With zombie noir film fest fave FLICK steadily approaching its October 26 DVD release (see previous item here) from Peace Arch Entertainment, Fango had a few words—and some exclusive storyboards and illustrated panels from the film—with the man responsible for the film's distinctive visual style, graphic artist and illustrator Alex Tomlinson. First seizing the attention of writer/director David Howard through his illustrative work featured in FORTEAN TIMES, the filmmakers asked Tomlinson to put together a series of designs, which evolved from some simple supplementary material to help pitch the project, to a full-fledged, self-contained comic book universe telling the story of Johnny "Flick" Taylor, the awkwardly shy introvert with a penchant for rockabilly and murder in 1960s Britain.

On the spawning of the film's visceral pulp comic style, Tomlinson recalls, "From my first meeting with David and [producer] Rik Hall, it was obvious we were all on the same wavelength from day one. When we met to discuss the comic book pages and transitions, we both said TALES FROM THE CRYPT at exactly the same time."

Tomlinson also notes that upon studying films like CREEPSHOW 2 extensively, his challenge remained how to produce his work in a similar way—for a fraction of the budget. While that influence remains surely prominent, the illustrator is quick to point out his own sensibility. "TALES FROM THE CRYPT was always in the back of my mind," he says, "but I was very conscious of the need to make the comics look distinctly British. The whole idea of the protagonist being a 'Teddy Boy' in a rubbish little British car, rather than say a cool greaser in a chromed coupe was very idiosyncratically British and gave the whole concept a more endearing slightly cozier feel from the outset."

The birth of the storyboards used in FLICK began with director Howard's own assembled tape of film clips that best demonstrated his inspiration. "I remember that he was very interested in the over-saturated color scheme of THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES, after having previously made a documentary about its star Ray Milland," Tomlinson reveals. "The compilation included a scene from Brian De Palma's RAISING CAIN to illustrate a particular framing technique. There was also a graveyard scene from 'SALEM'S LOT used to demonstrate the kind of atmosphere he wanted to recreate in our own graveyard scenes."

Rendering the storyboard images by building scale models of the sets populated with virtual 3-D actors, props and scenery—then arranging them according to realistic lighting and shadows—each storyboarded shot was rendered using camera setups that mirrored that of real world cinematography, inevitably presenting the world Johnny inhabits as a live action reflection of Tomlinson's conceptual art that manifests itself as a work in the vein of a missing Frank Miller graphic novel. To fans of the film quick to make such stylistic comparisons, though, the artist admits jokingly, "I didn't see SIN CITY until some time after I'd completed the storyboards. So any similarities you may detect are either flashes of RAIN MAN-like genius on my part, or more likely just coincidence."

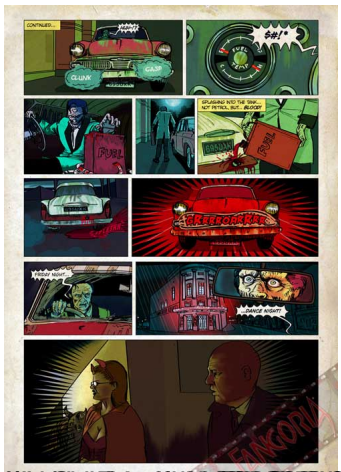
Equally as potent in the film's sense of aesthetic character is the role of music. After all, as FLICK's anti-heroic mythology goes, Johnny's gore-filled rampages can only be ignited by the nostalgia that the local rockabilly radio station provides. "David explained very early on that he wanted to show that Johnny's POV was still stuck in the late '50s or early '60s, it was always referred to as 'his '60s vision,' so whenever we saw the world through his eyes, it was as if he was seeing everything and everyone as it was back in the '60s," Tomlinson explains. "David again used THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES as an example of how to show two different POV in the same shot. So I was very conscious about making all the shots from Johnny's point of view very jarring and distinct from the rest of the film and echoing that in the comic pages. There was a lot of obscure rockabilly stuff and quite a few 'novelty' horror songs on the CD, and

I also felt the need to supplement this soundtrack with a lot of my own Cramps collection from time to time."

Tomlinson's own humble roots would have him recognize much of the nature of his artistry, which certainly translates to a bold and unabashedly bloodied degree in FLICK's more striking horror scenes. "My default setting is gore," he says, "and the first test storyboards I produced were pretty full on. When the project first started, we weren't sure how gory the final film would be. There was debate whether a film about a character with a flick knife would get a sensible certification [age rating] or if the then current climate of scare stories in the media about 'Knife Crime' would mean we would have to tone everything down."

Fango's first leaking of a select few of these images would be among some of the displeasing original works that ultimately didn't jibe with the ratings board. "I showed Johnny disemboweling a night watchman, whose intestines fall out and begin to cook on top of a three bar electric heater under the desk," Tomlinson says. "Johnny then sticks his flick-knife up the man's nostril and whisks his brain into a mush before slapping the top of his head like a soap dispenser and using the resultant goo to slick back his hair into a quiff. Not surprisingly this didn't make it into the final shooting script; it became clear that a 15 certificate would be the best level to pitch the film."

But where we may not have gotten a taste of the undead grooming tutorial those clips intended, those with a knack for the off-center will still be able to get their darkly comic fix from FLICK. "I'm very proud that the tidal wave of blood which precedes Bev being ejected onto the pavement like a newborn is all still intact," Tomlinson notes.


CONTINUED...
CLUNK
CLAP
SAY!*
FUEL
FULL
WHOOSH
FUEL
FULL
SPLASHING INTO THE SKIES
HOT PETROL BLUE... BLOOD!
WHOOSH
FUEL
FULL
WHOOSH
FUEL
FULL
Nobody home?
DANCE NIGHT!
DANCE NIGHT!

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