

# TIMESTYLE

BOOKS • THEATRE • MUSIC

## Nasty something from the American woodshed

### *Paperback issues*

By *LYN FROST*

**A**MERICAN writers continue to probe for what's nasty in their woodshed.

'Dress Gray' (Lucian K. Truscott IV, Fontana, 479pp, \$4.95) opens a lot of doors on that sacred cow, West Point. The author graduated from the military academy and comes from an old Army family: his grandfather was responsible for the liberation of Rome. Why he has chosen to blow the whistle on the estab-

blow the whistle on the establishment remains a mystery. The murder of a homosexual cadet proves an ideal subject for exploring the rigours of a grown-up fagging system — no pun intended. The West Point traditions are dedicated to sorting out the men from the boys. It's shape up, or ship out with a mass of physical and psychological bruises. Among those who survive there's an awesome sense of fraternity transcending even the honour on which the tradition is based. Truscott leaves no doubt that a few rotten apples can determine the state of the whole barrel for years to come.

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**'The 65th Tape' (Frank Ross, Pan, 320pp, \$4.50)** drags out all the dirty washing and ties it neatly into this American election year. A dying man confesses that he and other

man confesses that he and other power-brokers had formed an organisation called the "Matrix". It was dedicated to restoring or maintaining the nation's moral fibre, backbone and Christian beliefs. Unfortunately someone took things a little far. The assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King became part of the game plan. Three Matrix members only discovered the link while they were waiting to see President Nixon during the last days of the Watergate affair. And their conversation was recorded on what became 'the 65th tape'. Locating the tape is vital. One of the Matrix members is hoping to wrest the Democratic nomination from the President. His comrades fear that he is being "controlled" by evil which has overtaken their simple ideals. Very plausible.

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**'Ghost Story' (Peter Straub,**

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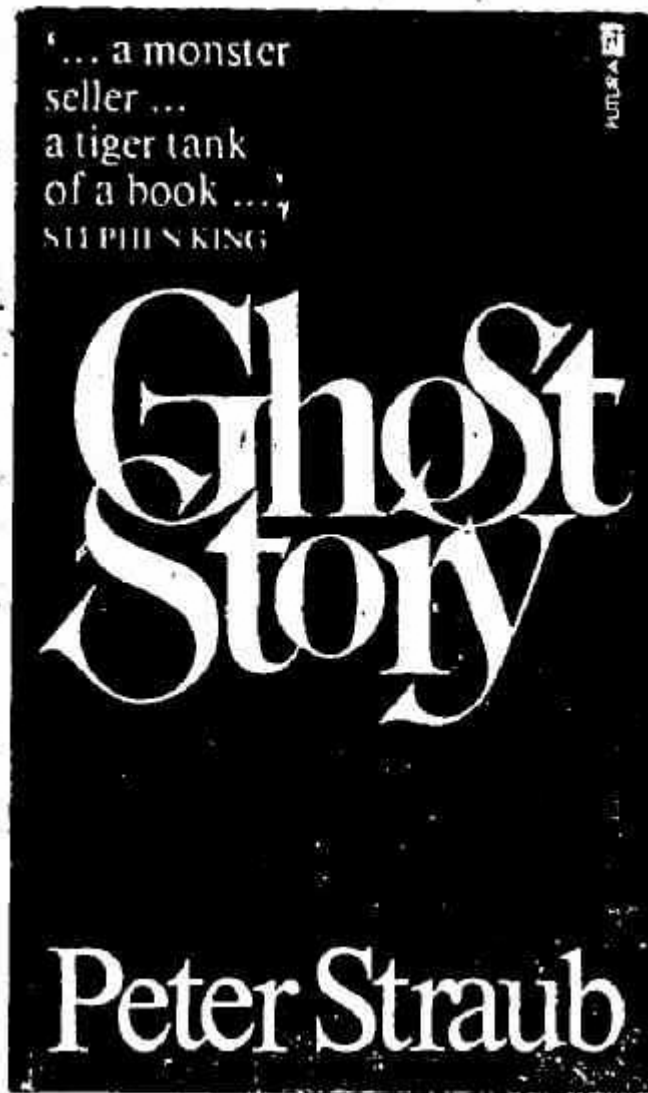
**Futura, 507pp, \$5.50)** has had a mass of good reviews, which is fair enough. It's a good retelling and jazzed up version of a story told by someone whose name escapes me — Robert Browning or Ray Bradbury perhaps. There was a whirlwind maker of music and leader of

maker of music and leader of parades who swept through towns capturing people's souls and never giving them back. In this one he's Dr Rabbitfoot, a werewolf, a kind of sorcerer's apprentice. The other world relationships are never terribly clear. But plainly a group of old men who offended the devil years before are now to pay the price. And the catalyst is to be a young man, nephew of one of them, who is writing a ghost story. His creation of characters lets the "night-watchers" play out their own ghastly drama.

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**'I Have a Complaint to Make'**  
(Guy Bellamy, Corgi, 183pp, \$3.50)  
is possibly the book the politicians should have had tucked behind those slightly soiled Budget papers this week. Fred "Cardboard" Carton, is told by his educated barmaid that "Life isn't full of sniffing roses". "If that's the case", he replies, "I have a complaint to make". Fred has an acting, unpaid membership of the human race. "While the workers hurried, lemming-like, towards their first coronary, he survived in idle poverty — better to live on your knees than die on your feet". Someone suggests that applying for the dole is the answer to his prayers. Fred finds the whole process too

... finds the whole process too squalid and offensive. He is almost saved by a good woman, but escapes. Eleven O Levels and the snappiest girlfriend in town are not enough to convince Fred that coffins aren't comfortable.



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Things from outer space are top sellers. Which many explain why two Australian authors have their book on "the first solid evidence of UFOs" published in Pan. 'Alien Honeycomb' (John Pinkney. Leonard Ryzman.

**(John Pinkney, Leonard Ryzman, 168pp, \$3.95)** is the story of a search for wreckage in Queensland. "Most

of the wreckage — strange, intricate, eerily beautiful — is now held by the United States Air Force in maximum security vaults". The authors, however, offer coloured photographs and information about pieces of fibrous material shaped like honeycomb which were found near the site of a UFO sighting.

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Some for the animal fanciers. **'Animal Hotel' (Diana Cooper, Corgi, 257pp, \$4.75)** is by yet another of those brisk English ladies who take in a stray dog and end up with boarding kennels. They write books with the same facility, seeing humour in ever upturned water bowl and hound with cod liver oil on its beard. Mrs Cooper extended into turtles, hens, goats, chickens and even children. There's a crisis on every page, very inspirational for those who may be just developing the capacity to muddle through. Those planning to go into the business probably should not be without two books from the "Zoovet", David Taylor. **'The Dog' (Unwin, 87pp)** and **'The Cat' (88pp)** are **'Owner's Maintenance Manuals'** at \$3.95.