

# CONTENTS

## SUMMARY

STORY SYNOPSIS

THE PROPERTY

"DR. DESPAIR": JAMES ARMSTRONG

THE DIRECTOR: ROY KNYRIM

THE PRODUCER: ERIC MILLER

THE WRITERS: RANDY & JEAN-MARC LOFFICIER

THE AUTHOR: MARC AGAPIT

THE MUSIC: MANUEL STAGARS

THE SPECIAL MAKE-UP EFFECTS: SOTA FX

THE BUDGET (SUMMARY)

THE MARKETING

ANCILLARY RIGHTS

## EXHIBITS

CHAIN OF TITLE

THE BUDGET (DETAILED)

RESUMES:

- JAMES ARMSTRONG

- ROY KNYRIM

- ERIC MILLER

- RANDY LOFFICIER

THE SCREENPLAY

SEQUENCE STORYBOARDS by SYLVAIN DESPRETZ

THE COMIC BOOK (PAGES 1-14)

THE SEQUEL

INTERVIEW WITH MARC AGAPIT

## SUMMARY

Despair is the first in a series of planned high quality, low-budget, ground-breaking horror features, put together by a talented and highly experienced crew of individuals who have all worked in genre films for well over a decade, and whose diverse credits include films such as Spawn, Gods and Monsters, Toxic Avenger, The Abyss, Skinner, etc.

Our policy has been to start with a strong story, in this instance a classic European horror novel adapted into a powerful script, which Horror Writers of America charter member Stephen R. Bissette (Swamp Thing) compared to "Misery on speed."

The strength and quality of our package was enough to attract two rising international stars: James Armstrong, an award-winning Australian actor with numerous film and television credits, to play the lead, and Manuel Stagers, a famed European composer, to write the music.

The contemplated budget has been kept to a minimum thanks to the creative contribution of the talent involved: \$760,000, a figure which ensures quality, while at the same time virtually guarantees the investor(s) a return on their investment.

Significantly, the commercial value of the elements assembled in this package has enabled the producers to secure a distribution agreement with a well-known, established international distributor, Fries Entertainment, a company with a long history of feature production and distribution, thus ensuring that the film will be sold and will make money for its backers.

Finally, a unique marketing and ancillary rights program, including sales of music CDs, a novelization and a comic book adaptation, has been put together, and is ready to go to market upon release of the picture.

At a time when stocks are tumbling, investing in tangible assets such as real estate and films is increasingly attractive. The value of horror films only appreciates over time, and in fact, has been shown to thrive during recessions, as people find refuge in pure escapist entertainment.

We strongly believe that Despair and its sequels are unique investment opportunities, delivering quality entertainment at low-budget prices.

## STORY SYNOPSIS

A man named Jackson meets a friend who tells him that a fortune-teller has (seemingly accurately) predicted a wonderful future for him. The unbelieving Jackson dismisses the predictions, stating that his friend could just as readily be hit by a truck. Which is exactly what happens after the friend walks out in the street.

A furious Jackson goes to see the fortune-teller to berate her, but she already knew of his friend's fate and confesses that she lied to him to make his last hours happy ones. She then offers to read Jackson's future. What she sees stupefies them both: none of this is real. It's all a dream Jackson is having. His subconscious is trying to warn him, because he's fallen asleep at the wheel of a car while driving to meet his lover!

The car crashes. Jackson survives, but finds himself on a dark, lonely country road.

Stumbling along, he finds a private clinic where he thinks he can get help. He blacks out and, when he awakens, finds himself strapped on an operating table, at the mercy of the clinic's lunatic owner, the terrifying Doctor Despair.

A climate of surreal terror sets in as Despair claims to hate Jackson because his lover is also Despair's head nurse and girl friend. With sadistic pleasure, Despair mutilates the helpless Jackson by blinding him, cutting out his tongue, then performing brain surgery to alter his memories. But when Jackson wakes up again, he learns that his mutilations are the result of the deadly car crash, his partial amnesia is post-traumatic shock, and that the kindly Doctor Despair actually saved his life. Or did he?...

As Jackson is introduced to the other, deformed and disturbed residents of the clinic, he starts to suspect that the earlier scenes of horror were very real, that Dr. Despair is truly mad and that he is using him as a pawn in a demented scheme of revenge against his wife, Helen, who once betrayed him. No one knows what Dr. Despair's plan is, other than that it is truly abominable and will do worse to Helen than merely kill her.

As per Dr. Despair's plan, Jackson slowly falls in love with Helen -- something that will make her agony even more unendurable. He desperately tries to divine what monstrous scheme the Doctor has hatched that will result in Helen's doom, but in Dr. Despair's asylum, no one is ever sure of what is a lie and what is the awful truth.

Ultimately, Dr. Despair succeeds in carrying out his ghastly scheme. Jackson gets his revenge and kills Dr. Despair. But the story is far from over as Jackson still has to discover who he really is, and understand the true meaning behind the abominable events that have taken place in Dr. Despair's clinic...

## THE PROPERTY

Despair is based on a classic 1959 French horror novel, "La Bête Immonde" by Marc Agapit. The title translates as "The Awful Beast" and refers to jealousy, that green-eyed monster, that gnawing cancer of the heart that can destroy a man's soul.

The publisher of "The Awful Beast" is Editions Fleuve Noir, a fifty-year-old division of the Presses De La Cité group, the second largest publishing company in France. Fleuve Noir was established in September, 1951, by publisher Marc de Caro, and specialized in popular "pulp" paperback imprints, such as police thrillers, espionage novels, war stories, science fiction, and horror. Its horror imprint, dubbed "Angoisse" (*Anguish*) was begun in 1954, and continued monthly until 1974, publishing a total of 261 volumes, a feat probably unique in the annals of horror literature.

Among its top authors were Kurt Steiner, B.R. Bruss, Marc Agapit, and renowned film writer Jean-Claude Carrière (The Discreet Charm Of the Bougeoisie, The Tin Drum, The Unbearable Lightness Of Being). It also published French translations of major international authors such as Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke.

Fleuve Noir was taken over by the giant publishing group, Presses de la Cité, in 1966, and increased its output, as well as diversified into comics and other fields.

The works of Marc Agapit are considered classics of French horror literature. Twelve of his most successful novels -- including "La Bête Immonde" -- were adapted into a series of graphic novels entitled "Hallucinations" published by Presses de la Cité in the early 1970s. His books were reprinted in new editions in the late 1970s. An "omnibus" edition of several of his best novels -- again including "La Bête Immonde" -- was released in 1997.

# DESPAIR

## THE NOVEL



ORIGINAL BOOK COVERS

FIRST EDITION (1959) (left) - OMNIBUS REPRINT (1997) (right)

## **"DR. DESPAIR": JAMES ARMSTRONG**

James Armstrong was born in Melbourne, Australia, and raised on the West Coast in Perth. From an early age, James had a passion for drama and film, spending many weekends making short films while still at high school. James was accepted into the exclusive Directing Course at the Curtin University Film School, and was also invited to study Acting with renowned actress and teacher, Barbara Dennis, at the acclaimed Curtin University School of Dramatic Arts. Unable to choose, he decided to do both, graduating from Curtin with a Bachelor of Arts, double majoring in Theatre and Film.

After University, James hitchhiked around the world, traveling through 26 countries on five continents. A year and a half later, he returned to Perth and pursued his acting career. He starred in many local productions for the Blue Room and The Subiaco Theatre, before moving to Sydney. James soon landed the lead role of 'Squealer' for the Iron Cove Theatre production of "Animal Farm". After rave reviews, he was invited to join the company, and became a regular cast member for several years, starring in productions of "Much Ado About Nothing", and "Les Liaisons Dangereuses". He also commenced his Master of Arts degree at the University of New South Wales.

Over the next few years his film and television acting career took off, landing plumb roles in "Undying", "Mercury", "Halifax FP", "Denton", "Good Guys Bad Guys", "Exile", "Big Sky". While Film and TV commitments occupied most of his time, he continued to accept lead roles in theatre, starring in "Bouncers", "King Lear", "Away", "Convict Streak", and "Seeing Things" among others.

While working consistently as an actor, James also pursued his career as a director. In 1992, he founded Armstrong Productions, which focused primarily on live events. In 1997, James built Studio Net Australia, and diversified into all facets of media production. From websites to music clips, from fashion parades to documentaries, from live events to film, James applied his creative expertise as a Director, Producer, Writer and Editor to many productions for media, corporate, and broadcast clients. He developed many of his own projects, including the feature documentary, "The Fringe", and the comedy film "Loserhead's Date", for which James won Best Comedy Actor at both the Buzz Film Festival and the Independent Filmmaker Awards. "Loserhead" then became a series on The Comedy Channel under James' direction.



**James Armstrong**

<http://www.cybamedia.com/>

Best Comedy Actor, Buzz Film Festival, 1999  
Best Comedy Actor, Independent Filmmaker Awards, 1999  
Best Actor, Western Australian Film Festival, 1988

Of James Armstrong's popularity, Tom Horton, the director of Television at Saatchi & Saatchi, one of England's largest entertainment production facilities, says: "*He is in constant demand in Australia, and it is no wonder the international industry is sitting up and taking notice.*"

Of his character, award-winning film and television Australian actor, Steve Adams, writes: "*Everyone who has worked with this actor has carried that experience with them into other productions and as a result, the bar has been raised and our industry is all the richer for it.*"

Of his career, John Eastway, the executive producer of Denton and a multiple Australian Film Institute Award winner, notes: "*James went on to enjoy a very successful career. . . and is now considered one of the best actors in Australia.*"

Of his talent, Simon Baldock veteran director/producer of network television in Australia (Channel 10) writes: "*In all my years of entertainment I have never seen such an outstanding talent as James Armstrong.*"

## THE DIRECTOR

### ROY KNYRIM

Born and raised in Rochester, NY, Roy Knyrim was always interested in film making and special effects. From an early age he utilized his parents Super 8 movie camera to make his own movies, which coincidentally enough, contained a lot of special effects. After graduating from Hilton Central High School in 1985, Roy worked with Rochester effects artist Pat Tantalo on some key make up effects scenes for the DeLaurentiis production, Slugs, which had come to film on location in upstate New York.

After this first professional experience, he went to New York City where he created all the gory effects for the second and third Toxic Avenger films. Having felt he had accomplished all he could on the east coast, he relocated to Southern California where he founded SOTA F/X along with partner Jerry Macaluso. For the last 12 years he has worked on hundreds of productions, some of which are: The Abyss, Ed Wood, Weird Science, Gods And Monsters, and The Profiler television series.

Having achieved success in the special effects industry Roy was eager to try creating his own shows. In 1999 he created Matthew Blackheart: Monster Smasher, which was sold to the Sci Fi Channel. In fall of 2001, Roy directed Demons At The Door, his first full length theatrical feature. Since then, Roy has also directed three music videos for Psychopathic Records featuring Insane Clown Posse, and a 30-second national spot.

Currently Roy still runs SOTA F/X out of their facility in Van Nuys and continues to develop film and television projects.

## THE PRODUCER

### ERIC MILLER

Eric Miller earned a Bachelor of Science degree in telecommunications from Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, in 1989.

Eric first worked in the industry as Director of Development for two years for Max Pix Inc., before becoming a screenwriter and a producer. As a writer, Eric co-wrote the 1997 sci-fi cult classic The Shadow Men, starring Eric Roberts and Sherilynn Fenn, and the pilot for Jack Armstrong, All-American Boy, a made-for-television comedy.

In the field of film production, Eric first assisted producers and directors on the Puppet Master and Trancers horror film franchises, before becoming a full-blown Producer, Line Producer and Production Supervisor. His producing credits now include over two dozen films in the low-budget genre arena, including Deep Freeze, Beanstalk, Demons at the Door, Beach Babes From Beyond, etc., and numerous television programs and commercials.

Eric is also a professional video camera operator, has grip, lighting, art department and editing experience on both film and video, has supervised transportation and location for numerous low-budget productions (including many shot in Mexico and Eastern Europe), and he is in good standing with entertainment industry bond companies. All of these skills are essential in the smooth running and management of a low-budget production such as Despair.

## THE WRITERS

### RANDY & JEAN-MARC LOFFICIER

Randy & Jean-Marc Lofficier have been a professional writing team since 1980, first covering the Hollywood scene for a variety of American and foreign cinema magazines, including American Cinematographer, Cinefex, and Starlog.

Randy and Jean-Marc have written animation scripts for The Real Ghostbusters (Columbia), Duck Tales (Disney), Bionic Six (Universal), Clash of the Super-Powers (Hanna-Barbera), and numerous other animated series. They have also written and sold three live-action screenplays, Mayday (a French low-budget horror feature), Game Over (a sci-fi action thriller), and Arzach, based on Moebius' classic graphic novel. They also sold one animated feature, The Airtight Garage, also based on a Moebius graphic novel, which became the basis for Sony's Metreon Entertainment Centers in San Francisco and Tokyo. Randy worked with Pioneer and Kurosawa to produce a made-in-Japan animated feature, Virtual Meltdown, and had a Saturday Morning series in development at ABC.

Randy & Jean-Marc have published two fantasy novels, and written numerous comic books, including Tongue\*Lash, Robur, Superman's Metropolis, Batman-Nosferatu, Clive Barker's Hellraiser, etc. They won the 1990 Inkpot Award for outstanding achievement in comic arts.

Jean-Marc is the author of a dozen media books such as The Doctor Who Programme Guide and Into The Twilight Zone, two genre anthologies, and an 800-page encyclopedia of French science fiction, fantasy and horror.

## THE AUTHOR

### MARC AGAPIT

Adrien Sobra (1897-1985), a French English teacher, was a mainstream novelist who had published a few novels and thrillers before turning to writing popular horror fiction under the pseudonym of "Marc Agapit" in the 1950s and 1960s. As Agapit, Sobra wrote forty-three novels for the popular horror imprint of Editions Fleuve Noir, one of the largest French publishers, and quickly became one of their best-selling and most acclaimed authors.

Agapit used the supernatural sparsely, his catalog of horrors being somewhat more akin to a Ruth Rendell story rewritten by the Grand-Guignol. He delighted in throwing a light on the perversity of the human soul, showing sordid, lonely, ordinary people ravaged by time, slowly sinking into madness. His heroes often came from cursed families. They exhibited an unhealthy sexuality, and may even have been afflicted with physical handicaps, such as the doomed protagonist of "La Bête Immonde" (1959), now the basis for the motion picture Despair, whose tragic hero is blind.

Agapit's protagonists were sometimes young boys who became natural prey for evil females, or innocently trafficked with the most monstrous, unnatural creatures, as in his classic "Grefte Mortelle" (1958), which was praised by Jean Cocteau, the renowned author of the immortal Beauty and the Beast.

## THE MUSIC

### MANUEL STAGARS

Manuel Stagars was educated and trained in Switzerland. He began his musical career at the age of 8. He received a classical musical education in composition and interpretation with noted pianist Stephen Bader and was awarded the Musikpreis 1st Prize for piano performance in 1989. Soon his musical career skyrocketed and he has been solely engaged in the business and art of music composition since 1996. In addition to concert composition, scoring and songwriting for the most established and famous figures in Europe, Manuel has a successful commercial music business in Zurich, Audiobox, through which he composes and records music for music labels, film production houses and advertising agencies.

Through Audiobox, Manuel has composed commercial music for many companies such as Deutsche Bank, Compaq Computer, Swatch, and Swisscom. Manuel has authored over one hundred original compositions for concert, television, commercials, and films, from chamber music to pop songs. His work has been performed live and broadcast on radio. He has composed and exhibited his music at such well-known music venues as the Rohstofflager in Zurich and La Biennale in Venice. Manuel was the selected composer to provide underscore to the science fiction-themed exhibition, "Space-A Dream" for Zurich Winter 2001. He has been nominated for art and music prizes and was the winner of such national awards as the Swiss Federal Art Prize in 1999 and 2000, and the Buro Art Prize in 2000.

Manuel's credits include film scores and theatre music, television series and live musical productions. Recent projects include composing for primetime Swiss television programming, composing the music for several European motion pictures, C -Files: Tell Saga, Sky High and Enchanted Evening. Manuel has now been retained to do a variety of music composition work in the United States, including, concert commission work, composing for television projects, website music composition, videos, and film.

## THE SPECIAL MAKE-UP EFFECTS

### SOTA F/X

SOTA F/X is a special effects company based in Van Nuys, California, specializing in Special Make-up Effects, Animatronics, Prosthetics, and Creature Effects for film, television, commercials, and music videos.

Founded in 1990, SOTA F/X has consistently created high quality creatures and effects for projects ranging from Spawn to the Emmy award winning Earth-2, from Ed Wood to Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers. SOTA's credits include such films as the Wishmaster series, Jack Frost, Prophecy 2 and 3, the Children of the Corn series, Indian in the Cupboard, The Howling, Darkman, The Abyss, Toxic Avenger, etc.

SOTA F/X was nominated for an Academy Award ("Oscar") for its work in duplicating Jack Pierce's famous Frankenstein Monster make-up for the 1998 film Gods and Monsters.

In 1995, SOTA built and animated 28 motion-control aliens for the CD-ROM game Star Control 3 -- a revolutionary approach to character creation for the game industry.

SOTA engineered a new silicone formula for prosthetics which they used to miraculously age David Schwimmer 30 years in HBO Pictures The Breast Men. SOTA's television credits also include make-up effects for NBC's Profiler and Pretender series, Universal's Earth-2, Babylon-5 and Son of the Beach.

Additionally, SOTA has contributed to a variety of commercials, music videos, even theme parks.

**THE BUDGET**

The budget for Despair is based on a 15 days shoot, 3-5 days week, SAG low budget rates, 16mm film stock, and a non-union crew. It can be summarized as follows:

(US\$)

Above the Line		
• Producers	30,000	
• Director	10,000	
• Rights/Script	50,000	
• Casting Director	10,000	
• Lead Actors	114,030	
• Other Actors, Misc.	51,965	
Total Above the Line	265,995	
Production	65,274	
Camera, Sound, Grip & Lighting	68,717	
Makeup & Wardrobe	23,918	
Art & Props	35,619	
Special Effects, Post Sound, Editing	70,000	
Location, Transportation, Catering	142,542	
Film, Lab & Post	18,924	
Total		690,989
10% contingency		69,098
Total Budget		760,087

## THE MARKETING

The success of horror films no longer needs to be proven. A good deal of that success can be attributed to the fact that the genre is well received by a core audience of dedicated horror fans, who will repeatedly support those films which they respect. These pictures were able to break through that audience, and reach a lucrative cult status, because of good word-of-mouth spread by the same loyal fans.

Despair is invested with the same imagery and concepts that have propelled all successful horror pictures. It has the gut-wrenching quality of Texas Chainsaw Massacre and the surreal imagery of Nightmare on Elm Street.

Because the horror community is familiar with certain names, the production will generate enormous publicity before the film is even released, by obtaining endorsements from:

-- Stephen R. Bisette, co-creator of Swamp Thing, publisher of From Hell, member of the Horror writers Of America, has already labelled Despair, "Misery on speed."

-- Clive Barker, writer and film-maker, author of Hellraiser, Nightbreed -- the writers of Despair wrote for the Hellraiser comics and can obtain a positive quote from Mr. Barker.

Intelligent marketing aimed at the cult audience will enhance this perception of Despair as a ground-breaking feature, including:

-- articles in Fangoria, America's #1 horror magazine, read by all serious fans and professionals alike -- the writers of Despair write book reviews for Fangoria's sister publication, Starlog, and should be able to secure excellent coverage in this vital publication.

-- access to a rare French interview with the late Marc Agapit.

Horror fans will not only pay to see the film in theaters, but will also rent, and since it is a collectors' market, buy the film on video and DVD. To capitalize on this behavior pattern, a "special edition" of the film, containing promotional storyboard art drawn by Sylvain Despretz, Ridley Scott's assistant and storyboard artist on the Oscar-winning Gladiator and Blackhawk Down, will be released.

In addition, Despair will also appeal to the rock music market, which parallels the intended horror audience. An appropriate sound track will help broaden the marketing base of the film, and generate additional publicity through cross-promotion of the music and music videos, which will use the film's terrifying visuals.

## ANCILLARY RIGHTS

Any analysis of a film project like Despair should not fail to take into account the upside potential for revenues in the exploitation of ancillary rights, more specifically:

- (i) the novel by Marc Agapit;
- (ii) the comic book adaptation;
- (iii) the possibility of sequels, using other Marc Agapit books as springboards.

Horror novels and horror comics are at the forefront of the expanding American popular entertainment market. Horror novels regularly break through on the bestseller lists, and comic book "graphic novels", priced anywhere between \$6 and \$15, have become a staple in the marketplace. The recent box office hit The Road to Perdition was based on a graphic novel, and the success of the film, in turn, boosted the sales of the graphic novel. Other recent successful pictures based on serious graphic novels include Ghost World and From Hell.

The producers of Despair have the option of licensing the publication of both the original Marc Agapit novel, and of a French graphic novel adaptation published in 1970, thereby increasing both the awareness of the product, as well as generating additional income from products with a long shelf-life.

With respect to a sequel, the producers have already started work on a story treatment entitled Despair 2: Alice's Story, based on another Marc Agapit novel, which tells the story of what happens to the character of Alice after the end of the first film. Alice's Story is another chilling Agapit story, with numerous horrific twists and that nightmarish sense of the surreal that is characteristic of his novels. Production on Despair 2: Alice's Story could begin immediately upon completion of Despair.

**THE SCREENPLAY**

# DESPAIR

screenplay by Randy & Jean-Marc Lofficier

based on the novel "La Bête Immonde" by Marc Agapit

## SEQUENCE STORYBOARDS

by Sylvain DESPRETZ

Sylvain Despretz is a renowned storyboard artist and production designer who has worked with Ridley Scott on Gladiator and Blackhawk Down, with Tim Burton on the aborted Superman Reborn and the remake of Planet of the Apes, with Jean-Pierre Jeunet on Alien Resurrection and with Luc Besson on The Fifth Element. His other recent credits include Stanley Kubrick's Eyes Wide Shut, David Fincher's Panic Room and Walter Hills's Supernova.

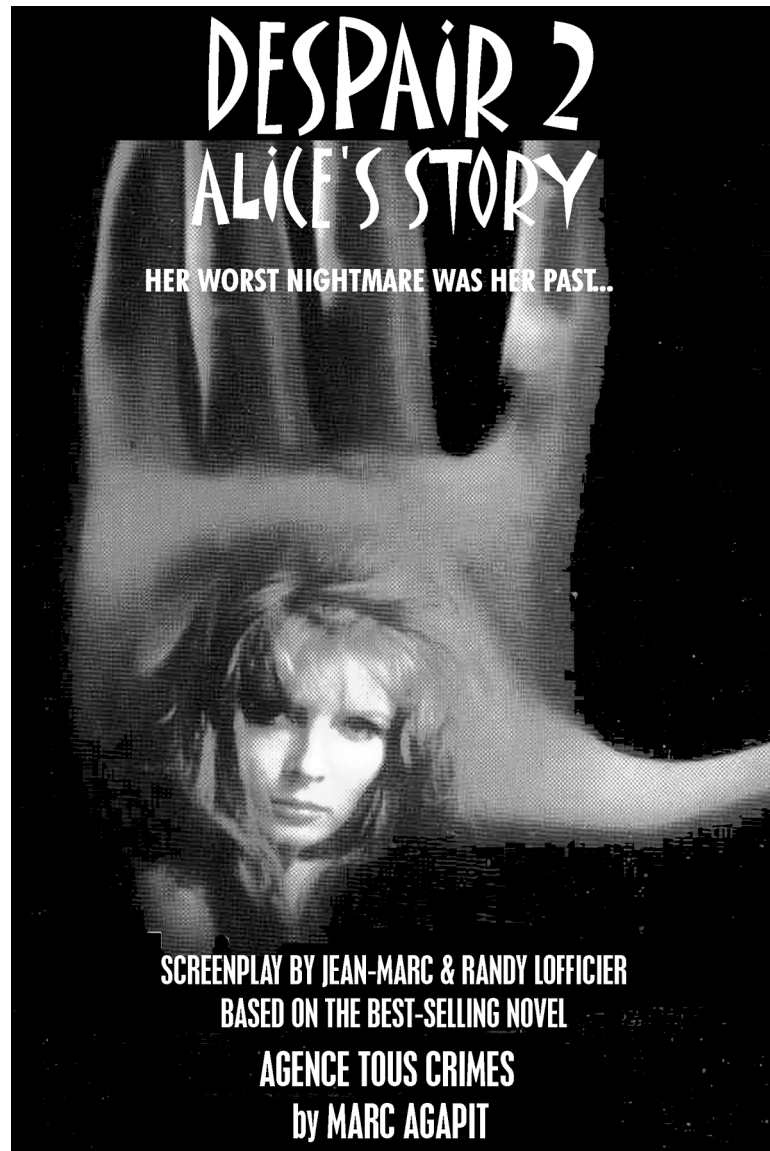
At the onset of the development of Despair, Sylvain took time out of his busy schedule to create a series of "mood" storyboards illustrating the film's stunning opening sequence, and providing a horrifying, yet fascinating, insight into the gloomy and creepy world of the clinic of the maniacal Doctor Despair...



## THE SEQUEL

### DESPAIR 2: ALICE'S STORY

This is the initial promotional poster for Despair 2: Alice's Story, which follows the life of Alice, the film's protagonist's girlfriend, after the horrible events of Despair. Alice's Story is based on "Agence Tous Crimes" (*The All-Crime Agency*), another stunning novel of surreal horror and the macabre by Marc Agapit.



## INTERVIEW WITH MARC AGAPIT

by George NAHON

(Originally published in French in *Horizons du Fantastique* No. 13, 1970; translated by Randy Lofficier.)

**QUESTION:** What does the term "horror novel" mean to you?

**AGAPIT:** A horror novel is like any other adventure novel -- a mystery, a thriller, even a science fiction novel. The spirit of Fleuve Noir's "Angoisse" [terror] imprint demands that the adventure elements be mixed with a certain amount of mystery, weirdness, or fantasy. It can even be tinged with a little bit of gore, but not too much.

**Q:** How did you start writing horror novels?

**AGAPIT:** I suppose I always liked the genre. I had written some short stories before that were more or less fantasies, but then one day I decided to burn them all. Then, I saw the "Angoisse" books published by Fleuve Noir, and they interested me -- I became especially fond of Kurt Steiner's work. So I began to rework most of the ideas that I'd played with in those old stories. Although the fire had turned them to ash, a good number of these had remained well implanted in my memory. So in the end, I was able to rework them and give them an added, new dimension, that of novels.

I know that you really liked my book Opéra de la Mort (*Opera of Death*). When it came out, a film director thought it was very cinematic in its treatment. One of its most poetic passages was, in fact, a literal excerpt from one of my old stories that I turned into that novel. Originally, the young Japanese girl's name in that book was "Mo-Ma-Mi." A proof reader decided that that word wasn't any good and replaced it twenty times with "Monami," which made it lose its Japanese sound and made it sound like "mon ami" (*my friend*).

That reminds me of an anecdote: an old writer friend of mine bitterly complained to me that four times in his latest novel, a proof reader replaced an uncommon word with a more banal one, thinking that he, the author, had made a mistake! I forget now what they were. But, suppose that a proof reader had replaced "Ciron" (a Greek classic) in my novel Les Santons du Diable (*The Devil's Nativity*) with "Citron" (*lemon*), I would have been furious!

**Q:** How do you approach the writing of a new novel?

**AGAPIT:** The important thing, of course, is finding the subject. Then, if it really captures my interest, you could say that the book writes itself. I don't follow any particular methods or rules. It seems to me that I only have to lock into a credible dramatic plot, and then add some supernatural elements, more or less artificially, because I have a natural bent towards that sort of thing. I also try to respect the spirit of the imprint for which I write; if I add a little humor into my novels -- something which you've probably noticed -- it's usually involuntary, if not subconscious.

Q: What are your favorite themes?

**AGAPIT:** I don't think I have any. I find the themes I use according to the needs of a specific novel. All of the classic genre themes, like the Devil, vampires, ghouls, evil creatures, etc. are, and remain, eternal. Some of my themes firmly belong to the tradition of classic horror, like the shambling monsters from Les Santons du Diable, the necrophiliac from L'Appel de l'Abîme (*The Call of the Abyss*), and the serpent woman from La Guivre.

But I've tried to expand on other themes, from completely different sources. For example, I used Oedipus as a source of inspiration for Piège Infernal (*The Hell Trap*). L'Île Magique (*The Magic Island*) is a personal adaptation, or rather a reworking, of Shakespeare's famous play The Tempest. I remained faithful to his characters: the two demons Ariel and Caliban are there, but my epilog, in contrast to his play, is particularly tragic.

In Les Yeux Braqués (*The Staring Eyes*), I was inspired by the Frankenstein theme; in Monsieur Personne (*Mister Nobody*), by that of the Wandering Jew. One of my novels, La Nuit du Minotaure (*The Night of the Minotaur*) is partly inspired by Greek mythology. I should also mention that my other subjects of inspiration are death, reincarnation, love, passion, remorse, resentment, hate, revenge, jealousy, curses, persecution, mental cruelty -- really, all the sins of Mankind one can imagine; certainly the cruelest and most vile! All of these themes serve as the basic canvas that always underlies all of my works. And, as I said, I'm not even really aware of doing it deliberately. I've simply tried, within the framework of the horror novel, to revisit certain themes with a fresh eye and, as much as possible, give them a new, original spin.

Q: How do you create your characters?

**AGAPIT:** Sometimes, I create them as the need arises for the story that I want to tell, but most often, I create the story around a character that already exists in my mind. Sometimes, both the story and the characters are created together in my mind, without me being consciously aware of the process. At the end of the day, I suppose it's the same for every writer.

Q: Are your characters monsters?

**AGAPIT:** There is always at least one major character in each of my novels who is strongly portrayed as a monster. But one could really say the same thing about a number of characters that we meet in mainstream literature. In my opinion -- if I can be so bold to attempt such a comparison -- Molière's Miser and Balzac's Père Goriot are monsters, that is if one looks at them from a certain angle. Yet, Molière and Balzac are part of our classic literary tradition.

Q: Young children are always portrayed as sympathetic characters in your novels. For instance, I'm thinking of Octave, the young ghost with gentle thoughts in Greffe Mortelle (*Deadly Transplant*).

**AGAPIT:** Of course, my horror novels are filled with sympathetic characters! But you're right; it's often young children who fulfill this role. Why not? They contrast with other characters that have more dramatic parts to play. Besides, I've always instinctively tried to introduce a human factor you can empathize with in even the most fantastic of my works.

Q: Some of your characters are deeply misogynistic. The heroine of L'École des Monstres (*The School of Monsters*), a work with no fantasy elements, is typical of that vein.

**AGAPIT:** Yes, L'École des Monstres is not really fantasy... The strangeness of its atmosphere comes from the description of this sinister, run-down house, filled with a deep, suffocating

atmosphere of hatred, where the story is narrated in the first-person by that rapacious, old woman...

It's true that that novel paints a rather grim picture of a matriarchy. But I don't think of it as misogynistic in principle. My characters have to be caricaturally grotesque, excessive versions of themselves in order to contrast them with reality; it's what makes the book work as a horror novel, even though it contains no fantasy elements. Besides, the reader has the right to interpret it as he or she wishes. For example, you told me that you found certain passages of L'Ile Magique erotic, and yet I can tell you that nothing of the sort was intended!

**Q:** Would you say that psychoanalysis is a source of inspiration for you? In particular, I'm referring to the dual natures of the characters that you used in La Bête Immonde (*The Awful Beast*, a.k.a. *Despair*), Les Yeux Braqués, and L'Ile Magique.

**AGAPIT:** Not particularly. The only thing I try to do is offer the reader an extraordinary tale, using basic logic and pushing the characters to the extreme limits of their own insanity. I don't have a particular liking for dual personality stories. It's a theme just like any other.

**Q:** What about black humor?

**AGAPIT:** Yes, that is present in most of my works, especially in Puzzle Macabre. In that case, the subject easily lent itself to its use. It's the story of a man who lost his head!

You can also find some humor in Parade des Morts-Vivants (*Parade of the Living Dead*), which I conceived as a playful variation on the hoary myth of the haunted castle. I quite like black humor, but I don't systematically try to inject it in my books. It has to be almost unconscious and done very subtly to really work well.

**Q:** Tell us about the apocalyptic universe that serves as a background for Nuits Rouges (*Red Nights*).

**AGAPIT:** There's nothing particularly remarkable about the world of Nuits Rouges. I'm not the one who invented Satan, Hell and all its familiar demons. I'm also not the one who invented horror; it has existed for thousands of years. When one embarks upon a horror novel, it's important to make use of those archetypal elements that have always been with us.

I did have a problem with Nuits Rouges. One scene dealt with a vaguely homosexual scene -- a kiss exchanged between two boys. The publisher made me change it. They thought it was some kind of sinister attempt to undermine morality or something like that. So I rewrote that part while trying to remain faithful to my original idea.

**Q:** Some critics berate you for what they see as too much gore or graphic horror in your novels. For example, Complexes (*Complexes*) and La Ville Hallucinante (*The City of Hallucinations*). Can you explain your taste for the "grand guignol"?

**AGAPIT:** A horror novel, in my opinion, must contain elements that are truly horrifying. This feeling of horror, the thrill of fear, of terror, has to be visceral, at least within the context of a popular genre novel.

You say that some complained that Complexes had too much horror? Yet, the magazine Fiction (French edition of F & SF) praised me for the believability of its characters. At any rate, the story wasn't any more monstrous than some of the things one reads in the tabloids. As to La Ville Hallucinante, the action takes place in Hell, so you have to expect some scenes of pure horror.

Q: In your novels, do you genuinely try to terrify your readers?

**AGAPIT:** Actually, not at all. Fear is like happiness. Someone once said that one must not look for it in order to find it.

Q: Tell s about La Goule (*The Ghoul*), your most recent book.

**AGAPIT:** It deals with a sort of vampirism that I would call "cerebral," because everything happens in the hero's mind. It eventually ends in madness, with some erotic moments throughout. The Song of Songs from the Bible plays the role of a catalyst.

Q: What are your favorite books?

**AGAPIT:** The first two that I wrote, about twelve years ago, Agence Tous Crimes (*All-Crime Agency*) and Greffe Mortelle. The latter was so powerful that Jean Cocteau himself wrote an elegiac letter to my publisher. My fans generally prefer Agence Tous Crimes, but real horror *connoisseurs* prefer the second one.