two ghoulish arms bust through the door choking Ash. At the same time Scotty, now horribly decayed, rises from the dead and bodily lifts Ash off the ground after he escapes from the first zombie. Momentarily freeing himself from Scotty by gouging both of his eye-balls into bloody red pulp using his thumbs, Ash views the *Book of the Dead* lying near the fireplace. He wisely tries to grasp the book to throw it into the fireplace, but he is held back by the still fighting corpse of Scotty who holds him by the legs as he tries to crawl toward the book. The other ghoul picks up a hot poker from the fireplace and savagely beats Ash over his back with it. Ash's necklace, now lying on the floor in the shape of the square demon's face that Cheryl had originally been compelled to draw on her sketch pad, is grabbed

and used as a hook to snare the book which is then immediately thrown into the fire.

At this moment the soundtrack becomes quiet and the demons become stiff and motionless. The only sound that Ash hears is the sound of crackling, brittle bones and skeletons which collapse under their own weight. The next sequence features stop-motion animation involving the decaying process as lips turn to dust, hair and flesh crumble and fall, and noses wither. Clay animation is frequently used during this segment to depict tongues which are extended and eyes that plop. Interestingly enough, one of the decaying faces assumes the horrible square countenance which has symbolized demon possession throughout the movie. The final segment of decay is the *VIDEODROME*-esque explosion of guts and blood as the bodies of the dead rip themselves apart. Usually when guts explode from stomachs, chests, or even legs, a horribly conceived demon hand also extends itself from the same exposed body part. Ash is literally bathed in blood. The corpses stumble and fall, skeletons crumble, and maggots scurry on the floor around this mass of decaying flesh. An ethereal cry proclaims, "Join us!!!"

Suddenly the sun is shining as Ash exhaustedly steps outside the cabin to look at the beautiful sunrise. However, from the other side of the cabin, further out in the woods, the invisible, intangible demon has returned via "shaky-cam" that floats, swerves, and charges through the woods over dried leaves toward the cabin. Continuing throughout the cabin the subjective camera violently charges Ash who half turns around and screams. Rapid cut to black as the credits flash by amid a replay of the 1930's jolly 78 rpm record.

Absolutely relentless in its pacing is the only way to describe the intense rhythms and solemnity of *THE EVIL DEAD*. Similar to our worst nightmares, *THE EVIL DEAD* never lets up or pauses for a second. Even when the viewer believes the ending sunrise spells release and an end to the horrors, the demon returns to claim its final victim. Everyone dies in *THE EVIL DEAD*! And one must remember that the never-ending brutality does not only involve ultra-gore, but it involves artistically executed cinematography and well-crafted fright sequences which involve the creation of atmosphere and suspense. Sam Raimi, only 22 years old when he made *THE EVIL DEAD*, was restricted by budget, resources, and acting talent; but he has managed to do something that studios with prestigious names and unlimited resources have not been able to do for a long time - scare the living hell out of the audience. I first watched *THE EVIL DEAD* on video tape one evening alone, and even in the confines of my living room, at age 33, I was terrified. That's the bottom line for any horror film!

Unfortunately, many horror genre fans have not seen either *BASKET CASE* nor *THE EVIL DEAD* - even though both are available "uncut" for rental or out-right sale at neighborhood video tape shops. Analysis Pictures, the distributor which originally released *BASKET CASE* in 1982, was then on financially shaky legs and soon after went bankrupt. Not understanding how to best present *BASKET CASE* to audiences throughout America, the film was only selectively screened at a few grind houses on 42nd Street presented via the *ROCKY HORROR* route of a midnight cult classic. In other open markets the film was reportedly trimmed of some of its ultra-gore in order to emphasize its demented humor. Censorship of violence alienated the film from the market it was financially marketed for - teenagers and young adults who want their gore undiluted. Therefore, because of the distribution strategy, the film was commercially doomed from the start. Only within the past months has a new outfit, Rugged Films, acquired theatrical distribution rights (after the film already had received saturation distribution via home video cassette!).

THE EVIL DEAD was also made in 1982 but not released until the spring of 1983 when it played some theaters again in New York City and received national reviews which appeared in publications such as *The Village Voice* and others; its distributor, New Line Cinema, wisely chose to release the film unrated thus avoiding the sure-fire "X" rating it would have been branded for excessive violence. However, many theater chains across the nation will not book unrated films, nor will many newspapers across the nation run advertising for "X" rated or even unrated movies. Word has circulated that *THE EVIL DEAD* has been edited for release in certain markets earning the profitable "R" rating. The home video cassette rights brought the film uncensored into national release via video shops by late 1983/early 1984 where it immediately flourished. In the winter of 1984, after the home video market had long been saturated, *THE EVIL DEAD* had a very limited one-week run here in Baltimore. The simple truth remains that distributors do not know how to properly market excessively violent horror films to the American public, even the artistic ultra-gore epics. Distributors are shackled by the national MPAA rating system that requires an "R" rating for financial success. Therefore director's "final cuts" often have to be re-edited by the studios for commercial survival. Even if films are released with an "X" rating or are left unrated by distributors, theater managers are leery of booking films which have been statistically shown will not make money. Theater managers also receive pressure from concerned groups within the community who often dictate what a theater may or may not show. The bottom line is that most genre fans will never see either of these films in movie theaters in their original, unedited formats.

But once we get past having the opportunity to view both of these ultra-gore epics, we must deal with one other essential concern - why should we bother to see such "trashy" films? For a moment let us deal specifically with *THE EVIL DEAD*. What merit can be gained from viewing a movie that is so pessimistic, so nihilistic, so anti-humanistic, and so offensive? Certainly an encounter with *THE EVIL DEAD* is not a pleasant experience, but are any nightmares a pleasant experience that one would want to cuddle up to?



Once *The Book of the Dead* has been thrown into the raging fireplace, the demon-possessed bodies of the dead instantly age and decay within two minutes. As parts of the corpses explode outwardly spewing forth buckets of blood and guts, horribly conceived demon hands pop out of the body parts as well.

Most definitely *THE EVIL DEAD* is an excessive barrier-breaker. But so was *HORROR OF DRACULA* when it showed chest-puncturing stakings in vivid Technicolor; so was *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* when it depicted zombies eating the still warm internal organs of the recently dead; and so was *THE EXORCIST* when it showed a corrupted young innocent masturbating with a crucifix and shouting obscenities. Cinema history now looks kindly upon such "excesses" realizing that sometimes artistic expression must be offensive, over-stated, and even crude. One only has to look to history's great literature to see examples of excessive violence and gore - the tragedies of Shakespeare come immediately to mind. What the discriminating viewer must discern is whether or not the ultra-gore is being utilized as commercial "product" for its own ends, or is it being employed as an artistic device - no matter how unpleasant - to further the tone or message of the movie? Whether or not we believe the violence of *THE EVIL DEAD* is excessive, what we really need to ask is how efficient is the film when viewed holistically, not piecemeal. Today's audiences are more sophisticated when it comes to accepting special visual effects and special make-up effects, so the filmmaker is forced to be even more cruel when it comes to horrifying audiences. The understated, subtle, psychological horror film (the ilk best represented by films such as *CARNIVAL OF SOULS*, *THE HAUNTING*, and *DON'T LOOK NOW*) certainly still could be successful today. But as stated earlier, the use of ultra-gore is only one means of achieving the ends of frightening movie audiences. Often times, the use of ultra-gore may be the most effective means of gaining artistic attention when rising up through the ranks of low-budget, independent movie-maker. But once the artist gains his audience's attention, the artist must effectively utilize the talent of technique to follow through and maintain the public's attention.

It is not with great glee that I have to admit that in another ten years we will be viewing horror movies which will make *BASKET CASE* and *THE EVIL DEAD* seem restrained. But once discriminating horror film buffs weed through all the crap, I feel confident that a few "gems" will definitely make their presence felt. Remember, in the future, ultra-gore will only become more "ultra"!

Even though the ultra-gore employed in making *BASKET CASE* and *THE EVIL DEAD* has been the primary aspect that has won each of these films notoriety in the press, this is certainly not the reason why in the summer of 1984 I'm calling these two movies among the best the genre has produced in the 1980's. *BASKET CASE* blends graphic violence with twisted humor and touching human relationships (a brother's love and responsibility for

another brother). Never taking itself too seriously as a drama, *BASKET CASE* becomes the logical extension of what Roger Corman and Charles B. Griffith were attempting to do with such off-beat films as *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS* and *BUCKET OF BLOOD* 20 years ago. Fred Henenlotter, by assimilating all these influences from his past cinematic viewing, has structured something perversely original - not for everyone's taste. Like it or not, *BASKET CASE* is energetic, innovative, and involving - certainly an exemplary horror film!

Sam Raimi's *THE EVIL UNDEAD* takes many of the old horror film clichés and turns them around, adding the element of surprise, to create something totally familiar yet totally new. By employing innovative fluid camera work threaded to a never relenting rhythmic pace that hits the viewer square between the eyes (and sometimes between the legs), *THE EVIL DEAD* becomes the definitive horror film roller-coaster ride. The ideas and story are simple enough; it's the total experience that makes *THE EVIL DEAD* the successful scare-fest that it is. Perhaps Raimi may someday look upon this movie as his exercise in scare technique, his thesis statement on how to terrify movie audiences. But this is the work of an artist at the beginning of his career. The mind boggles when I think of how Sam Raimi might utilize his technique in a more sophisticated production, assuming that Raimi remains faithful to his art and does not sell-out to the "Big Studio" play-it-safe doctrine.

Working within the confines of the exploitation film genre, it has become apparent that Henenlotter and Raimi are simply not making exploitative "product," but they are trying to transcend the inflexible politics of the studio system (which attempts to control all film expression from initial conception to the marketing and final rating which affects a film's financial chances of survival) and make the films that are crying inside themselves to be made. As Henenlotter and Raimi achieve success, we can only hope that the powers that be grant these and other young filmmakers the artistic freedom to pursue their own personal visions and grant them the power to make movies which are personal statements and are restricted only by the confines of each artist's imagination, not by studio politics or the close-minded morality of some self-righteous zealots.

SUBMIT NOW! The majority of the articles appearing in this issue were submitted as early as January or February of last winter. This allows time for editing and the assigning of title page art. Therefore, the sooner you submit your articles, the better chance that article will appear in MidMar #34. New writers welcome!!