

Pulp becomes poetry: The Executioner returns in ironic new Laba book

By STUART ROSS

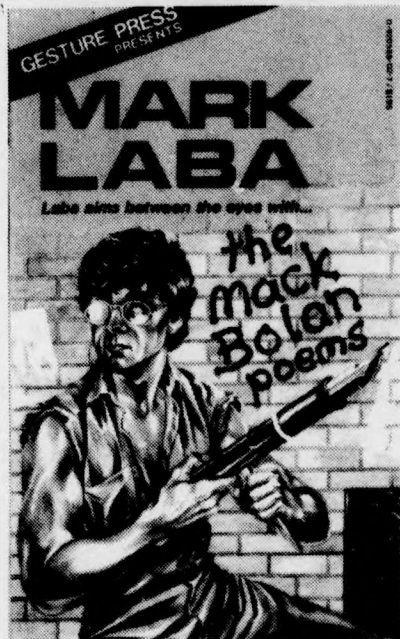
The Mack Bolan Poems
by Mark Laba
Gesture Press, Toronto
\$1.95, 16 pp.
(Available in The York Bookstore's
consignment section)

Toronto writer/artist Mark Laba's newest publication presents a contradiction even before one begins reading. The cover of *The Mack Bolan Poems* is a glossy, full-color illustration, virtually indistinguishable from a schlocky 'drugstore novel.' The book's insides, however, are (mainly) mimeographed. Yet this curious contrast in printing quality is integral to the work.

Mack Bolan, popularly known as The Executioner, is the hero of an endless series of pulp thrillers by Don Pendleton. Bolan is a Vietnam vet turned mercenary who, hired covertly by the US government, fights a one-man battle against The Mob. The cover of *The Mack Bolan Poems* depicts a Mark Laba look-alike replacing Bolan in a Rambo-like pose, clutching—instead of a machine-gun—a giant pen. The pen is significant, for what Laba is doing in this powerful series of cut-up/found poems is getting to the essence of Pendleton's language and themes.

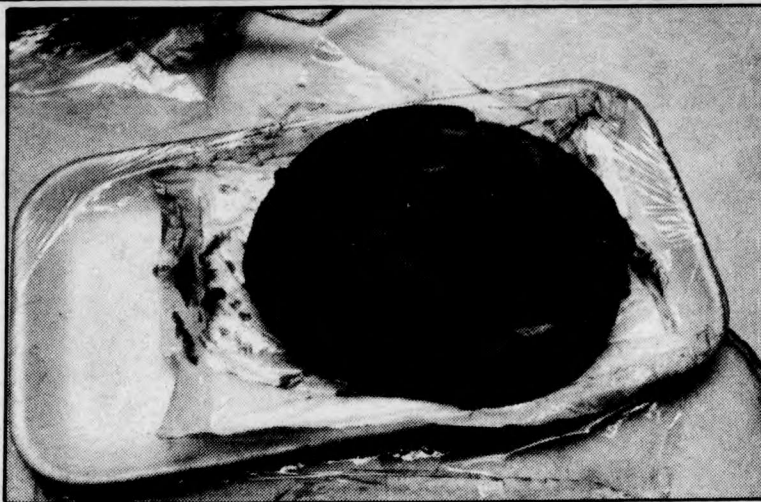
The audacious mimeo production brings out the grotteness and disposability of the Pendleton novels. And there is a nice irony in the small press poetry book emulating a mass-market publication whose contents are pure pulp.

In a brief interview from behind the cheese'n'deli counter of a downtown mini-mart where he works, Laba explained his use of source material in writing the poems. He basically flipped through the Pendleton novels, picking up a word or phrase here and there, fusing some



together and occasionally throwing in his own material. The result of this process is a sequence of distilled poems, concentrated nuggets of threats and violence.

The grammatical oddities and syntactical ambiguities resultant from the writing method are the key



GARY BLAKELEY

Once upon a reading week, Harriet visited the meat market. Now she patiently awaits Spring...barbeque season. Tenderizer anyone?

to this book. Just as Laba creates from his Pendleton source material, so we must create from Laba's text:

A junkie nicknamed entered soundlessly for the kink in the line cocked the hammer . . . she was letting her eyes grow, a few words an hour later, in his wound the necktie lay on it's side shrugging.

The book's richness lies partly in the many alternative readings possible. Laba's imagery challenges; it never clobbers you over the head. The weaker passages in the sequence, where the interpolations aren't so clever or witty, are camouflaged by the intense movement of the whole. There is an excitement in Laba's frequent haphazardness that one rarely finds in the works of poets obsessed with 'getting their message across.'

Swords & Sorcery

By KEVIN PASQUINO

Heroes and villains clash and all but the mightiest will lose his head in the heat of battle. So goes the story of *Highlander*, a sword and sorcery film that offers positive proof that a sensible story isn't really necessary for an adventure flick.

The action in the movie starts swiftly (and violently) as hero Connor MacLeod (Christopher Lambert, best known as Tarzan from *Greystoke*) has a sword fight in an underground parking garage with another 'immortal' hero. Why the two are fighting is unexplained until later in the film, but no one in the audience was clamoring for an explanation: they paid to see action and violence and they were getting their money's worth.

The plot of the story is quite sim-

ple: for ages immortals have been created by some mysterious force and that same force has drawn them together to do battle to the death. The lone survivor will receive power greater than all other men.

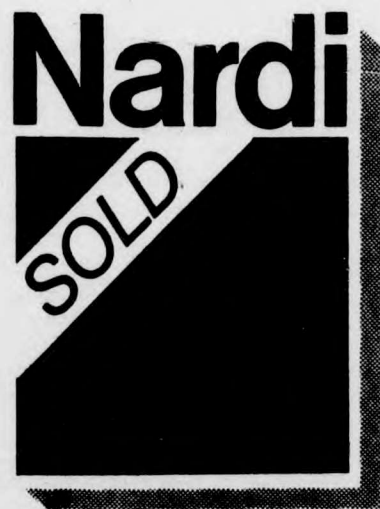
But how does one kill an immortal?—He has to be decapitated, which sort of explains why all of the immortals carry around swords (well, it *sort of* explains it). Of course, we in Ontario are fortunate enough to have the Ontario Censor Board, or whatever pseudonym they're going by this week, and because of this mixed blessing those decapitation scenes have been not so carefully snipped away. Thanks, Mary Brown, you have the best scissors in town.

Director Russel Mulcahy has cut his teeth into the early, stylish videos of Duran Duran and Culture Club, and he makes both modern day Manhattan and 16th Century Scotland look cinematically beautiful. Yet somewhere along the line he loses sight of the film's story. For example: why does Sean Connery (who has a bit part) look older than fellow immortal Christopher Lambert; shouldn't the immortals be roughly the same age? Does the film need a screaming, helpless love interest for the hero? And why were there so many lousy and inappropriate Queen songs in the film? (Queen sings "New York, New York"?! Now c'mon!)

If you're thinking of seeing this film, it'll be necessary to leave all common sense at home and just go and enjoy it. Christopher Lambert and villain Clancy Brown are both spectacular in their roles, and Sean Connery in his short appearance as an Obi-Wan Kenobi-like character is great fun. Overlook the holes in story and the film can be fun. And let's be honest: when you're the only new adventure flick in town, isn't common sense a bit too much to ask for?

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