

Hub Magazine

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EDITORIAL:

by **alasdair stuart**

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I have a game for you to play. Go into your nearest bookshop (one you like, of course) and look at an author you've never bothered with before. If you're feeling really adventurous go for a genre you've never tried before but regardless, try something new. Take yourself out of your comfort zone because after a while? Your comfort zone will start to fade, look a bit shabby, a bit less comfortable, small.

Oh of course it's safe but safe, sometimes, just doesn't do it. So try something different because the very act of doing it, the very act of picking the book up and walking to the counter to buy it will change you for the better. Because as you go, you'll find that you start to think about the other books by the same author, other books in the same field, whether or not you've seen a movie based on one of the books and enjoyed it. You will catapult yourself out of your preconceptions and land somewhere new and exciting and you'll do this for the price of a book, or the price of two books with a third free if you're lucky.

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We'll see you next week. In the meantime, go play Bookshop Roulette.



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FICTION

If You Believe In Me

by emma jane davies

In the midst of the jangling funfair, I found Danny glued to a noisy game of space-invaders. I leaned back against the side of the rumbling machine and folded my arms. He glanced up at me and grinned. "Hey Lou," he said, gaze returning quickly to the screen. Pixelated explosions reflected in his pupils. I watched him play, his brows knitted in concentration, though after a while I rolled my eyes and turned my back on him.

Like rats in a sewer, the penny arcade seethed with kids. They ran up and down the aisles and flocked around the juddering games machines. Coins cascaded, LEDs flashed, and one-armed bandits dinged a discordant melody. Honky-tonk piano tinkled from somewhere out in the fair. At the back of the hall, a woman yelled as she scored a full house on the bingo. The trailing scream of a ghost train echoed through the fairground like a lost banshee.

"You know they've got a Barnum and Bailey sideshow out there?" I said. "They've got a load of pickled foetuses and two-headed mutants in jars. It's fantastic."

Danny was still busy shooting down Cylons or Tie-fighters or something. He swore inventively and banged the side of the machine.

"What on earth are you doing?" I asked.

"Losing," he told me. Then he groped around in his pocket for some more change and fed it into the coin slot.

I groaned. "All right, Commander Skywalker, I'll wait outside." I made to leave.

"No, don't go," he said, starting away from the machine to catch my arm. He pulled me back and set about continuing his game.

"You know these things are addictive..." I began.

"Keep your buns on, Princess Leia," he replied snarkily. "It won't take me a minute to finish this."

I waited patiently. I reminded myself that I was lucky to get a holiday at all, even though we *had* spent most of it inside arcades due to an overabundance of typical British coastline weather. Danny's mum had rented a chalet and had asked me along. Danny had no brothers or sisters, and Danny's mum was liberal-minded about his girlfriend staying over. She was a free spirit, a hippy who decorated her house with patchwork blankets and burned patchouli incense whenever guests called by.

The game took more than a minute. It took several. Danny's expression was hawk-like. He had his long black hair pulled back into a loose ponytail. He wore dark jeans, and his ubiquitous velvet jacket. He seemed utterly out of place in this shabby seaside arcade hall, as if a film editor had transposed him here, cut from a green screen, a piece of make-believe made real. Danny is not a boyfriend I will be giving up any time ever. Even though I tease him and act cool with him, he is mine, and he is staying that way. Danny is special.

I bent close to his ear. "Once upon a time," I began, "A young chancer spent all of his money on arcade games, and then his mother wouldn't give him any more, so he had to go without fags and booze..."

He looked up at me, half amused, half annoyed, and he sighed. Then his ship exploded, and he cuffed me gently on the arm, and gave up. "I don't need mum's money," he said smartly, hopping out from the seat. "I can support her if I want, and you too when we get married."

"I shall hold you to that," I said, heart aflutter though I refused to show it. I followed him down an aisle of

one-armed bandits. I would not let him support me, but he had just said the M word, as casually as if he was talking about making tea or going to the shops.

"You should believe in me," he said. "I want you to."

I gestured towards the open maw of the arcade, the canvas sky hanging over the funfair, the rides flashing and clattering through a soft muslin of misty grey rain. "I had my tarot read. Gypsy Rose says I'll marry a man who spins on the wheel of destiny, and I'll have three kids, and we'll all travel the world and make our fortune. So what do you think of that?"

Danny raised an eyebrow evilly. "I'll show you how I'll do it if you want."

"What?" I asked, playing stupid.

"How I'll make my fortune."

I laughed, but inside I felt that familiar nervy pang. We had both just finished our A-levels, and we were still waiting for the results. The summer had been one long nail-biting insanity-generating torment. Neither of us knew if we would get into university yet. "You? Make your fortune? Tell me another one. What's your plan? You're not going to get an actual job are you?"

"Nooo..." he said, "as if I would lower myself to an honest trade, really Lou." He searched around in his pockets for something. "Lend me ten pee, will you."

I laughed again. "That's a very good way of making money, but no, I won't, because you'll just spend it."

"No I won't," he shook his head innocently. "I promise. Just have faith in me. That's all I need."

I smirked and dug into my pocket. "Here you are then. I bet you will spend it."

He led me down the aisle and past the penny falls to the ten-penny cascade, and fed my money into the machine.

"I thought you weren't going to spend it." I teased.

He glanced at me. It was not a sarcastic glance or an irritated glance. It was just a glance. "Now watch this," he said.

I knew what he was going to do even before he did it. I have known for a while now that Danny is not like other boys. Danny is something else. Danny is extraordinary.

He knelt down in front of the machine and stared at the ten pence, still reverberating on the moving top platform. It had landed half-on half-off a second coin, but abruptly it began to slide off. I smiled. Jerkily at first, then quite smoothly, it slid itself down flat against the metal shelf.

"Oh, I don't believe you..."

"Shush, don't say that. I have to concentrate."

"Yes sir!" Silenced, I watched. He pulled the coin towards him on the invisible thread of his mind. The motion of the top step caused the coin to push against others, to knock them down onto the lower tray. They pushed up into the pile, nothing more. I began to chuckle at him.

He looked up at me. Danny has this look, sometimes, as though devil has climbed inside him and is peering out through his eyes. "Tell me I can do it," he said.

"Of course you can do it," I replied, perplexed.

Danny shrugged and flexed his mind. I felt him do it, like a pressure wave. Smash! He was just a big kid, no subtlety whatsoever. The entire overhanging step of coins fell down and rattled out of the winnings tray onto the floor.

I burst out laughing. "You're getting stronger!" I exclaimed, clapping my hands together gleefully.

"Told you I could use it for good," Danny said, one eyebrow hiked in irony. He hastily began to pick up the fallen coins. "Lou, can you pass me your bag?" he asked, trying to fend off the curious kids gathering around to help. I passed him my bag and carried on laughing, because it was his mess, and funnier to watch him try to clear it up than it was to help.

Amongst the coins were a few toys and prizes. He picked up a cheap ring with a big fake diamond on it. Grinning up at me wickedly, he slipped the ring into his top pocket with a meaningful look.

"Twenty four carat plastic," I mocked, even though my heart soared like a gull. "I'm a very lucky girl."

Danny took his ten pence coins to the cashier to change them. He had made nearly twelve pounds, but he had not finished yet. He took out a pound coin from his winnings and guided me towards the

bandits.

He turned to me unexpectedly, and took me by the waist, pulling me close. "Do you think I can do it?" he asked. His hands felt warm through my t-shirt. I liked it when he touched me without thinking about it.

"You're no phony," I replied, temporarily transfixed by him. He could be so intense. I tingled with a little thread of excitement. "Of course I do. I have complete confidence in you."

Danny bit his bottom lip, deep in thought, his sharp teeth visible. He slipped the coin into the slot.

"I shall have to take you to Vegas." I said, as I imagined him reading playing cards face down in the deck. "You'll be rich."

"Love to," was the reply as the drum jumped around past the BAR to the cherries, and pound coins came clattering into the tray. "Guess we might travel the world, eh? I'm getting good with machines." His hungry hands poured money into the pockets of his velvet jacket.

He tugged one of my plaits. "Told you I could make money," he said, and he gave me back my ten pence. "A little faith goes a long way."

I glanced towards the sideshow trailers out in the fairground. "You know Danny, you want to stay away from these kinds of places," I teased. "Or someday they might put you in a freak show."

Danny smiled a smart little smile and held out his hand for me to catch. He led me out of the arcade and into the damp misty early evening, into the smell of sea salt and the sound of the gulls. A paper moon sailed over the cardboard sea, grey upon grey.

"Want to go and get some fish and chips?" I asked.

"Yes boss. Donuts for afters?"

We walked along the seafront together, down the steps and onto the soft sand, happy just to be out in the fresh air, listening to the waves crash against the shore. I trailed my gaze along the promenade.

"Looking for something?" he asked.

"A cash machine," I said.

"Cash machine? We're loaded, we don't need one."

"Well..." I said, unable to stop myself from smiling as the idea slowly coalesced in my head, "I've suddenly been struck by the belief that you won't need a debit card."

That familiar wicked grin spreading across Danny's face gave me all the reply I needed. Then he laughed, and I laughed along with him as we walked onwards, my hand in his. The sounds of the arcade faded slowly behind us, lost in the roar of the surf, and the cries of the gulls.



Toy Story 3

reviewed by richard whittaker



Written by Michael Arndt, Andrew Stanton, John Lasseter and Lee Unkrich

Starring: Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Joan Cusack, Ned Beatty, Jodi Benson, Michael Keaton, Don Rickles, Estelle Harris, John Morris

It's remarkable to think that there is a generation of kids who have grown up with the *Toy Story* franchise. Like Andy, the little boy oblivious to his toy's adventures, Buzz Lightyear and Sheriff Woody have always been there for them. And now, as they prepare for adulthood, *Toy Story 3* says farewell to them.

Thematically, the latest installment in Pixar's defining franchise seems to have been influenced by recent releases from the computer animation innovators. There's *Wall-E*'s fascination with a disposable material culture and *UP*'s sense of loss and abandonment at the cruel talons of time, both weaved into the existing plot threads. Nearly a decade has passed since the end of *Toy Story 2*, and Andy's bedroom has more skateboards than Barrels of Monkeys. Yard sales have sent most of the old faces – Bo Peep, Wheezy the Penguin, RC *et al* - to other homes. Now with Andy (Morris, who has voiced the boy hero for all three films) heading for college, the remaining heroes of the playtime posse – Woody (Hanks), Buzz (Allen) and the last loyal few – face a dark future. Their best option is the attic, where they will spend eternity getting dusty with the Christmas ornaments: The worst fate imaginable is the trash heap. So when the possibility of getting donated to the local day care is raised, well, at least it means they'll be played with, right?

All the Pixar hallmarks are here: The snappy banter, the tearjerker moments, the pratfalls for the kids and the nudge-nudge moments for the parents. Where there's a profound change from the earlier films is that the spotlight shifts away from Buzz and Woody and on to Woody and Andy. Previously the humans in the franchise have been leviathans, oblivious to the secret life of their playmates. This time around, Andy and the other humans are major characters whose actions impact upon the unseen emotional lives of the denizens of the toy box. While they never speak directly, the film depends on the interplay between the toy and his boy.

It's a significant change. The drama in the original 1995 *Toy Story* was about the battle between the spaceman and the cowboy to be top toy. The 2000 sequel moved on to tackle the question of what a toy is if it is never played with, as the mass-produced Buzz struggled to save his collectable best buddy from eternity as an AFA-graded ornament. This time the narrative driver is when Woody rejects the daycare plan and struggles to make his way back home to his beloved Andy, even as Andy leaves childhood behind. So what happens when, as the poem goes, childish things have been put aside?

That's what has always defined *Toy Story* as a piece of genre film making in a way that, say, *Finding Nemo* or *A Bug's Life* or even *Cars* never was. It's about what toys are for, and as a result it has a developed cosmology all of its own. After multiple outings at Pixar as a co-director (*Monsters, Inc.*, *Finding Nemo* and even *Toy Story 2*) Unkrich takes sole control of the *Toy Story* reigns and he undoubtedly understands the visual dynamics of the franchise, updating the plastic gloss of the first two chapters without losing the vacuum-molded charm. If there's one issue on the look of the film it's that, unlike *UP* (reviewed in Hub #99) or *Avatar* (Hub #108), the 3D process adds nothing to the visual experience. Yet Unkrich understands that there is a narrative cycle to these films, and that eventually they had to deal directly with what happens when the heroes of Andy's youth become so much landfill fodder.

So, as a story, this is the perfect way for the *Toy Story* generation to move on. There's just a little bit more of a question about how great this film is for everyone else. Not that this isn't a fine, fine piece of film making, but it's more intellectually satisfying than it is emotionally for much of its run time. It's not that it's redundant – in fact, to have left this unmade would have left a lot of questions unanswered – but it's far less rounded than the earlier films.

There is undoubtedly an element of fan service here, of consoling the viewers that grew up with the films that these beloved playthings won't be discarded even when, like them, Andy moves out of his childhood bedroom. There is still also raw emotional power, like the moment when the posse face what seems to be their doom, hand in hand. However, it's almost like the script team should have gone back and watched the other films – especially 2 – one more time. Woody is going through exactly what rambunctious cowgirl Jessie (Cusack) went through in the last movie. That film's heartbreaking musical flashback to when she was abandoned by her previous owner is an exact precursor to the narrative heart of this film, but it's relegated to a quick aside instead. Similarly, Lotso (Beatty), the strawberry-scented bear that secretly rules daycare, is an overstuffed retread of that film's bad guy, the seductive but venomous prospector Stinky Pete.

More troublingly, that all leaves the narrative at a bit of a loose end of what do with Buzz. Whereas previously he was Abbott to Woody's Costello, this time around the hero of Space Command is a bit player, with probably less screen time than Mr and Mrs Potato Head (Riccles and Harris, keeping up the old vaudeville charm.) What he does have is goofier (such as the antics when his factory settings get restored) or serve as a distracting sub-plot and a way to keep Jessie involved in the storyline. She in turn has been sidelined, in part because the film dedicates so much time to the knowing romance between the discarded Barbie (long-time Disney voice talent Benson) and the newly-arrived and knowingly-metrosexual Ken (Keaton.)

Ultimately what the film does for the franchise is, well, grow up. It's about leaving old purpose and old friendships behind while finding a sense of community that can outlast any one situation (it's also a probably unintentional but still rewarding two fingers to the Ayn Rand crew that seem to be sweeping through the American media that Woody and Co. are at their strongest and best when they all work together.) *Toy Story 3* may not raise the bar, but it's a satisfying way to mosey into the sunset.

X-Necrosha

reviewed by richard whittaker



Written by Craig Kyle, Chris Yost, Zeb Wells and Mike Carey
Marvel Comics
RRP \$/£29.99

After years of “who can we crowbar in?”-style crossovers, Marvel Comics seems to have the equation down to a simpler format. Rather than require readers to pick up every single issue of every single title (seriously, it got so complicated that the *Great Mutant Massacre* came with a map), there have been a series of central titles (*Secret War*/*Avengers Disassembled*/*Civil War*/*Secret Invasion*/*Dark Reign*/*Siege*) that create a central strand to the whole continuity. The same has applied to the somewhat-separate X-continuity, with tectonic events beginning with *House of M*, through *Decimation*, *Utopia* and now the *Messiah Complex*/*Messiah War*/*Second Coming* trilogy. Yet *Necrosha* is something different: Three parallel plots, set across three second tier X-titles.

It's a daring project. Front of the book are the relevant parts of the Marvel Universe's favorite networks

squad, *X-Force*. Rounding out the volume are the subplots from the revamped *New Mutants* and what can generously be described as the other-other X-men volume, *Legacy*, plus a series of one-shots, grabs from other necessary chapters and explanatory short stories.

The core is basically the culmination of the first *X-Force* arc that has played out over the last two years. Quick update: As new leader of the entire X-empire, Cyclops assembled a team of killers. Headed by Wolverine, it includes his semi-clone X-23 (as the ol' canuckle head once commented in *Twisted Toyfare Theater*, "I have - got - to stop leaving my DNA around"), gun-for-hire Domino, sleazy teleporter Vanisher, weremutant Wolfsbane, the razor-winged Archangel, healer/combat medic Elixir and knife-wielding bruiser Warpath. The slice-and-dice squad have butchered their way across the Marvel Universe for 20 issues, but even they have their limitations. After all, what's that old joke about no-one ever staying dead in mainstream comics?

That's why the team needed real nemeses, and they came in two forms: That which cannot be killed, and that which is already dead. The first comes courtesy of long-time background player Selene, who it turns out is an immortal psychic vampire with ambitions for godhood. The latter comes from long-time Marvel Maguffin the Technarchy Virus, an alien infestation that turns living creatures into circuitry and allows the biomechanical invaders to suck their life source like batteries. Selene gets hold of the T/O virus and concocts a plan to bring back every dead mutant as her slave, then burn their souls through black magic to become a deity.

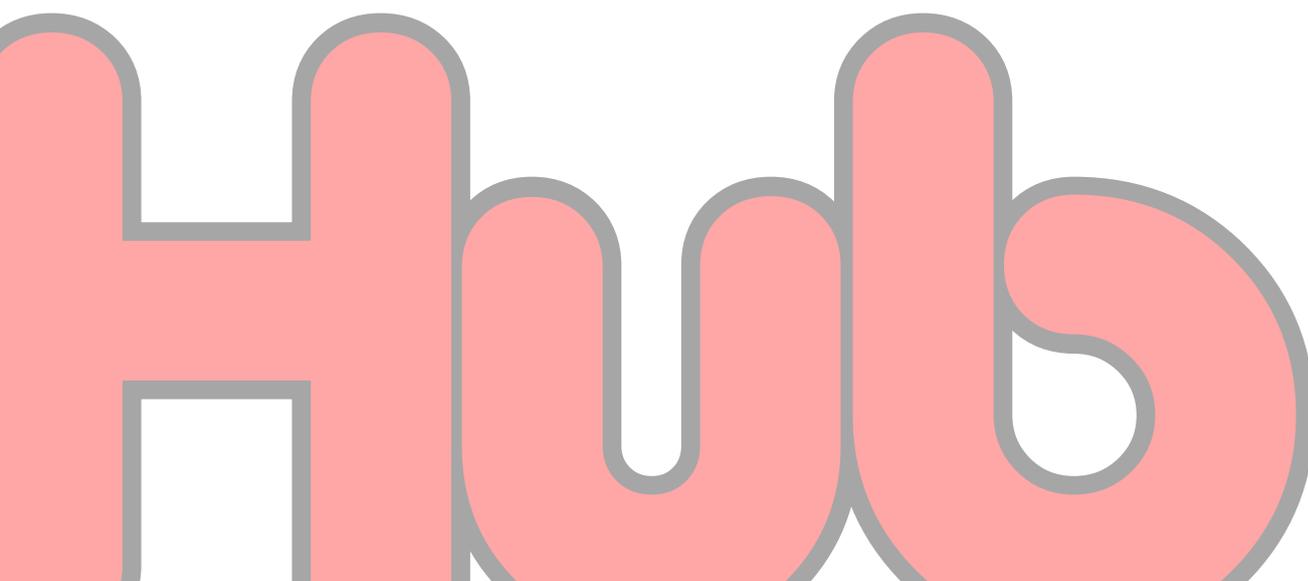
If that sounds goofy, then the sheer grounded brutality of the *X-Force* arc makes it seem grimly plausible (for a superhero environment). It's also the *X-Force* arc, plus the supporting *X-Necrosha* and *Necrosha: The Gathering* one-shots, that are the real reason to pick up this anthology. This is the big pay-off to much of what has been developing in the brutal series (the rest will be resolved in the current *Second Coming* arc, which is redefining the current X-verse.) After Mike Choi's suitably clinical run on the *Not Forgotten* storyline, Clayton Crain returns to take over sole art duties on the book that he helped define. This is the last hurrah for Crain and co-writers Yost and Kyle on the title, and it's the unrelenting mix of brutality and horror that has won the title a loyal readership. Crain's muted color palette is like a bruise, all fetid violets and ruptured greens, and it's a perfect match for the writers' vision of having the sometime-heroes take on the re-animated corpses of old friends and foes alike.

The Technarchy virus is the reason that the revamped *New Mutants* makes its way into this collection. Hard to believe that the original version of this title was the very first *X-Men* spin-off title, but more importantly this was the series that introduced the infection through Warlock, the heir to an alien empire. He returns, but so (and a lot more surprisingly) does his best friend Doug Ramsey AKA Cypher AKA the mutant with the worst power ever. Ramsey, raised by Selene from an early grave, has one useful skill: He can understand all languages. Now being a bipedal babel fish doesn't sound that useful in a combat scenario (thus probably explaining why he's dead) but writer Zeb Wells finally finds an imaginative use for him. It's not that he's powerful in the traditional sense but, like Echo in *Daredevil* or old *Avengers* villain The Taskmaster, his ability to translate the world around him makes him a deadly threat. It also leads to one of the most powerful scenes in recent Marvel history, as he sits outside of a window, reading the body language of his former team mates and revealing the subtext of their interplay.

By comparison to Crain's work in the *X-Force* plotline, *New Mutants* artist Diogenes Neves looks like a traditional (if better than average) four-color panel worker. Still, way better than the workmanlike Clay Mann's contribution to the *X-Men: Legacy* component of the story. Actually, beyond the word "Necrosha" on the title, it's hard to tell how this is supposed to fit into the overall arc. At least the *New Mutants* stuff feels like a bonus chapter that adds flavor without being essential to the main narrative: Bar the opening pages, this is completely unrelated to the overall plot, with Rogue, Magneto and their team being distracted by a false alarm to semi-regular X-haunt Muir Island. The only connection is that the big bad makes them think that the Technarchy Virus is present, when it's not.

It's kind of a head-scratcher why this is in the collection at all, especially when it looks so weak

compared to the other two-thirds. But even with it as ballast to an already over-stuffed edition, this is the kind of volume that Marvel does perfectly. Beyond all other major comic publishers, the sheer quality of the printing – from the paper stock to the binding – means the artwork will never look better. The core *X-Force* arc is, by itself, worth the cover price, but the extras – like the back stories to Selene's resurrected forces and a brief cameo by Deadpool – range from the comedic to the shocking. The only downside is that it'll mean picking up the rest of the *X-Force* trades for context. And for cybernetically enhanced zombies getting decapitated by razor-handed mutants. And if that's not a selling point, try an *Archie* comic.



FEATURES

The Crimson Rivers

by louise morgan

Starring: Jean Reno, Vincent Cassel

Directed by Matthieu Kassovitz

Written by Jean-Christophe Grangé and Matthieu Kassovitz.

Cert. 15, 101 mins.

DVD: 2001

Jean-Luc Godard once said: "Movies should have a beginning, a middle and an end, but not necessarily in that order."

This is an idea the makers of *The Crimson Rivers* clearly took to heart.

Based on the Jean-Christophe Grangé novel, *Les Rivières Pourpres*, the film begins with the arrival of "supercop" Pierre Niemanns (Jean Reno) in the remote region of Guernon in the French Alps. Summoned from Paris, he's tasked with investigating a bizarre murder: a mutilated corpse has been found high in the mountains, its hands and eyes removed. The victim is eventually identified as a librarian in the local university, and armed with this knowledge, Niemanns begins his investigation.

Meanwhile, not so very far away, the tomb of a young girl is desecrated and daubed with swastikas, and local lieutenant Max Kerkerian (Vincent Cassel) is duly dispatched to Deal With It. And deal with it he does - mostly by having a punch-up with the local skinheads. But something doesn't feel quite right, and the deeper into the case he digs, the worse it gets.

Inevitably, the cases intersect, and the two men find themselves working together... but just when you're expecting a stock police thriller based on the "veteran and maverick rookie join forces" formula, *The Crimson Rivers* turns into something very interesting indeed.

What began as a straightforward whodunnit rapidly evolves into a whodunnwhat? The narrative is deliberately convoluted and obscure, with little explanatory dialogue (this was cut in the early script stages by director Matthieu Kassovitz on the grounds it was "boring") and even one of its stars, Cassel, is on record as saying he doesn't understand it. It's entirely possible to watch it from beginning to end, and still be convinced that you've dozed off and missed something crucial - as happened to me. Twice.

Exhausting and - all too often, infuriating - as the film might be, it's genuinely a hidden gem. Because what begins as something very ordinary opens up into a clever film full of atmosphere and oddly comic moments. The remote mountain setting and the university campus at the centre of the crimes are strange and forbidding. Its perfect students, clad in their varsity tracksuits even in the library, appear even more sinister in the context of the sporting trophies lining the hallways - all of which are styled to recall the 1936 Olympics, and everything that implies. By the time Nieman discovers a thesis on eugenics in the room of the murdered librarian, it's clear that something is very wrong with this university.

The film benefits tremendously from the casting of Reno and Cassel: not just because both men are actors at the top of their profession, but because they immediately suggest a particular character: Reno as the grizzled cop who has seen too much, and Cassel (at the time, best known for *La Haine*) as the reckless, impulsive rebel. It's a useful shorthand for a film which makes so little easy for its audience: Kerkerian smokes joints with petty criminals, steals cars and isn't above the occasional spot of breaking-and-entering in the course of duty. However, the gravity of his character is constantly undermined by the film itself: his fight with the skinheads in the back room of a local bar is soundtracked by the game of *Virtua Fighter* being played in the background, and the swagger is knocked clean out of him when he is almost arrested by Niemanns on their first meeting.

Once the two men do join forces, as audience we expect them to fall into the roles of mentor and

protege. In any other film, they probably would - but *The Crimson Rivers* isn't any other film. Niemanns shares very little of what he knows, to the frustration of Kerkerian, who becomes increasingly petulant and almost adolescent in his behaviour. This relationship continues even into the climax of the film, and while the final line of dialogue suggests a resolution between them, the camera pulls back and the credits roll before we can be sure.

The most memorable moments of the film are also its most surreal: the scene in which Kerkerian chases a hooded suspect across a snow-covered athletics track, in heavy snow, at night. The sight of the two men high in the avalanche field above the university, wearing little more than leather jackets and jeans. Kerkerian's decidedly lo-tech exhumation of a body, armed with a crowbar and not much else. A corpse deeply embedded in the ice of a glacier, another which appears to cry on the mortuary slab. And yes, the *Virtua Fighter* fisticuffs.

You may well have never heard of *The Crimson Rivers*. Or maybe you have, but dismissed it as another thriller in the mould of so many before it. If that's the case, you're missing something worth seeing. It's not an easy film, but is by turns bleak, horrific, occasionally laughable, often utterly baffling... but never disappointing.



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