



Anthology Two Presents

**BENTO BOX #1**

*Bite-Sized Fiction*

by Jae Lizhini, H.H. Neville, Jason Kenney, Adrian J. Watts

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Cover designed by Jason Kenney

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**HER BLACK DEVICES 'Part one'**

*A CLASSIC HORROR SCENE*

(Music provided by Wumpscut)

by Jae Lizhini

“We gonna root or what?” an unsatisfied voice spoke, breaking the silence of night time at Reinfield Park. The moonlight’s weak rays littered the Pacific City park with a pale sheen, allowing the deep green grass to contrast from the dazzling skyline that plunged skyward from the looming shadow of the deciduous trees.

“Fuck you, Petey!” a female voice shrieked; her loud throated shrill echoed in a harsh reverb. “Did someone tell you I was whore or something?” The woman’s thin hands slammed into the Petey’s ivory dress shirt. The strike induced an audible slap across his barrel chest.

The stout man slipped his hands from the woman’s shoulder, gripping the cherry dipped backing of the bench they sat on. His wide lips instantly curled into a nasty grimace. “What you on about, Sherry? ‘Cause I want a little friendliness, suddenly a mate of mine been spreading rumours?”

“I didn’t say a mate of yours. But now you definitely have my attention,” Sherry said in the proper way, which fit neither her darkly rimmed eyes nor her layered blond hair, which looked more like a Britney Spear’s wig than something anyone would actually have attached to their scalp.

“Now don’t put bloody trite in my mouth!” Petey spat; his darkly tanned face shifted to a more reddish purple which contrasted his military-short shock of blond hair. “I didn’t hear you were easy to get in bed from anyone!”

“Then tell me, Petey, why did you think coming to Reinfield Park was such a brilliant idea? Everyone knows this is the place everyone goes to get their knickers lifted.” Her lip gloss shimmered in the moonlight; she crafted a comfortable smile. “Just tell me the bastard’s name, and things will be gold. I promise.”

“Everyone knows it, Sherry,” Petey said with a grin, but his smile quickly faded as his eyes shifted their gaze to her smooth crossed thighs, cradled by her micro black skirt. “Bleedin’ hell...,” the large man whispered, scooting a few inches from Sherry. “Don’t fucking move, shelia.”

Following Petey’s eyes, her own looked down at her lap. Her brown eyes widened in a heartbeat. Her orbs seemed to throb with a terror that plagued her entire body with a cold dread. “What...is...this?”

“It’s probably just some form of snake. I’ll just ring animal control, It won’t take a moment...” He had a bit more to say to calm her down, but his sentence was interrupted with a powerful scream.

Petey had gripped his mobile from the lump in his pocket. However, the scream brutally pierced his ear drums, forcing his gaze back to his companion. The sight caused his mouth to gape of its own accord. Australia was well known for deadly creatures, but he’d never seen anything like what he was witnessing now.

The small obsidian slug had stretched its body like elastic. Its elongating, slimy form stretched from her thigh, traversing the entirety of her chest and neck; the top of its body (what one might fashion to be its head) had enveloped her entire skull. Her head was fidgeting against the flesh of the

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creature. Its thin flesh inflated and deflated in small boils as though a plastic bag had wrapped itself around Sherry's head.

Petey's ears took in the muffled screams of help that pierced through the worm's bulbous head. She was fighting with word of mouth. Despite the desperate cries for help, his own fear paralyzed him from making any sort of motion of rescue.

The boy didn't move an inch, until a sound almost like the squeaking of plastic came through his ears. The boy looked down with his own shaking gaze. A second of the pliable slugs was slowly stretching its body up his large chest. Its featureless head was almost reflective due to the thick mucus coating its body. The glare was enough that Petey could see his frightened eyes staring back at him. "No... don't come any closer," he blubbered.

The worm seemed to have responded to his plea but not in the way Petey had hoped for. Its body stopped its crawling and stretching as it reached his collarbone. The top bit of its body seemed to angle upwards, quivering in a questioning manner. "That's right, you twat, just go back the way you came..." He continued trying to feign some sort of bravery.

There was a silence that seemed to have lasted forever. Then suddenly the head of the body stretched upwards in a blackened blur. The formless head right in line with the Petey's shaking lips. The head, an obsidian void slit horizontally, a gapping maul flapping backwards like loose flesh. The produced hole grew in size, both in height and width. The stretchy skin filling the frighten lad's gaze with a new void. When jagged hooks began to form on the outer rim of the gummy hole, Petey finally let out his own scream. The black slug's sick grimace moved forward, its gaping mouth plunging onto his head. The gleaming hooks sunk into his flesh, breaking through bone in a sick crunch.

The screams of both Petey and Sherry were soon replaced with the sucking sounds of the slugs covering their skulls. The sick noises seemed to drench the entire park, with a sort of supernatural reverie that made air thick with fear of the decidedly human nature. The lime blades of grass appeared to dive into shades of bracken. The cherry wood of the bench shifted to the colour of blood. Even the silhouettes of the welcoming trees turned into frightening sculptures of death.

"That should be enough," a commanding voice broke through the curtain of dread. The voice was like bass dipped with honey.

A snap of twig ushered the voice's owner as she stepped from the silhouetted trees. Like them, her body was devoid of any features. She stood tall, her bare feet stepping onto the cool grass. She, however, was careful not to step into the moon light. Instead, her piercing gaze stared at the dead couple. Slowly the slugs receded from Sherry and Petey, the obsidian forms exposing ivory skulls. Only the barest strings of flesh and muscle remained.

The cadavers fell heavily from the bench, crushing grass and peat in an earthen thud. The black slugs slid from the spent cadavers and onto the bed of green. They slinked through the grass in a slow but constant pace. Though their bodies looked no bigger, the movement was gradual and burdened.

The woman stood silently waiting. As they approached, she pulled her garment free and extended her arms to either side. Even with no light touching the woman, the outline suggested, under the robe, she was naked. The two obsidian worms disappeared as their shadow bodies met her feet. "Very good," her Kingston accent spoke. She closed her robe in a quick flurry of black fabric. Turning on her heels, she stepped back into the silhouette of trees.

**THE DEAF MUSICIAN'S MELANCHOLY ON WARPED VINYL**  
*OTHERWISE,*  
*ANOTHER CLAUSTROPHOBIC ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE*  
(Soundtrack by The Gorillaz)  
by H.H. Neville

i. EVERY PLANET WE REACH IS DEAD

She sat alone in the gut of the massive transport, trying to avoid comparing it to a live beast. The metallic cargo hold was sac-like; a creature's belly in which she now sat, its carrion. Bowed steel beams striped the length of the ship, reinforcing the exterior; a rib cage. A heavy whirlpool of air stirred by six massive propellers which she felt but could not hear; the monster's roar. Given the circumstances, the thought seems morbid now.

A lone filament bulb in the ship that had bathed the hold sanguine red switched to green, waking her from her undesired reverie. She looked from the rear of the ship to the cockpit and found the comical features of Andy Leung, the co-pilot, looking back. He looked like an aging Hong Kong entertainer. His smashed nose that looked like a flattened tan plum swam strangely in his shallow cheeks. A wide, silly grin hung ever present from picture-railing lips. He looked hardly competent enough to run a razor over his stubbled chin, much less assist in flying aircraft.

He held his hand out, all five fingers extended for her to see. He mouthed the Mandarin word “?” for five. She didn't hear his words. The sound-deadening buds clipped to her ears saw to that. He wasn't dumb enough to vocalise them anyway. The People's Republic of China had put a ban on all verbal communication shortly after the outbreak.

She steepled the points of her elbows across her knees, clasped her palms and batted her eyes. The gesture could be mistook for prayer, but she had long ago resigned from searching out help. Society's gods, the armies of the world, even those in her teen years she battled alongside — the superpowered protectors — ultimately failed. All she had was herself. She reminded herself of that; took one long, overstored breath and rose to her feet.

Her fingers searched quizzically into the recesses of her slender frame; her gear was in order. She navigated the shivering craft, shook by turbulence toward the tail. She shot Andy a quick hand signal over her shoulder. On cue the attentive co-pilot grabbed for the lever to open the cargo doors and thrust down.

Painfully the massive doors unbarred, as if tormented by and afraid to reveal the horrors on the other side. Slowly the panorama filled with the scabbed over, picked apart leftovers of Shanghai.

To her left, a phlegmatic Yangtze River's oily black pools burned orange like an eclipsed sun. The artificial neon of The Bund had long ago died. The remaining lights, like kamikaze moths crackling and sputtering, swallowed by flame. The Jin Mao Tower, a beacon in the Shanghai skyline — it's needle shape commonly jabbing through cloud cover — was all but swallowed by smoke; the burning city's ghosts.

To her right, she noticed less random destruction collecting on the flat roof of a nearby office building. Tiny sparks of fire wavered through the haze in a purposeful pattern; a signal:

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S.O.S.

The word silently formed on her lips, “survivors.” At least, there were. This late into the infestation, the chances of uninfected still alive in the city were negligible.

The transmission of the virus to humans first occurred a few months prior. A popular MMO, “Capsule Takers,” was targeted for distribution. Investigations never uncovered the origin or Patient Zero, but methods for transmission were uncovered. The virus’ data packet attached itself to the physical manifestation of sound waves, infecting organic hearing receptors. From there, carriers spread the virus through further conversation.

It spread fastest and hit hardest in China, by way of the thousands of “farming” operations for the popular game.

The virus attacked communication and social constructs. By design it alienated potential survivors, made organisation impossible.

It didn’t really matter; she had to try. She had her LZ.

She rolled her neck across the valley of her shoulders, loosened her muscles. Without an extra thought, she sprinted through the hold and dove head first toward the dying city below.

**GUN**

*BANG*

By Jason Kenney

The blast tossed him off his feet and into the side of a parked car. He fell to the ground, glass from the car's window falling on him, mixing with rocks and debris that clattered across the pavement.

He tried to push himself up, his left arm giving as a shock of pain ran through his shoulder. He cried out but couldn't even hear himself over the ringing in his ears. He tried his right arm, his shoulder fine, the glass digging in his hand minor as he clamored to his feet.

John Franklin tried to take a step but faltered, stumbled, caught himself on the car he'd hit. He shook his head, tried to clear the vertigo, but that only made it worse.

He quickly patted himself down, making sure he was all there, all parts accounted for. Keys in front right pocket, wallet in rear, gun holstered to his right hip. His cigarettes were missing from his shirt pocket, but those were replaceable. The lighter from his father was snug in his front left pocket. Minus a bum left shoulder and the ringing in his ears, he was whole.

John cursed but only heard it in his mind as he squinted through the dust at the chaos around him. Pieces of building, vehicles, people filled the street. Smoke billowed down and across the way, the gaping hole that used to be the front of a building peeking through the cloud of dust.

People were moving around him: most getting away, a few trying to get closer to see if there was anything to be done to help. No one was moving around the hole. No one could have survived whatever that was.

A hand on John's shoulder got his attention. A balding man in glasses was at his side, mouthing something John couldn't hear but what looked to be a question of whether or not he was all right. John nodded, gently pushed away from the man, and started toward the chaos; staggered there, paused, got his step, and kept going.

The man in the glasses grabbed his left arm. A jolt of pain brought a scream from John's mouth, and the man let go. He stepped in front of John, seemed to want to stop him from going on, from trying to help. John shouted he was fine and pushed past the man in the glasses, who merely shrugged and followed John toward the chaos.

There was a woman standing in the middle of the street, crying, clutching something in her arms, but another man got to her before John, spirited her away. A man down the street was yelling something, pointing, seeming to take charge and try to direct those coming to help. John headed toward him but stopped as movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention.

Someone was emerging from the hole in the side of the building, the dust and debris parting as he came toward the street, toward the gathered few first responders. He stepped out with a bag in one hand, another over his shoulder, a smile on his face.

The man in the glasses stepped past John, headed toward the emerging man, and seemed to be asking if he was all right. The man kept smiling, lifted his free hand, and pointed at the man in the glasses. The smiling man's eyes began to glow, and suddenly the man in the glasses had the glasses on his face explode.

The man formerly in the glasses paused, his body hesitating a second before tumbling to the ground. The smiling man spun his arm around, pointing at another person near by. The eyes glowed

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again, watching as a watch exploded, removing a hand, sending another person down, making the smiling man laugh.

It was a fluid movement, one John had practiced most of his life for.

His father had taught him how to shoot a gun. Had instilled in him a respect for the weight on his hip and the responsibility that came with the right to carry it. His father spent twenty years in the force and only once had to draw his weapon while under fire.

His father drew a little too slow.

John practiced to never be too slow.

The smiling man with the glowing eyes turned his finger as John drew. A duel without ten paces. A burning rose in John's gut, his chest, his entire body. And, for a moment, he felt like he was on fire.

And John Franklin pulled the trigger.

**DUAL**  
*Origin #1*  
by Adrian J. Watts

When the first peal of thunder ripped through the quiet night of Melbourne, most people didn't even bat an eyelid. That was, primarily, because they were asleep – but not everyone was tucked away in bed as the first crackle and boom! was followed by another, and then another.

Kye Prentice was one of those people. He didn't sleep; not much, anyway. Instead, the sixteen-year-old sat at his desk, staring solemnly out of his window as torrent after torrent of rain ran down the surface of the glass, his own reflection flashing periodically as it was backlit by occasional bursts of lightning.

It was just another winter night for Kye. Rain pattered, lightning flashed, thunder roared, and the only thing to stand by him long enough to be considered anything remotely resembling a companion was the quiet moon, high above – and even that was often obscured by the dark clouds which hung over the city like a funeral pall, reflecting the lightning and reminded everyone and everything beneath them that that is exactly what they were: beneath them, The Things Below, the unimportant scum of the Earth.

He sighed resignedly and wondered what he could do to fill the hours until he had to get up for school. It had become a nightly tradition, but one which never stuck strongly enough with him during the day for him to properly prepare for it. Every night he cast his eyes over the rack of dusty, unwatched DVDs, the shelves of comics and novels (mostly read, but none more than once), the rarely-used television set, and the computer which busily searched the Internet for news on superheroes (of the four-colour variety, not those who had long-protected Pacific City, or the relatively new breed appearing in the United States, or even the armoured one which had recently started assisting fire fighters in his own city). Once the night came, none of it really appealed. It just sat there, looking out of place, like a solar panel buried nine feet under the ground.

The thunder roared again, but there was something different about it. It had taken on the opposite quality to the items that Kye found himself so casually dismissing once the midnight hours came – it seemed to truly belong, not just as an expected part of the ravaging storm beyond his bedroom walls, but as an integral part of the fabric of the night.

Then came the hooting.

And then the smashing.

Kye hurried to his window and yanked back the blinds. The street outside was filled by something Kye had never seen before. A cluster of people, their faces – illuminated by the occasional flash of lightning – more pale than anything Kye had seen before. Each person's body was wrapped tightly in black-and-silver cloth, and each enthusiastically gripped a long, white, curved blade with which they hacked and stabbed at anything they found – cars, trees, fences.

It was a riot, and it was approaching Kye's home. Fast.

Crap! he thought to himself. What am I supposed to do about this?

He quickly made his way across the room and scooped up his mobile phone, which was anchored to the wall by its charger. He dialed '000' as he moved back to the window.

Someone must have called alre –

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“AHH!” he yelled at fell backwards, onto the floor, the phone falling from his hand and skidding across the ground. It struck the skirting board on the wall facing the window and split open.

Something had appeared at the window, and, as Kye’s heart pounded furiously, he tried to figure out what it was. He took several long, deep breaths, and his racing mind and heart began to slow. The panic had passed, and he was able to consider the fact that what he had seen was simply one of the people marching down his street – not the hideous, terrifying, fish-like beast which flashed through his mind.

He looked around for anything he could use as a weapon and waited for the tell-tale crash! of glass that would tell him the thug was trying to get inside – but it didn’t come. The reason, Kye soon realised, was that the person didn’t need to smash the window or break down the wall. Somehow, the person was walking right through it.

A ripple effect spilled over the wall surrounding the area the figure was passing through, and Kye felt his chest tighten in panic again. He hadn’t found a weapon – the only thing his hand had been able to close around was one of the broken sides of his mobile. He cried out again and threw the plastic piece at the approaching... monster, he guessed it was – but his assailant was faster; it slashed forward with its shimmering white blade, which knocked the plastic aside.

“Stay back!” Kye yelled, but the monster kept coming, and soon the strain was simply too much. Kye noticed his vision beginning to blur, his fingers beginning to tingle – and an instant later, everything was black. He’d fainted.