

# Pete's dragon

by David Deaton

Pete Townshend — **The Iron Man**

Inspiration has strange sources. Consider the latest album by rock veteran Pete Townshend, formerly of The Who, now of Faber & Faber.

As befits a part-time editor, Townshend draws upon a children's story by Britain's poet laureate Ted Hughes.

Ted Hughes will always be remembered by English majors as the man who drove his wife, American poet Sylvia Plath, to suicide. That happened in 1963, before The Who even existed.

Out of Hughes' modern-day fairy tale Townshend has fashioned what he quaintly describes as a "musical." It's something of a return to the narrative "con-

cept" albums of *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia*.

Knowledge of the story may not be absolutely necessary, but it sure helps. Fortunately, it's all explained in the excellent song-by-song liner notes.

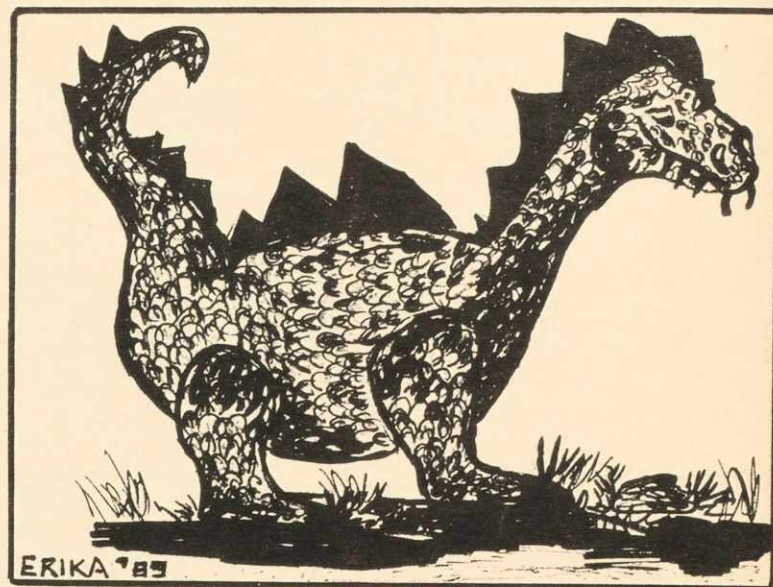
*Iron Man* tells the story of a metal-munching monster who makes friends with a little English boy, Hogarth, the story's real protagonist. After much despoilation and misunderstanding, the Iron Man finds happiness when Hogarth leads him to a scrapyard.

That's side one, in a paragraph. Side two features another creature, this one not so friendly.

An outer space dragon, larger than Australia, crashes to earth and demands large quantities of living flesh. Iron Man whups the dragon, Hogarth meets his mate, and all ends happily.

Townshend enlists plenty of vocal support to tell this story. Blues great John Lee Hooker gives an admirably deep-voiced performance as the Iron Man. We also hear from Pete's brother, Simon; Who frontman, Roger Daltrey; and, for the first time, female vocalists.

The only problem with this arrangement is that we don't hear much from Pete Townshend himself. So diligently does he keep to the background, you can sometimes forget it's *his* record.



The result gets to be mighty uneven.

*Iron Man* reaches for a grandeur it doesn't quite attain. A lovely story lies behind it all, but it proves too unwieldy when translated into another medium.

The last song, trying desperately to be climactic, turns out to be that much more disappointing. Townshend scarcely appears. In his place: a woman who sounds distressingly like Whitney Houston. Help!

"New Life" has the uplifting exultation of a "Just Say No" commercial. It stinks. Townshend's legendary chord-crunching guitar-work gives way to synthesized pop. It's as if, in a fit of perversity, Pete chose to write an anthem, "Let's Get Fooled Again."

But the unkindest cut of all

inevitably falls to the spaced-out dragon. On the maddeningly campy "Fast Food" it thunders:

*I must say it's gracious  
of you all to multiply.  
For I am voracious  
And I need a huge supply  
Of organic, bleeding  
Palpitating swill.  
I'm ready for feeding  
And I don't want a bill!*

You can guess that the music barely rises to the level of incidental. In trying to do justice to Hughes' story, Townshend obscures his own melodic gift.

Understandably, *Iron Man* is no Care Bears cartoon but a vivid, thoughtful story, rich with meaning.

Example: Before the dragon crashes down to earth, Hogarth

Continued on page 9

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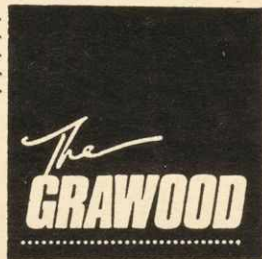
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## trashy and fast Shallow sea

by Silia Coiro

A ragged, alcoholic, depressed Al Pacino, pining over the loss of his wife to a fellow detective, turns a homicide investigation into a police financed and approved dating session in *Sea of Love*, currently playing at the Hyland Theatre.

Pacino's emotional instability turns an otherwise unexceptional suspense-thriller cop story into an unpredictable psychological drama.

The Harold Becker directed movie is jolting, fast-paced and sexually vibrant, everything one expects to find in a good, trashy, Hollywood production.

Richard Price's plot has Pacino and partner, John Goodman, leading an investigation into a series of sex slayings. As Goodman's character appropriately puts it, "You play, you pay."

The sole clue linking the victims appears to be that they all

wrote bad poetry in the personal classified ads. (Poetic 'justice for all?')

Pacino devises an unorthodox scheme to find the killer and winds up dating Ellen Barkin, a possible suspect in the case. What ensues is a turmoil-filled relationship, in which Pacino must fight with his emotions. Is she the killer or not?

As with most cop stories, there are a number of incongruities in the movie with respect to characters and their actions.

One has to wonder why Barkin must seek out dates through the classifieds. Barkin, the manager of a pricey downtown Manhattan shoe store, wears expensive, seductive, body-clinging minis. She is definitely not the shy homely-looking type; it's hard to believe she has a problem meeting men.

All sarcasm aside, *Sea of Love* rates as good entertainment. If you don't expect a classic, you won't be disappointed.