

Fear and loathing (and IMAX) in Thornhill

by Dr. Eric M. Alper

film
Rolling Stones At the Max
 starring The Rolling Stones
 various directors
 at the Ontario Place Cinesphere

It is 5:30 in the morning and I am out of ice. I am also out of scotch, tequila, cocaine, peyote, speed, mescaline, chips and luck. I am trapped in a nun's motel-room closet, chewing my buttons for comfort after the ice ran out.

It's ten days since I loaded the car up with alcohol and myself with six gallons of unleaded, and it's five days since they stopped pumping my stomach and helped me back into my sea-blue '72 Buick Centurion, where a puzzled Romberg was waiting for me.

"Hi Lee," I said, offering him a long toke of home-grown marijuana as the Centurion eased out of the garage and onto Highway 7. Turning up the volume on John Denver while singing and snorting aspirin, we tore towards Thornhill touching ninety on the straightaways.

For the first ten minutes I didn't look at the road and concentrated on finishing off the brandy and white wine in my flask, only speaking to Romberg when I realised he wasn't looking at the road either. In fact, he wasn't even driving. He had his eyes shut tight and was sitting in the back seat.

I decided that one of us ought to drive, and, pausing only to swallow 15 milligrams of magnesium sulphate and insert a methadine suppository, I slid into the vacant driver's seat to hit the accelerator. I finally found it by scrambling around the dashboard, which scared the shit out of Romberg, but kept me amused for a while. We seemed to be missing most of the traffic, so while I was down there I took a quick shot of nembuthol and Pernod fifty-fifty and squirted some bicarbonate of soda into an old vein; when I finally emerged to look out of the windscreen, we had left Highway 7 and were heading down the 404 the wrong way.

I made a fast U-turn over the grassy median, squeezing neatly between two crashing Freightliners and the horrified look of a clearly underaged driver,

and accelerated fast away from the sound of squealing tires and breaking glass. I lit up a Churchill-sized, opium-poppo, sherry-soaked, STP-impregnated giant reefer, turned on the "David Cassidy Sings the Blues" tape and settled back for a snooze.

I awoke to find Romberg trying to kill me. He seemed cross. We were somewhere on top of a northbound Via Rail train speeding towards Timmins, but unfortunately still in the car, having failed to negotiate a bridge in the recommended direction.

I tried to calm Romberg down by hitting him across the eyes with my emergency tequila bottle and the car jack. He seemed quieter after a bit and I decided to risk reversing the car off the moving train...

We checked out of the hospital ten days later and I claimed Romberg. I think he'd been trying to avoid me, as he was attempting to register himself as a voluntary mental patient, and hid in a toilet when he saw me coming, but his wounds were beginning to heal well and I needed him for the story. I shot him a friendly needle full of 100% pure alcohol when he wasn't looking and he passed out.

Some people just can't handle drugs.

I called Arts Editor Ira Nayman collect at *Excalibur*. A silly mistake, since he's never there on Wednesdays, but I needed to know in a hurry what story I was working on. He was out. The managing editor seemed surprised to hear from me and recommended I stay away from the *Excal* office until the train crash inquiry was over.

Apparently Lee and I are supposed to be covering the new Rolling Stones 'Imax' concert movie at the Ontario Place Ballroom commemorating their 60th anniversary in the music business, but he wouldn't tell me more,



refused to put some ice in a taxi, and hung up. I took a quick sniff of potassium cyanide, gargled some raw heroin and decided to go look in Lee's fridge — maybe he has some ice.

Kicking through the thin apartment wall into the next room where Romberg is supposed to be sleeping I realise something has made me woozy — maybe the coffee — and the only inmate of this room is an alcoholic Scotsman with strong homicidal tendencies towards strangers who kick his wall down during the night.

I belt him in the temple so he won't recognize me and hide in the cupboard. It's warm and cozy in there, and I think something's starting to work.

I must have slept for days; when I wake, up the wall has been repaired, the Scotsman gone — taking my flak jacket with him, dammit — and the room has been relet to a nun who spends all day on her knees. Also, there's no ice.

I'm squatting in a walk-in cupboard with nothing left to pop, drink, insert, inject or smoke. Desperately, I swallow one of my shirt buttons but there is hardly a buzz. I strongly suspect by her constant praying that she is fasting and is intending to remain here for a self-absorbed weekend without so much as popping out for a hamburger. I'm trapped.

Whilst her attention is elsewhere — perhaps reading a possibly sinful article in *Psychology Today* — I crawl across the floor and steal the telephone. She's feeling too guilty to notice. Back in the cupboard, I call Ira at the office. I can tell he's not too happy to hear from me because he puts the phone down.

I call him again. "For God's sake, Ira," I plead, "I'm suffering. I haven't had a drink for days and I'm fast running out of shirt buttons."

He doesn't seem very sympathetic. Also I think he thinks I'm lying about calling from a nun's closet. "Look, just get me out of here and junked up and I promise I'll make the copy date."

He has a nasty laugh when he wants to. "The copy date, schmuck," says Ira evilly, "expired 18 weeks ago."

So why get so touchy, what's so awful about missing an issue?

"You've missed nine issues, dum dum," says Ira. I admire his honesty.

A few seconds later I was the new ex-music writer for the *Excalibur*. I was also trapped in a motel closet with an unpaid bill, a buttonless shirt and a hangover you could elect a Pope in. I had to act fast.

I called New York collect and then dialled Bombay, Bermuda, Kyoto Japan, Melbourne Australia, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, Vegas, Saigon and Hawaii. I wasn't in any of them. Too bad, but I had to check out that I wasn't just hallucinating.

Sister Maria was launched into her fourth hour of self-denial and was causing me more than just a tremor of interest. I had discovered that Levi 501 buttons get you less high than even shirt buttons; also, I was busting to go to the bathroom.

I decided to come clean. I knew it was a desperate gamble, but maybe if I could just explain that I was on my way to cover the Stones, had been recovering in her cupboard for four days from a multi-drug overdose while hiding from a thieving alcoholic Scotsman who had attempted to kill me for knocking down his wall, mistaking it for that of a passed-out friend when I was looking for some ice... Well maybe she would believe me.

I cleared my throat, swallowed my last pant button and decided to come out of my closet. I stood up, opened the door and stepped out, remembering too late that I'd just popped my last supporting button. So there I was with my jeans around my knees and a startled nun staring at the only piece of mine my editors haven't yet managed to cut. I decided to improvise.

"Hello," I squeaked in a loud voice. "I am the holy Ghost. Blessed art thou amongst women" and moved forward.

Unfortunately, I hadn't had a drug for ten minutes and my body was in no shape and my ankle went: I tripped over the trashcan, put my foot through the television set and fell forward vomiting onto the bedspread.

The petrified nun stared mutely at me. I like to think I saw pity mingling with the terror that flashed across her features at the sight of what had staggered out of her closet, catching her in mid-meditation, and was presently throwing up over her bed.

I tried to get up, knocking over the bedside lamp and cutting my wrist on the glass. It wasn't deliberate but it

added to the effect. Blood now spurted on the motel wall. "I am the Holy Ghost," I tried again, in a Canadian accent. "But this is my lunch hour."

I think she might have liked me had we perhaps met under different circumstances, but now she made a strange gurgling noise at the back of

arts

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her throat and, trembling all over, ran gibbering from the room. I realised I ought to try and leave quickly, although it would be a minute or two before she could tell anybody what she'd seen, and probably several days before they'd believe her.

I locked the door, pushed the wardrobe over in front of it and set fire to the bed to create a diversion. I kicked hard at the glass window, shattering it and jumping forward at the same time. I found myself in the shower. Standing up, I banged my head on the tap lever, which turned on the water, soaking me completely. I made a break for the real window and made a dive for the pavement.

I must have missed by inches, but the wall gave way and I crawled out of the burning wreckage in time to see the ceiling fall in. There was a lot of angry shouting and some screams, so I fired several shots from my machine pistol in their direction to create another diversion and sprinted for the Buick.

I found Romberg trying to run away and persuaded him to give me a lift by offering him the alternative of having his head blown off. He accepted gracefully, although he foamed at the mouth every time he looked at me, but I was too busy gulping down some mescaline, insulin, aspirin, mandrax, morphine, arsenic, hashish, insecticide and LSD, to care.

As we scorched away, we caught a quick glimpse of the fiercely burning motel collapsing into the swimming pool.

"Wow, that was a close thing, eh Lee?" I said, as we hit the road.

But he was already throwing up in the back seat.

...and a review in *Excal*

by David Kuswanto

I was hesitant to see the Rolling Stones on IMAX; the project seemed too grandiose. Not only that, but the thought of seeing Mick Jagger larger than life, puckering up to the screen scared the shit out of me. Fortunately, Jagger has spared us from horror sequences, and *Rolling Stones At the Max* comes through with flying colours.

It's easy to forget how good these guys are. The only chance of seeing them strut their stuff is limited to either a 24-inch set or venues like the Skydome — catastrophes of capitalism that make the Stones look and sound more like a colony of ants than the greatest rock and roll band in the world. This is why the IMAX film is so good: it captures the group as if they were right there with you, live and in concert.

The obvious disadvantage of being cooped up in a cinema is the restriction of movement. You can't jump up and down without tripping over yourself or being escorted to a "better seat" outside.

But the experience of seeing a rock show on IMAX is just that, an experience. The visuals are startling and precise; you can see the most minute details, from the brand of cigarettes Ron Wood smokes to the rip in Jagger's shirt.

In *At the Max*, you witness the incredible physical exaggeration Jagger puts into a performance and the good-natured but mischievous schoolboy antics he throws at his mates, constantly trying to catch them off guard. You realize what an excellent guitarist Keith Richards is, and how linked he is to the instrument as a form of expression. His playing speaks a language that can be read in each note, gesture and facial quirk.

There are also some fantastic shots of the crowd, the kind you could have sworn you saw yourself in. One particular shot showed a father carrying his son on his shoulders, both singing the immortal declaration, "I know it's only rock and roll, but I like it." The Stones cranked out an exceptional version of this and other classics; and, through state-of-the-art digital meddling, they sound better than ever.

At the Max only disappoints twice: the first disappointment is the over-ambitious pseudo-psychedelic visual effects that accompanied the song "2,000 Light Years From Home." You can't get much cornier than this, folks. The second is the end of the show, which could have gone on much longer.

Rolling Stones At the Max is a perfect way to see the band in action, although you might want to bring earplugs.