



Anthology Two Presents

BENTO BOX #3

Bite-Sized Fiction

By H.H. Neville, Adrian J. Watts,
Emmanuel Goldstein (starring Jacob Milnestein) and Jason Kenney

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

ii. M1A1

The heavy winds imprinted around her frame, ripping at any fold not pulled tight. The barren, empty city, starved, rushed to swallow her whole. As the anguished urban maw drew nearer, it's half-gnawed carrion became clearer. Her soaked, windswept eyes darted wildly from side to side, taking in every last bit. From the safety of the military choppers, the destruction seemed mostly inanimate. As she plummeted toward the pit of din, she noticed it was completely alive. Not quite human things writhed in and out of their mangled lives, feeding. Grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.

She swept her wingspan wide, absorbing her descent and dragged her body toward her destination. She scanned the multitude of floors. Nothing shone in the the upper third, just solid blackness. Contrasted were the middle floors. Underneath oily black sheets of glass, flames burned wildly. Angry brass specters haunted the offices with loud, sizzling moans. Below the fires, discord. Pieces of humanity mended together with circuitry and wire ambled into the base of the skyscraper. They gave no attention to each other, trampling mangled parts into the pavement as they plodded inward. The lobby blasted outward with shredded human mutton, pooling onto the ground.

The building shook, its footing tested. More mindless fiends packed in. If she had meant to infiltrate the area via the building and scope for possible survivors, she knew she would need to provide an appetizing distraction. Herself.

She pinned her knees to her chest, reclining through her fall. She ripped the French PSG1 sniper rifle from its velcro housing on her back and cradled it in her armpit.

She snapped her eye to the scope and, in high powered infrared zoom, targeted members of the swarm, slithering about in the bowels of the construct.

Account for wind.

Account for speed of descent.

Coordinate gaps in breathing.

Squeeze.

Window spiderwebbed and ruptured. The round dug past skull deep into the soft matter beneath. The target in the second story toppled - a perfect kill shot - alarming the nearby horde. The sky thundered with the sound of the shot, alarming the rest.

Those from the second story were content to amble toward the bullet-made opening in the glass exterior and fall to their deaths, cracking open like eggs. Those at ground level craned their necks rigidly toward the heavens, distorted their disgusting maws and howled unheard, foul screams.

She positioned her scope over another skull, this one on the rubble streets. She pressed. Again. Again. Again. Head matter and dirty black blood splashed wildly across the asphalt like smashing cans loaded with paint. Inhuman bodies kept falling until a final squeeze clicked empty.

BENTO BOX #3

Her eyes skipped across street and building like her bullets, scanning. Taking shots had thrown her off trajectory, meaning she'd have to scramble for a suitable landing. What she didn't expect to find was the second story window shattered by her first shot was now empty.

This meant one of two things. The fiends showed either a learning curve, or shared communication network. If she had a guess, she'd suspect they could communicate. The lab coats would have loved that intel. Not that she gave a damn about the scientific process. Well, unless it included a bullet.

What was relevant to her was that they weren't tossing themselves to their deaths blindly anymore. The lemming had wised up and given chase. The flesh of the building now rippled with the movement of the things surging inside.

Her toes tapped down to the streets a few clicks from her handcrafted carnage. Her welcoming party had doubled and they were hungry. She charged them, full sprint willing to oblige.

They too came at her. Much less a charge than a toddle. She didn't break stride. They broke into pieces. The first one lunged from her left. Its brittle, hollow skull splintered like balsa under the influence of her rifle butt, swung like a baseball bat. Before the second could get its stubby, cold fingers on her, she snapped through its knees, swinging her rifle again and then stamped down on its skull.

All around her the fiends mewled and spat, furiously spouting their virus. Beyond that, they were little threat; slow, stiff and unintelligent. The only hazard to her came in numbers. She had to be vigilant and kill as many as she could, while she kept moving to not get over-encumbered.

A third, fourth, and fifth attacked her at the same time, none of them head-on. It was clear they had some kind of reasoning; it was a good pack strategy.

The first lunged just off the back of her right shoulder, and she was able to pad the blow with her rifle as a shield. On cue, the second and third attacked; one from directly behind and the one at a forty-five degree angle at her left.

She heaved the rifle over her shoulder, lodging the weapon into the fiend's skull and popping the cork. Its open neck fountained and foamed in dead, zombie cabernet. It was a good year, still fresh.

At this she left the empty French rifle cum brain basher just in time to catch the second creature on her back, arms around her bust in a bear hug. The last fiend dug its fingers into her neck, all the while both moaning sweet nothings into her face in languid, dead whispers, hoping to penetrate and infect her skull.

How cute, she thought.

Hands wrangled in the hug, she sprinted up the side of the front creature, ripping footholds into its ribs, while dragging the dead weight clutched to her back up into the air with her. She snared the side creature's neck in her thighs and twisted sideways. Dead.

From atop that set of rotten shoulders, she somersaulted forward, pinning the fiend between her and the road. It shredded into various anatomical puzzle pieces. She came to her feet all in the same motion. She found the various parts wriggling after her yet, the head chattering back and forth, still screaming at her.

Then, belying an almost fear, every bit of the fiend seemed to die. She spun on her heels. Ghost Town. Those that had come to attack her were gone. Even the nearby building lobby, cluttered with bodies, stilled.

Her head spun and spun. Where there were creatures, they either froze or retreated into the oily black smoke.

Given her earbuds, she didn't hear it coming. Eventually she would feel it. Nervously she glanced over her shoulder. She saw it, charging her down, a thousand miles an hour.

DUAL
Origin #3
by Adrian J. Watts

There was a loud *CRACKLE!*, followed by a *BOOM!*, followed by the sudden dimming of the lights, which cast their bright white harshness against the featureless walls. Kye screamed out again, fearing what was to come—and, to his surprise, he felt his muscles tense, his veins harden, the strain loosening the bonds, which held him fast against the metal operating table on which he lay. The cloaked female figure and labcoat-clad male—who had, moments before, been assailing him with metal tools of torture—took a step back, and the lights returned to their full brightness.

“You called?” he heard a voice say. He turned his head to face it, but could make out only a dim humanoid shape through the red haze which coloured his vision. He could, however, take in the *smell*; it was damp, slimy, and thick.

“We have experienced another failure,” the male voice said plainly. “Dispose of it to your pleasure.”

Kye heard the cracking of bones—*knuckles*, he supposed—as the wet-smelling thing came nearer. He blinked, trying to clear his vision, and it returned to him just in time to see the backs of the man and woman as they hurried from the room. Above him stood something else entirely—a tall figure with a torso that seemed to be a purple fish face, complete with scales, but with purple human arms and legs.

Very *muscular* arms and legs.

“Oh, it's you!” the fish-thing said. “The one I brought in myself...”

Kye's mind flashed back to the last thing he could recall before waking up in his present state. He remembered the riot in his street and the bizarre, ripple-like images he had seen move across his walls. For a second, his mind tried to tell him that it had been an illusion caused by fear and anxiety, but, as he stared at the fish-thing, he realised it was something far more bizarre than that; what he remembered *had* happened.

“I'll let *you* pick,” it said. “Lightning or water?”

“W-what...?” Kye stammered.

“Electrocution or drowning?”

Kye blinked again, rubbing out the last vestiges of the redness that had obscured his vision. The fish-thing was leaning over him now, almost close enough to touch...

Almost without thinking, Kye reached out with his right arm. The strap which was tied around his wrist snapped easily, and, with almost lightning-like speed, his fingers clawed at the creature's chest, which he supposed was also its *face*. His nails raked across its round, lidless eyes, sending it staggering backwards.

“You little punk!” it screamed. Kye looked at his hand. It was bigger, thicker, *stronger* than he remembered. Something had changed about him. With surprisingly little effort he pulled himself free of his remaining bonds and slid himself onto the cold, white linoleum floor. All around him were pools of blood; he cast his eyes around quickly and saw several other metal tables, each supporting a human body—or parts of a human body, at least. Each had been ripped open, exposing jagged pieces of bone and loose organs. Blood slowly dripped from one exposed internal sac and onto the floor, and it was the sound rather than the sight that made Kye want to wretch.

BENTO BOX #3

A harsh grinding sound and several clicking noises drew Kye's attention back to the fish-creature. Several of the scales on its torso-face were folding back, and from the openings slid long, slender metal cylinders. The fish-thing began to smile—or to offer the closest match it could, a horizontal widening of its gaping round mouth—and Kye could hear a crackling sound emanate from inside its body.

“Run, you little bitch!” the creature snarled.

Kye didn't need to be told twice. He darted for the door, the exit through which he had seen the man and woman depart, but he knew he'd never make it. He smelt burning air behind him and ducked, falling on his shoulder behind one of the blood-soaked examination tables.

Crackling silver-white lightning missed him by only inches, and he was careful not to touch the metal surface beside him. A second later he felt dampness around his bare feet. He recoiled for a moment, fearing that it was the blood of one of his assailants' other victims, then looked down—water was pouring from somewhere, covering the floor, sloshing around his ankles as a pale pink sludge.

Electrocution or drowning, he remembered. *Maybe he's going for both!*

He swung his head from side to side, looking for something he could use to defend himself. He saw nothing, and the effort made him dizzy; so dizzy, in fact, that he fell facefirst into the slop at his feet.

Images danced through his mind once again—images of the sun and the moon, the night and the day, the good and the bad. He saw his own body—his *new* body, he guessed, more strong and capable than the one he thought he owned—cleaved in half, one side lighting the darkness, the other dimming the light.

Suddenly, an indistinct black figure—visible even against the darkness—leaped through him, and his body was wrapped with thick silver and white armour. His hair turned silver, and both the sun and the moon recoiled from him. *Armour Start*, his mental-self said, but the voice was not the one he had heard in his own mind for many years; it was deeper and somewhat alien.

His eyes flashed open, and he pushed himself up from the mix of blood and water that flowed around him. Somehow, he *knew* that almost no time had passed; he had felt trapped in his own mind for hours, but, if that had really been the case, he would have drowned, or the fish-thing would have finished him off some other way.

No—somehow, for some reason, he'd been given a chance. And he wasn't going to waste it.

“**Armour Start!**” he shouted—and, suddenly, nothing was the same.

THE BLACK IRON PRISON tome #4

"yes"

by Emmanuel Goldstein (starring Jacob Milnestein)

Suzuka Rin had become used to unwanted displays of affection. There wasn't a child in attendance at the academy who, regardless of age, had not, at some point in their life, suffered the indignity of participating, against their will, in one manner of lewd act or another. It was to be expected of those older than they; this was the way in which adults interacted with children. What was painful was the way in which older children adopted the practice in regards to younger students.

The world was full of such horrors, the human race beaten into submission, cowed heads gratefully accepting the horrors heaped upon them.

Rin had first been abused at the age of 10, a memory so distant now, the pain so dulled by successive encounters that it no longer summoned the hurt and shame she had felt at the time. Her form teacher had expressed surprise during the act that she was still a virgin. She had protested that her father wasn't like that, to which he had replied that *all* men were like that.

The encounters after that had been less memorable, repetitive acts of violence and betrayal, face pushed down against cold stone and arms held tightly behind her back. One of the older boys had broken her arm once, snapped it as she lay passively down, her skirt pulled up about her hips. There had been hell to pay after that; her physical education instructor had been furious, as she'd been unable to represent the school in the previously arranged tennis competitions against their nearest rivals.

After he had finished berating her, she had gone out on trembling legs, her face swollen and bruised, and watched with casual disinterest as he had pulled her original assailant out of line on the way to assembly and beaten him near to death with the same racket that was still stained by her own blood.

She had felt nothing, no stirring of the heart, no satisfaction of revenge, watching as the older boy had gone down on the tarmac court, flowers of spreading red appearing beneath the crumpled white school shirt.

Her eyes, swollen and closing over, had taken in the scene for what it was: retribution for the abuse of school property.

The students of the academy were not individuals; they were commodities. Following their extensive education in cruelty and brutality, they would be dashed upon the rocks of the adult world, some sinking, others struggling to shore. There were no human beings in attendance at her school, only monsters and their victims.

She wondered if the world could ever be changed, if all the evil and horror could be washed or burnt away. Beneath the gaze of previous headmasters and the entwined carrion birds of the royal family's coat of arms, Suzuka Rin found herself unable to imagine a future that was not mired in suffering and hate.

Moving silently through the corridor, her scuffed slippers making but the smallest of sounds, she found herself drawn onwards, as if on rails, towards her English master's study. In her hand, she held the crumpled note that had been addressed to her, the instructions of what time she was expected and the cajoling and threats made clear, should she choose not to attend.

BENTO BOX #3

There had been a girl once who had attempted to avoid the English master's attentions. It had been back when Rin had first been assigned to the academy, her inner thighs still bruised from her encounter with her form teacher. The girl had only been a few years older than Rin at the time, 11 or 12 at the most. She had made continual attempts to avoid him, feigning illness and prior engagements whenever he summoned her. Rin had heard that she had even offered herself to another teacher, praying that an intercession might be made on her behalf.

The English master had found her in the end, of course.

She remembered walking past the wailing girl every day as the entirety of the English master's form queued in orderly lines up and down the hallway, waiting for successive turns between her legs.

Rin had bowed her head as she passed, pretending that the sobbing, wailing girl wasn't there until, at last, one day she wasn't. She had never had the courage to ask what had become of that other girl and had tried not to make the connexion with the pale, undercooked meat that had appeared on the menu in the dining hall.

There was no salvation from the crooked authority of the academy, no respite from the endless horror. Beneath the school playing fields were the unmarked graves of those who had sought to free themselves from the horror of those hallowed halls. Their skin had been stripped from their living bodies, hardened into Shrovetide footballs; their clothes, glasses, and possessions divided up amongst the deserving; and their skinless bodies, often still living, interred in the earth or swung from the gates.

It was impossible to stand against the system, impossible to defy the adult world.

Yet she remembered the sudden quickening of her heart when she had discovered the email that had been deposited in her account, the impossible message from an uncrowned king:

*“I want to commit murder.
I want you to help me.
Meet me at midnight beneath the sickened branches of the London plane tree.”
- Louis XV*

She had tried to find the point of origin, but, without alerting the attentions of the hook-nosed librarians, there was no way in which she could trace the email.

For a while, she had considered that perhaps the invitation was a trap, a plot to lure her into revealing her hatred of everything around her. She had considered ignoring the email... and then she had realised that, even if it was indeed a trap, she had nothing left to lose. She would die either way, within the system of her nation or the microcosm of the academy. Her body would be used until, like the wailing girl who had declined the English master's attentions, it could take no more.

She was a product, a commodity, and, as such, her options were limited. It mattered not the manner in which she died, and yet it was inevitable that she *would* die.

She could choose now to make a stand, to defy the world, to embrace death with a thankful heart.

Slowly, she came to a halt before the English master's oaken door, the paper crushed as her hand coiled into a fist.

She would meet the uncrowned king beneath the shelter of the tree, and, if he were planning murder, then she would ask of him a favour. They would trade vendettas, dress themselves in each other's hatred.

Suzuka Rin lifted her balled fist and hammered spitefully against the wood.

Tonight would be the last night she crouched down on bended knees before the English master.

After tonight, she too would become a monster.

JACK DIAMOND
Hell Of A Way To Live Part 1
by Jason Kenney

There's something to be said for that first cigarette after going without for so long. You realize the things that you usually take for granted: the feel between the fingers, how it sits between your lips, the smell of the initial burn, the long, slow inhale and soothing sensation as it rolls down the back of your throat and into your lungs, a cloud of softness comforting your nerves as it runs out your chest and through your arms and legs, spreading out and settling down.

For a moment, one blissful moment, it's like meditating. The all encompassing ohm. It makes you wonder what all the fuss is about.

It only takes a shorter moment spent with a woman thrashing in your backseat, screaming as she claws at her arms to wrench out the poison that tears through her veins, that burns at her organs, the frothing of her mouth, the groan and snaps of her joints that spasm at unnatural angles, all in response to a voluntarily injected substance, to remind you that the same thing that drives her back to this point at least twice a month is the same thing that makes that cigarette seem so damn good.

Addiction is a hell of a way to live.

I would say that May in the back was learning that the hard way but she'd been going about things the hard way for as long as I'd known her and I'd known her for about as long as you can know anyone without having been birthed by them.

"We're almost there," I said to May's reflection in my rearview though I doubt she heard me.

She hit a lull, a point where her body just jerked with full body cramps to a beat of a distant tune only audible to her. It took me a moment to realize she was trying to say something, that the sound coming from her lips was not out of pain or doped up daydreams but of actual effort to talk to me.

"N... n..." a hard constant of a stutter that eventually gained sensible anchor with a vowel, "no..." and she repeated it, again and again, the second word so hard to come by, so distant.

"No' what, May?"

"No hospital!" she shouted, as if so happy to finally find the word that the whole world must hear it, her back arched, her feet pressed against the door, her head pushed hard into the corner of where the back seat meets the door, her hands out and gripping at air, one at the back windshield, the other just over my shoulder, fingers clenching once, twice, thrice before finding my shirt and bunching it in her fist.

"You need help, May," I said as I swerved to dodge a car whose driver seemed oblivious to the siren and blaring lights that nearly tore through his back end.

"Y... y... y..." The stutter again, as if trying to gulp for air, and her hand was now digging into my shoulder, her nails clawing at me, as if they'd find the words she's trying to spout from in there somewhere. "You..."

"What about me, May?"

"N... n... no. Y... you..."

"I'm getting you help, May."

A gust of air and I'm slamming on the breaks as May manages to open the door at her head, forcing me to go from eighty to dead stop and toss her to the floor of the back.

BENTO BOX #3

“Shit, May!”

She was clawing and crawling her way out of the back before I got out and around to her. She tried to fight me off but did about as good a job of it as she had of talking.

“Y... you...” she said again as I grabbed her under her arms and tried to pick her up. “You will he... help. Help!”

She pushed off of me and fell against the car, sliding along the side and I grabbed her before she hit the ground.

And I realized she wasn't saying “You”. She was saying “Ewe”.

What the hell had she put into herself?