ENGLAND NOW AND THEN:
DEREK JARMAN, JULIEN TEMPLE, JAMES IVORY
THE STUFF, BLIND ALLEY
& THE PRIVATE FILES OF LARRY COHEN
KUROSAWA'S RAN, CHRIS MARKER'S KUROSAWA
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(photograph courtesy of BFI Production)

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Volume 53
Number 627
April 1986

Published by
The British Film Institute,
81 Dean Street,
London W1V 6AA.

Subscription rates:
For one year £13.20/$20.00 inclusive of postage; airmail £22.65/$38.00 for one year. Reduced rates for full members of the British Film Institute. Back issues available at the current cover price.

Advertising: T. G. Scott & Son Ltd.,
30/32 Southwark Street,
London WC2E 7HR.

Editor: Richard Combs
Associate Editor: Pam Cook
Assistant Editor: Janet Hawkes

Credit Abbreviations:
Cert.—Certificate
dist.—Distributor
p.c.—Production Company
eexec.—Executive Producer
p.—Producer
assoc.—Associate Producer
sp.—Supervisor
manager.—Production Manager
2nd Unit Dir.—2nd Unit Director
ass.—Assistant Director
sc.—Script
adapt.—Adaptation
dial.—Dialogue
ph.—Photography
col.—Colour Process
cam.—Camera Operator
anim.—Animation
sp. ph. effects.—Special Photographic Effects
sup. ed.—Supervising Editor
ed.—Editor
p. designer.—Production Designer
a.d.—Art Director
set dec.—Set Decorator
sp. effects.—Special Effects
m.—Music
m.d.—Music Director
cost.—Costumes
choro.—Choreography
sd.—Sound
sd. ed.—Sound Editor
dt.—Survey
com.—Commentary
l.p.—Leading Players
fps.—Frames Per Second

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as Hugo brings news of May’s acceptance for a role in a TV commercial.

This engaging, upbeat scrutiny of sub-Hollywood dreamers marks an accomplished shift into narrative film-making by former documentarist Robert Dornhelm (The Children of Theatre Street, She Dances Alone). Not least of its attractions is the genial irresolution of its everyday dramas. In fact, an account of the film’s charms could all too easily turn into a log of the pitfalls it so adroitly avoids. Eccentric characterisations are pitched well away from the poles of ingratiating kookiness or garishly-ism; the ‘delusions-about-illusions’ irony is never spelled out; this Tinsel-town underbelly is not painted in the standard shades of sleaze; ‘delusions-about-illusions’ irony is never really unmasking. A casual generosity of style and spirit also reflects Michael Ventura’s witty script (which is in the same league, as, say, the ‘self-employed’ John Sayles or the Alan Rudolph of Choose Me), deflecting it away from our half-expectations. Only the short, virtually redundant dream/fantasy sequences with which the film begins and ends cut against its pleasurable grain.

Paul Taylor

Fright Night

U.S.A., 1985

Director: Tom Holland


When new people next door move in at night with a silver coffin, Charley Brewster’s curiosity is aroused to such an extent that he forgets his interest in his girlfriend Amy Peterson, who leaves him in a huff. In ways that follow, Charley links news reports of local murders with various odd occurrences he has seen from his window, and becomes convinced that his neighbour is a vampire. Persuading a police detective to visit the house with him, Charley is quickly ridiculed by Billy Cole, a friend of the absent owner Jerry Dandridge. But that night, Dandridge arrives in Charley’s room to ensure his silence. Driven off when Charley’s mother is woken by the noise, the vampire furiously promises to return the following night. Desperate, Charley turns for help to Peter Vincent, host of a late-night television horror series and self-styled vampire-killing expert. Vincent refuses to take him seriously, but is persuaded by Amy, worried about Charley’s sanity, to meet with Cole and Dandridge. Discovering that Dandridge has no reflection, Vincent is convinced. Fancied by Amy meanwhile, the vampire sets one of his acolytes to deal with Vincent while he seduces the girl. As Vincent fights off a werewolf, Amy is infected by Dandridge and is destined to join the living dead herself unless the vampire is destroyed by daybreak. Charlie and Vincent close the vampire, but both Amy and Cole (who turns out to be a zombie, immune to bullets) as the night turns to dawn and Dandridge heads for his coffin in the cellar. In a last desperate struggle, the vampire is felled by sunlight and Amy is saved. She and Charley resume their courtship unaware that something still lurks in the shadows next door.

Although, thanks to John Landis and Rick Baker, the werewolf seems to have little difficulty in keeping up with the 1980s (actually achieving teenage idol status as the break-dancing basketball champion in Teen Wolf), the vampire is finding it less easy to shake off the Carpathian image. Tom Holland (whose script for Psycho II similarly sought to update Gothic nightmarishness) has now applied the sophistication of the 1980s to the familiar iconography of the undead, complete with coffins, stakes, and lethal giant bats. It’s an enterprising hybridisation, for which Dracula fans may be expected to raise at least an anemic smile of approval.

From his careers as actor (prolific) and screenplay writer (modest), Holland has evidently learned enough to put together an efficient first film as director. Elegantly photographed by Vilmos Zsigmond’s former assistant Jan Kiesser, Fright Night is unarguably a smoother ride, and with more comfortable performances than, for instance, Wes Craven’s horrendously ugly and edgy Nightmare on Elm Street. There are plenty of pleasing details, like the curl of a wood shaving driven into an insect’s head, which slides grimly along a bannister, the mother ploddingly offering her son a Valium when he has just avoided being flung out of a window, or the vampire listening with modest pride to his rival’s distant scream at the discovery that Amy has been fanged. Owing nothing to special effects but everything to script and timing, two particularly happy encounters
are the scene in which Charley's accusations are outclassed by the vampire's po­litely incredulous assistant (an appealing action début by Jonathan Stark), and the sequence when Dandridge mesmerises Amy on the dance floor and calmly tosses aside the heavies who come to her defence. If the old legend is to offer any kind of chill in a modern context, these are surprisingly convincing illustrations.

Chris Sarandon plays the monster as the established smoothie, a plausible neighbour­hood psychopath right up to the dis­appointing moment of dissolution when the eyes go weird, the teeth grow, and the single objective is a box in the cellar. Holland rounds it all off with a battle royal amidst the antique furniture, bolts of sunlight knocking the antagonists across the room and crushing the darkness in a whirlwind of flames. The snarling enemy deserves a better opponent, however, than the miscast Roddy McDowall, whose chalk-dust hair and balefully aggrieved expression are, of all the film's challenges, by far the least persuasive. William Ragsdale, another newcomer, captures more accurately the script's tone of part-fearful, part-hopeful bemusement, a horror-film fan by no means averse to finding the Universal classics coming to life next door. A pity, though, that after his first mauling by his super­natur­al adversary he shows not a single bruise.

PHILIP STRICK

Intimate Strangers

Great Britain, 1985
Director: Robert Smith

Dist.—Front room Productions. p.c.—Front room Productions. With financial assistance from Channel 4. p.manager—Angela Topping. sd.—developed with the cast from an idea by Robert Smith. add. material—Gordon Hann. ph.—John Davies. In colour. sd.—Robert Smith. a.d.—Caroline Hanania. m.—Nick Garvey. titles—Rosalind Boon. sd.ed.—John Davies. sd.rec.—Angela Topping. sd. re-rec.—Colin Martin. Ip—Irene Marat (Jo), Colin Smith (Lee), Irene Sutcliffe (Grandmother), Anthony Collins (Grandfather), John Rankin (Barrister), Marian McGlaughlin (Jo's Friend), Marilyn Milgram (Solicitor), Terry Murphy (Lee's Friend), Jerry Judge and Ridgewell Hawkes (Policemen). 1,656 ft. 46 mins. (16 mm.).

Under cover of darkness, Jo and her son Lee break into an abandoned house in Brixton. Appropriating the few possessions left by their predecessors, they paint the walls bright colours and make it into their 'home'. When left alone in the house, Lee becomes anxious, and talks about ghosts upstairs. He asks for a television and, although poor, Jo manages to get one. Lee takes up with a friend and the two boys wander around the city streets, staring covetously into the shop windows full of new high-tech gadgetry. They steal a home computer which Lee plays with obsessively in his room. Jo’s parents come from the north to visit them for the day. While Jo is at the pub, Lee and his friend are caught stealing more hardware by the police. At the solicitor's office, a detention centre is discussed. At home, a glance and a gesture confirm that the trust between mother and son has not been broken.

PHILIP STRICK

Intimate Strangers is an odd animal. Given the slim plot and characterisation—single mother, life in a squat, child crime, violence in the streets—one might have expected yet another 'social message' docu-drama. On the contrary, this is a mysterious, wonderfully performed study in domestic privacy, with a relaxed, understated narration and replete with stylish tableaux. Since Acceptable Levels, Front room Productions, true to their name, have consistently (City Farm, Ursula and Grenery) been concerned with making small films within the broad social problem category, but relocating the social in the context of the private home, and remaining suggestive rather than explicatory, with no general overview. In Intimate Strangers, fiction is made out of documentary material, and realism is focused on the emotional and physical landscape of personal lives.

An atmosphere of menace emanates from within the characters, not through dialogue (very little is actually said), but obliquely, through suggestion and ambience. Look­ ing out of the window, Lee feels afraid: for him, the orderly, ordinary streets, the immaculately clipped neighbours' hedges, the washing on the line, evoke menace and reproach. Yet the familiarity of the interior—family life—is not necessarily a safeguard against the outside threat. After Lee witnesses a mugging from his bedroom window, the menace enters his home when he opens a door to find his mother violently making love. The darkness of the house and the imagined sounds of previous inhab­itants evade the proximity of other people's lives, but also their infinite distance.

The lack of knowledge about one another between intimates within the family is as real as that between the anonymous citizens with whom we co-exist. The ties between Lee and his mother have their limits. While they are mutually dependent, their lives inexorably interwoven, they are incapable of answering each other's fears and desires—ultimately, they remain a mystery to one another. Intimate Strangers leaves one with that feeling experienced on a train as it enters a town at night. For a moment, one sees into the front rooms of strangers, little snapshots of peoples' lives, ordinary, apparently straight­forward; but locked away in their own space, they are infinitely mysterious, and for that reason, fascinating.

SUSAN BARROWCLOUGH
MIKE NICHOLS’ MANHATTAN TRANSFER
MENELIK SHABAZZ SOUNDING A WARNING
ERROL MORRIS:
GATES OF HEAVEN TO HANDCARVED COFFINS
PATTY HEARST BURIED ALIVE
On the Cover:
Fires were started, again:
Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky
(photograph courtesy of Artificial Eye)
Charley Brewer, the teenager who joined forces with horror film host Peter Vincent to destroy vampire Jerry Dandridge (see Fright Night, M.F.B., April 1986), has been persuaded by psychiatrists that he suffered a psychotic episode and that vampires do not exist. Charley, now a college student, visits the fire escape he sees Regine and Belle einne Hellerstein. Gilbride, Carol Rees, Sheryl Sue Jones, Maria R. Kelly, Wayne Montanio, Phil Culotta, David Rationalising the events as a dream, Charley tries to carry on as normal, but the next night Charley is drawn to Regine, but Peter and Charley resists the temptation to become a vampire himself. Although it returns to Bram Stoker for Dracula (which introduced the concept of vampires as beings who could be killed by sunlight), this time, in some minor reversals, Charley is the sceptic who must be convinced by Peter that such things exist, and it is the girl who has to redeem her neo-vampire boyfriend (unfortunately, this dispenses with the intriguing gay sub-text of the original). Otherwise, situations, characters, lines of dialogue and special effects are simply copied from the first film. Jonathan Gries, the Wolf Man from The Monster Squad, replaces Stephen Geoffreys’ “Evil Ed” character, but his awkwardly comic performance simply comes across as a schmuck somewhat inducted into the vampire queen’s peculiar harem (in fact, Geoffreys was originally scheduled to return to the role, but dropped out, prompting a minimal rewrite for Gries).
Iron Eagle II

Canada, 1988

Director: Sidney J. Furie


Catherine Hutton. A Middle Eastern country with a dangerously unstable regime is on the point of calling off and Chappy and Cooper volunteer to go to Moscow as part of an exchange programme. Following Red Heat in its use of resurgent detente as a background for simple shoot-'em-up action, Iron Eagle II is a mix of the absurdly nautical—the villains of the piece are never specifically identified as Iranians, although since the maps show located their missile base to the East of the Persian Gulf there can be little doubt of their identity—and the simply absurd. The ploy whereby Stillmore and a Russian general co-operate on a nuclear bombing mission because they hate the very idea of Soviet-American military co-operation is typical of the script's general ludicrousness. In the air, it's all a matter of having Clay Lacy, aerial photographer of Top Gun, recreate the finale of Star Wars, which was itself derivative of aviation movies. And on the ground, the training of the international misfits is a low-key reworking of the Dirty Dozen formula, with a wise-cracking capitalist pilot trying to sell blankets to the Russian soldiers, an assortment of broad caricatures squabbling but then deciding they love each other after all.直销小说

Kamikaze

France, 1986

Director: Didier Groussset