

The Gore Boys

by andrew dowler

Gore is the medium, horror the message. Up to their elbows in blood, guts, flesh and bones, the graphic horror specialists working on the corpses for *Virus*, turn what most of us would consider to be a hideous job into a high art. Still, it's a gory story!



Marlene Graham, Gordon Smith and Peter Creswell putting finishing touches on casualties for *Virus*. Enjoying every minute of it!
photo: Christensin/The Toronto Globe and Mail

Two corpses, a woman with a child in her lap, sit in a rocking chair in the middle of a small, cluttered apartment. They look like they've been dead for months; their clothes and soft parts have gone to almost nothing. Only the large muscles, now reduced to thin strings on the neck and thighs, and tough membranes are left. Marlene Graham crouches before them,

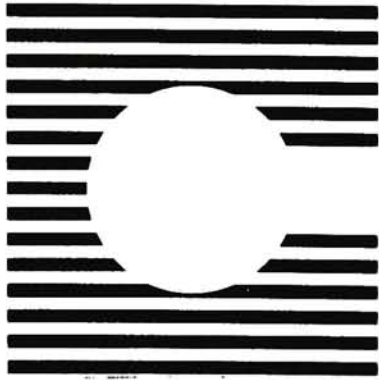
a bony foot in one hand, a large pair of shears in the other. She begins cutting the corpses's toes. The sound, without the muting benefit of flesh, is an unwholesome, gritty scrape.

"This is disgusting," says Peter Creswell, "I can't watch." He steps around a corpse in a shipping crate and joins Gord Smith in the kitchen. Together they foul and tatter a suit of clothes while Kevin Ward pokes a grey and shrivelled eyeball, the remnant of its lens hanging by a shred, into an empty socket.

The corpses are special props for **Virus**,

the multi-million dollar Japanese disaster epic. Marlene, Peter, Gord and Kevin are The Gore Boys — specialists in graphic horror. The name comes from Gord's first venture into the field: creating a realistic exploding stomach for a character in the play **Winter Offensive**, mounted by Ken Gass.

This commission is their biggest to date. It's the result of **Virus'** director Kinji Fukasaku's dissatisfaction with the bodies that had been sent from Japan. One of them still sits in the kitchen, waiting to be transformed. It's not a



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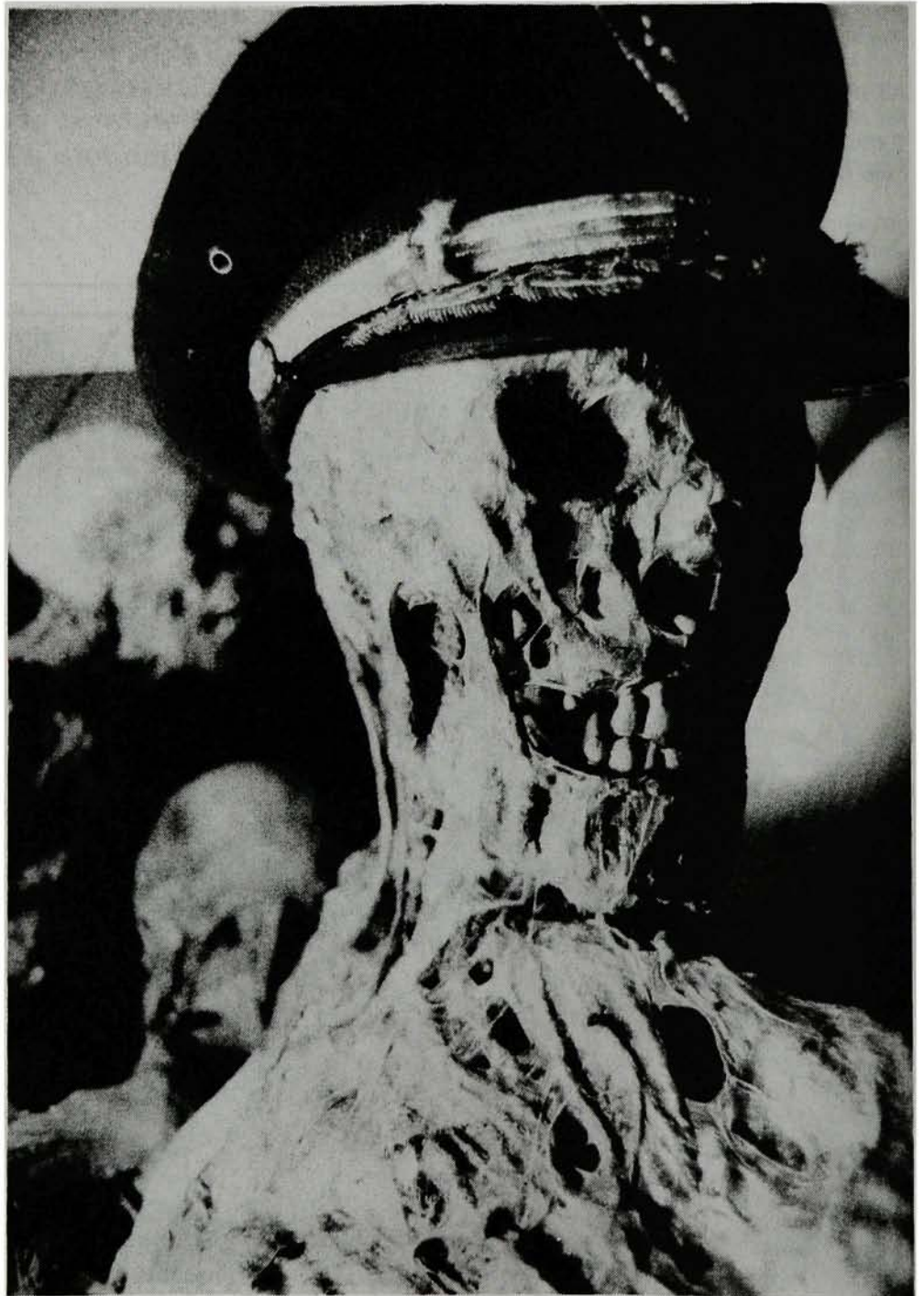
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Guess who's coming to dinner?

pleasant sight. The basic skeleton is fine. It has missing teeth, individualistic-looking bones, a warped sternum and, over all, a streaky colouring of dried blood and custardy yellow. A lived-in skeleton, no doubt about it. But over it has been stretched a piece of dirty plastic, supposedly to represent the remnants of tissue, flesh and muscle. It is not convincing; not frightening.

Peter explains that the skeletons look so real because they *are*, purchased cheaply in India from the Durban region of the Darjeeling province and smuggled into Japan. Then he explains that that is the story concocted for the **Globe & Mail** reporter. **Cinema Canada** readers, he thinks, deserve the truth: the skeletons are plastic, made in Japan, and carefully stained to simulate the real thing.

Peter and the others have been running on very little sleep for the past five days. They were offered the job Friday afternoon, worked all night applying lots of skin and musculature to George, the prototype, and shipped him off to the location Saturday morning. There, the story goes, the director looked at it, carved about half the issue off with his Swiss army knife and said, "Fine." George returned late Saturday afternoon and since then the Gore Boys have been working steadily to ready nine bodies for early Wednesday morning.

Preparing corpses is first a matter of adding flesh to the bones. Latex rubber is wadded and stuffed between the bones for cartilage. Cheesecloth is dipped in latex and twisted into ropes for the remnants of muscle. Latex coloured with food dye and spread over the cheesecloth simulates skin. Muscle, cartilage and eyeballs are dyed a hideous grey from the contents of a drum that arrived without label or explanation from Japan — its use discovered quite by accident.

The colours and placement of muscle and tissue on the skeletons are anatomically accurate. Anatomy and pathology texts, open to the colour photos clutter the couch.

Marlene has finished nail clipping and is now adding just a hint of polish to the toes. She explains that neck and thigh muscles last longest because they are so thick and tough to begin with, and that eyeballs, though they shrivel fast, disintegrate slowly because their skin is so tough.

One problem with adding the tissue is that nobody is quite sure how long the corpses are supposed to have been dead. Word from the company varies between two and eighteen months — 'word' that has come filtered through a translator, offering little reassurance. Their solution



is to create newer corpses — adding tissue takes work, removing it can be done with Mr. Fukasaku's Swiss army knife.

After the tissue comes the hair and clothing. **Virus** has supplied a green garbage bag full of Christian Dior wigs and polyester clothes. The wigs are hacked down to a few strands and glued to the skulls. The clothing is harder work. Polyester does not take the dirt well and giving

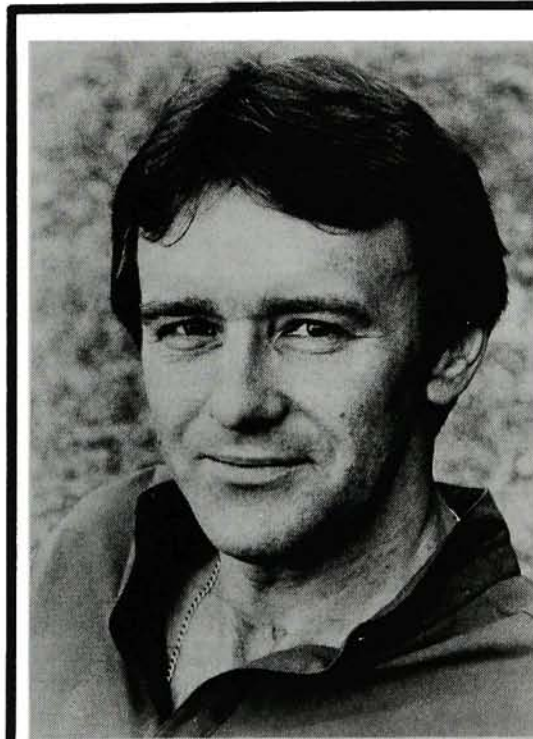
it that two-months-exposed-to-the-elements look is a matter of diligent elbow greasing.

The arrangement of tissue and clothing depends on the situation of the corpses. The script is specific: one woman has died while 'making out' in the front seat of a car. Her clothes have been arranged accordingly — her blouse half-open, bra half-off. Her head and arm, closest to the open car window, have lost a good deal more flesh than the rest of her.

These are the sort of details that the Gore Boys take pride in. Though they are of different backgrounds — Marlene is an art school graduate and has worked on **Middle Aged Crazy**, Kevin Ward is an actor, from the National Theatre School, who has worked for three years as an editor, just finished an experimental film and is currently writing a play; Gord has worked in props and as a set dresser, and Peter is a York University film department graduate who has had "lots of random film-related jobs" — they are united in their love of graphic horror. Kevin's interest was initially triggered by his grandmother, who used to sit up with him and "watch horror movies on the box til all hours." Now he dreams of tendons that won't stay on no matter what, and he, like the rest of them, sees people as skeletons and organs through their skins.

Summing up their collective attitude, Marlene comments, "Horror, without seeing what's supposed to be horrifying, is like seeing with your glasses off."

And she's right. □



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