

Hub Magazine

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CONTENTS:

- FICTION:** *Hush a Bye* by Beverley Allen
- REVIEW:** *The Incredible Hulk Season 2*
 The Unblemished
- FEATURE:** *Bleeding Words #2* by Gary McMahon



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EDITORIAL:

by alasdair stuart

The Return of Buck Homs, Two Fisted Scientist

I'm a radio drama nut, in a big, big way. When I was younger I remember, sitting in bed, listening to the book at bedtime on Radio 4, followed by an hour of either very odd comedy or very odd drama every night. It, along with the towering work that was Mark and Lard's ten fill midnight show on Radio 1 was a major part of my cultural education, introducing me to comedians, bands, movies and poems I still love today.

It's actually got more acute as the years have gone on and my iphone is chock full of Sherlock Holmes, Edgar Allan Poe, Paul Cornell and The Man in Black. However, it's also linked with another of my deep geek loves. I speak of none other than...

The Two Fisted Scientist

Ever since I saw Quatermass and The Pit aged about 15, I've been fascinated by the idea of the scientist as good guy, of a hero who solves problems by being clever. It's an impossibly tough path to follow for most authors and whilst Indiana Jones comes close, the fact remains Indy tends to be a bit handy first and a bit clever second.

Until now, that is.

The last couple of years have seen something of a renaissance for the two fisted scientist, especially on US TV. Jacob Hood, the hero of Steven Gallagher's Eleventh House didn't last long over here despite being played by Patrick Stewart, but the US version is doing well. Likewise, Fringe's spectacular, to say nothing of spectacularly mad, Walter Bishop has carved a niche for himself as one of the most compelling characters on TV.

But there's still potential for more. I stumbled onto an old radio show called Adventures in Research recently. It's an old and slightly stilted set of dramatisations of famous breakthroughs in science and it's actually kind of wonderful. 'A Piece of Silk' for example, about the invention of the parachute is refreshingly up front about what an incredible weird and dangerous thing research is as our hero jumps off a building attached to...a silk bag.

He lives of course but that sense of adventure, of discovery is the next stage for the two fisted scientist. After all, Andreas Vesalius, arguably one of the original two fisted scientists, had to escape packs of wild dogs and dodge the authorities to steal the cadavers he needed for his research. If that isn't two fisted action adventure, then I don't what it is.

So let's hear it for the two fisted scientists, the sons and daughters of Daniel Jackson and Bernard Quatermass, of Walter Bishop and Harrison Blackwood. They finally look set to marry the swashbuckling fun of Doctor Who with the quiet, inspired lunacy of actual invention. Because, after all, would you jump off a building wearing a silk bag?



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FICTION

Hush a Bye

by beverley allen

He sat behind the Telegraph as usual, the only sign of life a hand that appeared every now and then to find a slice of toast or a cup. He ate and drank silently; even toast seemed to dissolve in his mouth. She found that ironic.

Finally he lowered the paper.

"You look tired," he remarked.

"I am."

"Why?"

"I didn't sleep well."

He made a small impatient gesture.

"You never sleep well," he said.

"It's hard to sleep through the noise," she replied.

His eyes sparkled and he smiled.

"I never hear anything," he said.

Her nails rasped against the cup as her fingers twisted around the handle.

"No," she said, "You never do."

He made a great play of folding the newspaper.

"I must be going, I've an important meeting."

As he rose from the table she put out a hand to stop him. He was impatient of her touch, but she held his wrist.

"I'm begging you," she said, "Will you please see a doctor?"

He peeled back her fingers and patted her hand.

"I've told you before, my dear it's you who need to see the doctor."

Her fingers pinched and pleated the table cloth into sharp, steeped ridges

"I haven't slept properly in months."

"So you tell." He laughed, "But as I've explain again and again, it doesn't keep me awake."

He always laughed.

Bile rose to sear the back of her throat.

"Please," she repeated.

"Don't make a fuss," he replied happily, "Have a little lay down in the afternoons."

"I haven't the time....."

But he'd gone, leaving her to deal with the correspondence, the telephone and the house; running away from the conversation as he always did.

Her inbox was full.

Technically it was his, but he ran from the computer as he ran from anything he didn't understand or want to understand.

The email should have been amongst the junk, with the Canadian medicines and the Viagra peddlers.

Someone called "*Snoring Stopped*" was offering her "*Success Guaranteed*".

She deleted it, reporting it as spam, but it was back the next day and the next.

She considered blocking the sender, but then she thought there was no harm in looking.

No harm at all.

Just once.

And you never knew.

After all, it was only a web site.

She lay looking up at the ceiling.

He was already asleep; even through the wall she could hear him, the sound echoing around the room

It seemed to travel through every crack and crevice of the old house. Deep within the walls it throbbed and thrummed to a primeval rhythm that reverberated on her every nerve.

He slept soundly as he always slept through his cacophony of grunts, moans and snorts, oblivious to it all. And there would be a thin trail of dribble from his wide open mouth soaking down into his pillow.

She got out of her bed.

Now the noise seemed to rise up from the wooden boards and she could feel the vibrations with her bare feet, rising up her body to beat in her head, making even the filings in her teeth sing.

She went to her dressing table drawer and retrieved the box.

He never stirred as she opened his bedroom door. The sound seemed to push against her, defying her, trying to force her back.

She ignored it and gazed down at him.

He lay on his back, his head thrown back against the bank of pillows, his mouth gaping wide to allow the spittle to trickle out unimpeded.

His head looked too small for his body, a miniature appendage to the great curve of his belly grown huge in the last few years. His stomach rose and fell in time to the noise from his mouth.

She opened the box carefully in accordance with the instructions and was startled by the colour.

Why had she expected it to be black?

It was so small she had to use her eyebrow tweezers to gently remove it from its nest and place it on his chin.

For a time it didn't move, not until she spoke the name they'd given her; then it followed the trail of spit to the open mouth and passed that to the red peak of his nose quivering in time with the raucous expulsion of air from his throat.

It slipped between the hairs in his nostrils, pushing them aside like a hunter through elephant grass.

The noise didn't stop that night, or in the nights that followed, but eventually she was lulled to sleep by a steady tread as he paced the floor of his room.

His unsleeping activity was like the steady rock of a cradle, soothing in its soft, repetitive regularity.

It was later that he clubbed a fellow bishop and two other priests to death with a candle stick.

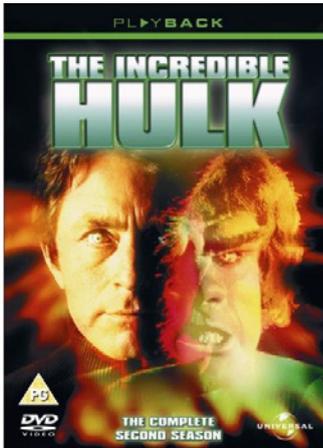
There was a rumour they'd been trying to perform an exorcism, but it was hushed up for the sake of the widow.

He was very quiet when they took him away.



The Incredible Hulk Season 2 DVD Box Set

reviewed by ro smith



Starring Bill Bixby, Lou Ferrigno
rrp £27.99

This is a fun season, packed with a lot of top quality episodes that will stand up to multiple re-watchings. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that if you're only willing to shell out for one box set to reconnect you with all the joys and sorrows of *The Incredible Hulk*, then this is the season for you. I liked the first season, and it's always tempting to start from the beginning, but you don't get that many episodes for your money, and there's not much back story in the pilot that isn't neatly encapsulated in the introductory voice-over that accompanies every episode. For better or worse, there isn't really the sort of cross-episode story arc that can make most TV programmes today difficult to pick up part way through.

Some episodes are better than others, but in general, I'd agree with producer Kenneth Johnson that this is the season in which they really found their stride. However, although it's not the only thing I'd agree with him on, I wouldn't recommend sitting through his commentary on the feature length season opener, nor even his 'Introduction' to the season, which are the sum total of the bonus features. As DVD extras go, I'd really rather they hadn't bothered. I was never a fan of the comic books, but Johnson's casual disdain for the origins of the Hulk is off-putting; moreover, the pseudo-intellectual self-congratulation is grating and, on the whole, underserved.

The commentary has the odd tidbit of interesting information, but I wouldn't sit through it unless you are writing a review. Sometimes I found myself agreeing that such-and-such was a good shot, with some subtle and interesting effects, but mostly it feels like an exercise in unjustified ego-stroking on Johnson's part. Perhaps the most disappointing thing is that he repeatedly mentions how they were always having such a good time on set – that there were some really excellent outtakes that they used to air at end of season parties. Wonderful! Sounds like those would have made *killer* extras – why couldn't you have included *them* instead?

But enough about that. It actually was a very good season, and the less than satisfactory commentary should not be allowed to detract from that. In fact, the feature length first episode ('Married') is a real gem. Unlike the over-long, slow paced pilot, this season opener makes excellent use of its one and a half hours. Money was clearly spent. Johnson complains that the 1.4 million they spent on the episode is nothing to what modern TV shows spend on a half hour presentation, but it wasn't an inconsiderable amount at the time. A good script is hung on a better plot with some really excellent acting to smooth over the awkward parts and bring the really good parts into somewhere rather special. A lot of credit is owed to Mariette Hartley's excellent portrayal of Dr Carolyn Fields. She earned every bit of the Emmy award she won for this role. And, unlike in the pilot, where his performance pales in comparison to his co-star, Bixby really rises to the challenge here.

They have the sort of on-screen chemistry that's a rare find and a joy to see, and which contributes much towards holding the dramatic tension and plausibility of the plot together. Dr Fields is one of many stunningly attractive women who somehow fall in love with Banner over the course of the show's run, and about whose spontaneous love it would be easy to feel sceptical. Don't get me wrong, Bixby isn't an ugly man, but he's no Edward Norton or Eric Banner. On the one hand, it's refreshing to have a leading man who isn't a stud-muffin. I like that we repeatedly see the nice guy getting some action, rather than the excessively good looking guy. But it has to be confessed that, for an average looking man, of reserved manner - and a drifter to boot – over the course of five years, Banner gets a remarkable amount of female attention. The nice thing about *this* episode is that they genuinely succeed in creating an emotional arc that makes sense. And with that in place, the other events follow more smoothly on.

Some of the effects are a bit cheesy, but they do explore some really interesting ideas. The less said about the echoey voice over employed in the hypnosis scenes, the better; but the depiction of the mental battle between Banner and the Hulk in the desert of Banner's mind is visually striking, and allows for the otherwise impossible, but fascinating, happenstance of Banner and the Hulk coming together in the same frame. They've also clearly worked on making the iconic shirt ripping, which results from Banner's transformation into the Hulk, more plausible. They never really succeed in making this look utterly convincing, but it does look somewhat less obviously like two guys tugging on the fabric somewhere out of shot. Then again, whoever thought lighting the Hulk's face from beneath would do anything but make him look like a kid with a flashlight under his chin was sorely mistaken. Similarly, I'm not sure if talk of 'Renegade

Indians' (Native Americans) and use of 'humourous' Chinese accents would go down quite as well in today's more politically correct world.

Dodgy effects and outdated language aside, 'Married' has a lot to recommend it, and it is only with great restraint that I find myself able to resist a scene by scene analysis, squeeing over my favourite moments, and discussing why some of these worked whilst others did not. However, this is not the only good episode of the season. On a more light-hearted note, 'Another Path' combines both an enjoyable romp that sees the Hulk fighting ninjas, and another interesting alternate route for Banner to explore in his quest to conquer his unusual problem, with the help of the Chinese philosopher Li Sung. (I like it better when Banner runs into trouble in the course of his search for a cure, rather than those cases where he is simply unfortunate enough to stumble upon it simply because of that well known condition: TV-show-protagonist-itus.)

Refreshingly, this season is also dotted with pleasing moments of continuity. So often, in *The Incredible Hulk*, Banner apparently abandons a potentially fruitful path simply because the episode it arose in came to an end. However, later in the season we see Banner return to Li Sung. In reality, this may have had more to do with the 'ZOMG - ninjas!' factor, but I enjoy the sense of continuity anyway.

The two parter, 'Mystery Man', is possibly my favourite *Hulk* storyline, though. The set up is, admittedly, utterly improbable. David inadvisably hitches a lift with a crazy lady who ends up crashing her car. She gets thrown free, but he's caught and cannot escape. There's a fuel leak, which is set alight. The pain and desperation of Banner's situation forces a transformation. The Hulk struggles free, but apparently feels the need to guarantee an impressive explosion, and so throws the car down the hill for good measure. He's partially caught in the blast, and stumbles away to collapse out of sight. (Somewhat surprisingly, it looks as though they *actually* set Lou Ferrigno *on fire* here.) Banner is found and taken to hospital. Thankfully, we see nothing more of the crazy lady, whose acting skills were not supreme.

All this attracts the attention of Jack McGee – not only has there been a Hulk sighting, but the hitch hiker who may have seen him had just come from Oklahoma City, the place the Hulk was last sighted. Unfortunately for McGee, when Banner wakes up, he has that old TV favourite: amnesia. His face is also conveniently wrapped in bandages, and his larynx has been bruised, so he speaks in a somewhat husky voice. Nicely done: McGee is completely excused for failing to recognise the man he believes to be dead. (Although, seriously, Jack, what reporter worth his salt fails to recognise that a drifter of the name David B-something-or-other is always to be found hanging around, or quickly departing from, Hulk sightings? Ah well...) However, the 'mystery man' (dubbed, unsurprisingly, 'John Doe'), finds something strangely familiar about McGee. Both men seize on the hope that they can be of use to each other, and they set off by plane to see a specialist in traumatic amnesia.

A storm blows up, and the plane crashes.

All this to engineer a situation where Jack McGee and David Banner can be alone with each other in the wilderness for (almost) a week, each effectively unaware of the other's true identity. (Maybe it's just me, but I can't help but feel that if this happened today, the internet would be a-splurge with fan-squee within minutes. Jack's quite a handsome man, David has Teh Angst, they have antag/protag tension... to the slash fic writer, it's a winning combination. Just saying.)

Whilst the set up might seem somewhat forced, though, I can't say I regret it. In an entirely non-slashy way, I have always loved the relationship between McGee and Banner, and I thoroughly enjoyed this unique opportunity to see it explored. Especially the extra colour that is given to McGee's character. John Colvin always played the role with a style and subtlety that went beyond the obsessive reporter determined to chase down the Hulk, and it's wonderful to see him get to fill that character out. I couldn't help but sympathise with the man; and I couldn't help but be frustrated with him. Similarly, Banner's dawning realisation of who and what he is, and of who his new friend really is to him, is a pleasure to see. The only drawback is the entirely artificial and unnecessary voice over that gives us Banner's inner thoughts on the matter – as if we couldn't read them on his face.

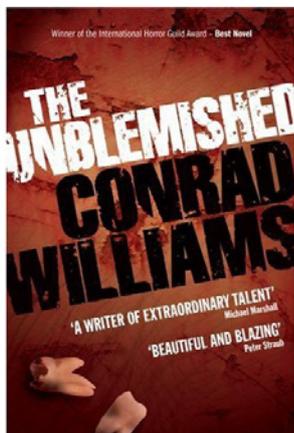
There are silly moments – one wonders if the wolves and the forest fire were *really* necessary – but I forgive them. To say much more would be to spoil a storyline that largely succeeds on tension. There are other episodes worthy of note (I especially recommend the one where McGee is given the run-around by a man claiming to be his 'John Doe'), but I'll leave them for you to discover. All in all, this is a well put together season, and I recommend it both to those looking to indulge in nostalgia, and those looking for a good place to start with this science fiction classic.

The Unblemished

reviewed by andrew edwards

by Conrad Williams
rnp £7.99

The Unblemished, by Conrad Williams, is a welcome addition to Horror fiction, and it is an assured



piece of work which deserves a high-ranking place among the best work of both fellow UK horror writers such as Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell and James Herbert and internationally acclaimed authors such as Joe Hill and Stephen King (Hill's father, incidentally). Manchester based Williams has built a reputation for himself as a prolific short story writer, and with this, his fourth published novel, he has surpassed himself with an effective, visceral narrative. *The Unblemished* is definitely worth taking a long, hard look at.

From the very start of the novel, Williams compels you to continue reading. He constructs a prologue which moves from a relationship going wrong to an unspeakable horrific disaster with deceptive ease and emotive, skilful writing. He structures the main body of the novel by adopting various narrative perspectives. The main narrative begins by focusing on Bo Mulvey, a disillusioned photographer who is approached by a "nut" in a pub. Mulvey decides to chat to this stranger, which is a decision that propels him on a mind-bending journey of horror and weirdness.

Williams also tells us about Sarah Hickman, who is protecting her daughter by going on the run from a debt collector called Mancer, who killed her husband. We come to discover that Mancer is an acolyte of a sinister serial killer and connoisseur of flesh called Gyorsi Salavaria. Mancer feeds Salavaria with fresh slices of flesh he is able to procure. How? By carving them from his own customised amputees, who he enjoys sexual congress with.

This is undoubtedly a horror novel of horrific proportions, and Williams is an effective writer of the sensationally grotesque and fantastic.

Williams does not compromise by shying away from the more graphic aspects of such ideas, and his choices of expression language and creation of tone are extremely effective; when reading, at times you have to physically pause to process the more disturbing sections of the novel, which can make you wince with voyeuristic glee. Williams revels in the more bizarre and disturbing concepts he allows himself to deal with, and a sense of perverse joy can be felt in his work – clearly, this is a writer who loves horror, and deserves to be read with care and due attention. *The Unblemished* is a British-based horror novel with world-class appeal.

FEATURES

Bleeding Words

Bleeding Words #2: Books Matter

by gary mcmahon

Books saved my life.

Now there's a bold sentence if ever there was one. You're probably thinking that I'm using more than a dash of literary licence or that the above statement is a deliberate exaggeration utilised for dramatic effect. But you'd be wrong. Books really did save my life.

Bear with me and I'll try not to keep you for too long. I know we all have stuff to do, places to go, day jobs to cling to for our very lives.

When I was thirteen or fourteen (my exact age at the time escapes me now, but the information isn't crucial for my purpose here) I was going through a Bad Time (oh, yes; those capitals are deliberate). The details aren't important, so I won't bore you with them, but suffice to say at the time my entire life felt pointless and I was convinced that I was useless. This was more than just a severe case of teen angst; I now recognise it as an early sign of the mild depression I've dealt with all my life.

Anyway, to get back to the point (if indeed there is one), one evening I found myself sitting on the edge of my bed with the blade of a fishing knife pressed against my wrist. I'm still not sure, even to this day, if I would actually have cut myself, but at the time I tried to come up with a reason – any reason – not to die.

So I sat and I thought and I struggled.

In the end, the only reason I could think of was: books.

As I looked around me, locked between the walls of my cramped little bedroom, and saw the spines of all the books sitting on my shelves and piled up on top of the wardrobe, I realised that if I were to die, I'd miss out on all the books I still wanted to read. That queue of unread volumes was like a line tethering me to the world, giving me a reason when I most needed one.

So I put down the knife.

See.

Books saved my life.

I tell you this not to shock or to show off that I can be oh-so candid and confessional in my writing, but as a crude and forthright attempt to illustrate the depth of feeling I have about this subject, to show you why I believe so much in the role of books and literature in our society, and in our lives. In my opinion (and in my experience), books are not simply important, they are fucking *vital*.

So whenever I read reports that tell me reading is dead, or that people are spending more time and money on computer games than books, part of me dies. When I find that hardly anyone I encounter during my normal waking life can talk about books, my soul crumples like a tin can hit by a rock. When I see kids spending their pocket money on increasingly tiny games consoles rather than paperbacks I shudder as if someone has just danced across my grave.

And it isn't just kids. This prose malaise stretches far beyond the young and effects even my generation. At work I'm often surrounded by people who never read, or who see reading as a chore. These people don't even recognise the titles of great books and the authors who created them. Recently I was discussing William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* with a colleague, and she'd never heard of it until she saw it on one of those Guardian or Telegraph "Best 100 Books" lists (which, God bless her, she's decided to work her way through because she feels that she should read at least some of the recognised classics).

She'd never heard of a book whose title has actually entered popular culture and the English language to describe a certain situation, a certain group mentality.

Just take a moment to imagine this: think of your life without Shakespeare or Dickens or Graham Greene. Think of a world where *Great Expectations*, *Brighton Rock* and *Hamlet* had never been written.

That's *their* world: the ones who never read, and who have never read; the ones who see reading as a chore. Their minds are bereft of Romeo's great love for Juliet, of Jacob Marley's ghost and his terrible message, and of Orwell's timeless symbol of a boot stamping on an upturned face forever...

I present for you a few terrifying statistics, gleaned from just a quick scan of the Web:

- English children's literacy levels are among the worst in the developed world
- Almost one in six children are unable to write their own name or say the alphabet when they start school
- About seven million British adults are unable to read, write or add up to the level they would need to communicate clearly in the everyday world

I could go on, but I won't. Because of where this article will be published and that publication's target audience, I'd like to guess that I'm already preaching to the converted. We all read; we make sure that our children read. We know the score when it comes to words and the vessels which contain them.

But what of the others, the ones who don't read, who never read, because it's a chore?

When I think of the future counterpart of that thirteen or fourteen year old me, sitting on his bed and looking for a reason not to cut, a single hint of daylight in the darkness of his world...when I see him there, with his empty shelves and his Kindle or his Sony Reader resting on the floor at his feet, I despair that he might not find that reason. That he might just use the fishing knife. Instead of finding a reason to go on, he might see there, in that place devoid of the printed word, a reason to prematurely close the covers on the book of his life.

I reach out to him, that child, but only through my words, which he will never see on the page anyway because he no longer knows what a page is or what it looks and feels and smells like.

Books saved my life.



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