

MURKY DEPTHS

MATURE CONTENT

The Quarterly Anthology of Graphically Dark Speculative Fiction

Richard Calder

Sylvanus Moxley

Luke Cooper

Matt Wallace

Gareth D Jones

Martin Deep

Garry Brown

Les Edwards



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ISSUE

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WELCOME TO A TASTER

If you've already bought a print copy of Murky Depths you will appreciate the high production values that help to make Murky Depths stand out from the crowd. Not to mention the fact that I don't know of any other magazine or anthology at the moment that mixes prose and comic strips, or illustrates every prose story with unique commissioned artwork, the way we do.

You will also know that it was my intention not to produce a PDF version of Murky Depths. I continue to stick by that. So what is this then? It's what it says on the cover: a taster. It's not going to do us justice. You'll get a few stories that have appeared or will be appearing in future issues of Murky Depths to give you an idea of the layout of the magazine, and to convince you, if you haven't already done so, to dip into the piggy bank and take out a year's subscription.

Sure, we're not the cheapest mag around. But compare us to a graphic novel and you'll find there's no one that quite matches us for value for money. Printing isn't cheap (particularly in the UK), which is why so many are taking the electronic route, and although we only pay token amounts for both stories and artwork it still adds up to a considerable amount.

As an appreciator of good stories and illustrations (not always well combined in a comic strip let alone a prose short story) I want to show both in the best

possible way, and I believe print is the best medium for doing that. Call me a Luddite if you like, but you'd be wrong.

Where do distributors pigeonhole us? They don't. They're somewhat flumoxed at the moment.

Diamond, one of the biggest comic distributors in the US (and probably the UK too), declined to distribute Murky Depths. Is that short sighted of them or a shrewd business decision? We'll never know!

Terry Martin, Publishing Editor

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ART: GARRY BROWN IS A UK BASED FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR AND COMIC BOOK ARTIST. HE HAS COMICS PUBLISHED IN HORROR AND CRIME ANTHOLOGIES AS WELL AS INDEPENDENT COMIC LABELS. THE ILLUSTRATION WAS INSPIRED BY RICHARD MATHESON'S BOOK "I AM LEGEND". HE IS CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING FUTURE COMIC BOOKS AND OTHER ILLUSTRATION PROJECTS. WWW.THISISMYBOOMSTICK.CO.UK

POETRY: SYLVANUS MOXLEY. INSPIRED BY GARRY BROWN'S ILLUSTRATION.

A time ...

Death is close. Desprate am I
to save my love. She passes by.
I'd fought to save her from this jinn,
though soon I'll be a slave of him.
But life is ripped as minions thresh,
their teeth and nails thrash skin and flesh.
Through death I swear vengeance be mine,
and that will come, there's always time.



Death and the Maiden



... this from
Episode 3
Issue #3

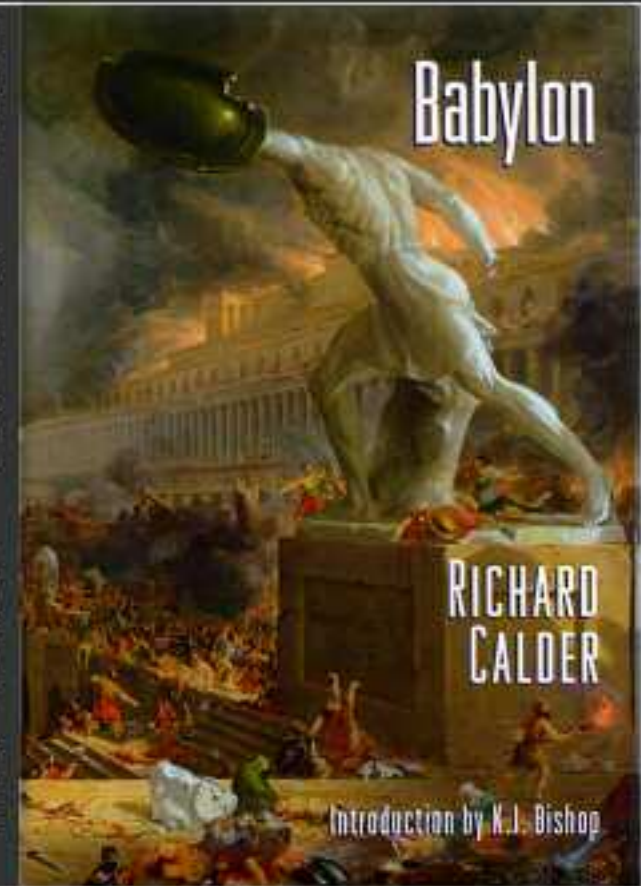
PS PUBLISHING

Your Passport To Strange Places

Whitechapel, London, 1888. Madeleine Fell is dreaming of Babylon. Not the Victorian Babylon of London, but a second, Mesopotamian Babylon that exists in a parallel dimension, a world populated and ruled by Ishtar's sacred prostitutes that has of late gained ascendancy over our own.

In Whitechapel, Jack the Ripper is murdering Babylonian whores. And off-world, on Babylon itself, the men of the Black Order plot revolution—by instituting a ruthless program of gendecide. Unbeknown to her disapproving parents, Madeleine enters the Babylonian novitiate, her heart set upon travelling to the exotic, parallel world of her dreams, fearful, yet at the same time strangely excited, by the intimation that her demon lover awaits.

When Madeleine's parents discover what she has done, she escapes to Babylon with the help of her irrepressible friend and fellow novice, Cliticia. As the two adventuresses journey through a landscape of magnificently bizarre ruins towards the consummation of their *amour fou* and a concomitant disillusionment, they begin to understand that Babylon the Great, like London, is as much a city of the mind as a set of co-ordinates on a transdimensional map, and that they owe the Black Order, and even Jack the Ripper himself, a debt of complicity.



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Day 1: Arrived orbit planet 'Earth'. Local day 75% standard. Will report in standard time units.

Day 2: Communication with natives attempted. 'Human' minds unresponsive. Continuing mind scans.

Day 3: Minds of younger humans easier to access, less cluttered. Still no response to attempted communication.

Day 4: Theory: Youngest mind most amenable to communication. Scanning for candidate.

Day 6: Contact established with human young. As yet unborn. Gestation period of approximately 200 days before birth. From growth rate, age extrapolated back to 15 days. Specimen's mind totally uncluttered and open to communication. Specimen mistook me for 'Mother' (human female host during gestation). Mistaken view corrected but specimen now wants communication with 'Mother'.

Day 7: Human young grows at extraordinary rate. Many traits already evident, determined by DNA. Not controlled by instinct. Child is female.

Day 10: Child claims that she will have blonde hair and blue eyes when born. This combination is generally considered attractive among humans of her culture. She was very pleased when I informed her.

Day 12: Child reports development of fingers. Requests information on Mother. Now attempting identification.

Day 13: Human mother identified. Now searching earth data banks for information. Child also inquisitive of my appearance. Security directives disallow divulgence of this information.

Day 14: Mother also has blonde hair / blue eyes; shorter than average height; average intelligence; high work achievement; athletic. Child declares she too will be athletic. Unsure as to validity of child's claim.

Day 15: Child inquisitive of outside world. Scanning human sources to obtain correct viewpoint. To me earth appears alien, but human child would not consider it so. Imparting my insights could warp future development of child.

Day 17: Began lessons in human sociology. Child intrigued by human behaviour. Appalled by sociological injustice. Decided to rectify situation when born.

Day 18: Child somehow aware that mother now knows of her existence. Wondered if mother has thought of name. I supplied list of names in her native language. She decided that she would like to be called Lisa. I somehow feel that mother will choose the same. I am at a loss to understand this.

Looking In, Looking Out

Gareth D Jones

Day 38: Unable to contact Lisa today. Have finally accessed mother's medical records. She is perfectly healthy. This will be pleasing to Lisa.

Day 37: Shipboard computer estimates ten more days until we are forced to leave earth orbit. I found it very difficult to explain computers to Lisa.

Day 36: Lisa now aspires to be a medical practitioner, and intends to solve the problem of death. I recommend that we maintain contact with earth just in case she accomplishes this.

Day 35: Recent discussions of human biology and medicine have led to Lisa's worrying over her health. She says her heart is strong, however, and thinks she will live forever. I informed her that current human life expectancy is 80 earth years, but she was unable to differentiate between this and eternity. She postulates that her current cell replication rate should increase indefinitely, thus obviating the problem of biological breakdown.

Day 32: After listening to much music, Lisa has decided in favour of a form known as classical. She would like to produce such sounds herself. This is the eighth career she has chosen.

Day 31: Humans indulge in a strange form of recreation known as 'music', involving sound manipulation. Lisa was able to hear this from outside her mother and enjoyed it immensely. I am now preparing to relay samples to her directly.

Day 29: Lisa is sad that we cannot stay indefinitely. She is looking forward to seeing mother in person however.

Day 28: Shipboard computer reports limited time remaining until return home is forced. We shall only be able to remain for a quarter of the gestation period due to engine complications.

Day 26: For the first time Lisa opened her eyes. She reports darkness. She has difficulty comprehending light and colour, or the nature of the sun. Our discussion led eventually to lessons in astronomy.

Day 24: Growth of hair reported. Strangely this grows mostly on the human head, unlike most creatures previously encountered that are either hirsute or bald. Lisa wonders whether mother wants a male or female child. I am unable to supply this information.

Day 21: Lisa's capacity for absorbing knowledge is truly remarkable. I Hope she is not too over-qualified at birth. Her inquisitiveness is leading me to supply information on many varied subjects. Each one captures her interest briefly, but is soon replaced by another.

Day 19: Continuing with sociology lessons. Branching into ecology. Lisa feels sorry for extinct animals. Asked if death equivalent to state before initial self-awareness. I Did not feel qualified to answer.

Day 40: Continued attempts at communication have failed. Preparing to depart earth orbit. Mission aborted.

The Real SPACE DUDE

an interview with comic writer and artist **Barren Douglas**



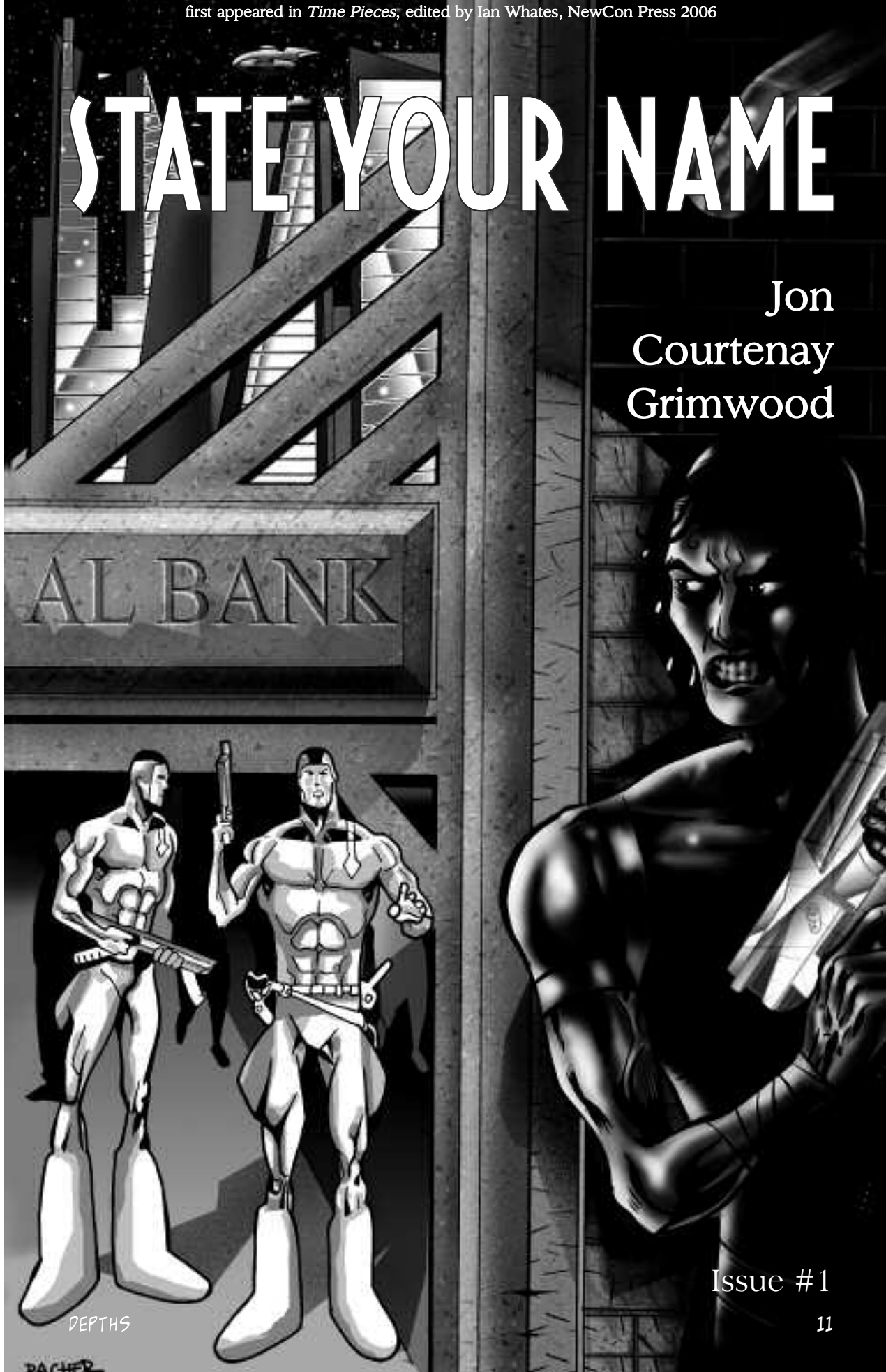
Issue #2



MURKY

STATE YOUR NAME

Jon Courtenay Grimwood




Issue #1



DEPTHS

Promo Issue

THE DEAD MAN AND THE BERSERK



MATT WALLACE IS AN AUTHOR AND A SCREENWRITER WHOSE FICTION HAS PEARED IN VARIOUS PRINT, ON-LINE, AND PODCAST MAGAZINES. IN 2006, HIS SHORT STORY "ABSOLUTION, INSURED" WAS THE WINNER OF THE FIRST ANNUAL PARSEC AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SPECULATIVE FICTION PODCASTING, AND HE IS A FEATURED CONTRIBUTOR ON THE VARIANT FREQUENCIES PODCAST.

Matt Wallace

The club is called Bazard and the old brick building doesn't want it. This is meant to be a temple of industry, a factory that once produced nice respectable toxic products. Now it's used to manufacture midnight pleasuremongers from daytime wage slaves and bored school kids. It is an abomination. The walls cry tears of dust and mold while the load bearings creak hollow spook-house protests that aren't even blips beneath the crushing sonic weight of the music.

It's Saturday night, and the sweat and spilt alcohol has congealed five hundred of them into one undulating organism; leather children, necrophages, next gen cyber goths filtering the world through their designer spectrographic goggles. On the main stage, a band with the Babel-text moniker "griMM/griN" is in the middle of a shriekgasming second set. Their frontflesh, a milky waif two generations too late for heroin chic, has a vocal splitter that allows her to scream the death metal refrain and sing Lovecraftian lyrics in a soft siren falsetto at the same time. The women sway and the men thrash, vice versa in some cases, under an aurora borealis cascade. The light field, magnesium flare-magenta and acid mist-green, is generated as one solid slate. It materializes in the

rafters then blinks down toward the floor in scanning waves. As it descends over the crowd, tossing heads break through the field like drowning victims struggling for their last gasps.

Two men hit Bazard after 1:00 a.m. that the mood and the music don't touch. They're not here for either. They are stoics in a cult of hedonists. Still buoys in an angry sea.

The first one, reanimated and renamed, is called Gideon now. There's a reason, always a reason for a name, but the context required to understand this particular name is far too esoteric. He's otherwise unremarkable; unremarkable height, unremarkable build. But his skin is as hard and dark as Venusian rock, skull clean shaven except for long curving sideburns and a meticulously kempt Van Dyke; a look that was very in vogue ten years ago. The ceramic mail shirt and black slicker he wears, with its fibreglass suspension rings down the spine, are more contemporary.

The one behind him, the big man, 6'5" and wide through the shoulders, as white as Gideon is black, follows his lead. Darrick's threads aren't as shiny as Gideon's, dusty black jeans and dustier boots, an old charcoal shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the

elbows. He's new to Gideon's world. His eyes wander more, his mind questions more. He is new, but not inexperienced, not unsure. Those eyes that wander are not wide eyes, they're slit and sharp and broadcasting on all-bands a warning wherever they search. And the titanium collar around his neck looks like it's there for a reason.

"Who're we looking for?" Darrick asks, the faces all blurring into one frenzied mosaic.

"We'll know soon," Gideon says.

In the thick of it Darrick pauses, eyes to the stage, pupils dilating as they refocus.

"What is it?" Gideon asks.

"The chick. The lead singer. She's sending out double-coded sound waves. I can see them."

"I know."

"Can anyone else?"

"No."

"What're they for?"

"It doesn't matter," Gideon says. "It's not why we're here. Focus."

"That is weird, man. They're like fireflies going into everybody's ears. Except for ours. Is that the implants?"

"Focus!"

"All right. But it's weird."

Gideon slips a hand inside one of the pockets on his slicker, as casual as a man waiting for a bus. He calibrates the device tucked down there by touch, reading the buttons like braille. It remodulates the aurora cascade above their heads; now the light carries a saturating signal, electromagnetic particles that penetrate the pores, designed not to disrupt everyday cybernetics. The particles are encoded for a single purpose, a specific power supply. When the scanning field descends for the two hundredth time of the night no one notices any difference, and at first glance the crowd seems unaffected; and at second glance, at third glance. Then Gideon spots him, a man who was just another too-spiff club nanite in his surface-of-Mars print jacket a moment ago, before his body was inundated with EM particles.

At first it looks like an absence seizure, then a full blown seizure, and by the time anyone realizes it's not a seizure at all the man's spine bursts through his back like an angry invertebrate. The circle of bodies that's formed around him watch as he's deboned by the hand of the gods, holding their drinks in front of them like protective talismans. The reproTon has already grown into the man's skull and seized his ocular cavities; his eyeballs suddenly disappear. Tears rip through each cheek and his mandible snaps off, hanging down his chest like a broken trap door, an escape hatch being employed by the thing wriggling free through his cracked hard palate. The man's neck balloons as the reproTon pulls its chassis up his throat, the part that released his spinal cord, poisoned by the EM particles in the man's blood, forced to excise itself from his body.

The reproTon hits the dance floor a second before the pile of wasted flesh it has discarded like

an infected limb. Its head is no bigger than a doll's and decorated with bits of the man's frontal lobe. His eyes dangle from interface cables connected to it. The reproTon's body is just a small mass of claws and gears overgrowing a cylindrical frame; it's impossible to distinguish the blood from the oil it fabricates to lube its moving parts. The metallic mushroom thing writhes weakly, like a newborn, slowly righting itself.

Meanwhile the men who've beaten it from the bio brush are trying to circumvent Chaos' children, the rest of the rollers and ravers and clubbers who think all is right in their supersonic, chemically-synthesized world. Darrick shoves them aside and the crowd lets him because they think he's a bouncer; later they'll tell the Uni cops he looked so much like one.

Gideon has almost reached it when the reproTon starts hopping across the club floor, head bobbing and gears springing like some grotesque tinker toy. This toy, however, is self-generating. Blue tendrils of electricity fire from its metallic skullcap, wafting and careening like luminous sea algae under oceanic currents. They create a magnetic vortex, calling every ounce of metal in a twenty yard radius: furniture, piercings, jewellery, watch parts, PDAs, cell phones. It cannibalizes every useable bit of hardware, reshaping metal with centrifugal force and melding the new pieces into a crude bipedal form, building itself a body from the ground up, literally, and doing it on the run. The pogo stick inertia moving it forward becomes the hobbling gait of two prosthetic legs.

Gideon and Darrick try to intercept, to close the gap between themselves and reproTon. But the crowd is too thick and oblivious, the club too big. The pair are caught in an undertow of bodies recoiling from the industrial monstrosity clawing its way off the dance floor with hands made of forks and drink stirrers. Even Darrick's arms, the only two things that never fail him, seem useless to stem the tide.

"We're losing it!" Gideon yells. "We can't let it get out the door!"

"Need a diesel with a cowcatcher to mow these fuckers down, man."

"Darrick! Berserk!"

"I can't. I'm not pissed off."

"It's getting away!"

"This is a rave, not a battlefield."

"Berserk! Now!"

"I can't!"

Gideon doesn't have time to argue the point any further. The knife is in his hand as if it's always been there. He picks the fleshiest part of Darrick's thigh and sinks the blade, all four inches. Gideon twists the knife's mother-of-pearl grips until its polycrystalline edge scrapes bone.

The pain is God; vengeful, all-powerful. Opposing it is surprise and confusion and anger. Darrick's agonized curses turn into animal growls that sound like the death throes of some heavy

machine. The on-set of convulsions is quick, and the convulsions are inhuman in their violence; it should be physically impossible for muscles to contract that fast. He starts to change. His veins and the seams of his clothes seem to burst at the same time. The titanium collar around his neck stretches into two dozen individual platelets on a band of silicon elastic. Roars shake the heat-woven air, shattering the reverb of the music, and the bear goes crashing through the crowd, brushing bodies aside like tall blades of grass. Its claws never taste flesh, but the blood of a dozen broken noses stains its dull amber coat. More than a few bodies fall under the stampede. More than a few rib cages are crushed by it.

The bear, not a grizzly, not anything that's tromped the open terra for two thousand years, catches the reproTon at the top of the staircase leading to the main doors. The limbs it's formed from steel bar stool legs and rolled up serving trays fold in the bear's angry maw. The personal defence systems of reproTons are as varied as a person's response to attack. This one runs 50,000 volts through the bear's body. It only singes fur and enrages an already raging berserk. The bear crushes the reproTon to the grated flooring of the staircase, mashing its cobbled guts under a shaggy paw. The human eyes attached to its robotic head have already glazed over, but now, what was operating them, dies as well.

A berserk's bloodlust is not sated by lubricant, and so it will turn on the crowd, drawn to their hear, to the thunder of their hearts and in their veins.

Gideon's traded in his knife for a thumbnail remote controller. It only has one button, and when he presses it, the titanium platelet against the back of the bear's neck emits a steady stream of alpha waves, sent through the cervical spinal cord to the inferior end of the medulla oblongata. The bombardment retards the brain chemistry of the berserk, triggering a recall before rave flesh is put on tonight's menu.

The berserk comes on fast and violent. The trip back is slow torture. First shedding fur, then skin cells, bones moving and cracking and breaking down under a thick hide that's slowly becoming thin skin. Bald paws split and become webbed fingers and webbed toes that have yet to remember how to evolve. The maw is hardest to watch. Its teeth break. It regurgitates blood in buckets. Its snout's wet black end shrivels and falls off. Then the whole thing shrinks, withering, vaguely phallic and disturbing because of that. But the eyes never change, just their inflection. The humanity returns. The rage, like crimson rings around each iris, has receded.

Five minutes later, five minutes that are forever for the beholders and longer for Darrick, he's curled up on the floor, naked, hairless, toothless, bleeding. The bristles of the bear's coat surround his fetal shivering like threshed wheat.

He's forgotten all about the knife wound.

Darrick's first words aren't really words. They sound like hard wind in a cave. His breath is so ragged, his voice so deep.

"God it hurts . . . it hurts . . ."

"I know," Gideon says, kneeling beside him.

"Help me . . . oh fuck . . . help . . ."

"I can't."

Instincts say touch him, hold him for support; physical, emotional. His hand hovers. The air moves an inch between Gideon's fingers and Darrick's shoulder. Anywhere he places them will bring agony, at least right now. Gideon can hear Darrick's epidermis solidifying. It sounds like wood swelling and splitting in a heavy rain.

The band has stopped playing. The bouncers, called out in force, idle in their leather muscle vests. They want none of this. There are so many sets of unblinking eyes straining to process the horror, so many minds, so much sense memory searching for some point of reference that will put this situation into a context they can accept.

Gideon watches the remains of the reproTon. They need to be contained. It can convert the radiation from the several hundred electrical appliances in the vicinity. It can regenerate. The containment team is waiting outside with their lead-lined anti-deuterium storage equipment.

This one wasn't parasitic. It was symbiotic. For all they know the pile of meat ventilating on the dance floor was born in conjunction with the reproTon. Gideon sees it more and more now. He's seen baby birds hatch with fiberglass eyes. He's seen flora blossom with nanotech pollen. He's seen The Integration, the inevitable process of mankind merging with its own rampant technology, that the transhumanist movements prophesize and The Company refuses to accept. The Company, who dispatches teams of reanimated soldiers like Gideon and sapienmorphs like Darrick to combat reproTons as if they're a disease that can be contained. And though Gideon wasn't reprogrammed to think outside mission parameters, he knows that soon their efforts won't matter anymore. The difference between a plague and evolution is only what's left. Soon there'll be no more Sneetches without stars, and Gideon and his berserk partner will just be outmoded hardware.

Darrick has stopped moaning, and even though every muscle, every joint, every splinter of bone screams, even though it feels like he's only a day born and trying to stand on his own, he does it. He stands, aching and unashamed, swallowing the blood from his gums because using the muscles involved in spitting it out would hurt far more.

"I'm cold," Darrick says.

Gideon nods. "I know what that's like."

"What're they all staring at?"

"A Dead Man and a Berserk," Gideon says, and greenlights the containment team.

MURKY
DEPTHS

MURKY

The Last Flight

Dancing dawn's death into dainty daylight
Came Captain Baloo and the crew of "The Flight".
Though cut throats and ruthless, and rapists the lot,
There wasn't a one who'd not share out the pot.

The thunder of thrusters, the screaming of stress,
Brought "The Flight" and its crew safely to rest.
Baloo was the first out, as always was he,
The bravest the strongest, the crew had to see.

The Amals were beauties, goddess incarnate.
The Flight crew, frustrated, were keen just to mate.
Baloo, strangely, stopped them, "There's something wrong here."
But his men didn't listen, celibate for a year.

Baloo left them crazy and lusting for days,
As he studied old photos in drink'n'drugs haze,
In his cabin that mirrored the room he'd once shared
With Martha O'Reilly the one whom he cared.

But outside the pirates, 'cause that's what they were,
Were testing their manhood, their buttocks a blur.
The planet was heaven for all that they'd need
And soon their long passions had sown fruitful seed.

The Amals were breeders, genes tweaked to a peak,
So nine months gestation was down to a week.
When pregnant the Amals would off like a cat,
While others replaced them, men's eyes wouldn't bat.

Their int'rests were so set on dipping their wick,
That none of them noticed or spotted the trick.
But while Amal women were beauty to see
Their offspring were grotesque, you'd just want to flee.

And that was the safest of actions to take
Unless through their hearts you could drive an oak stake.
For Amal's young children were vampire and keen
To reep of the sowers a blood fest supreme.

Their growth was far quicker than that in the womb
And ready for action the vampires were soon.
Meanwhile in the ship Cap' Baloo had resolved
To give up on Martha. That sweetheart of old.

But just then, as happens, from out of the dark,
An all-female-crewed ship decided to park,
And leading them out, I'm sure you'll have guessed,
Was Martha O'Reilly in her trademark red vest.

"Aha there me hearties," she cried to the men,
"Where's Baloo. Where's your cap'n." Perchance it was then
That the vampires leapt forward intent on their feasts
While the women of Amal became were-like beasts.

Limbs flew asunder as claws did their worst,
And men grabbed for weapons and let off a burst
Before they could realise that bullets alone
Would not stop these horrors, they'd not see their home.

But oddly enough the new pirates were left.
It was only The Flight's crew. They left all the rest,
Including the captain, who'd found his sweetheart,
And both of them promised to make a new start.

This story's no moral, but then if it had:
Be ever so careful if you're a vampire's dad.

DEPTHS

Silvanus Moxley

15

DEATH AND THE MAIDEN

Now, m' dear, if you would kindly step aside ...

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

DAMN, I CAN'T STAND IT ANY MORE ...

YOU WILL PAY FOR YOUR INTERFERENCE, PATHETIC SUB-CREATURE. I WILL FEAST ON YOUR ENTRAILS AND ENSLAVE YOUR PITIFUL SOUL.

EMPATHY

By Luke Cooper

WHAT MORE CAN I BRING?

I AM THE FORESIGHT OF TRUTH; THE HARBINGER OF YOUR DREAMS AND A BEARER OF DISEASE, ILLNESS, AND DEATH. I AM LILITH.

I HAVE TO GO NOW, SWEETHEART.

AND SO DO YOU.



THE DARK GOSPEL

1. TIN-MAN

BY LUKE COOPER

THE ART OF WAR



The Other Woman

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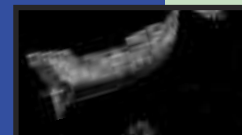
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STAN NICHOLLS

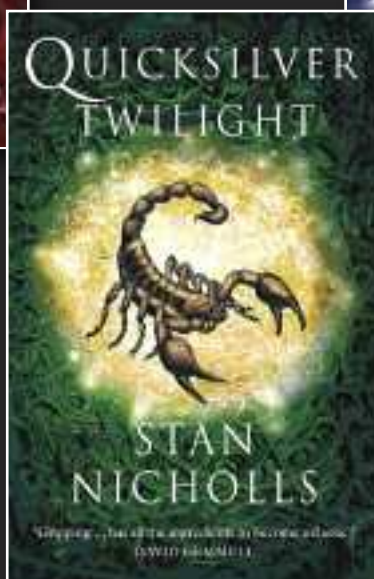


"Quicksilver Rising is brilliantly conceived and beautifully constructed. From the first gripping action scene it had me hooked. Nicholls' Orcs series was exciting and action packed, but Quicksilver Rising has all the ingredients to become a classic of the genre."

David Gemmell

"This is epic fantasy crammed with all the ingredients that aficionados demand, delivered with tremendous panache. Exhilarating, innovative fantasy writing."

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"Stan Nicholls writes sparkling, action-packed fantasy with a dangerous edge."

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"Exhilarating, innovative fantasy writing."

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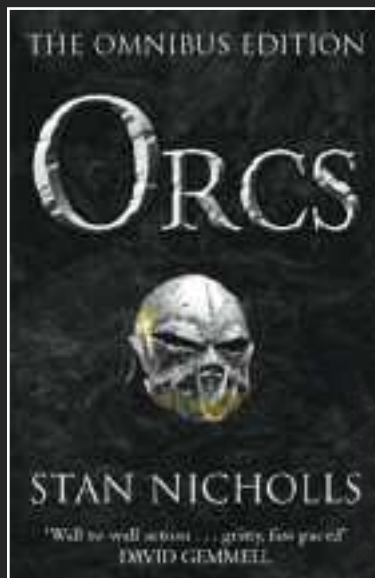
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Jon Courtenay Grimwood, The Guardian

"For all those who feel orcs got a raw deal in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings."

Publishers' Weekly

"The Orcs series is, above all, a wonderful piece of storytelling; fast-paced with plenty of hairpin twists, crammed with loads of juicy battles and properly bad baddies, racing towards a carefully set-up conclusion that's both exciting and genuinely moving. ... a feast for the most jaded fantasy-lover's palate."

Tom Holt, SFX magazine

Coming soon:
a new orcs trilogy,
Orcs: Bad Blood

