

ANGST & DREAD

Life In Video Culture

Gerald Saul lives in Regina and recently travelled western Canada promoting his film, **Angst**. It's a way-too-cool half-hour "Depressionist" vampire movie (without a drop of blood). It follows Kynth, a lonely vampire woman, who's seen too many bodies in 697 years of feeding two or three times a week. She finds a human companion, a terminally depressed filmmaker with a 28-inch TV, and tries to adjust herself to the twentieth century. As the tag-line goes: "You can be good for all your life, or you can be evil forever."

Angst gets three claws up, because it survives multiple viewings. It's experimental, but not Art-School (probably because Gerald has a sense of humour). The film stars Brian Stockton as the film geek, and Dawn Henderson as the sexy dancing vampire. Gerald also co-directed [with Stockton] the post-holocaust farmer-on-the-road cult hit **Wheat Soup**. He was also associate producer of Stockton's latest feature, **The 24 Store**.



Bruce Fletcher: What are you working on now?

Gerald Saul: **The Man With the Rocket Shoes**, a very exciting space-opera that's too expensive to make. I wrote it, but it'll probably sit on the burner forever. **Dream Sequence** has been in the works for two years and is in post-production. It's a wacky comedy with a happy ending. They rush into each other's arms and live happily-ever-after, which is completely unrealistic because everyone knows they're doomed to be locked up in jail. But they believe they're happy, so I guess that's what's important.

I'm also starting **Dread**, part two of a trilogy. It's the unofficial sequel to **Angst** because there's not really any similarity, except it'll be the same length, and in somewhat the same style with layers of sounds and images not necessarily in phase. **Dread** is more of a documentary about fear; what people think they're afraid of, if you ask them, which then evolves into what they're really afraid of.

BF: Why is **Angst** a "Depressionist" film?

GS: I was writing it late at night, when my life was sort of dismal and dull and unattractive to anybody. One morning I was writing on the bus with the sunlight shining in and it was all wrong. I ended up throwing out all the daytime stuff. **Angst** is just a sampling of the dark side of my life, my fear, pain and all that. I wrote it in bad moods and threw everything else out.

BF: But it's funny.

GS: If you're always depressed, then you're not. People who have major mood swings

can't last. If it's your natural state of mind, it seems OK and you get a sense of humour about it. If you don't, then you die.

BF: Black humour to cope.

GS: Very much. My friends are like that too. We tell "How bad can it get?" stories. It's a challenge to have a worse life than your friends.

I think the greatest threat to me as a "Depressionist" is that I seem to be getting better at finding meaningful situations that make me happy. Now life seems to be getting easier, and it worries me. That's going to change everything. I get very self-analytical. My new things aren't necessarily about depression, they deal with the stuff much deeper than that: the root of it all. Eventually the bad day might come when I've purged all of this shit, and it will come to an end.

BF: What do you think you have in common with other prairie filmmakers?

GS: I do feel there's a similarity between say, Regina's film community and the one in Winnipeg; similarities in themes and approach more than anything. Maybe not in style, but in the **desire to create** whatever it is that you're doing. Although we're frequently doing the same sorts of things, for some reason we don't network at all. We don't say, "I'm doing this, what do you think?" I try to keep my opinions, work, and research down to a select few. Why would that be? Let's analyze it. (Long Pause) I'm not sure. It's not even jealousy; a number of years ago there was paranoia about people stealing ideas from one another, but it doesn't happen. If I don't have enough ideas of my own I should drop out of the business.

BF: Do you accept the idea of regional styles?

GS: A few years ago I heard it analyzed into ideas of the prairies, our heritage, the arts that came before us, isolation, and all these things. A bunch of film groups from western Canada got together to talk about their particular centres. I'll buy it to a limited extent.

but I think it comes down to the people who work together.

BF: How do you get funding for your films?

GS: I'm expected to do what is expected from me, and from my centre, when I apply for a grant.

BF: Do you seriously consider that?

GS: I try not to, but it's impossible. You want money: it all rides on money. If there's anything I'm afraid of, it's the fear of being broke and not having money to do the things I'm doing. Money makes people into slaves. If you don't have money then you're under the control of whoever. But, if you **do** have money, it becomes a measure of who you are: whether you use that money to control people or not. The first thing you should do with money is to free yourself. Money equals freedom in this society. When I apply for a grant, two or four people decide if I'm going to be broke and need a job. You can't help but think, "what do they want to hear?" It's scary when you start throwing in some little patriotism statement or something. I sometimes do the opposite. I'll talk about how I hate this and that, which sometimes works. They think it's funny: "Hey, this guy's not kissing our asses!"

Presentation of the script is important too. The idea that how the words look on a page affects whether you can make a film or not is completely illogical, but it's reality.

BF: Do you think there's any reality to the "twentysomething" idea?

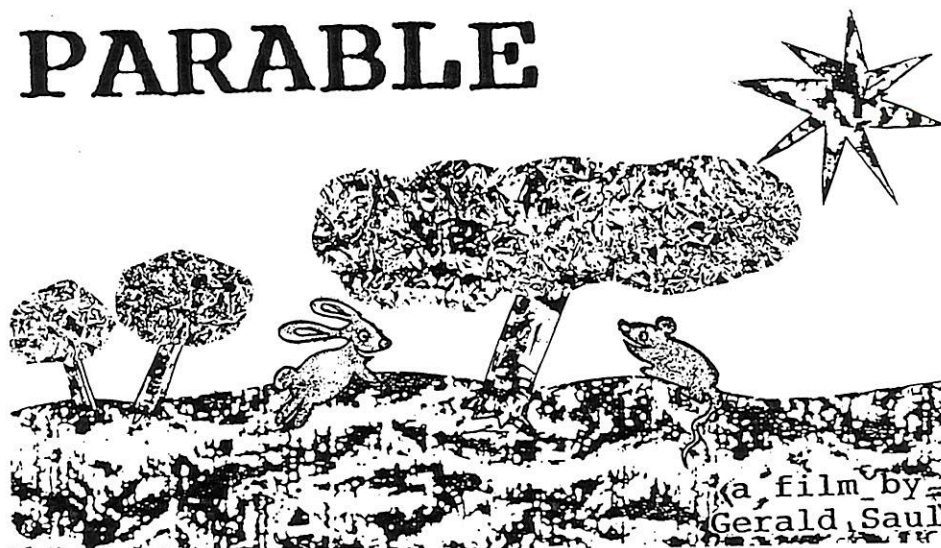
GS: There was an issue of **TIME** [July 16, 1990] about 'twentysomethings: the New Lost Generation', or something like that. Everyone I know picked it up, looked at the cover, and flipped through it. No one coughed up the two bucks to buy it. Five seconds of curiosity and the apathy sets back in.

BF: (Laughing) That sense of "Oh yeah, so what" comes through in your films. They're too weird and slow for people much younger than us, and older people don't seem to relate to the profound sense of meaninglessness.

GS: I've had older people ask: "Why are you so depressed?" or "How are you doing?" I'll reply, "Oh, kind of down today." "Why is that?" They're worried about me, and I just say, "Well, that's what I am." In Winnipeg we went to the NFB to watch **Sid and Nancy**. The guy who ran it couldn't even understand why we wanted to see it.

Bad Taste [a great hungry-aliens-on-

PARABLE



the-loose gore-comedy from New Zealand, directed, written by, and starring Peter Jackson] is the first thing that I've seen that's intense enough to evoke our memories of things like **The Abominable Dr. Phibes**, which is an important film. When you're ten, it was like ... OOOH gross! So we remember them as being in grossly bad taste. Things our parents wouldn't approve of. Finally there's something else out there that parents wouldn't approve of!

BF: Our taste is surprisingly similar, considering our relative isolation. Maybe it's mass media, like CBC.

GS: The mass media thing is true for TV, but Regina is more isolated than that. Edmonton is pretty isolated, but you have access. I don't think most people in Edmonton, and particularly in Regina, have a lot of art and movies and culture available. TV is the only non-isolated thing, but you watch TV alone; what's more isolated than that?

BF: I don't agree. We have the same music, videotapes, books, and commercial films. Only weird things have to be specially ordered.

GS: I try to protect my isolation. Isolation is what keeps us individuals. If we're all in one world-community then we're all the same as everyone else. If everybody's equal, there's no individuality. So, I'd rather be isolated than in the middle of everything.

BF: Yeah. Northern Canada is kind of a monastic cultural existence. It's easy to be completely cut off from culture. You have to search it out. It won't come to you. Having the same TV channels is interesting though. If there's no 'underground', everybody watches the weirdest mass-culture stuff.

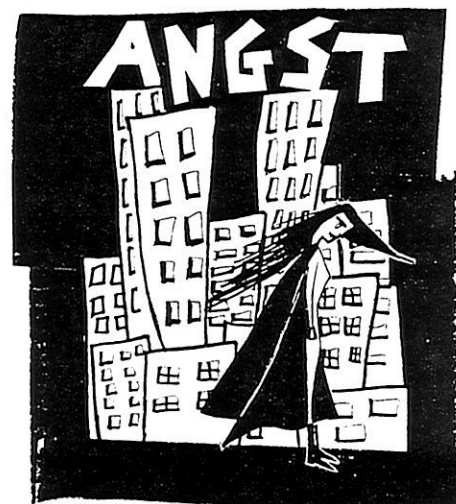
GS: Regina also got cable TV later than most cities. I was in grade six or seven before I could watch **The Flintstones** at noon.

BF: Now it's different with video. Not always having it probably makes us appreciate it a little more. I used to scan the TV listings every week.

GS: Yeah **The Abominable Dr. Phibes** would come on at midnight, and you'd plan a party around it.

BF: Now that seems so anachronistic; like a '70s theme event.

GS: There's so much I miss. I'm not much of a family person, but I have memories of **The Sound of Music** on TV. Long movies on Saturday night that the whole family could watch. During commercials everyone dashed for popcorn, or Kool-Aid. If you missed any-



*What do you do when
you are always dying,
but you never die?*

a film by Gerald Saul

thing, they'd fill you in. That can't exist anymore with a cassette. Now, my mom gets up to wander around because she can rewind it. Now the consumer chooses; it isn't chosen for you. Maybe that's it: our lives were chosen for us. Our movie-watching revolved around what was available, and when we could see it.

BF: (Laughs) It gave us something to be nostalgic for, like **The Brady Bunch**, **The Partridge Family** and **The Flintstones** (which may have taught us to laugh at our parents' lifestyle). Cut-and-Paste Culture.

GS: I kind of admired the hippies as a little kid growing up in the '70s. I remember thinking that the hippies changed the world, but I didn't remember a world that wasn't changed by them. I don't **know** if they changed the world. I didn't experience it before them, only after. They might have changed it, maybe not. But I don't see possibilities for change now; I think that's been lost somewhere.

BF: What do you mean?

GS: Well, personal change is possible, but social change ... It absolutely amazes me when someone has a letter-writing campaign that works. It blows my mind; I don't believe it happens. I have this belief that the government does what it wants, and everybody does what they want, except us. (Laughs) We don't get what we want.

BF: (Laughing) I don't believe anything. Especially stuff like the Gulf War coverage

GS: Yeah, but we watched it every day. I've got a video of the war in five hours: three or four minutes a day. I should be able to watch it in an afternoon. But I'm not going to war, even if they draft me. I don't open my mail much, so I can imagine losing it under a pile of unopened correspondence. Eventually they'd come to my door, put a gun to my head and say, "Why didn't you enlist?!" I'll have to say, "I don't know - I forgot." (Laughs)

BF: Invite them in to watch the video.

GS: Our youth was a transition period in many ways. I talk to teenagers now, and there's not much drugs or drinking, not like what we were on the tail end of. My sisters and thirtyish people tell me about the drugs and parties and stuff that existed. I know it existed because I sampled bits of it at one point. We caught the tail end, the transition period.

We're also used to being ignored. This whole idea of not being labelled, and



Gerald and Margaret meet a friend in the bar

accepting being a part of an invisible generation. It's that isolation thing again. Nobody worried about us and we didn't cause a hassle. We didn't cause uprisings and picket things. That was already done. I got the feeling that there were no more changes to be made. When feminists talk I recognize that there are still changes in Women's Rights that need to be made. But the momentum is already there, and I don't feel those differences. I wouldn't even dream of paying a woman less than a man for doing the same job. It's not logical; it's not in our mindset. That was all set: we grew up believing it. No one is fighting against us, and we're not fighting for, or against, anything.

BF: To hold a protest rally in Edmonton, the organizers had to file for a civil disobedience permit at City Hall.

GS: If they don't file they get arrested?

BF: Yeah; according to my as-reliable-as-any-other source.

GS: I've watched those movies about the '60s; they're supposed to get arrested. (Laughs)

BF: Hippie mythology.

GS: So we didn't cause trouble, and nobody noticed us. How old are you?

BF: Twenty-seven, same as you.

GS: We were even a little too young for the punk movement.

BF: It happened in Alberta a little later, so I

caught the tail end of it.

GS: Punk happened in Regina when I was finishing in a conservative high school. Punk was two or three people.

BF: Punk was throwing up to an 8-track of "Never Mind the Bollocks" blasting out of two house-speakers in the trunk of an orange Datsun at a bush-party. We usually listened to **Pink Floyd**, **Nazareth**, **Queen**, **AC/DC**, **Kiss** and **Aerosmith**.

GS: Real Rock and Roll! The most meaningless Rock and Roll! It had no message. We didn't disco, and we weren't really punks. We're **the Do-Nothing Generation**. That's what you should call us.

BF: Anything to sum this up?

GS: I'm just sort of afraid of letting life pass us by, and growing old and dying with nobody knowing we were even here. I like to remember the '70s.

—Bruce Fletcher

I don't know . . . whether I feel more that I want to punish some aging crock for frittering away my world, or whether I'm just upset that the world has gotten too big - way beyond our capacity to tell stories about it and so what we're stuck with are these blips and chunks and snippets on bumpers.

—Douglas Copeland, **Generation X**