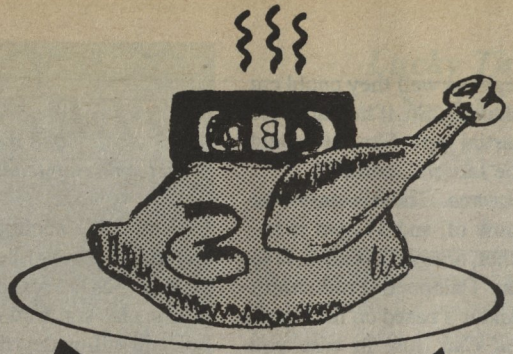
years ago involving the Crimson Avenger and the Phantom of the Fair). The biggest change in the character is actually visual, as artist Guy Davis has redesigned Sandman's outfit, opting for a trenchcoat instead of a cape and replacing his bizarre blue-and-gold gasmask with a more conventional (and somewhat more intimidating) World War I vintage gas mask. The result is a slightly more realistic yet still stylishly spooky figure.

Wagner's scripting is excellent. The reader is presented with a strong supporting cast: the idealistic, upright Judge Schaffer; the blustery but sincere District Attorney Lawrence Belmont; and the headstrong, intelligent and free-spirited Dian Belmont, the D.A.'s daughter. Dian, who was a recurring figure in the original Sandman stories, is intrigued by the eccentric Wesley Dodds, finding herself drawn to him and more deeply involved in the mystery surrounding his alter ego as both Sandman and police hunt the Tarantula, another shadowy figure whose murderous misogyny finds an outlet in the kidnapping and murder of beautiful young women, beginning with a friend of Dian's who may have had ties with the mob. Wagner builds suspense very effectively as the story unfolds bit by bit. Even the Sandman himself is a figure of mystery to us at first, as along with the other characters we see only a bizarre figure of an unknown nature lurking in the shadows.

This atmosphere of mystery is made possible in part by the artwork of Guy Davis. Davis' work is highly detailed, very illustrative, and emphasizes linework in its figures and shadings to an extent that the finished artwork is reminiscent of etchings or engravings. It can look rather scratchy or sloppy in spots, but in many other places it achieves a moody atmosphere that is very compelling. Together with colorist David Tornung, Davis creates a shadowy chiaroscuro that gives an eerie, dreamlike quality to such scenes as the Sandman's nocturnal visit to the D.A. and Dian's unexpected encounter with a certain gas-masked figure lurking in the darkened ladies room of the police precinct. Still, the art is not without its flaws. The drawing's occasional sloppiness is most evident and distressing in the faces of the characters, which are sometimes distorted or inconsistent. In particular, Davis has a habit of drawing the most grotesquely bulbous noses this side of Karl Malden, particularly jarring when they appear on female faces. Hideous honkers and sloppiness aside, the artwork is reasonably competent and excellently suited to the mood and tone of the series.

Offering an intriguing mix of mystery, horror, and psychological drama, *Sandman Mystery Theatre* is an unusual and unique new series that promises to be very interesting. It's priced at a somewhat expensive $2.50 per issue and is published monthly, and the book's distinctive photographic cover art by Gavin Wilson makes it stand out. With all that it has going for it, *Sandman Mystery Theatre* may become DC's best sleeper hit. ●



# TURKEY DINNER

***This Week: Revenge of the Ninja Warrior and Shogun Assassin***

*by Trent Drake*

We're turning Japanese. We're turning Japanese. I really think so. Seems like everybody these days is being sucked up into a swirling tornado of shuriken, katanas, lame plots and Oriental action. Let's face it, ninjas are *HOT*. They're absolutely everywhere. They're in cereal boxes, sewers, theme parks, video games, Oprah, and your closets (That oughtta make you paranoid).

And with all that popularity, you'd think they could afford more than one plot.

But noooo, all we ever get is good ninja versus the bad ninja(s) who killed his father. And we all know why, right? Because American film producers don't know enough about real Japanese culture to do a realistic martial arts movie. Right? Right?

Well, sort of. The two movies I'm reviewing here were produced with Japanese scripts, Japanese crews, and Japanese locales... and they suck. This week's column has one goal: To, by showing that even the near mythic Japanese are capable of their fair share of cultural distortion, show them to be only human and bring the world one step closer to a global brotherhood of man.

And maybe get some cheap laughs in the process.

First up, the world's most convoluted plot in the world's least animated Japanimation feature: *Revenge of the Ninja Warrior*. This is the tale of Jiro, a young orphan boy who possesses a glowing dagger. In the second scene, a Ninja Assassin(tm) from a Mysterious Cult(c) kills Jiro's mother and sister and frames Jiro for it. As the plot develops, confusion abounds. Jiro's real father turns out to be from a clan of mysterious ninjas that guards a mountain from which blows a fierce wind that may be either good or evil. The evil leader of the clan chases Jiro and has his real father killed and then befriends Jiro and trains him to be a fierce warrior and sends him to the mysterious village at the foot of the mysterious mountain and dispatches Jiro's trainer to kill Jiro for some mysterious reason and there's a mysterious fight scene and mysteriously, it's as boring as the Hell Where People Watch Reruns of Full House. Jiro fights the trainer and then poisons him (?).

From here, the plot slows to the pace of a physically challenged snail, and goes through more twists than a boa constrictor in a pretzel maker. As Jiro searches, first for his mother and then for Captain Kid's treasure (??), he goes through fight scene after fight scene with no real reason except so the ninjas can kill Jiro's friends. He goes to America, meets a lovely Indian lass who later turns out to be a Caucasian reporter in disguise (???) and even befriends Mark Twain (????).

Stupid? You bet. Boring? Yep. Idiotic? Yeah... worse than Bob Saget. Spectacularly animated? Nope. The characters barely move. Most of the movie is one still picture with a moving background of laser effects. When the characters do move, they all move the same way. In a word, stupidly. They leap like horny kangaroos through forest and rocks and across flat meadows. Even the fight scenes are stiff and undynamic, suffering from a severe case of overused laser effects. The final conflict with the High Priest barely moves.

Stuff to Watch For: Only one scene I can think of has to be seen. Near the end, on board a ship, Jiro turns to two guys he doesn't know and delivers the following wonderfully dumb line in a stoic deadpan: "You are the only two who survived. I am grateful."

Judgement: Don't watch it, if you value your illusions of the quality of Japanese animation. It SUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCKS! Still, it could have been worse. His name could have been Ryu.

But anyone who knows anything about Japanese culture realizes that the hype over ninjas is undeserved. Real ninjas were cowardly, skulking creatures with little or none of the honour and swordfighting prowess that the movies attribute to them. The real stars of feudal Japan were the samurai who guarded the Shogun. They were so full of honour they squished when

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