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From 1965 to 1988, Andy Milligan made an astounding 29 exploitation movies, including "Gutter Trash," "Torture Dungeon," "The Ghastly Ones," "Seeds," "Bloodthirsty Butchers," and "Fleshpot on 42nd Street." For most of the shlockmeisters, exploitation was a joke. But fo

The Ghastly One: The Sex-Gore Netherworld of Filmmaker Andy Milligan Details

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From Reader Review *The Ghastly One: The Sex-Gore Netherworld* of Filmmaker Andy Milligan for online ebook

Ben says

I've never seen any of Andy Milligan's films, though I've read about them previously. The majority of them were shot for \$10,000-15,000 and played largely in Times Square grindhouses (an overused term at these days but appropriate). I understand that the ones that survived (half are believed destroyed) are pretty difficult to watch. I still want to see some of them.

As for the book itself: I must admit I got hooked into it. I wasn't sure at first; I wasn't fond of the author placing himself into the narrative and writing in the first person. Over the length of the book it makes more sense, due to his personal involvement in Andy's life. The author does make nearly constant use of footnotes for sidebar commentary, which I always found to be annoying. A better author might have been able to work those things into the narrative a little more effectively.

The book is at its best early in the text, when the author makes a surprisingly detailed description of the Caffe Cino, one of the original homes of off-off-(off-) Broadway plays in the early 60s. Andy becomes one of the directors for the 8x8's stage, where his particular brand of intensity and his obsessions become apparent.

Milligan was quite the character: he was a gay man who hated nearly all women and most gay men. He was a sadist, both on and off set. He surrounded himself with a nearly-equally odd group of cohorts, one of whom later went on to bomb abortion clinics in Manhattan.

The book, in the end, actually raises more questions than it answers, but I don't have a problem with that. Despite my reservations, I do recommend it. The same author wrote a biography of filmmaker Russ Meyer, which I'm reading currently. I don't think I like it as much as this short, sharp little bit of craziness.

Duke Haney says

I was at Skylight Books here in L.A. a few days ago, and I saw, taped to a shelf, a sign that recommended this book. You must know the kind of sign I mean: it was written by an employee. All indie bookstores nowadays seem to have these signs: "Miranda recommends *Room!*" (I look around. Without a name tag to identify her, I'm sure that girl at the cash register is Miranda.) "Saul recommends *Freedom!*" (I look around. Without a name tag to identify him, I'm sure that guy grinding coffee is Saul.) Sometimes the signs are embroidered with hand-drawn flowers.

But I digress. This particular sign, which had no flowers drawn on it, said it didn't matter if the reader knew anything about "Andy," *The Ghastly One* was nevertheless a "wild ride." I thought, "Who the fuck is Andy?" But I love a wild ride, so I flipped through a copy of *The Ghastly One*, and I thought, "Oh, wow, this is about exploitation movies from the late sixties and early seventies." I've always wanted to read more about those movies, and specifically about the people who made them, and this "Andy" was apparently one of those people. Also, I was just in the mood to buy a book.

So I took this copy of *The Ghastly One* to the register, and I said to the guy working there, "You know, I've never done this before. I've never taken a recommendation from one of those little signs in a bookstore." And

the guy said, "Oh, well, I'm the one who wrote it."

It hadn't even occurred to me. My powers of deduction must be in decline.

"I hope you like it," he said. "If you don't, just come back and punch me in the face."

What a strange thing to say! On the other hand, considering the kind of book *The Ghastly One* is, a punch in the face might be appropriate. Andy -- that is, Andy Milligan -- was a sadist. There's a lot of sadism in the book, along with, inevitably, masochism. Name the depravity, and it's probably in there. I thought I had a strong stomach for depravity. I've been around, and if I haven't witnessed or even experienced something depraved firsthand, I would bet that I'm acquainted with it secondhand. Still, this book managed to make me feel queasy. After a while, my soul longed for a lengthy shower.

Still, I'm happy to have read it. I knew practically nothing about Caffè Cino, for instance, the experimental theater in New York that launched Andy Milligan. I'd heard a little about its proprietor, Joe Cino, who, I was told when I lived in New York many years later, had hacked himself to death, but the version I heard (from an actor who'd worked at Caffè Cino) was inaccurate. And, of course, I learned about exploitation movies of the late sixties and early seventies, and it goes without saying that I learned much too much about Andy Milligan. In fact, I'm wondering if, at some point, my path didn't cross his. I was already living in L.A. around the time he died from AIDS just down the street from me. The book supplies his (former) address, and at dawn on July 4th, while walking home from an all-night party, I made an excursion past his house, which was said to have been haunted. It *looks* haunted, and it was eerie to pause on the street and know who used to inhabit that house, as well as some of the depraved things that went on there not so very long ago.

I am not going to punch that guy in the face. In fact, if you can stomach the depravity, as I wrongly believed I could, you may consider this post my own little sign of recommendation, without any hand-drawn flowers.

Stephanie McGarrah says

However big a scumbag asshole you think you are, however perverted and sick you think your buddies are, you all probably still seem pretty average when compared with Andy Milligan and his cohorts. The stories still seem shocking today, which is something I never say (I don't think I need to explain why). I'm only 50 pages in and already engrossed in the stories of Cine's strange theater and its debauchery. The people inhabiting this world are simultaneously horrific and fascinating. Milligan pushed his actors (and audience) beyond their breaking points before it was an accepted, even appreciated, way of directing. De Sade would be proud. I normally don't write reviews until I'm finished with a book, but I'm impressed.

Recommended for S&M enthusiasts, fans of odd biographies, memories of the old seedy New York that is no longer.

Nick says

Absolutely incredible read that takes you into the mind of cult director Andy Milligan. One-of-a-kind bio.

Jason Coffman says

Absolutely astonishing/horrifying book about one of the most bizarre filmmakers in history. Highest possible recommendation.

Elwycke says

I'm a big fan of trash/horror/exploitation movies and have only seen one Mr Milligan film: "The Ghastly Ones", and I genuinely hoped it was the last I ever saw by him.

The problem with it was that it committed the worst crime in movies: it was boring.

Having now read this very well written and researched book, I must say it's made me want to see other films by him.

Or rather, it's made me want to have been able to see his theatre productions, to me it seems that's really where his crazed imagination and raw power worked.

He doesn't sound a particularly pleasant individual, but you had to hand it to him, he took life by the bollocks and gave them a bloody good squeeze!

A fascinating life and a fascinating book. Shame about those movies.

JBP says

I'd never heard of Milligan but he was a madman according to this biography. He churned out c-film after c-film for \$10,000 and they played in the seedy 42nd St. area theatres before disappearing from the world entirely. Lots of underground NY theatre stuff as well. Milligan was kind of a sadist who loved to torment actors/friends/anyone and some of the crazy stories of his films and film shoots almost seem made up. Not sure I even want to watch some of his sex and horror exploitation films but they were entertaining to read about here.

Mark Desrosiers says

Weirdest of many weird facts in this bio: Milligan's obsession with the Golden Girls. Hang my brain upside-down and it makes sense -- a hit sitcom with a secret queer aesthetic and misanthropic angle, what else could comfort this guy as his hospice Boswell wiped his incontinent ass?

Except Milligan -- whose sexual attentions usually focused on ugly, mentally-challenged, messed up dudes -- hated "queers". And if he had a sense of humor, there's no evidence in this bio or in his dire body of work.

The man's films -- I've seen two -- are a fascinating but unendurable hybrid of Coleman Francis and Herschell Gordon Lewis. Claustrophobic, cruel, exhausting -- how did this handsome boy from St. Paul, MN end up here?

The bio -- which ranks with Tosches' Dino as one of the best I've read -- not only enlarges the guy, but gives

us a deep look at two NYC scenes. First, the Cafe Cino off-off Broadway scene where Milligan, remarkably, began as an auteur. The same community that also launched Bernadette Peters and Abe Vigoda (in one of Milligan's Bernard Shaw productions). And then we get the 42nd Street sleaze-cinema world where Milligan's odd flicks sometimes made green. The decline and demise of both was echoed in Milligan's hatred of NYC, just about the time the Deuce got boulderized. He exiled himself to LA, delivered in a car by an oddball named Dennis Malvasi, yes, that guy Made a couple even crappier flicks there, posed for an RV ad while dying of AIDS, muttered and harangued to the luckiest biographer ever.

McDonough's posthumous research into Milligan's childhood in St. Paul, added as a surprise ending here, should give this a sixth star. A creepy sexual mismatch between a pedophile and an adipose nympho begat a rage-fetus whose exit from the womb actually scarred him physically.

I'd like to think Andy knew the shot from day zero, but there's a tale of discovery here, from acting, to puppeteer, to dressmaking, to the grimy Auricon of his stories, slipping on blood, costumes, and hate. All this gives him -- and the bio -- an element of rational wisdom. The rat's are coming. The werewolves are here.

Roland says

I read this book after reading the author's other bio on Russ Meyer. I have yet to see an Andy Milligan film, but this book gave me an idea as to what to expect. Probably one of the most sadistic filmmakers of all time, the behind-the-scenes stories on how he got off on putting his crew through hell were jaw dropping. A bigger surprise from this book was the history of 42nd street and what a dangerous and scummy place it was before it got cleaned up. I understand the nostalgia for it, but after reading about what actually happened there, I don't know that I'd ever have wanted to go there. The strange thing about this book is that it continues to be disturbing even after Andy's death, when the author describes family interviews and includes excerpts from some of his scripts. Perhaps the most shocking thing is reading about the budgets he worked with, and how he made his film for nothing. There will probably never be a revival of Milligan's work the way there was for directors such as Ed Wood, but I'm glad that this book exists to showcase his career and keep it from being forgotten.

Erich Scholz says

OK, OK...I know who Andy Milligan is...or do I? I've seen a few of his films. As the great Psychotronic famously mentions, "If you're a Milligan fan, there's no hope for you." Milligan's movies, to put it bluntly, suck. Even his fans admit this. But there's something about McDonough's bio that goes beyond the subject and straight into the heart and soul of an artist and what makes him tick. Yes, Andy Milligan was an artist. There can be no denying it. The first part of the book delves into the rather interesting subject of underground (or Off-off-Broadway) theater in New York circa 1960. Milligan was there and all indications point to the fact that he was an artistic if not commercial success. Why then is he known as a maker of schlocky, boring, thread-bare horror pictures (most of which are long lost)? I think the answer is spelled out

pretty explicitly in this book. Even if you don't know who Milligan is it's still an interesting read since it cuts across two completely different worlds in 1960s NYC. Milligan doesn't come off as a good guy but if you're even a little bit interested in 60s homosexual sub-culture, underground theater or 42nd St. grindhouse then this is the book for you. I liked it better than McDonough's Russ Meyer bio.

Perry says

"Andy Milligan screamed his soul out in his dime-store creations. It was the wail of a banshee, of a werewolf, of a shrieking skeleton mocking the black night. A voice too painful for the world to hear."

Hands down the single best biography I've ever read. A seriously life-changing read.

CleverGirl says

jimmy mcdonough makes this asshole nobody's ever heard of your slimy, pornography-obsessed, slightly uncle-ish hero. i, personally, have a deep love and appreciation of horror movies and a facsination with exploitation pictures, so that and the incredible writing make this one of my all time favorites. this author is best known as neil young's only authorized biographer, so that give you an ideas of what caliber non-fiction you will get from checkin this out. also a real-feeling portrait of old-school, gritty nyc. i love it!

Daddy Bookworm says

A really great read. Milligan, and those individuals in his orbit, are such great characters and the reader is taken omn a tour through sleazy NYC/Times Square during this period of time (late '60s/early '70s).

Clint says

An amazing biography. The life of ultra-low budget filmmaker Andy Milligan is a journey through hell -- the polar opposite of redemption through art.

The cast of real-life personalities range through the days of Cafe Cino (where off-broadway was born) through 42nd Street Grindhouse theater owners up to those faithful few who knew Milligan during his protracted death from AIDS in the 90s. There is nary a redeemable person in the lot.

It is a fascinating read for those with the stomach.

Ben says

Illuminating, incredibly absorbing, and weirdly touching. I might find it difficult to appreciate Milligan's insane, unpleasant, confronational films without having read this book--but knowing about his life, the films

are fascinating. Each one is like a corrupted, tortured soul. Sort of like Lance Loud (but, I'd say, much less admirable as a person), Milligan was like the Forrest Gump of New York underground/trash culture in the '60s and '70s. Between the two of them, they did everything, knew everyone, and were everywhere. This is maybe the best biography I've ever read.
