

whatever I say and he's decorative. But that doesn't mean that I trust him"). Plotting is unexceptional thus far, the first storyline being Catwoman's attempts to adjust to life under Gotham's new crimelord, Bane, whose rise and fall is chronicled in Batman's "Knightfall" storyline. It's a tie-in with the Batman books which weakens the book's independent viability, but there are some completely internal plot elements (the Selina/Arizona relationship, Selina's life as a fugitive, and Leopold's questionable loyalties) that hold hope for engaging ongoing reader interest and developing a strong internal continuity outside of the Batman stories.

The art is very good. Newcomer Jim Balent draws people, action scenes, and a variety of locales well, and while unexceptional he has a good sense of storytelling and pacing as well as a clean, almost slick style of line drawing. The delicate linework and fluid renderings of anatomy come through best in his drawings of

**"...an interesting if not outstanding adventure series that at least deserves a look."**

the curvaceous Catwoman herself, conveying the character's agility and trademark sensuality. Balent is ably assisted by veteran inker Dick Giordano, whose enthusiasm for comic book heroines probably made him jump at the chance to help illustrate DC's buxom, bullwhip-brandishing brunette. On the subject of visuals, Catwoman's new costume is a reasonable compromise between the drab grey outfit of recent years and her gaudier costumes of the past. It's attractive but with a reasonably dark, imposing colour scheme (black and purple) worthy of a villainess, and its simplicity logically allows for plenty of freedom of movement (mind you, the body stocking portion of the suit looks like it was sprayed on and ain't ever coming off, but that's a comic book convention and I guess we can assume there is a zipper hidden somewhere.) On a final visual note, the first issue's embossed cover is a handsome piece of artwork, but Balent's drawing would be just as striking with or without the embossing (and the price it adds to the book), though it is a nice effect and nowhere near as gaudy or expensive as a lot of other cover enhancements on the market. C'est la vie. Whether you judge it by its cover or not, *Catwoman* is an interesting if not outstanding adventure series that at least deserves a look. It's published monthly by DC comics, and while the first issue is still on some newsstands the third issue will have hit the shops by about the time you read this.

SEAN MCQUAID

## Film

# Needful Things

Cover your eyes and lock the children indoors, 'cause Stephen King is back in the theatres. Castle Rock Entertainment has brushed the cobwebs off yet another King novel, *Needful Things*. It's a tale of gore, greed, and corruption in typical King style, but if you already have a taste for King's bloody fantasies this film will probably satisfy. It also boasts a thought-provoking premise and some reasonably good performances.

*Needful Things* is a bit more subtle than some other King projects. No shape changing, child-killing clowns or demon dogs from heck here, no sir, just the quiet little town of Castle Rock (gee, that name sounds familiar). It soon becomes clear, though, that we are looking at the proverbial calm before the storm. From the opening minutes the film seethes with underlying tension. Clouds gather, ill winds blow, and the townsfolk fester with petty grudges and rivalries. The storm begins with the arrival of Leland Gaunt, who opens a quaint little general merchandise store known as "Needful Things". Shrewd and businesslike but unassuming in

appearance and actions, Gaunt carries literally any merchandise imaginable and one nasty little secret: he just happens to be the devil himself (or a reasonable facsimile thereof), and his real business is the corruption of souls.

Gaunt pursues his secret agenda by selling to the citizens of Castle Rock, from the clergy to the town drunk, whatever thing their little hearts desire. In return, Gaunt asks "favours" of his customers, having them perform anything from minor pranks to cruel tricks on other townsfolk so that before long the citizenry of Castle Rock is burning with suspicion and hatred of one another, until, bit by bit, the town self-destructs as the people lash out at one another in what eventually becomes a bloodbath.

As a thriller, the film works. Suspense builds almost constantly as Gaunt draws more and more unsuspecting pawns into his web and the truth about his nature becomes ever more horribly apparent to the audience. The direction by Fraser Heston is taut, gripping, and very conscious of the ugliness of the violence it depicts. The film gives a disturbingly unvarnished



Max Von Sydow in *Needful Things*