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EDITORIAL:

by lee harris

As we mentioned last week, we now have a new sponsor for Hub Magazine. Taking us through the next 50 issues will be Rebellion-owned Solaris Books and Abaddon Books. Two very different imprints from one of the UK's most popular entertainment companies. Rebellion also produce computer games and the always excellent *2000AD*.

Do take the time to click on their banner and have a look through their sites - we're only able to provide you with free fiction every week through the generosity of our sponsors. So, thanks once again to HarperCollins who got us through the magic Issue 100 - and raise your glasses to Solaris and Abaddon, who will get us past number 150!



FAQ About Time Travel Competition

The winners of the *FAQ About Time Travel* competition from issue 100 are Sarah Stocks from Fife, Jenny Graham from London and Steven Castle from Strood. Each of them wins a DVD of the movie. Well done!

FICTION

Angel Dust

by david watkins

The world's press were gathered in the hospital car park waiting for my father to die. It looked like there were thousands of them, a big sprawling mass of long coats, longer lenses and bright lipstick.

Someone spotted me and they all started shouting, a thousand cameras aimed at me like a photographic firing squad. I stepped back from the window and glanced nervously behind me. A nurse saw me and smiled sympathetically. Her name tag identified her as Nora.

"Coffee?"

"No thanks, I just put one out." I looked at the bin, more embarrassed at the weak joke than anything else.

"OK then." She opened the door to my father's room and paused in the doorway, looking at the floor – studiously ignoring the burly policeman standing there. "Whatever people say, I think he's a great man." She then looked me in the eye. "You should come and say goodbye, Doctor Philips."

Instead I sank to a chair as she went into the room. What the hell could I say to him? We hadn't spoken in years and now he was dying. The phone call from the prison had said he wouldn't last the night, so here I was. That's what you did, right? That was the traditional thing to do, back when we had traditions.

A TV flicked into life in the corner of the waiting room. Nora had finished doing – well, whatever the hell it was she did in there. Unsurprisingly, *he* was the main story on the news channel. Nora looked at me for a second but I didn't acknowledge her so she let it stay. I drowned it out, knowing what it would say without needing to hear it. The famous photo from the Age Riots of all those middle aged people rioting in their suits, my dad front and centre screaming in rage.

They would undoubtedly focus on the bomb. They usually did. It was over fifty years ago for God's sake. No-one got hurt, so get over it. He had said time and again that he hadn't intended anyone to get hurt, it was a symbol – an *act* against the ludicrous decisions made at the time. Most people assumed that's why we didn't speak anymore.

Most people are wrong.

Nora came over and sat next to me. She gave me a cup of coffee and shrugged. "You looked like you could use it."

I smiled my thanks.

"He's awake." She said quietly. When I didn't respond, she continued: "He's asked for you."

I nodded and breathed in deeply. Time to go see the oldest man in the country, if not the world. I stood up and downed the lukewarm coffee, mostly to hide the sudden lump in my throat.

"I looked like this the day he went in." That was a totally unnecessary comment. Just about everybody looked like they did the day he was sent down.

"Daniel." My father rasped and I choked back another sudden flood of tears. How the hell could anyone look so frail and still be alive? I instantly regretted coming. My memories of a strong, good looking, elegant man were forever ruined by the sight of the pathetic creature in front of me.

Countless tubes ran into his body and a respirator hissed in the corner. His breathing mask allowed him to talk, but it clearly took a lot of effort. So, one of the most notorious figures of the Age Riots and possibly one of the most influential men of all time lay dying in front of me.

"I'm glad you came." He said with a smile. "You haven't changed a bit."

He followed that by a sound similar to paper rustling in the wind and I realised he was laughing.

"Still laughing at your own jokes, Dad." I whispered, tears now running freely down my face.

"Always, kid." His pet name for me since I was two. I was now sixty-three, with my own PhD and a staff of twenty, but would always be "kid" to him.

I had chosen to freeze my age at thirty-six, four years before the cut off for Angel Dust. I'd been far too geeky in my twenties, but had kind of grown into my face in my thirties. A good age, my wife said.

"Am I on the news?"

"Of course." I didn't mention the glee with which the coverage was being handled. The oldest survivor of the Age Riots, the man who had come close to taking down Parliament like some sort of modern day Guy Fawkes, the man who had railed loudest and longest against the unfairness of the Angel Dust legislation.

"Do they think I'm dangerous?"

He laughed the horrible raspy laugh again, but this time I laughed with him. I sat next to his bed and took his hand in mine. Liver spots over the back held a fascination for a moment, but I forced myself to focus on his face. His eyes were as sharp as ever in the folds of his face.

"Not anymore Dad."

He nodded sagely. "They were wrong you know. Angel Dust was a mistake."

I didn't say anything. It was always the same thing with my Dad. He never really talked about anything else and hadn't for years. I was tired of the argument – I'd agreed with the government at the time, but then I'd been nineteen. Forty had seemed a lifetime away and really old. Dad had been forty-one. That had to hurt. And we were set as one of the oldest limits in the world. Only Russia had been higher than us. China had set it at twenty-one – I'm still surprised that they got away with that. What had really pissed my dad off had been that the PM had been thirty-nine.

He hadn't even voted for him.

"You don't want to talk about it." He grinned toothlessly at me. "I understand."

He winced then, sat up quickly and a machine started beeping alarmingly. Nora rushed in, fiddled with one monitor and upped a setting on another. Dad groaned with pleasure and sank back into his pillow. I noticed the word 'morphine' briefly registered on the screen and wished I knew more about medicine. My computer science PhD helped me understand *how* the machines worked, but not *what* they did.

Nora leant in to me and whispered "Soon" before she left.

Tears filled my eyes again.

"Not yet." Dad said. "Drugs are great, should have taken them years ago." I laughed suddenly. Memories of him going ape when he discovered my grass stash came flooding back.

"Keep the fight going, kid, keep it going."

"It's over, Dad." I said gently. "They won."

The Riots had been suppressed by brute force from the police and army. People don't believe that now, of course, because those images aren't public any more, but I remember the tanks. God, the tanks, rolling towards my father. He was arrested along with the other ring leaders soon after that. It didn't take them long to link him to the bombing attempt and that was it for Dad. *Indefinite incarceration*. It even sounds long.

He nodded again. "That they did, kid, but at what cost?"

He coughed and wheezed for a moment and I realised that I was watching him die, second by second. "Make sure that your boys know the truth, how they turned their backs on a generation."

He closed his eyes and his breathing edged away to nothing. I stood up quickly and clutched his hand tighter. Suddenly I was filled with the need to say so much but my throat constricted. The only word that came was "proud".

It was only when he smiled that I realised that he had heard me. It took several more seconds for me to realise that he had stopped breathing and then all the machine alarms kicked off at once. I was deeply ashamed that I had deserted him for those final years. I couldn't handle watching him get old whilst I didn't

change. Tears streamed down my face as Nora unplugged the machines. The policeman watched in silence.

Later, I sank my umpteenth coffee and prepared to tell the world's press that the inventor of Angel Dust had died.

fin

Howdy

REVIEWS

The Clone Wars Series 2 – Episode 4-6

reviewed by richard whittaker



“Senate Spy” Directed by Steward Lee, written by Melinda Hsu

“Landing at Rain Point” Directed by Brian Kalin O’Connell, written by Brian Larsen

“Weapons Factory” Directed by Giancarlo Volpe, written by Brian Larsen
Starring: Matt Lanter, James Arnold Taylor, Ashley Eckstein, Catherine Taber, Brian George, Meredith Salenger, Robin Atkin Downes, Anthony Daniels, Olivia D’Abo

Comfortably into its second season, *The Clone Wars* seems to be settling well into the three episode arc format that it established so strongly with last run with the *Malevolence* plot. After the mixed success of Coruscant-set season two opener the *Holocron* saga (reviewed in *Hub* issue 102), it’s back to the battlefield for this second tale. The Republic is continuing to get its collective democratic behind handed to it by the ever-extending Trade Federation droid army. The winged and wattled Geonosians, last seen in *Attack of the Clones* and still controlled by the sinister Poggle the Lesser, have ramped up weapons production and, if the Republic wants to staunch the bleeding, it’s time for a mixture of subterfuge, infiltration and all-out attack to get the job done.

The subterfuge, in fact downright deception, comes courtesy of the return of Padme Amidala (Taber) in *Senate Spy*. The Jedi order asks her to act as a honey trap against her former friend Sen. Rush Clovis (Downes), as the Republic suspects that his banking clan has been funding the new Separatist arms race. Even for *The Clone Wars*, this is a surprisingly mature episode, predicated on Padme balancing Clovis’ lust with the trust issues of lightsaber swinging covert boyfriend Anakin Skywalker (Lanter). While the series has always cut near the knuckle on violence, if this were live-action, there’s no way some of her more revealing and gravity-defying costumes would pass the TV-PG rating system.

While the animation of Padme seems occasionally a little doll-like, and the resolution is a little simplistic, it’s still by far one of the best talking head episodes the show has produced, and sets the groundwork for *Landing at Rain Point*. This second act is a different challenge to the arc opener, which had to stay interesting to a younger audience while avoiding action sequences: Here the puzzler is to create a ground assault as good as the original invasion of Geonosis from *Episode II* and not just a clone of its strategies. Arguably, this episode may even exceed the original in scale and brutality.

That’s high praise, considering that the cinematic original stands with the battle of Hoth as one of the best sci-fi depictions of land warfare. The set-up is simple: As part of a planet-wide assault based on Padme’s espionage, Obi-Wan Kenobi (Taylor), Anakin and Ki-Adi-Mundi (George) are to meet at a landing site and launch a three-pronged attack on a ray-shielded droid factory. When that plan goes south – well, more like plows into the ground at high speed after being shot down by Geonosian air defense – the three generals pick up Sun Tzu’s wisdom: “In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory.”

Why is this episode so successful? Because it takes the best elements of the best siege warfare narratives and wraps them into a single, rampaging 22 minutes. Geonosis itself looks as burnt and brutal as it did in the movie, and the scale of the battle is equally huge. More importantly, scripter Brian Larsen takes advantage of the geography and topography laid out in *Episode II*, giving each Jedi not simply a different battle but a different battleground to cross. Anakin and his Padawan learner Ahsoka Tano (Eckstein) get all *The Guns of Navarone* on the cliffs, Obi-Wan circles the metaphorical wagons on hostile plains for the *Black LAAT Down* subplot, while Mundi and his troops fight a surprisingly gruesome cave battle that tips its combat

helmet to *Aliens* (right down to the flame throwers. Burning bugs ahoy).

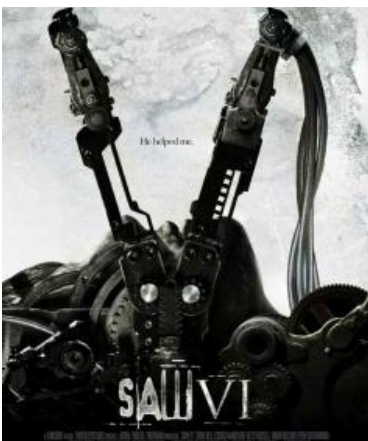
There's also more deepening of the narrative around the relationship between Anakin and Ahsoka. Their shared flippancy binds them together, while at the same time it's what worries Obi-Wan the most. "I'll never understand how you can simplify these battles into some kind of game," he sighs after the grinning pair swap body counts. That's also the springboard for the final chapter, where the attention switches to Ahsoka. As part of the final push, she is paired with Barriss Offee (Salenger), the by-the-book Padawan to by-the-book Jedi master Luminara Unduli (D'Abo). That's not so much fun for little miss "what's the book?", but does give returning scripter Larsen an opportunity to dig a little deeper in the series' tween lead.

It's a breakthrough episode for director Volpe who, like a major part of this show's talent, cut his animation teeth as a go-to talent on *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Somewhere between his series debut on season one's somewhat lumpen *Blue Shadow Virus* and the breathless season closer *Hostage Crisis*, he grasped the show's dynamic. Yet it may be his *Avatar* experience that benefits him most here. That show regularly bounced between high comedy, high drama, high action and high philosophy, and this is arguably the toughest, most complicated and ambiguous plot of *The Clone Wars* so far. As Barriss and Ahsoka work their way through the catacombs of the droid factory to blow up the reactor, Luminara and Anakin compare styles of combat as a diversion on the access bridge above. But it's really about the bond between master and learner, and whether Anakin has, as is his way, become too attached to his Padawan. It's also the first time that Kevin Kiner's score moves out of the background and starts to compete (and this may sound like heresy) with John Williams' pivotal work. The final assault on the factory is raised from impressive to enthralling because of his orchestration.

In total, this return to Geonosis is well worth the trip, serving to move both the flow of the war and deepen the complex matrix of relationships between Anakin, Padme and Ahsoka. Plus, don't expect Geonosis to go away quickly: The aftermath arc that follows deals with the extremely unpleasant mop-up operation, and continues the experiment with *Star Wars* horror begun in print with the recently-released *Death Troopers* novel. Dark and bloody as this arc got, things are about to get, if not gorier, undoubtedly gooier.

Saw VI

reviewed by richard whittaker



Directed by Kevin Greutert, Written by Marcus Dunstan and Patrick Melton

Starring: Tobin Bell, Costas Mandylor, Betsy Russell, Shawnee Smith, Peter Outerbridge

When did the *Saw* franchise become so nakedly political?

The film series that has hogged Halloween release dates for much of this decade has always had a deep moralizing streak (of the 'eye for an eye' strain). *Saw IV* dabbled in something more sociological by punishing a trial lawyer. However, the last entry in the series (2008's *Saw V*) was set around the punishment and rehabilitation, Jigsaw-style, of five people connected to a building fire. In it, there were plenty of jabs at gentrification and the real estate industry just as the property bubble exploded and took the US economy with it. Now returning writers Dunstan and Melton have dug their scalpel blades into this year's political hot topic – the health insurance industry.

This time around, it's executive William Easton (Outerbridge) at the end of Jigsaw's dangerous leash. He has, as is the norm, one hour to get through a series of complex puzzles and redeem his soul. And there's

a lot of redemption to be done: He is, after all, a man who has become rich by denying people medical coverage. Why did he, out of all the scummy health insurance executives in the world, so bring down Jigsaw's ire that he wakes up in a chest vice with hand grenades tied to his limbs? That's the driving force behind his trip through the barbed-wire-lined maze.

Behind the story of one man and his battle with the odds, some steam vents, a buzz saw and a couple of vats of flesh-eating acid, is the ongoing story of the battle for the legacy of Jigsaw – the thinking man's serial killer. What sets the *Saw* franchise apart from other episodic horror plodders is that there is actually something that looks and feels like an uber-plot. Underneath the gruesomeness, there's a back-flipping complexity, where assumptions about what conversations in earlier films meant are re-evaluated and re-contextualized. Seriously, there are so many flashbacks that it's actually worth a quick continuity refresher course before buying a ticket.

Saw VI is another passing of the mantle of Jigsaw, and another analysis of what motivates each successive contender to the title. The deceased John Tuck (Bell) was crazy but at least had logic to his actions. The equally deceased Amanda (Smith) was too passionate and unpredictable, loyal solely to Tuck and not to his world-changing agenda. Post-*Saw V*, it's pretty clear that Detective Hoffman (Mandylor) is just a murderous sociopath with a violent and strangely competitive streak. Now the question is raised of how involved Tuck's wife Jill (Russell) is in all of this, and what was in the box Tuck left her in the last movie. As anyone who has paid any attention will know by now, there's no such thing as an overlooked hanging plot thread in this franchise. So having *Saw I-V* editor Greutart in the helmer's chair makes sense. His queasy 2006 avian flu paranoia short *Old Friends* had its own fair share of *Saw*-esque booby traps, as a family tries to secure their home against possible incursion and infection. It also got how quickly friends and workmates will turn on each other (another *Saw* mainstay), so his credentials are far stronger than could be expected for a first-time feature director. Yet while there's little for him to add creatively to the established rust-covered and green-hued style, he manages to be a safe pair of hands when it comes to severing limbs.

Of course, this is still the grand daddy of American torture porn franchises (yeah, you heard me, *Hostel*). There may still be some lessons to be learnt from the blunter end of the Japanese horror industry (be warned: *The Ginipigu* series, aka *Guinea Pig 1-7*, is really for the most hardened of stomachs) but the inter-character narrative is set against the ingenious post-industrial torture. Beginning with a pound-of-flesh challenge, this keeps up with the gore. Does it have anything as hurl-inducing as the "drowning by ground putrified pig carcass" of *III*? Arguably not, but that and the limb-twisting rack may be the series' defining disturbing visuals. Instead, the challenges are more cerebral. Easton is forced to choose who lives and who dies, and what he's prepared to sacrifice to keep someone alive. As an indictment of the modern American health care industry, that's a sharp indictment with a blunt tool.

But that political insight may be where the film falls down a little bit as regards the in-series logic. There are a couple of traps where the survival of the contestant (it seems more fitting than 'victim' in this morality matrix) is down to the choice of others. Arguably, that could be down to the degraded version of the Jigsaw mentality that the lesser designer show, but it seems that Melton and Dunstan may have let their own vision overtake the basic redemptive concept.

Yet another part of their job, and a major part of the film's purpose, has to be setting up interest in sequels. Normally, such dragged-out horror stories have dried up like old blood well before this point. Take the *Halloween* movies, which underwent a complete reboot for *III* and then just became hackneyed re-runs of themselves, with no motivation for re-runs and revisits bar morbid curiosity. That may be *VI*'s biggest achievement. Since *IV*, the films have seemed to simply drift off to a quasi-resolution, rather than establishing the next step forward. *VI* leaves no doubt where this is all going. The nature and disposition of the survivors means that *VII* is inevitable, but could go in a direction never seen before. Suffice to say that, with multiple contenders to Jigsaw's crown as the patron saint of mutilation, how long before they cross paths and swords. If the big wigs at Lionsgate distribution have their way, pencil it in for next Halloween. More importantly, even after six movies, there's still more than enough energy and ingenuity in the plot to make the effort seem appealing.

FEATURES

7th Son of a 7th Son - An Interview with JC Hutchins

with *alasdair stuart*

JC Hutchins is one of podcasting fiction's kings beneath the hill. The author of *Personal Effects: Dark Art* made quite a splash earlier in the year thanks to that novel's combination of horror and transmedia technique but is best known for the *7th Son* trilogy of podcast novels. The story of seven men who share both DNA and a terrible destiny it took podcasting by storm and the first volume, *Descent*, has just been released in print. We talked to him about podcasting, cloning, his favourite genres and his plans for the future.

1. What would you say was the biggest influence on *7th Son*?

Honestly? 1980s sci-fi action movies and "team" superhero comic books. I love big ideas and ensemble casts, and some of the best of those worlds -- from James Cameron's *Aliens* to Grant Morrison's mid-1990s run on JLA -- are excellent stories, and truly inspirational for me. I'm also a huge fan of Michael Crichton, Stephen King and Jeffrey Deaver; the stories those novelists tell made a big creative impact.

2. *7th Son* spans a couple of genres, taking in elements from techno thrillers and horror to science fiction, where would you classify it?

I classify it as a thriller, since the novel takes place in present day, and it skimps on the Hard SF elements. If nudged a bit, I call it a technothriller, in the spirit of a Crichton novel. I'm just grateful the thing's in print and in bookstores. Put me in Historical Romance! [laughs] I have no problem with that!

3. This has been a constant process of revision for you from the podcast to the print novel. Is there anything you had to cut that you would have liked to have kept?

Nope; actually, it's the opposite. During the editing process for the *7th Son: Descent* print edition, I was able to add chapters and some subtle character conflict to the novel. Longtime fans of the original podcast can now see some ominous first-act machinations of the villains, and new set-pieces in the Project 7th Son science facility. I also added some history to the 7th Son cloning project, which can permit a nice prequel or spinoff series.

I also did a dramatic character swap in the third act for the print novel. John Smith, the book's primary POV character, wasn't in mortal peril in the 2006 podcast novel's third act. Now he is. I believe it's a solid improvement.

4. Conversely, is there anything you'd have liked to put in but weren't able to?

Nope! I crammed as many improvements and new content into the print edition as possible, while trying to remain as faithful as possible to the podcast version so many people enjoyed.

5. What scene in the book gave you the biggest emotional response when you were writing it?

It was the big reveal of "The Womb," the monstrous machine that birthed the seven clones. It was a challenging scene to write, because this is *the* moment, dig -- the moment where our heroes are confronted with the reality that their lives are indeed steeped in government-sponsored lies. It was also cinematic: the description of the cloning machine, the reactions of our heroes, the "voiceover" explanation by a scientist. Through it all, I tried to put myself in the shoes of the protagonists, and tried to convey the

awe and horror of their realizations.

6. Each one of the clones has a very different world view, taking in everything from science and religion to paranoia. Which one do you identify with most?

All of them, really. A hearty side of me would be traumatized by the realization that my origins were literally manufactured -- like the character John. Another facet of me would puzzle in alarm over the spiritual and "soulless" ramifications, like Father Thomas. Another side of me would roll up my emotional sleeves and try to quickly accept the revelation, like Michael. And I know I'd be incensed by the moral, ethical and legal violations, as Dr. Mike, Jack and Jay do.

And yes, I suspect a side of me -- a small side, but it's there -- would think that being a living conspiracy theory would be pretty cool. That's how mad hacker Kilroy2.0 reacts to the news.

7. What are your plans for the sequels? Will they be coming to print as well?

The sequels are written, obviously -- they were released in podcast form back in 2007. But their fate in print is still in question. If *7th Son: Descent* does well in print, we'll secure the sequels in print too. But we have to earn that right -- which means *Descent* must be a sales success. Did I mention it was available for immediate purchase in North American bookstores, and online? [laughs]

8. With the sequels and 7th Son in development as a movie, have you got anything you'd still like to do with John Alpha and the clones?

Oh, absolutely. Some of the characters have rich backstories to mine for anything from prequel short story series to full-out novels. And there is a rich foundation laid for additional sequel novels. If the 7th Son trilogy is successful in print, and there's demand for additional stories in that universe, I'll happily revisit it. I love the 7th Son world, and the tech- and conspiracy-soaked vibe it has.

7th Son: Descent is available now from St Martins Press. Check out <http://jchutchins.net/> for vast amounts of free content including the podcast novelisation of 7th Son.

