


# NATURAL BORN FILMMAKER

JOHN BOROWSKI IS AN UNUSUAL FILMMAKER WHO SPECIALISES IN SERIAL KILLER DOCU-DRAMAS THAT DELVE DEEP INTO SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST PSYCHOTIC MINDS. AND NOW BIZARRE IS ENTERING HIS...

WORDS STEPHEN DAULTREY  
PICTURES JOHN BOROWSKI AND MATTHEW AARON

**W**e all see and hear things that set our creative minds whirring. The high-speed terror of a Slayer riff tells you to start a metal band. Bianca Beauchamp's cover shoots scream at you to shed your togs – or become a photographer. And when a teenage John Borowski saw a secret police file containing pics of Jeffrey Dahmer's cannibalistic sex murders, the impressionable horror buff decided to make films about serial killers.

"There were photos of severed heads in freezers, heads in the sink with their mouths wide open, and body parts on the counter, all taken by Dahmer himself," the award-winning filmmaker recounts of the notorious loner who murdered 17 young men between 1978 and 1991. "The file belonged to the father of a school friend, who was a police officer at the time of Dahmer's arrest. These photos will never be released to the public because of →

A large photograph of John Borowski, a man with a beard and a blue t-shirt, looking directly at the camera. He is holding a human skull in a black metal cage with both hands. The background is dark and indistinct.

John Borowski poses with the skull of German serial killer, Peter Kurten (1883 – 1931), dubbed The Vampire Of Dusseldorf, whose brain was used for posthumous scientific study. It's currently exhibited at Ripley's Believe It Or Not! in Wisconsin, US

# MURDER BALLADS

Bizarre's five favourite songs about real-life serial killers

## DEAD SKIN MASK, SLAYER



**ALBUM** *Seasons In The Abyss* (1990)

The thrash giants slow down the tempo and crank out a chilling guitar riff in honour of the Wisconsin bodysnatcher, Ed Gein. The screaming girl at the climax makes it extra creepy. **CREEPIEST LYRIC** 'Graze the skin with my finger tips / The brush of dead warm flesh pacifies the means / Incised members ornaments on my being / Adulating the skin before me.'

## SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN THE SMITHS



**ALBUM** *The Smiths* (1984)

Morrissey wrote this controversial and tender pop song about Moors Murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley after reading *Beyond Belief: A Chronicle Of Murder And Its Detection*. **CREEPIEST LYRIC** 'For a child cries: "Oh, find me... We are on a sullen misty moor / We may be dead and we may be gone / But we will be, we will be, we will be right by your side."'

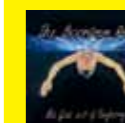
## KILLING FOR COMPANY, SWANS



**ALBUM** *The Great Annihilator* (1995)

Arguably the most melodic track on a dark, dark album, this psychological beast talks about the adoration that Dennis Nilsen exerted for the preserved corpses of the men he killed. **CREEPIEST LYRIC** 'I couldn't stop myself / I knew I'd do it again / But I could heal myself / If I could feel your skin / And if I comprehend this moment / I know we'll live again.'

## I DON'T LIKE MONDAYS BOOMTOWN RATS



**ALBUM** *The Fine Art Of Surfacing* (1979)

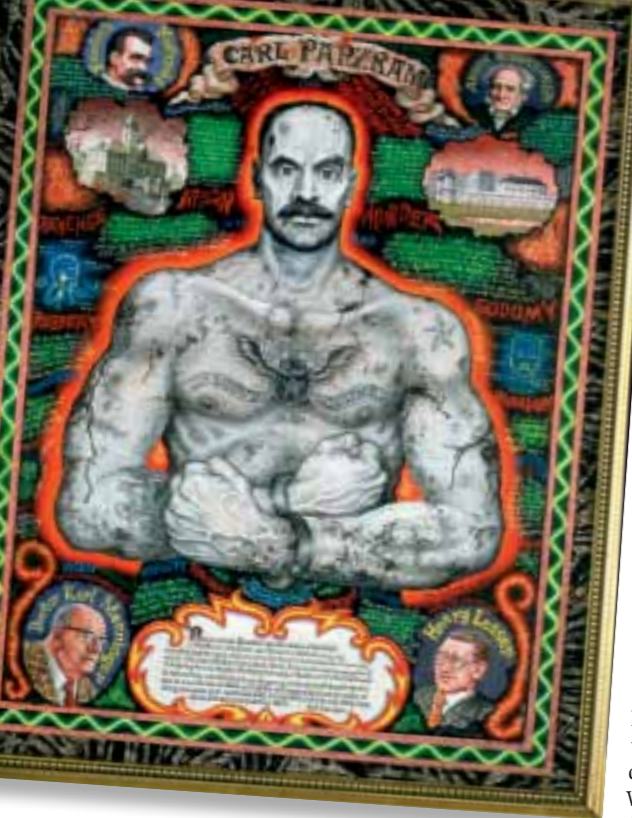
And you thought Geldof's pop ditty was about struggling to work on Monday mornings, right? It's actually about the 1979 school-shooting spree of 16-year-old Brenda Ann Spencer. **CREEPIEST LYRIC** 'The playing's stopped in the playground now / She wants to play with her toys... / And school's out early and soon we'll be learning / The lesson today is how to die.'

## BIND, TORTURE, KILL SUICIDE COMMANDO



**ALBUM**: *Bind, Torture, Kill* (2006)

Pounding EBM / 'aggrotech' classic that's a dancefloor fave at goth raves, courtesy of Belgium's Johan van Roy. It's about the 'Bind, Torture, Kill' maniac Dennis Rader. Obviously. **CREEPIEST LYRIC** 'Soul stripper, soul ripper / I bind her legs excruciate her / Start bleeding stop breathing / I take your life I am defeating... Bind, torture and kill.'



A portrait painting of Carl Panzram by the amazing Joe Coleman

how graphic and awful they are. But they burned a hole in my mind and introduced me to the real monsters that inhabit our world."

With an inquisitive nature and a taste for the macabre, Borowski pursued a career in film and true crime. To date he has made three independent feature-length docu-dramas, with a fourth on serial killer culture in the works. Light on gore but high on psychological reasoning, his agenda is to explore what makes serial killers tick.

Borowski's 2004 debut, *HH Holmes: America's First Serial Killer*, focused on the methodical monster who built a hotel-cum-secret-torture-castle

in late-19th century Chicago. His second documentary film, *Albert Fish* (2007), examined how its eponymous felon (1870–1936) grew from an abused orphan into a child-killing cannibal. But his most recent film, *Carl Panzram: The Spirit Of Hatred And Vengeance* (2012), is the director's most accomplished work, presenting a rounded character study of the hate-filled Panzram (1891–1930) who claims to have sodomised around 1,000 boys and murdered 20 of them. For Borowski, filmmaking isn't just about telling a tale, but delving deep into the psychology of corrupted minds.

"I'm fascinated by extreme cases and the psychological aspects of someone like Albert Fish, who had a religious complex and may genuinely have believed that he was sending children to heaven before they could be violated," he says. "How did these people live with themselves? What was it that drove them to commit these extreme crimes? And when you look at the characters, you uncover

these fascinating lives. HH Holmes (1861–1896) acted as the attorney at his own trial and was a medical student. That's not just someone who constructed a building with secret passageways and a crematorium in the basement. There are lots of urban legends generated about these people, but there's no need to create fiction from fact."

### HISTORICAL HORRORS

Just as he's fascinated by extreme sociopathic minds, Borowski is also intrigued by the earlier, pre-forensics detective methods that eventually brought these killers to justice

– and which provide an extra layer of narrative to his films. Albert Fish, for example, was caught after police traced him via the letterhead of a note he'd written to the mother of one of his victims. Fittingly, the filmmaker researches his own films with the same intensity as any prying reporter or thorough detective. While *HH Holmes: America's First Serial Killer* was a straightforward tell-a-story documentary, *Carl Panzram: The Spirit Of Hatred And Vengeance* took four years to make, and focused on the criminal's relationship with a sympathetic prison guard. It questioned whether a man such as Panzram could be reformed, and shed fresh light on real events and the characters involved. In one instance, Panzram tried to climb a prison wall and fell onto a hard concrete floor. The unsympathetic warders simply dragged his broken body back to his cell, and let his shattered bones heal naturally without any medical attention or painkillers. That's gonna fuck anyone up.

"It left Panzram with a permanent limp, and he claims that's when he really started to hate the whole of humanity," says Borowski. "He even plotted how to start a world war between US and Britain while he was in his cell! I'd like to push this investigative side of my filmmaking like I did with *Carl Panzram*, which was a combination of dramatic re-enactments and investigation. There are different angles to these cases. For example, Ed Gein's (1906–1984) story has been told many times before, but he allegedly made furniture from human body parts and skin. Where are those crime scene photos? I'd love to do a documentary focused on my search for them."



### KILLING CULTURE

Borowski's expertise in serial killer psychology has not gone unnoticed. In 2011 'The Happy Face Killer', Keith Jesperson – a Canadian-born trucker who murdered at least eight prostitutes – wrote to Borowski, requesting that he become the next subject of one of his films. It's the first direct contact Borowski's had with a killer, but so far he hasn't responded. "There are serial killers who crave attention and Jesperson is one of them. He wants people to write about him, and that makes it harder to get to the truth."

More excitingly for Borowski, he aided the Wichita Kansas Police Department in their pursuit of the mysterious BTK Killer ('Bind, Torture, Kill') who had killed 10 people between 1974 and 1991, but had resurfaced again in 2004, sending a series of new letters to police and reporters. As it was known that the BTK Killer was a fan of HH Holmes' 'work', the police initially contacted Borowski to examine the records of everyone who had purchased the Holmes documentary directly from him. When that proved fruitless, authorities and Borowski cunningly organised a screening of the film in the Kansas state, hoping that it would lure the BTK Killer from his hiding place. The killer was upended before the screening could take place, and his true identity was revealed as Dennis Rader – a Kansas native with a sexual fetish for women's underwear.

"If they'd arrested Rader at my screening, the publicity would've been monumental," concedes Borowski, somewhat wryly and semi-cheekily.



# "HOW DID THESE PEOPLE LIVE WITH THEMSELVES?"





# “THE PURPOSE OF ART IS TO BRING EMOTION. I WANT TO DISTURB PEOPLE.”

Previously in *Bizarre*, controversial tattoos of famous killers have fallen under our editorial spotlight, with published skin ink that includes mugshots of Hindley, her partner Ian Brady, and Charles Manson. “Some might say it’s disgusting, but these killers are celebrities in the same way that someone might have Elvis on their arm,” observes Borowski. “It walks that fine line between what is good and bad taste, what is right or wrong. When I interviewed Joe Coleman I said to him that some people think you’re putting these killers on pedestals and making them gods. His response was, ‘Yeah, so, what’s wrong that?’ To him, the Ancient Greeks had dark gods, and these killers are *ours*. We need to learn lessons from them. There’s a need for them to exist...”

## DISTURBING INTENTIONS

Borowski would also love to make a film about “the British Jeffrey Dahmer”, Dennis Nilsen (born 1945, and about whom American post-punk experimentalists, Swans, wrote one of *Bizarre*’s favourite songs, ‘Killing For Company’). Currently serving time at HMP Full Sutton maximum security prison for the murder of 15 men from 1978–1983, Nilsen fits Borowski’s profile of a ‘psychological extreme’, but his killing spree took place three decades after 1950. “His psychological perspective is fascinating and, like Dahmer, he took his loneliness to extremes,” he says. “Nilsen was gay and strangled men in his flat with ties. He preserved their bodies under the floorboards, and each night he’d wash them in the bathtub, adore their bodies and watch TV with them like they were company. His next apartment was on the second floor, so with no floorboards he’d boil his victims’ body parts and flush them down the toilet. He was caught

because the plumbing system got blocked up. When he came home to discover the authorities in his apartment, he said: ‘There’s another body in the closet...’”

Yet despite a ‘shopping list’ of possible future true crime subjects, which also includes the unusual case of Mary Bell (born 1957), who killed two infants when she was just 10- and 11-years-old, Borowski reveals he still harbours a creative ambition beyond serial killer docs. “Ultimately, I want to do a feature film,” he says. “I’m working on a few ideas now. Horror is my

personal favourite genre, but I feel that in the last five to 10 years, horror has been very samey. It needs something fresh and unique, and that is what I’m aiming for.”

Citing Alfred Hitchcock, Martin Scorsese and *Irreversible* (2002) man Gaspar Noé as his favourite directors, Borowski also hopes that his experience in psychological docu-dramas and complex character studies will serve as the perfect training ground for his progression to big screen drama.

“Hitchcock and Noé brought deep psychology into films; they analysed each shot to see if it was the best one for generating an emotional response in the audience,” he says. “But when I watch recent horror films, all I feel is a quick shock. The purpose of art is to bring emotion, and that’s what I want to do. I want to disturb people.”

**Carl Panzram: *The Spirit Of Hatred And Vengeance* is available now on DVD and to download.**

**For more on John Borowski, visit [JohnBorowski.com](http://JohnBorowski.com)**

