



SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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by **alasdair stuart**

It's Not OK, But You Can Help

OK Comics are based in Leeds in the Arndale Centre. They're a comic shop who have a huge back issue library (All 50p), run a graphic novel lending library and introduced the idea of a reusable bag to their customers. This bag is called the Kapowch and frankly, that name alone should get them awards. It hasn't, but what has is that OK are fiercely talented, smart, articulate people who love their industry and know it inside out and backwards.

They're also in trouble. Scaffolding outside the shop and the renovations to the Arndale Centre have meant that passing trade has bottomed out and, having run a store for seven years myself, I know how much you rely on passing trade. They're in real trouble, and have asked customers to do the following:

- If there is a book or comic you were thinking of trying, do OK Comics a favour and try it now.*
- If you've ordered something and have yet to pick it up, do it today.*
- Recommend OK Comics to your friends.*
- If it's been a while since you collected your standing order, do it very soon.*
- If you've got a friend who's got a birthday coming up, buy their present from OK Comics now.*

I'm a customer at OK, I own a Kapowch and I've worked both sides of the counter. I know how hard the job is, I know how great OK's staff are at it and I know they deserve to stay open. So, if you can, order something and give them a hand. I can particularly recommend Scott Pilgrim, the collected Death's Head and Fear Agent, all of which I picked up from there recently.

OK Comics can be found at: www.okcomics.co.uk

FICTION

Murdress Lane

by louise morgan

I once met a man who had a habit of finding strange places. I say "habit" rather than "gift" although that's what I'd call it, myself. He was a man who could be found next to a bar - no matter the time of day or night; the kind of man who, if asked the right sort of questions and given the right sort of drinks, would tell you anything you wanted to know. Just the kind I was looking for.

I met him in a pub in west Smithfield, where he was slowly but steadily working his way through the row of bottles behind the bar: he wasn't especially pleased to see me, but I sat down beside him anyway and began by asking if he was the man who had found the Hall of Corpses. The question didn't surprise him, and instead he squinted across at me, then laughed. "So you know about that one, do you?"

I did. It was the stuff of urban legend, one that had already been doing the rounds for years by the time I first heard it - that somewhere beneath Smithfield, London's busy meat market, there's a maze of tunnels originally built to bring in livestock for slaughter. And that somewhere in that maze, there's a room. A market worker, so the story goes, got lost down there one night and came across a tunnel he'd never used before, and as in most of these stories, he walked down it until he reached a door - big, heavy, old - carved with strange letters and faces that stared out at him. He pushed the door open and stepped into a place he couldn't wait to leave: stretching away into the distance, far past the boundaries of the market, full of shadows... but not quite dark enough to hide the bodies.

Hanging from the roof, rows and rows of bodies, stripped and gutted and butchered like the animal carcasses above ground; only these weren't cows or pigs - these were people. As far as the eye could see, dead people swinging from hooks. And he was so busy throwing up over his own shoes that he didn't hear the footsteps behind him, or the key turning in the lock...

The legend winds up, if it's told right, with the poor market worker never being heard from again - except if that's true, where's the story come from? Exactly. But that's only the start of it, as a couple of years ago, a rumour started to do the rounds: that someone had not only found the Hall of Corpses, he'd made it back to tell the tale. Which was why I was sitting next to a drunkard in an empty pub at three o'clock in the afternoon. Despite the smell.

We talked; or rather, I talked while I bought him drinks and he occasionally mumbled into the bottom of the glass. I told him how I had come to London, how I had fallen in love with its strange histories, its lost legends. How I'd heard the one about the Hall of Corpses...

"And you wondered how you'd go about finding somewhere like that, right?" he said, turning to look at me. I nodded; must have said something I thought was witty. He simply looked me up and down, then shook his head. "You think you want to find them? The hidden places? You listen to me, princess: you don't. They're all forgotten for a reason. The city bundled them up and hid them away and let you forget about them. You should trust it knows what it's doing. But you think it's funny, don't you? You think it's clever and you'll go looking anyway. And one day... well, I figure you'll find it out soon enough." He drained his glass and set it down with a bang. "You want to find one? Really? One of these lost treasures you keep talking about? It's easy enough: all you have to do is open your eyes. And then open them again." He rubbed at the bristle on his jaw and sniffed. "Try the City. Somewhere near the Exchange should see you right. But don't you come crying to me when you find what you're looking for."

And that, I said to myself, was no less than you should have expected. Open your eyes, and then open them again. Uh-huh. So I picked up my bag and left, walking towards the Tube station - keeping a healthy

distance between myself and the market, just in case. I suppose I must have been thinking about that Hall of Corpses story, or the things that he said, because after a while I looked up and realised I'd gone way past my station: I was in the middle of the City, in front of the Royal Exchange. Just where he'd told me to go. Maybe it was my subconscious. Maybe it was destiny. There I was, standing exactly where he'd said I should look. For what? No idea. What was there to lose? Alright, so I might look like a total plank, but... why not?

I took a deep breath, I closed my eyes. I opened them again and looked about me. Still looked the same: even down to the bus parked squarely across the yellow box on the road. Nothing different there. I closed my eyes again, opened them... and closed them, opened them... again and again until I was dizzy and a little old lady passing by asked "whether you've got something in your eye, dear?" Serve me right, I thought as I sat down on a bench. The whole thing was stupid. Legends, myths, fantasies... they're all just that.

Except...

Had that been there a moment ago?

Directly across from me was an alley running between two heavy stone office buildings: one housing an insurance brokers' and the other a discreetly expensive firm of solicitors. Two buildings that I could swear were attached to one another a moment ago. Now there was a gloomy gap between them, blurry at the edges and...

I stared into the darkness. It stared right back.

I grabbed my bag and ran. Back down Cheapside as fast as my little feet could carry me, awash with fear: feeling like I'd done something I knew I wasn't supposed to, and had been found out; been somewhere I shouldn't be. Seen something I shouldn't have. Maybe that's what it was, but all I knew was that I wanted to get as much pavement between my back and that darkness as possible. I was afraid it would swallow me whole.

A busy crossing made me stop, catch my breath while I waited for the light to change, leaning on the signal post and trying to pull myself together... which might have been easier had I not become aware of a woman standing next to me, slightly too close for comfort, pulling a dirty grey shawl around her shoulders. People stepped around her on the pavement without seeing her, without her seeing them—but she could certainly see me, and she was watching me with a look of intense amusement.

"Wotcha running for?"

I must have looked at her blankly, because she smirked and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. "Ain't no point in running, pet. You're in now." She looked me up and down before turning away and sauntering down the road, turning onto a street I knew shouldn't be there, just as I knew that the building behind me (were I to turn around and look at it) wouldn't be a bookshop anymore - it would be something else. I didn't want to know what that might be.

The crossing lights changed, the traffic stopping. Ahead of me, everything was as it should be and I thought that if I kept going, kept moving ahead, I would be alright. If I could get to the station, I'd be fine: I was overtired, that was all, and I needed to get home. Just needed to get home. But behind me I could feel something shifting; a pressure as though the streets were pulling and twisting to let something *other* through. A man brushed past me from behind as I crossed the street, standing out from the dark suits everywhere around because he was dressed in tattered tweed and wore a noose around his neck. He turned and grinned at me as he passed, but not before I saw the hole where the back of his head should be.

I could scream, I said to myself. I could scream, and then someone will stop and help me. They'll call an ambulance. Someone will help. Someone. And just as I thought this, an old woman pulled at my elbow. "Thought this was what you wanted, deary? To see the lost spaces?"

Her eyes were sewn shut, and I was running again. Between people, real or imaginary; between buses and cars and horses and carts. Between A-boards for golf sales, and crowds of flagellants.

I'm losing my mind, I thought as I saw the sign for the Tube station ahead... I'm losing my mind.

It was getting dark. A staircase stretched down into the ground, its walls set with glittering teeth - and with one quick look, the Tube became a non-option. Instead, I turned left into what should have been

a public garden; now a grim maze of winding passages with no doors or windows - just high brick walls. I turned this way and that, left then right, doubling back on myself time and again until I was hopelessly lost.

This couldn't be: I know this city. I know it, and I love it for all that I know. But as I realised that I was lost and I sank to the floor; as I drowned in my panic, I heard laughter behind me. It was my friend from the Hook and Cleaver pub, the man from Smithfield, but somehow he looked taller, stronger, less disheveled. A dirt-streaked courtesan hung on his arm, her shoes caked with mud and blood, her eyes glassy. "You found your way, then?"

"I think I lost it."

"No, you found it alright. You wanted to see, and now you do. You see all those hidden places you were so keen to find. Never thought to consider whether you'd like them, did you? Well, now. Too late for that: tears and spilled milk. You're stuck seeing what you see: once your eyes are open, they don't close again - not until they're closed, if you get what I mean? You're lost to the city, like me: you'll see what it wants you to see and there's no way back. It's why I drink, you know. I can't stop any more. I can't see anything else, not even when I try - only this, so I drink to make it stop. To make it leave me alone. I just want to see the same as everyone else. I want to see roads and cars, and pavements and chewing gum. Buses running red lights, even those fucking bike couriers. But I can't stop seeing this *place*, these things. And it doesn't stop; it never ends."

I couldn't answer. I just looked up at him, leaning so very casually against the wall while I sat in a broken puddle on the ground. He shrugged. "Take my advice and stay to the west. You're not ready for the east yet." He sniffed again, just like he had a world ago. What was that: an hour? "And if you're wise, you won't come looking for me." Then he was gone, leaving me alone in the dark.

I once met a man who had a habit of finding strange places. I say "habit" rather than "gift" although that's what I would once have called it, myself. He taught me to see the things that are hidden in the streets of a city, the things the city chooses to keep to itself, and he taught me how - at least for a short while - to stop seeing them. So I sit here in this bar, and wait: for the dead to creep in at the edges of my mind, for the sounds of a past that may never have happened to break through the din of today. I wait for the day someone comes in and asks me whether it's true that there's a chamber of horrors beneath the market. And when they come, I'll tell them that it's not just a chamber (it's easy enough: all you have to do is open your eyes. And then open them again) but a whole world of them.



Halting State

reviewed by martin willoughby



HALTING STATE
IS ONE EXTREMELY
SMART SPECIES OF FUN
WILLIAM GIBSON

by Charles Stross

Orbit

rrp £7.99



"The first couple of pages had
me hooked and I didn't touch
another book until I finished it!"
JOHN CARMACK, Technical Director,
D Software and creator of
Doom and Quake



CHARLES STROSS
is the most spectacular science
fiction writer of recent years. In
Halting State, he has written a
near-future story that is at
once over-the-top and
compellingly believable!
VERNOR VINGE

I should've guessed this was not going to be my kind of book when I read the names of the three people on the front who were praising it. Vernor Vinge is a scientist, SF author and professor of maths, John Carmack is the creator of Doom and Quake, whilst the third was William Gibson. The words 'geek' and 'nerd' shrieked at me.

To say that the book is full of jargon is an understatement. It was like reading a dictionary where none of the words are explained. To put it another way, Halting State suffers from a rare disease in a novel, but one quite common in science books. Acronymitis.

Which is sad, in a way, as the three main characters are quite likeable and the book does have an element of humour that I would normally be attracted to. But! The acronyms and the details of how Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games operate was, for me, dull, boring, uninterestzzzzzzzzzz... ungh... errr... sorry, I dozed off.

The other annoying and irritating aspect were the number of words and phrases THAT WERE IN CAPITALS and **PRINTED IN BOLD FOR ADDED EMPHASIS**. It's almost as if Stross is shouting at the reader to make sure they get the point.

What about the story? I hear you ask. Then I'll tell you about it.

There has been a robbery at an online bank by a gang of orcs. Ordinarily this wouldn't matter, but as the bank is important in the online gaming world, the police are called in, as are their company's insurers. The trouble is, the police were called in by accident.

The sequence of events that follow are the stuff of farce, until real people start ending up in the morgue. It also turns out that others are on the fiddle in a big way and that Interpol, MI6 and several other intelligence agencies are involved in a plot to destroy western civilisation.

I have to say that the story is quite compelling in many ways, is well paced and well written. It's just the nerdy gobbledegook and the **SHOUTING IN BOLD** that occurs on most of the pages that jars and requires some powerful paracetamol.

By the time you get to the end of the book, not only have several people been killed, we get the inside on a fraud, a spy mission between the EU and China and a plague of zombies outside a hotel. Yes, I did say zombies.

All in all, the story is a very strong one.

The three main characters, through whose eyes the story is told, are a cop, an insurer and a games programmer: Sue, Elaine and Jack. It is set in an independent Scotland at some undetermined future date. This future world is filled with technology to make life easier for the police, such as glasses that allow the police to see each other in a virtual environment known as copspace.

All three are well drawn, but only Jack has a hidden past: which makes a pleasant change from books where every main character has something shady to hide. His hidden past, though, is quite funny, albeit in

a tragic sort of way.

And there you have it. It's not a book for someone who hates **BEING SHOUTED AT IN BOLD**, nor is it for someone who's eyes glaze over at technical descriptions of servers, games programming and hidden weapons inside a tomb. If, however, you are into MMO games and want a laugh, this could be the book for you.

And Another Thing

reviewed by martin willoughby



by Eoin Colfer
Penguin
rrp £7.99

For those who worship at the Islington altar of Saint Douglas, this was always going to be a book too far. For the rest of us, it was a worry. The good news is that Colfer hasn't run roughshod over Adam's legacy and has treated the series well. He has managed to retain parts of the Adamesque humour and writing style, whilst writing his own book. The bad news is that Marvin the Paranoid Android doesn't appear.

If, like me, you've read the previous five books of the trilogy, seen the film, listened to the radio programmes, watched the TV series and got the lot on CD, DVD and paperback, you will be well aware of the discontinuity between them. 'And Another Thing' continues in this tradition by ignoring the ending that the fifth series was given in the radio treatment and concentrates on the previous book instead: sort of.

We meet Arthur, Ford, Trillian and Random living their own lives in various parts of the galaxy. Ford is at an expensive resort, getting drunk every night and waking up with no hangover whilst paying for it with an unlimited credit card.

Trillian is about to meet her daughter for an interview after a long and successful career in galactic news reporting. Her daughter, Random Dent, is now president of the galaxy and is about to marry her pet.

Arthur, meanwhile, is on a beach with nothing to disturb him. No planets exploding under his feet or aliens trying to kill him for revenge.

Their four little worlds slowly collapse into each other's and disappear, landing them back on Earth as the Grebulons are destroying it. In the nick of time, Zaphod turns up in the Heart of Gold and rescues them... again. Unfortunately Zaphod has removed his second head and plugged into the computer and can't give it proper instructions. This is where Wowbagger turns up and the story gets its skates on.

What follows is an escape from certain death, the Vogons chasing them across the galaxy and Arthur standing on another planet full of humans that's about to be destroyed.

The main characters, Ford, Trillian, Zaphod, Random and Arthur are all there. But there are three other characters, though two of them aren't new, that have some big parts to play.

The first of these is Wowbagger. In case you'd forgotten, he's the immortal who has decided to go around the galaxy insulting everyone in alphabetical order. This time he rescues Arthur and co from certain destruction as Zaphod has promised to kill him. Why? Wowbagger said he was fat.

Then there's Hillman Hunter. For those of you below the age of 40, a Hillman Hunter was a car as was a Ford Prefect. Hillman is disgustingly rich and has managed to buy a planet where other disgustingly rich people can bring their servants, pay him a lot of money and live out the rest of their lives in luxury. Unfortunately another group of humans have also been brought there and they now worship the god Cheese. In the ensuing chaos and revolution, he's advertising for a God to rule the place, which leads us

to the third character.

Thor has been humiliated due to a galactic wide viral video showing him in... less than godlike poses that involve leather. It was a video that he made at the suggestion of his then manager, Zaphod Beeblebrox. It is Thor that Zaphod will hopefully persuade to kill Wowbagger.

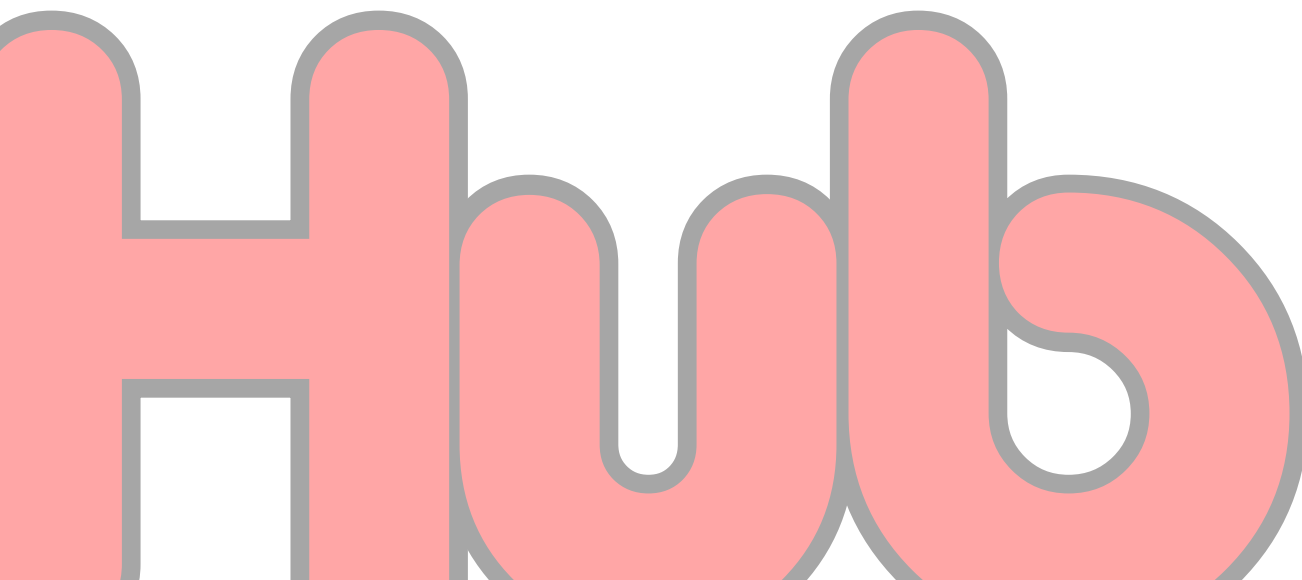
The Vogons are their normal, bureaucratic selves, though one of them does have a slight conscience, and are trying to finish all the humans off. Zaphod is up to his usual tricks with several episodes of double dealing and working behind the scenes (not to mention his vanity).

Trillian and Wowbagger fall in love, Random hates everybody and Ford keeps trying to get drunk hoping that all the problems will disappear of their own accord: and they do.

Arthur just wants some peace and quiet and doesn't get it. We do discover that Arthur's pain has a knock on effect on the rest of the galaxy. It turns out that due to his suffering, several planets are enjoying untold happiness.

There's so much more in this book to enjoy and it's great fun, especially as Colfer hasn't trampled on the legacy. He has, instead added to it and hopefully there will be more in the future.

The only thing I do wonder about the legacy is this: did Eoin Colfer keep to the deadline with the same lack of scrupulousness as Douglas Adams? I hope that he, too, heard the whoosh of deadlines passing by.



FEATURES

Interview: Guy Davis

with richard whittaker

When you think American comics and tentacles, there's only one name that comes to mind: Guy Davis. The Michigan-based illustrator has become one of the few artists to straddle both the indie and mainstream comic worlds. Starting his career with the subversive *Baker Street*, he brought detective noir back to DC with his run on *Sandman Mystery Theater* before drawing an alternative history of Marvel's first family, *Fantastic Four: Unstable Molecules*. Now he's forever linked to *BPRD*, the paramilitary paranormal investigation squad born out of Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* series. Davis came onboard in 2003 to draw the *BPRD: Dark Waters* one-shot (now collected as part of *BPRD: The Soul of Venice*). In 2004 he became sole artist for volume 3, *Plague of Frogs*, and since then he has been the defining artist for fish-man Abe Sapien, the ghostly Johann Kraus, pyrokinetic Liz Sherman and the rest of the bureau's human and inhuman misfits. In 2009 the series brought him his third Eisner, and in August he opens the next big arc for the bureau with the *Hell on Earth* miniseries. However, for all his epic and eerie depictions of arcane and otherworldly invaders, Davis is often known as "the man that can draw hats," specializing in street-level action and cerebral detection. *Hub Magazine* recently talked with him about working in the Mignolaverse, the future of the bureau, and killing off a beloved character.

Hub Magazine: *Sandman Mystery Theater* was really where you broke on the mainstream. Neil Gaiman had almost defined a genre with his gothy *Sandman* reboot, and you take the title back to its roots by making Wesley Dodds, the protagonist, a tubby guy in a gas mask. Was it easy to sell DC on that?

Guy Davis: They wanted something in the Vertigo vein, not a DC-U revamp. So looking at the old comics, he looked like a very Bruce Wayne-type, so I made him look like Peter Lorre, kinda pudgy. Since he's using a gas-gun to knock people out and beat them up, he didn't need to be in shape. He was wearing the gas mask, so I could put glasses underneath, just to make him quirky and different and more studious. But Matt [Wagner, series writer] really saw that *Sandman* was doing so well for Vertigo that it gave him an in for *Mystery Theater*. I never looked at it in the vein of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* but as an homage to the old pulp serials with the trench coats and cliff hanger.

HM: Your title was also a potted social history of 1930s America, dealing with issues like Nazi sympathizers and union politics.

GD: Matt and [cowriter] Steven [Seagle] really fleshed that out so it wasn't just two-dimensional stereotypes, especially between Wesley and Dian [Belmont, his girlfriend]. I think that gave it a lot of life and depth. You knew it was about their relationship and not just about who are they fighting.

HM: While *Hellboy* is still very much Mike's project, you've become as synonymous with *BPRD* as he is. After all these years, how does that working relationship work?

GD: Mike's involved in every process of it. When I started out, there were certain things he wanted me to make sure of, like the markings on Abe [Sapien's] head. Originally, in my inherent style, I gave him fish lips and Mike said, 'Just give him one big upper lip. He'll look really odd if you give him fish lips,' and he was right. So he had a real sense of how the characters should look, but within that he let me approach that within my own style. He would never tell me to mimic his shadows or mimic his style, it was just 'Do what you've got to do.' With Johann, he noticed that the way I had been drawing his hands was different from the way he'd established the design. What I had done was basically just drawn them as I had interpreted his artwork. I wasn't trying to be off-model, it was just my interpretation on paper was a little far removed. As

far as the new designs, Mike oversees everything. If something like the Wendigo or Black Flame clicks on the first pass, that's great. But he's got the best imagination, so it always strengthens the final design. It's a lot of fun doing a back-and-forth. I'll send him a sketch and he'll be like, "it needs this thing" and I'll re-do it.

HM: Comparing the way you draw the BPRD characters to how Mike does them, you're sort of Howard Chaykin to his Jack Kirby. How did your style evolve?

GD: It wasn't anything I decided to do, it just came out a certain way. Issue after issue, year after year, it evolved. Some of the hecticness came about from deadlines. I didn't have a lot of time on *Sandman Mystery Theater* to think things through. It sounds awful, but I had to make decisions on the fly, so a lot of things came from having to work quickly.

HM: You've gone from working with just Mike to Mike co-writing with John Arcudi. What's the dynamic there?

GD: They work it out beforehand. I'm friends with both and I talk with both, and they'll usually get together to work out the plots and storylines ahead, so they'll tell me what's coming. Nothing so set, because things change before the final script, but I know the basics of what's ahead. As for division of labor, I think right in the beginning, it was about 50-50, but now John does pretty much all the scripting. He always did, but Mike used to come in and type some of Abe's dialogue. I don't think he does that any more. It's all John being comfortable with the characters. As far as the plotting and the direction, Mike's still really involved, then John fleshes that out across five issues. Mike said he looks over layouts and he'll pencil something in, but he really doesn't follow it as closely because he knows what trusts John has in store. Sometimes he likes reading it as it comes out, because he's not worried we're going to screw it up.

HM: Is it different working with a writer-artist than with pure writer?

GD: Not really, no. John is great because he's very visual, so he'll send me references - nothing drawn, but if he's looking for a certain object he'll send me a picture. Mike is different because, being an artist, he'll just show you what he needs. Instead of trying to talk you through it, he'll just draw, which John doesn't do. I've also worked in the past with writers who were mostly known as artists, and their scripts were dense and didn't work artistically, and then I've worked with writers who don't draw a line and they're really visual. So it's really hard to pin down a type, it just depends on the person and their scripts.

HM: You've talked about yourself as being 'the guy that can draw hats,' able to draw really kitchen sink drama, but on BPRD you also draw on an epic, world-ending scale.

GD: John was loving his two-page spreads for a while there.

HM: That also means there are real consequences for characters, like when you killed off Roger the Homunculus. Is it tough to kill a character you helped define?

GD: They'd actually told me about that a couple of series before we got there. They'd always planned it, and I thought it was great that, when someone's dead, they're dead. I was itching to draw it, which sound kinda morbid, but I knew it would have a big impact on the series and no-one was expecting it - especially since, in *Plague of Frogs*, people had thought Roger had died in that one when he'd just been knocked out. So when we really killed him, people thought, oh, it's happened before he'll get better. That's when we blew him up into a chunk, so there was no doubt. But it was one of those things where I enjoyed drawing the character but I wasn't emotionally attached to him, so when I read the script I said, 'Well, this will be fun.' I wanted him to go out in style and he'd stay dead and people will get a thrill out of it.

HM: So what's next for the bureau?

GD: *King of Fear* wraps up the larger trilogy that began with *The Warning* and *Black Goddess*, so I've already started work on the next series. All I can say is, lots more surprises, lots more shocks and lots more adventure.

