

# The mysterious castle of Baron von Gut

by ALAN DOERKSEN

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Alex Montgomery Zuma, and writing's my trade. You've probably read my articles in Newsweek, Dime, Reader's Digest or similar worthless rags like this one. On the side, I write a few screenplays, novels and biographies, but I always use noms-de-plume for legal reasons. Have you heard of Elderly Queen? That's me. So's J.R. Trolking, Isick Asinine and James Michelin. Anyway, one day last spring I was spending some time in Monaco when...

"You're sure you want to go through with this?" I asked her dubiously.

"Absolutely, Mr. Zuma."

"Please...call me Alex! I thought we were on a first name basis, by now."

"Don't worry about Dinah," Churlie interjected. "She takes her job too formally. After all, we've only been married a year or so. Here, have some Jamaican punch. My brother sent it over from Mystique, the island where he's staying now."

"I hear he's having a wild time with that Kook Shark girl."

"Oh, please...don't mention her. My mother's having a fit over that escapade. It's almost as bad as when I got kissed by that Aussie girl, a few years back."

I sipped the champagne and admired the view of the beach and the bay.

"Superb yacht you've got here, Churlie," I said. "How's it been holding up the last year?"

"Pretty well, except for that jaunt in the Caribbean."

At this point, Dinah blushed. "You'd better leave that out of my biography, Mr. Zuma," she stated.

"Ratz, I was planning to feature those photos of you in a special colour section," I kidded her. Churlie laughed, but Dinah scowled at me.

"You two are impossible!" she said. "Maybe you shouldn't write the book after all."

"Come now, darling," Churlie rebuked her. "If Alex doesn't, people will start spreading nasty rumors about your past."

"I suppose so," Dinah agreed begrudgingly. "Still, if I didn't know you better...Alex..."

"That's better!" I interrupted.

"...I'd swear you were just out to make a fast pound!"

"I am shocked!" I replied. "But while we're on the subject, just how much am I getting for this?"

"Let's just say it's a princess's ransom!" chuckled Churlie. We chatted and ate an improvised brunch, and then I

returned to shore from the Royal Yacht. I had to go to Cannes that day to attend the spring film festival, so I checked out of my hotel and went to the local Eurail station. I was getting ready to board my train when a man in a trench-coat (with trench-mouth) hailed me. "Hey, Mr. Zuma, I want to talk with you."

"The hail you say," I remarked. "If so, you'll have to meet me in Cannes."

He followed me into the first-class coach (that's the kind with the padded seats) and took a seat opposite me. I made myself comfortable, pretending to ignore the chap (who was starting to get on my nerves). Taking out the copy of Paris-Mush I had bought at the station, I perused it while keeping an eye on the stranger. He refused to say a word, pretending to watch the scenery. At last I couldn't take anymore.

"Out with it! C'mon, tell me, who are you?" I practised my Roger Pultry imitation.

"That's better," replied Mr. X. "My name's Xavier. I was sent by the Ripoff Foundation to ascertain..."

"You don't mean Ripoff's Believe It or Else...?"

"Quite right, sir. We thought you might be interested in taking on an assignment for us."

"It'll have to wait. I've got a stake in three movies showing at Cannes this week, and I've got a biography to write. "But you may as well tell me what this is about, Fred."

"Frank's the name, to tell the truth. You see, there's a certain Baron von Gut in Baden Worse, Germany who lives in an ancient castle and conducts grotesque experiments involving the occult..."

"Now wait a minute, what do you take me for? You don't expect me to believe this X?\*-0, do you?"

Believe it...or else." Xavier answered concisely.

I pondered it over momentarily. Then I quizzed the Ripoff man further.

"Just how do I fit into this deal?"

"We'd like you visit Baron von Gut, and write up a documentary for us. Then we'll broadcast a T.V. special based on your findings this Halloween."

"Sounds promising. What's in it for me?" I asked unabashedly.

"Ten thousand dollars plus ten percent of what the T.V. network pays us."

"What network is this?"

"Why, P.B.S., of course: Channel 131!"

"Forget it. Make that twenty grand straight and I'll take it."

"If that's the way you feel I could always speak to Peter Stenchly about this..."

"Forget that! Let's settle on sixteen thousand."

"Sixteen thousand."

"You've got it. When can I go to the castle?"

"As soon as you want to. Arrangements have already been made with the baron to accommodate you at his castle. If I were you, I'd go prepared, though. Rumor has it the baron keeps an entourage of geeks and monsters locked in the dungeon."

Xavier smiled when he said this, but I got a sinking feeling it wasn't too far from the truth. In a few days I'd find out for sure. Until then, I had business afoot (show business, that is) in Cannes.

It was mid-afternoon when the train arrived. I got out, checked into my hotel and took a stroll along the beach. The sun was shining brightly among wispy clouds in the sky. Palm trees lined the broad, golden beach upon which were distributed dozens of gorgeous, brown bodies. I worked my way through this bevy of beauties until I reached the hotel where the Festival movies were showing. Reaching the door, I rolled up my sleeve, revealing the stylized pink tattoo of a shapely girl. The doorman nodded and let me in upon examining the girl. I went to the projection room, which was crowded with movie celebrities, and found a seat. First on the schedule was "Star Wreck II: The Rates of Cannes", and introducing it was Gene Rottenberry. Also present were Leonard Nimrod, Retardo Nonchalant and James Dookey. Soon the lights went down and the reels began to roll. I put on my 3-D glasses and munched on noisy popcorn for several minutes.

When I woke up, the movie was over and one for which I had written the plot was being introduced by its producer, Francis Ford Coprolite. This was the summer extravaganza, "The Extraterrestrial Zombi of Malibu Beach", which starred a cast of complete unknowns including several dozen Play-joy bunnies and a three-foot-high, two hundred fifty pound midget with two heads. I had contrived the plot so as to attract the fans of horror, science fiction and good old beach movies. Shakespeare it wasn't, but who gives a yam? That summer it grossed over 100 million (dollars, as well as people!)

Fully awake, I sat entranced through the first "public" showing of the movie. After a thoroughly enjoyable two hours, "E.T.Z.M.B." was given a standing ovation...by me and Francis, at least. The audience had mixed feelings about the movie, but I slipped out before the onslaught.

I left the hotel and strolled

down the beach to a seaside cafe, where I found a table and sat down for dinner. As I was ordering beef stroganof and rice, who should turn up but Margaux Henningway.

"Hiya, Marg," I greeted her. "Won't you join me for evening munchies?"

"Glad to, Alex. How's it going? I haven't seen you for over a year."

She sat down and we talked awhile.

"Things have been pretty busy for me," I lamented. "I've got a stake in three movies here, and the situation is 'make or break'."

"I understand. My sister's been trying to strike it rich for two or three years, now. I suppose you saw "Personal Pest?"

"I'm afraid so. Ariel did a fine job, but the part wasn't good enough for her. If I had written that script..."

"Never mind. Personally, I've been thinking of making a movie or two, if I can take time off from modelling."

"Great idea. I'll see if I can line something up."

She ordered her dinner, of lobster and French fries, and for an hour we ate and conversed. Then I returned to the Hiltop Hotel, where an opening bash was being held for Festival entrants. Everyone was wearing costumes appropriate to the movies they were involved with. Naturally, I was confused as to what to wear, so on impulse I dressed as a vampire. Unfortunately, George Camelton showed up. Also present was Herbie Villainchase, star of my "E.T.Z.M.B." movie.

"How are ya doing, Herb?" I said. "Talking to yourself again? Like they say, two heads are better than one!"

"Aw, c'mon, boss," Herbie argued. "I'm sick of this publicity stunt. When can I take off my plastic head?"

"As soon as we're done here at Cannes," I told him, in an aside. "Just make sure you take the right one off!"

I went to get a glass of punch, and passed several bunnies on the way. They, too, were wearing suitable costumes, consisting of minuscule bikinis. In case you're still wondering what the other two movies were, one was "The Exorcist Meets the Teenage Ghouls of Ridicule High", while the other was an animated short called "Freaking Out". The former starred the infamous Reverend Jimmy Bones (remember the Kook-Ale bash in Guyana?) as well as a cast of nubile school-girls. As for the latter (don't call it a cartoon!), it was a project Frank Zapata and I put together, along with the help of some artists from MUD magazine. Frank had written the music, of course, which was reminiscent of his FM smash, "Vallium Girl".

For the rest of the evening I mixed (drinks) and mingled with the party-cipants. Then I returned to my own hotel, completely exhausted. Stopping at the front desk, I asked the concierge if there were any messages for me.

"Oui, monsieur. A telegram came two hours ago from a Monsieur Xavier. It is marked 'Urgent'."

"Don't tell me it's a singing telegram. Here, let me see it."

He handed it to me, and this is what it said: "To Mr. Zuma stop baronvongut has disappeared mysteriously stop stop what you are doing and rush to badenworse immediately stop" With that, the telegram came to a stop. It wasn't signed, so I couldn't be sure it was really from Xavier. Maybe it was a ruse to get me out of Cannes while the films were being judged. However, I didn't remember seeing anyone suspicious-looking in the train when I'd talked to the Ripoff man. Authentic or not, this telegram could be the ticket to an incredible story. Going upstairs, I decided to call it a night, and sleep on the matter for the time being.

(Continued next week)

## Christmas craft workshop held

Kids are you interested in making presents for Christmas! Then the Fredericton National Exhibition Centre has a workshop for you. For six Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 12 noon beginning on November 6 the Centre is offering a course entitled "A Potpourri of Presents." It is for children ages 8 to 12 and you can learn to make presents for the whole family. Registration fee is \$20.00. To register call 453-3747. Registration is limited to 15.