

Rotting Bones

Issue 666 >> Friday 13
\$4.99

splashpages.com[®]

**Carrie
Underworld**
New Underworld Tour

Freakenstein
Making Music
with Odds & Ends

Vampire Weekend



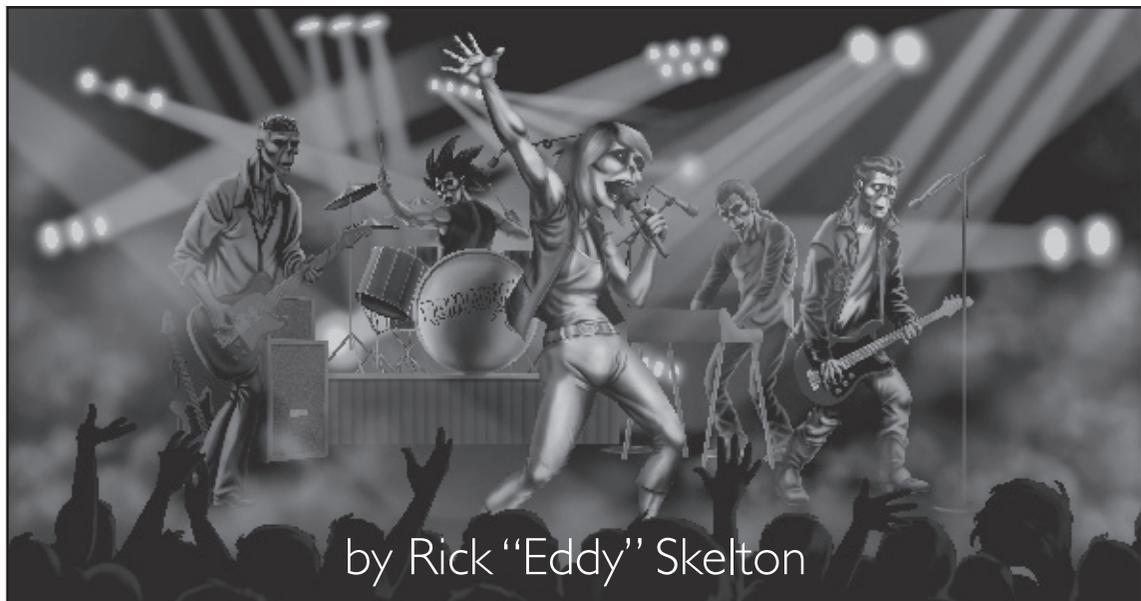
**The
Remainz**
Here Comes
The Rocking Dead

NEW MUSIC

The Lunar Objects
Greg Gory
Barking Spiders
Burial Chamber Orchestra

The Remainz

Here Comes The Rocking Dead



by Rick "Eddy" Skelton

If you haven't heard of the REMAINZ, you need to get out of the tomb more often. This killer quintet has been spirited to popularity like a tsunami, fueled by performances charged with an intense, original, otherworldly vibe. Buried in virtual obscurity for years, this group has risen from below ground to demand the attention of critics and fans alike.

"We were a pretty average club band, playing small rooms and bars all over the country," says Barry Shelley, who plays keyboards and an assortment of homemade instruments. "Our sound was completely generic. We were struggling. We were having a hard time getting it all together. No one really paid much attention to us, until we died."

In saying that, he's not talking about flopping on stage. They all perished together in a tragic car accident. "We were late for a gig, trying to make up time and driving in heavy fog. We went off the road and all died."

Normally, that would be the end of the story. Few would take notice of the expiration of an unknown group of musicians. The memory of their existence would pass quietly into oblivion. But strange forces lurk in the dark remote recesses of the Louisiana swamps. Incredibly, through the casting of a malicious voodoo curse, the entire band was summoned back from death as zombies, to act as agents for a reclusive cajun sorceress.

Normally, zombies would simply carry out the orders of the person that had conjured them, but somehow they returned with their own personalities and memories intact.

"When we died so suddenly, it was like we'd finally hit rock bottom," says Barry. "I mean, how much lower can you go? We were dead. But then, we got better." Not only did they get better by overcoming death, but their music suddenly took on a new life. Whether as a benefit of the voodoo magic that brought them back, or by virtue of their change in life status, the Remainz have found a distinctive niche in the modern music scene. The change prompted them to change their name from the "Remains" to the "Remainz".

"The 'Z' stands for 'zombie'," comments Barry. "It was a natural alteration." The usage of the different names in this article distinguishes the periods of the band before and after their altered life/death condition.

Once you get past the novelty of the band's story, it all comes down to the music. Their sound is a gritty cross of punk & hip hop, blending influences from blues and soul to industrial and heavy metal. The haunting vocals are a mixture of male and female harmonies, which seem to have been extricated from beyond the grave. The shambling rhythm of their musical compositions combine strident, roaring guitars with eerie, theremin-like keyboards.

“We’ve totally found our groove,” says Morgan Shelley, Barry’s sister and lead vocalist. “Being dead never felt so alive!” And their audiences agree. Lately their performances have been lurking room only venues, selling out increasingly larger halls and auditoriums. Their appeal is cross cultural and they enjoy an avid fanbase from a diverse living status demographic.

From everything I’d heard about them, I really wanted to meet them. I caught up with them on tour as they performed in Tombstone, Arizona. I was curious to meet the band that had come so far in so little time. After witnessing for myself their incredible performance to an appreciative throng, I met with them backstage to get the 411 on the afterlife. The first impression I got was that this was a tightly knit group.

“There’s a special kind of esprit de corps you experience when your mates are just as dead as you are,” explained Rip Wilde, the tallest member of the band, and also the most British. His striking lack of hair is transcended only by his exposed brain, which extends up over his open cranium. I asked him to go into a little of the history he shares with the band.

“Seems like only yesterday. I had come across the pond with Burning Britons, the London band I was with at the time. It was the first time any of us had been to America, and we were bloody well ready to take it by storm!”

“Well, the lads were fine musicians, well enough. We were playing wee pubs and festivals, and were all having a smashing time. But as we got further into the tour, things began to go squiffy. The lads were getting completely knackered before our sets. It was getting pretty bad, with Nigel going arse over elbow into the audience and Collin unintelligible on stage. I’m for fun and games as much as the next bloke, but things were getting out of hand. So, I tried to reason with them, save the bender for after the sets, but they wouldn’t listen. They’d let it all go to their heads.

“Long story short, we’d seen the Remains a few times when they opened for us, or we opened for them, and I really thought they were ace! When I walked out on Burning Britons, Morgan asked me if I’d fancy signing up with them. Seems we had a mutual admiration for each other. So I fell in with the band, and it seemed to be a perfect fit.”

It was a prime example of being at the right place at the right time, and the rest of the group felt their new guitarist was a great addition to the band. “We’re glad that Rip is on our team, we’re better than our wildest dream,” said Urny Orwell, the Remains anatomically challenged drummer. “We jam better than we did before. When our show ends, they scream for more.” He answered all of my questions in a rap-like rhyme. When I asked him if he was an aspiring

rapper, he explained that the rhyming had a substantive purpose. “Rhyming helps control the stutter of every word and phrase I utter. I’ve stammered since I was quite young, rhyming loosens up my tongue.” In order to cope with a childhood tendency to stutter, he developed an interesting method to combat it. I’d heard of vocalists stricken with a stammer being able to sing song lyrics flawlessly. I assumed the same principle applied here.

Urny’s musical origins were established in Minneapolis, his home town. He took up the drums at a young age, as a vehicle to help him socialize with his peers. In high school, he played exclusively with a group of friends who shared his musical tastes. When that band dissolved after graduation, he drifted from band to band until he found a home with the Remains. With his hair moussed into shocking black spikes, and tattoos in a style that are a cross between M.C. Esher and H.R. Giger, he has another interesting attribute that actually effects the bands’ performances. As a result of the fatal accident that changed their fortunes, his midsection is twisted around so that his bottom half is pointing in the opposite direction from his top half. This presented a problem for the drummer, who had to reconfigure his drumset and acclimate to the new arrangement. “It took a while to readjust. I overcame as I knew I must.” Even with this encumbrance, his drumming skills are as potent as ever.



THE REMAINS

Urny Orwell, Morgan Shelly, Rip Wilde, Barry Shelly, and Don Stoker. The band before the big life change.



Rounding out the band is bassist Don Stoker. Raised in Arkansas, his sensibilities are influenced by a variety of provincial musical forms. Don injects a flavor of Americana into their sound. He delivers a deep, chugging bass to drive the band's raw yet melodic compositions. "When performing, I think of the song as something the band builds together. Each one of us contributes to the body of the song. I always felt the bass formed the flesh of the song, like the muscles. Urny's drums make the skeleton, and I hang the muscles over that." Following that dynamic, the other band members provide detail to the organism, adding the skin, hair and features. "It becomes a living thing." But the heart and soul seems to be Morgan's contribution.

"You've got to give her the cred," says brother Barry. "She's a first-rate song writer and lead singer. She's the main reason for our success."

Morgan is a bit more tempered regarding her value to the group. "None of us is more important to the band than another," she said. "Each one of us is, like, instrumental to our success. There isn't one of us who could do this alone."

Morgan and Barry grew up in San Francisco, the offspring of music teachers at the University of Berkeley. "We were totally exposed to all kinds of music as children," says Morgan. "We were encouraged to learn all kinds of musical instruments. Barry, like, he even builds his own instruments." Much of the unique sound that is produced by the band comes from the custom-made instruments created by Barry.

"I like to take apart and rebuild things," says Barry. "If I can figure out how something works, I can modify it, or create something similar of my own." He has a knack for all things mechanical, and they

would have a hard time getting around in their vintage touring vehicle if not for his expert ministrations.

Coping with their new undead status has not been all positive. To be sure, being virtually indestructible as an aspect of the magic that created them has its advantages. There are, however, some disadvantages to the deceased lifestyle that may not be immediately apparent. "The worst thing is the constant craving for brains," states Don. "It can get pretty distracting when you're trying to lay down a riff. Then, there's the lack of sleep. Did you know that zombies never sleep? I used to love to get me some 40 winks."

There were drastic changes in other respects as well. "We've got more groupies than ever," says Rip. "But posh birds just don't turn me head as before." As a zombie, your libido is overcome by other cravings. And since the body consists of unliving tissue, there is no chance for sexual arousal. So what about "drugs and sex and rock and roll?" "These days it's less about the drugs and sex, but we still know how to rock and roll!"

Since their transformation, the band enjoys heightened feelings of loyalty and friendship for one another. It's easier to relate to other zombies when everyone else around you is of the living persuasion. Being that they are such a unique collection of individuals, one would think they would tend to limit their circle of familiars. On the contrary, the band travels with some unexpected companions. They are joined on the road by a dead dog, reanimated by the same alchemy that vivifies them. Answering to the name Doug, he is a canine of indeterminate breed that serves as both companion and mascot. Because of the nature of the witchcraft that revived him and

the band, he continues to be bound to the group. He is also devoted to a still living, breathing, energetic five year old girl named Scarlet, who has been taken in by the group and stays with them as they tour. The bonds of loyalty between Doug and Scarlet may be even stronger than of that between the other zombies in the troop. Their friendship began before their association with the Remainz. The two were living on back streets together, joining forces after Scarlet's mother died, the victim of poverty and lack of proper medical care.

At times Scarlet seems mature for her age, no doubt developing a no-nonsense personality as a result of a hard life on the street. When she gets to know you, and after she lets her defenses down, you see the little girl within. Along with Doug, her constant companion is a dismembered teddy bear she calls Mr. Rukus. Her attachment to the mangled toy is resolute. Bigger, newer and softer stuffed animals offered as replacements have all been refused.

Scarlet is attended by a former social worker of Haitian descent named Dominique Charisma who also accompanies the band. After the death of Scarlet's mother, Dominique had tried to place the homeless child in foster care, but Scarlet proved elusive, and would not leave Doug to live alone on the street. Finally, resolving that the best she could do was to monitor the tyke, she would settle with looking in on her and collect reports from the local merchants the youngster had befriended.

Doug was killed on the mean streets the pair had made their home, the victim of a hit and run. Inexplicably, his body was exposed to the same potion that resurrected the members of the Remains. Once Doug became allied with the Remainz, Scarlet adopted the group as her family. When Dominique came calling to check in on her, she was horrified

to find the girl living in a nest of zombies. She was all too familiar with the ways of the living dead, having been raised by her grandmother, an accomplished voodoo priestess. After recovering from the initial shock, she realized that there was little threat posed to Scarlet. These were not your normal walking stiff. Somehow, they retained their link to their former existence, rather than becoming the mindless husks that typify most of your run of the mill living dead. It quickly became apparent, however, that they had no familiarity with being reanimated corpses. They were in need of someone to help guide them in their new situation, someone who had experience with zombies. Intrigued by the prospect, Dominique resigned from her social work, and agreed to sign on as nanny and zombie consultant.

Revitalized, the band and their extended family have been touring throughout the country and have ventured into Mexico and Canada. "We've yet to play overseas," comments Morgan, "but the way things are going, like, anything is possible." There are concerns that their living dead status might complicate any travel abroad. They've decided to take a wait-and-see approach. "We'll cross that ocean when we come to it," she says.

After the performance, it's back on the road, wending their way to the next destination on the agenda. Despite adhering to a rigorous schedule, everyone seems to be in top form and good spirits. "Bring on the show! We're ready to go!" Urny's proclaims enthusiastically. His sentiments are affirmed by the others. "Let everyone in the country know, the Remainz rock hard, from head to toe!" As the tour makes its way across the nation, the Remainz will be appearing somewhere close to you in the near future. Don't miss what will surely be one of the most exciting experiences of your life - or afterlife.

