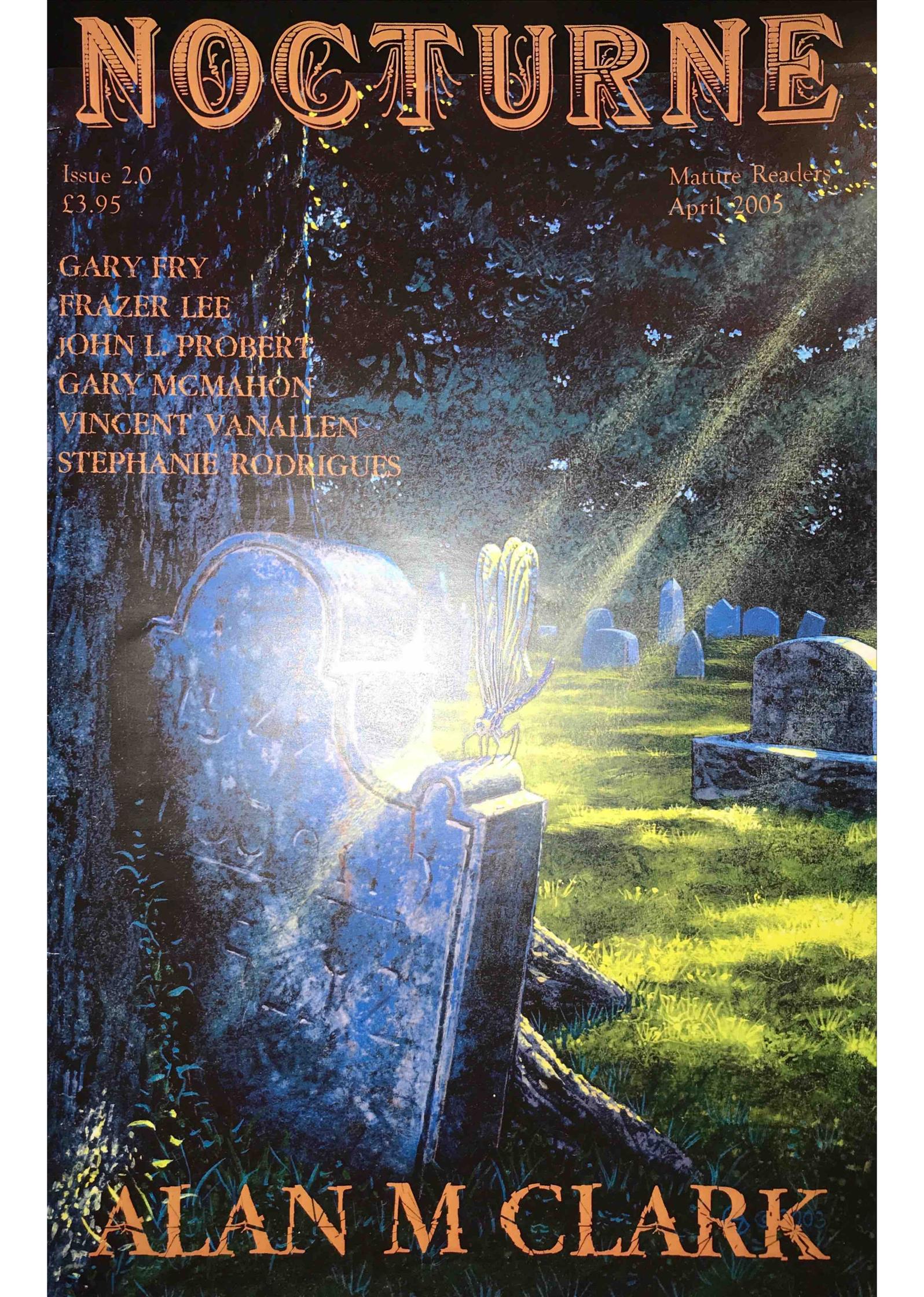


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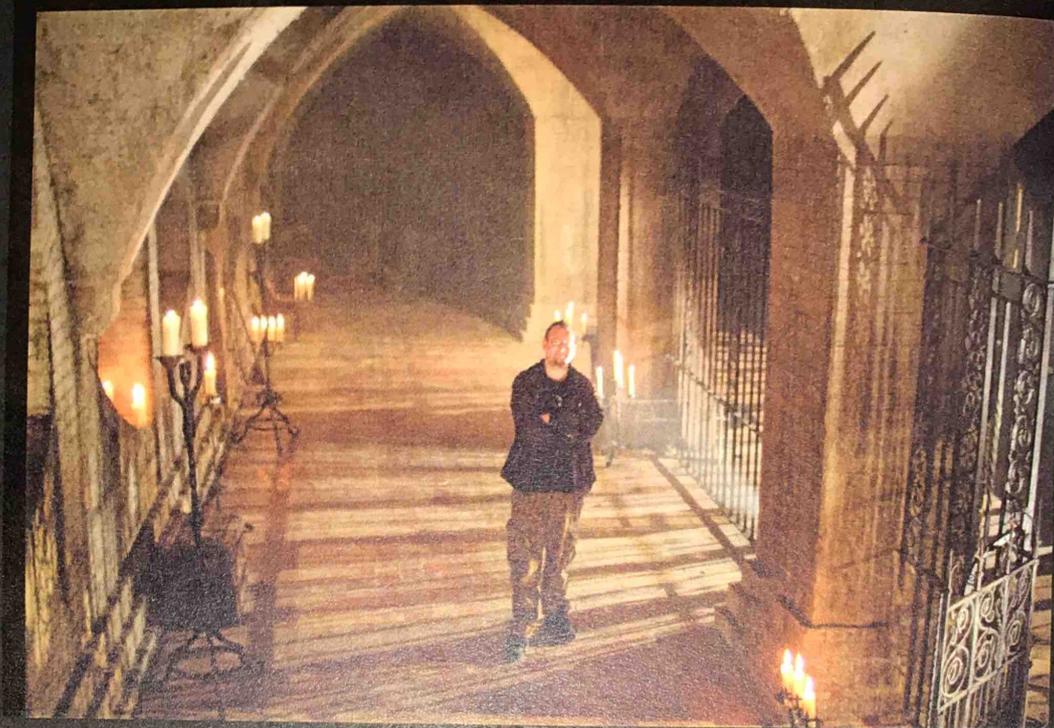
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Mature Readers
April 2005

GARY FRY
FRAZER LEE
JOHN L. PROBERT
GARY MCMAHON
VINCENT VANALLEN
STEPHANIE RODRIGUES

ALAN M CLARK

FRAZER LEE



Above: Frazer Lee, location scouting in a London crypt

Nocturne spoke to Frazer Lee about his past work, and his latest project which looks set to elevate him into the limelight.

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When did you first become interested in filmmaking, and was there anywhere that you were able to study the subject?

As a child, I started watching the Hammer and Universal horror double bills on Friday nights and soon became hooked. I saw these movies as a place to escape to, to crawl into and curl up in. They gave me my first burning desire to make movies. At school, all the kids were saying they wanted to be astronauts when they grew up. Space travel appealed to me too, but I announced that I wanted to be a film director. After all, I could always make movies about astronauts, I thought. All bases covered!

As a filmmaker, I studied the most on film sets. I did about 6 years as a runner, gaffer, production assistant

anything that would keep me on set. I learned from some of the best and worst people in the business and discovered that even after 9 weeks of shooting 16-hour days in freezing conditions, my enthusiasm for film hadn't waned one bit. I also studied BA (Hons) Media, with film being my major focus for the final year. After that I enrolled in a Masters Degree in Screenwriting to try and hone my writing. I still believe that any film, however abstract, begins and ends with good storytelling.

Where are you situated?

I'm currently sitting at my desk in "London's fashionable Camden!" I am surrounded by horror memorabilia, and audio-visual stimuli to keep me going through the wee dark hours. I have an extreme

love-hate relationship with London, and have lived here for about 15 years - maybe that's where all the horror comes from! You're sure to find me out and about in Camden at night, or Soho, or at the cinema - if you see me, please say hi!

Do you have any intention of moving to, or working in America, where there seems to be a thriving film industry?

I've been to lots of film festivals in the States, which I suppose is technically a "work" assignment (who am I kidding, hanging out with friends at the bar and watching tons of horror movies - work?) and I would definitely be open to going out there if the right project came along. Basically, I think you have to take the movie where the money is these days. And if I fall in love with a story, then I just have to tell it, even if I have to follow it to Timbuktu! I agree with your point about the American film industry thriving, although I'm sure the multicultural nature of the film business over there helps a lot.

Incredibly talented artists like Clive Barker made the journey over there, and I think they have enriched the diversity of Hollywood with their stories. So the short answer is yes - if a great project, or opportunity to create one of my dream projects, came along then I'd be more than willing to book a flight. Until such a time though, I'm happy to struggle on with the fight to make theatrical release-quality British horror.

With regards to making short films, have you received much support from the local arts council? What are your views on local arts funding?

(Laughter) Nope! Nothing at all - zip, nada. I've lost count the number of times we've approached the Film Council for funding, only to be turned down again and again. Sometimes we're told we have too much of a "commercial" project, and then the Film Council funds no-brainers like "Long Time Dead" and "Creep". No offence intended to the makers of these films of course, but I just find the stories so narrow and unimaginative, and the delivery flat.

I've decided that there is absolutely no rhyme nor reason to the Film Council's decisions about a project - I truly believe that it is just down to taste at the end of the day. But when I see yet another fricking gangster movie, or yet another social-realist council estate drama oozing out of their money pot, I admit that it does annoy me. It annoys me a lot. But we're struggling on in the private sector and that's what counts.



above: Frazer with Claudio Simonetti



above: Frazer with Robert 'Freddie' Englund



above: Frazer with Doug 'Pinhead' Bradley

below: 'Red Lines' still



In terms of our short films "On Edge" and "Red Lines" we've had theatrical release with a major feature film, won several awards, dozens of telly screenings, Internet screenings - and both films are still playing at festivals around the world to this day (Monster Mania, New Jersey, USA is next). There aren't many Film Council FEATURES doing that well, let alone shorts! I'm not bitching, mind you, I'm just telling it like it is (laughs).

I'd like to see some really well-written genre product coming out of local arts funding. These movies do really well when they have a bit of craft to them. The profits could be put back into the loop to support art films and community projects. Now THAT'S a no-brainer.

Given the opportunity to make a feature film, what type of film would you choose and why?

I've got projects coming out of my ears and most of them are horror movies. To me, horror is the king of genres - you get your romance, your action, your subtext - you get it all. But what you also get with horror is the chance to tell a story using shocking and atmospheric visuals. You can subvert the everyday into something magical and "other". And on a very basic level, if I'm going to spend the best part of two years working on the same project, it'd better be horror! That way, I'm working on the thing that drives me the most and not losing interest. I did pitch a romantic zombie comedy once though (many years before "Shaun of the Dead" I might add) - it was called "Rotting Hill" - I got laughed out of the room! Ahead of my time, I guess.

For someone thinking about making a start in short films, what equipment would you recommend?

Even equipment starts with the storytelling process I think. The story should tell you at what level it needs to be told. If the budget is going to be higher, then obviously you have bigger risks, so you'd better shoot 35mm Anamorphic just to be sure. If your story is all handheld and possible on a micro-budget, then DV cameras or DigiBeta will suffice. At the end of the day, the best piece of equipment you can have is a good cast and crew, especially a good Director of Photography! These guys will often be able to get good equipment and processing deals, and will have enough experience to advise you, so you don't have to worry about ending up with a bad looking, or sounding, film.

I've been lucky in my career to work with Panavision 35mm, which has got to be the best kit in the world. I've also worked with Digital, which gave me lots of freedom to shoot a lot and quickly. I've yet to try HD, which seems to me to be a new and imprecise art from what others have told me, but I'm open to whatever format is best for telling the story.

Which film directors do you admire and why?

I'm a great admirer of a great many directors. John Carpenter is one, because his craftsmanship is undisputed in movies like "Halloween" and "Prince of Darkness" - he always conjures an atmosphere in his movies and draws you into the story - no distance, however fantastical the subject matter. Dario Argento, because, well, have you SEEN his movies? "Suspiria" is one of the best damn movies I have ever, and will ever, see. David Cronenberg is another firm favourite, as his films always go that extra mile deeper, or darker, and all you can do is cling on for dear life. I love that feeling of descent in Cronenberg's work.

David Lynch made a genre all of his own with his movies, but deeply rooted in horror - especially his masterpiece "Lost Highway". Ah, there are so many directors I admire! Robert Wise, Shinya Tsukamoto, Tobe Hooper, George Romero, Peter Jackson, Mario Biondi, Guillermo del Toro, and so on. And I'm still discovering and rediscovering amazing directors who inspire me all the time.

When it comes to reading, what are your interests? Do you read much horror?

I wish I had more time to read - I'm often too "all storied out" by the time I get to pick up a book too. But when I do read, I like reading non-fiction - especially biographies and occult material. On my night table at the moment is "Bill Hicks: Agent of Evolution" and a copy of "The book of the Sacred Magic of Abra Melin the Mage". I do read a lot of horror fiction too - I'm especially into Clive Barker, Poppy Z. Brite, Kim Newman and Christopher Fowler - and thank goodness I picked up a copy of "Sharper Knives" by Fowler, because that's where I found "On Edge"! H. P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti are also favourites. I guess I cut my teeth on Stephen King, James Herbert, and some Anne Rice too. As a kid I scared myself silly reading Blatty's "The Exorcist"! And like any horror fanboy worth his salt, I'm also an avid reader of graphic novels and always pick up Fangoria and Shivers magazines, as well as your publications. Again, I do have other interests,

but horror tells the best and most imaginative stories in my opinion, so my shelves are stacked with the stuff.

Which part of the filmmaking process do you most enjoy?

Now, this will sound like a cop-out, but I enjoy the whole bit. Without the lows, the highs wouldn't be quite so high, so even the frustrating rejections during development and problems when the weather turns during filming become enjoyable in retrospect. Working with so many talented people during shooting has got to be a highlight - I enjoy collaborating with a diverse range of actors and crew - it's wonderful to see everyone working hard and nine times out of ten, enjoying it. I strive to create a happy set, a collaborative atmosphere. I've got to tell you though; one of the most pleasurable aspects of the process is the interactive one between filmmaker and audience.

When you finally get to put a film in front of an audience, that's a great feeling. And when some of those people enjoy the movie, that's even better. I really enjoy the screenwriting process too - I love how the ideas evolve over time - the recent completion of a twelfth draft of "Urbane" is testament to that!

Please tell us about Urbane.

"Urbane" is to be, I hope, my debut feature film. It is a 21st century gothic horror movie that deals with an ancient race of demons who hide behind the clinical-clean façade of a medical school. A young medical student called Lili stumbles across their terrifying secrets after the death of her roommate, and is forced to quite literally 'face her demons'.

We've been developing the movie for several years now, and after 12 drafts of the script and a few deals that went sour, we're finally getting there!

Doug Bradley (Pinhead from "Hellraiser"), whom I worked with on both "On Edge" and "Red Lines" is playing a deliciously deviant villain called Richard Germaine. Currently, Robert Englund (Freddy Krueger from "A Nightmare on Elm Street") has expressed his interest in playing the mysterious Professor Fredericksen. His character is the arch-enemy of Doug's, so hopefully we'll get to see these two horror titans facing off with each other on the big screen.

For me, Doug and Robert are the Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing of their generation, and I'm very

excited about the possibilities of working with both of them. Also on board, we have legendary Goblin musician Claudio Simonetti ("Suspiria", "Dawn of the Dead") composing the score, and FX maestro Bob Keen ("Hellraiser", "Nightbreed", "Dog Soldiers") creating the gory prosthetic effects. I hope you're as excited by the line-up as I am, and it'd be great if you could check out the official "Urbane" website (www.urbanethemovie.com) to catch up with the latest on the film.

I also wrote a short story prelude to "Urbane" which is to be published by the very kind people at this magazine, in the "Lunar Harvest" anthology.

When will this film start shooting and when will it be released?

Well, I'm at the mercy of the moneymen right now, but hopefully we'll be able to shoot later this year for a 2006 release. I'm off to Cannes in a few days with my producers and sales agent to meet with potential investors - and hopefully we can seal that deal. Wish me luck, and I hope to see you at the movies!

Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak about my work, thanks for publishing some of my stories - and thank you for supporting our scary movies!

Frazer, April 2005

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