



Anthology Two Presents
BENTO BOX #4
Bite-Sized Fiction
by Jae Lizabeth, Emmanuel Goldstein (starring Jacob Milnestein)
and Jason Kenney

Copyright © 2009-2011 by Artifice Comics and respective authors

Cover designed by Ian Astheimer

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Published by Artifice Comics - <http://www.artificecomics.com>

CONTENTS

HER BLACK DEVICES 'Part three'

by Jae Lizabeth

1

THE BLACK IRON PRISON TOME #12

"a world that sends you reeling from decimated dreams"

by Emmanuel Goldstein (starring Jacob Milnestein)

3

JACK DIAMOND

Hell Of A Way To Live Part 2

By Jason Kenney

7

HER BLACK DEVICES 'Part three'

by Jae Lizabeth

Detective Emily Swanson gripped the onyx handle of the .38 special. Her bright blue eyes narrowed into a squint, the mouth of the hand gun pointed at where she imagined the forehead of the silhouette would be. The strange man who had arrived only a few minutes ago was knelled down, his hands held up, bent at the elbow to be leveled with the black cowboy hat that was crooked and off centered on the base of his skull. The black gloves looked to be the same color of shadow that the rest of his dark clothing was. Despite the bright morning sun it all looked to be created from shadows.

"I've had it with bloody masked bastards trying to make their way into investigations. As far I've been told vigilantism is still illegal. And you are holding up a police investigation --so off to the station with you." Swanson said. Her voice was more of a high pitched squeak despite her determination. She was after all not sure what sort of power the science hero in front of her had. He could be able to melt her brain with a thought for all she knew.

"Tell the bastard." Her partner Barry nodded and had also extended his large forearm towards the knelling man in the black duster. It didn't escape Barry's keen eye that the man's entire face seemed to be engulfed in shadow from the brim of his hat-- in the middle of the morning. Even the man's hair which was also black didn't seem to get even the slightest highlight from the Australian sun. There was not a part of him that didn't look like a shadow. Barry wondered what caused that effect. He'd heard whispers of magic and the supernatural. But he hadn't witnessed anything up close. He'd been on the beat for a long time, and though he'd seen a lot of things. There was nothing that could convince him on anything he hadn't seen firsthand. And that included the Super natural.

"Can't say it was my intention to disrupt your investigation," The dark man spoke. His voice had a slow draw to it, the sort of voice the Australian detectives had heard in those American Spaghetti westerns. The way all Americans were supposed to talk. .

"You're a mite bit away from home mate." Barry spoke. He walked closer to the Science Hero, and pressed the butt of his gun to the back of the Man In Black's back. Carefully he began to run his fingers over the fringes of the long duster. Searching for items lodged in the pockets. He came up completely empty. Not even a set of keys.

"Y'all shouldn't be doing this. You don't know what you've stepped into." The Man In Black said.

"I reckon your one who doesn't know what they've stepped into." Barry spoke in the man's ear. "No ID, no mobile-- they call that 'off the grid'. You're on foreign soil, and your country will have no idea where you are. We can put you really fucking deep in a hole."

BENTO BOX #4

“You are not prepared to handle what has started in your City. Allow me to fix this mess, before more innocent blood is spilled.”

“You are impeding an investigation.” Det. Swanson said. “You have stepped into, and contaminated a crime scene. This is our jurisdiction, not some yank who stole Dracula’s wardrobe.” She cocked her gun and leveled it at The Man again. “This is my jurisdiction, and you have caught me on a very bad day.”

“That is where you have made a grave error Detective.” The Man in Black said his head slightly bowed. From his kneeled location Emily could easily see the nape of his neck, and for a split second she felt as though she saw olive flesh, along his neck line. *“This is my jurisdiction.”*

“You are in no position to speak so frankly.” Emily Swanson spat. Her voice was hoarse and full of anger. “Barry, cuff him,” She said not turning her eyes from the dark clothed man.

“You are putting yourself in danger, by confronting that which you possibly can’t understand, child.” The Man spoke feeling the cold metal sliding over his wrists. He simply nods his head, as he hears the monotone voice of Emily reading him his rights.

Barry’s eyes went wide as he saw the dark clothed man’s wrist slip through the handcuffs. His entire body began to grow transparent, his form transforming into a dark vapour before their eyes. The tendrils of the Man in Black’s gas form disappeared in mere seconds.

Barry dropped the cuffs on the cold wet peat. His face emblazed with a dark scarlet. His mouth was wide as he began to yell. “This is why I don’t like those masked freaks! Well now he’s done it! Now we play hardball.”

Emily Swanson lowered her firearm. Her thumb released the cocked trigger as she slid the gun back into her leather holster at her hip. “I don’t understand what happened mate. But I reckon he was out to prove a point.”

Barry lifted his hand to scratch his brow. His plump face pruned into a frown. “Don’t tell me you believe that super powered freak!”

“I don’t believe much of anything, Barry. But there is one thing he got right. We have no idea what we are dealing with. But apparently he does.”

“So what are you saying love?” Barry asked, “You want to let this mental patient running around in our city?”

“I think we have bigger problems than some mental patient.”

The Man in Black’s body reconstituted itself as gracefully as it had unraveled. His dark vapours slowly faded from a dark soup of fog. His body never seemed to miss his stride on the firm earth as he grew corporeal once more. His left hand went to grip the brim of his hat as he seemingly nodded to himself.

“She’s back.” He said to himself. “And things are going to get real violent real soon.” He spoke as he walked through the park towards the exit. He knew he would have to move fast. His greatest failure was killing again, she was awake and hungry.

THE BLACK IRON PRISON TOME #12

“a world that sends you reeling from decimated dreams”

by Emmanuel Goldstein (starring Jacob Milnestein)

“I know I believe in nothing but it is my nothing.”

- Richey James Edwards,

‘Faster’

Louis shook his head, his body trembling in fear as, behind the crouching, ambiguous figure of the young prince, the eye within the hole blinked wildly, rotating in its mad search for life within the world.

“It's true, Tetsuya,” Baldr purred, his voice soft, enticing, “the world which you have tried so painstakingly to subvert has never honoured you, never even noticed you.”

Calmly, s/he reached out, tracing the line of blood that ran down his forehead.

“You are insignificant, Tetsuya, a prison within a prison within a prison. This world you have glimpsed, this suggestion of a better life is but a dream, a shadow on the wall cast by the bars of your cell. There is only this place.

“Above resides the throne of the King, wrapped in cloud. Below lies the grave.”

“I-I saw it,” Louis protested, his resolve breaking, “I saw it! We all did...”

Baldr smiled patiently.

“You saw a mirage, Tetsuya, a dream of a world you can never possess.” In his large, doleful eyes, there seemed to be a sense of understanding, yet his cruel lips betrayed his mockery. “In many ways, you were right; this world *is* a prison, a trap for noble souls degraded by filth.

“It is an *oubliette* through which the King can enter but through which the souls contained within cannot escape.”

Again, the smile widened upon his lips.

“The light of your soul will never be able to rejoin the worlds you glimpsed through the rift, Tetsuya. The realm beyond is impossible for you to reach.”

The boy swallowed hard, fear like a weight in his stomach, his anger dissolving as terror took hold.

“W-Who are you people?” he gasped. “Who are you people, *really?*”

Prince Baldr stared intently at him, studying the features of the boy's face.

“We are the Archons, the first born emanations of the King's power,” s/he announced at last, straightening his back and rising again to his feet. “We are your enemy, Tetsuya. We are the enemy of all humanity.”

Louis stared openly up at the child, unable to reply. Everything he had planned, everything he had dreamed of lay now in ruin before him, the fallen bodies of his accomplices littered about the room surrounding the open wound in the world.

BENTO BOX #4

Behind the ambiguous prince, armoured guards kept their weapons trained upon the wounded boy, their faces grim and pallid.

There was a flicker of understanding in Baldr's eyes.

“You can't reach them, Tetsuya. Indoctrination in the service of the King does not allow for free will, you should know that.”

“They're still human,” the boy spat back, the words unbidden.

Baldr raised a single eyebrow.

“You say this as if it is a good thing.”

“It's better than being a fucking monster,” Louis snarled. “If they are still human, then that means they still have souls, and that's what you want from us, isn't it? If the King is what you say He is and if this really is a prison, then what's the point in holding people hostage if they don't know they're being held against their will?”

The youth inclined his head.

“I see the thrust of your argument, Tetsuya,” s/he said thoughtfully.

Louis felt his heart quicken, his pulse race. Perhaps he was not as doomed as he had at first presumed; perhaps, through appealing to the young prince's cruelty, he would be able to win back the guardsmen their freedom and convince them to spare him.

“I see the thrust of your argument,” Baldr said once again, “and I reject it.”

The prince stretched, reaching up with his arms and exposing the milk white flesh of his navel as s/he rose up on tip-toes.

“Tell me, Tetsuya,” s/he purred softly, “in the time that you spent at school, they did teach about how the world was made, didn't they? I mean you do know who I am now that I've told you I'm an Archon?”

Louis simply nodded, the energy required to answer the youth's asinine questions having deserted him.

Again, Baldr dropped into a crouch.

“I am Iao who was worshipped by men upon the Capitoline Hill, my flesh wrapped in the death of the world moments after its birth and my jurisdiction that which proceeds from my rancid Father. I am the castigator of tyrants, the first born of stolen power.”

Slowly, the child crawled forward, his face close to Louis' own as s/he placed his hands either side of him, his right leg resting against his.

“It is I who, following my Father's example, forced my way inside of Eve in search of the divine spark, just as it was I who was charged with policing this world; with drawing in souls and denying them exit.”

His breath was hot upon his face, his lips close to his.

“Tetsuya, I am the force against which you rage, the presence which ordains all the misery you have endured. Whilst the King howls in madness, driven insane by the bondage of his frustration, I have continued to regulate the lives you lead.

“I have made myself the author of your misery.”

BENTO BOX #4

Hir thin lips parted and hir tongue snaked free, saliva staining Louis' cheek as s/he explored the warmth of his flesh. He struggled to resist and then, with horrifying terror, felt a pain in his chest, a blade passing through his shirt and blunting on his sternum.

A cry escaped his lips, blood welling up behind his teeth and instantly, Baldr's lips were against his, hir tongue drinking in the blood even as it rose in his throat.

Desperately, he struggled to push the creature from him, to drive hir back yet all he succeeded in doing was dislodging hir lips from his.

With wide eyes, he looked down to see the youthful fingers wrapped around the handle of an ornate dagger buried in his chest.

“If you had but devoted yourself to the fates, Tetsuya, the world would have embraced you with open arms,” Baldr pouted, hir lips and chin smeared with blood.

He looked up at the angelic face before him, the calm blue eyes and ashen hair, and felt both horror and arousal, the body struggling to come to terms with its mortality as the brain panicked and excited feelings of romance in one last attempt at futile procreation.

Despite the penetration of his chest by cold metal, he felt the shaft of his penis rising, the flesh yearning to fuck away mortality.

“All that anger and cruelty, all that hate and contempt. Oh, Tetsuya, if you had but directed that against those around you rather than what was above you, then maybe we wouldn't be here like this; you with a knife in your chest and I with a longing in mine.

“Perhaps, had you only but listening to the lessons of the world around you, our first meeting could have been more convivial.”

“Fuck you,” Louis gasped, the pain in his chest increasing as the knife twisted and Baldr secured hir grasp on the weapon. “Fuck you and all you stand for.”

With desperate, groping hands, he reached out for the youth, drawing hir to him in a hateful, loving embrace as s/she pushed the blade deeper into the cartilage that bound his ribs together in his chest.

His fingers wrapped about hir throat, hir weight coming to rest upon the shaft of his manhood, pinning it down within his trousers against his naval as hir smiling, bloodstained face looked down at him.

“Fuck you,” he gasped again, thrusting his hips up in a frustrated gesture, a useless attempt to either free himself of hir weight or drive his own weapon into the space between hir legs.

“I will return once again. From the very heart of Hell, I will claw my way back, just to curse you, to damn you, to spit upon you.”

His hips spasmed once again, a jerk of motion that widened the wound in his chest and spilt blood down his torn shirt.

“When all light has faded from the world, when you've crushed the sun and stuffed yourself full of whatever excrement remains of humankind, I, the king uncrowned, will drag myself up from the grave to wound you once again.”

The young prince tore free the knife and Louis screamed in pain, his head falling back against the wall as his hips slammed upwards again.

BENTO BOX #4

“I will defeat you!” he gasped, staring at the high ceiling of the ancient palace. “I will return... to defeat you!”

Without comment, Prince Baldr drove the dagger down once more, smashing through the sternum with supernatural strength and tearing the jagged edge of the weapon into Louis' heart.

Blood ejaculated from his mouth, rising in an arc that fell like rose petals about him. Between his legs, a second effusion surmounted its constraints, spreading warmth upon the tender flesh against which it pressed.

His body jerked in its death throes, the ghostly eyes of his fallen conspirators watching as the life bleached from his face and soured between his legs.

“I will return,” he murmured, his body cooling, the movement of his hips slowing.

He could feel the weight of the youth upon him yet no longer did he feel hir a force to be wrestled with, rather hir warmth was a comfort to him, a reminder of the life he once possessed.

“I will return... to defeat you...”

His breath slowed, the blood congealing in his mouth as the light of the world dimmed and the heat of the body upon him seemed to lift.

He felt his heart protest at the loss, a cry of sorrow welling up in the turgid blood that lined his throat yet he was unable to give voice to it.

Above him, the white of the ceiling grew dark and then, Louis le Bien-Aimé – le Roi Căina, His Most Heathen Majesty of Antenora, the Count of Ptolomaea and the lands adjacent, the Dauphin of Judecca – passed at last into abject nothingness.

JACK DIAMOND

Hell Of A Way To Live Part 2

By Jason Kenney

You'd think a pusher with a tendency to have his place raided would have a stronger door. Or maybe he just got sick of replacing it every few months so he just put in something cheap and inexpensive. He'd just need to replace it again sooner or later. Or tonight.

"What the fuck!"

Eww Tomb leapt off his couch and fell over his coffee table as I came in with May in my arms, May fighting all the way.

"Whatever you sold her, Ewe, you damn well better have a fix."

"You can't just keep fucking coming in here like this, man," Ewe said as he pushed sweaty, stringy hair out of his eyes and back over his head. I laid May on his couch and tried to hold her down as gently as I could which was a whole lot harder than one might think. "Where's your warrant?"

I looked at Ewe who raised his hands as if to shield himself from my glare.

"Fix her, Ewe, or else."

"Shit." Ewe turned and disappeared down the hall, his curses bouncing about as he went from room to room, tearing through wherever he kept stuff.

May's convulsions started to ease a bit but not from a lull. Her eyes started to lose focus, started to roll.

"May!" I shouted as I smacked her and she jarred but her eyes still were gone. "Hurry up, Ewe!"

"Fuckin' coming!" Ewe came back into the room and dumped a pile of stuff out of his arms and onto the coffee table. "Hold her shoulders down," he said as he came around with a tube and sliver of metal. "Get her mouth open."

I leaned onto May to hold her down and pried her clenched mouth open. Ewe slipped in the metal and followed with the tube, pulling away the metal and nodding toward the table.

"Gimmie the can."

I grabbed it and handed it off, Ewe screwing the end of the tube onto the can's tip and spraying the can.

May's eyes quickly focused and widened, her body stiffening as Ewe emptied whatever was in the can into May's lungs. May's hand grabbed my shirt and pulled, though whether it was voluntary or not was beyond me.

"Alright," Ewe said, pulling the tube out of May's throat and letting her gasp for air. Ewe bounced aside to the table, grabbed something, the bounced back, pressing small plastic cylinder to May's neck. A snap and a hiss and May started to relax, her body easing, her eyes fluttering before she passed out.

"She'll be out for a couple hours," said Ewe as he whipped hair from his face again. "She'll probably be starvin', but she should be as good as new."

BENTO BOX #4

My hand coming around his throat caught him by surprise, though not as much as my motion, my lifting him into the air, spinning, and slamming him through his coffee table and onto the floor. The whole thing was more for effect than actual practicality, but sometimes effect has a practical purpose.

“Shit, Jack,” he croaked and I tightened my grip to shut him up.

“What was she on?”

“Inhalant called teft,” croaked Ewe. “Some synthetic shit passed down about a week back.”

“What’s it do?”

“Small doses it makes you feel like you’re having a fuckin’ orgasm for the length of the rush, twenty to forty minutes. A little more and you feel an orgasm like the opposite sex would.”

“How much would do that?” I asked, nodding toward May.

“Just a little more,” said Ewe with a shrug and a smirk.

I pulled my hand from his throat and stood up with a growl.

“What the hell kinda purpose is a drug like that?” I asked as I rubbed my face, exhaustion and frustration mixing for one hell of an effect.

Ewe stood up and shrugged again.

“I’ve heard it’s for anything from throwing off the enemy to a top brass unable to please his mistress or himself wanting to have a little extra fun. They don’t tell me what this shit is for, I just...”

“Yeah, yeah, you just push it.”

Ewe with his damn shrug.

The problem with being a nowhere town is that its people are nobodies.

The city’s a dumping ground for the nation’s refuge, unwanted problems to be swept under the rug quickly and quietly. Retired spooks who know too much, supernatural things that no one’s supposed to know anything about, former druggies in the employ of the government now tasked with testing its latest developments on a populace no one really cares about anyway.

And a handful of people in place to keep it all in check.

“Who all have you given this stuff to?” I asked.

“Just a few or the diehards.” Ewe started scratching at his all too fresh trackmarks, more in thought than in itch. “May, Joey Lowe up on the north end, Tiff tried a hit the other night.”

“Tiffany Gordon?” Ewe nodded. “Your girlfriend?”

“Curiosity’s a beast, man.”

“Is that it?”

“Yeah. They didn’t give me a whole lot to begin with.”

“But they gave you enough for May to get like that?”

“It doesn’t take a lot.”

“Do you have any left?”

“Just a couple doses.”

“Give them to me.”

“What?”

“Give them to me.”

BENTO BOX #4

“Shit, Jack, you know I can’t do that.”

“I know I can make your life a living hell if you don’t.”

“Oh yeah? And what about the feds?”

“You think I can’t make it look good?” Ewe narrowed his eyes. “You think I can’t hide a body?” His eyes weren’t so narrow anymore.

“Shit, Jack...”

“Shit, Jack’ me one more time, Ewe,” I said, pulling out my cell phone and starting to dial. “Just one more time.”

“Alright, alright. Just give me a sec.”

Ewe disappeared back down the hall and I put the phone to my ear.

“Pierce, it’s Diamond. I need you to run uptown and drop in on a guy named Joey Lowe. Yeah, same one. Call me when you check him, let me know how he is. You’re just checking to make sure he’s not convulsing on the floor or dead. Yeah. I’m being purposefully vague, Pierce. Just do this, alright? Alright.”

I hung up as Ewe came back in with a shoebox.

“That all of it?” Ewe nodded. “And the antidotes?” He nodded again.

“What do I tell them when they ask about this shit?”

“You tell them to call me,” I said as I walked to the couch and looked down on May for a moment. Out like a light. So peaceful.

“They aren’t gonna be happy, Jack.”

“Yeah, well I’m not too happy either, Ewe.”

ALSO AVAILABLE

SOPHISTRY

*"I thought you might have forgotten about me."
"I lost sight of what was important. One by one my family slipped away..."
"You're not the dreamer," he said firmly, "London is."*

"...it's against God!"

From Camden, an old lady sets out in the company of a soft toy to pass through the seven gates of London in order to kill a distant and heartless king.

ISBN: 978-1-4092-5051-7

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Sophistry-Jacob-Milnestein/dp/1409250512/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1262269696&sr=8-1

ALSO AVAILABLE

BUSH43 VOLUME #1: OH, THE LAMEITY

When your costume is a suit, tie and George W. Bush mask it's hard to be taken seriously as a superhero. Volume 1 collects the first four issues of *Bush43* and an exclusive Issue #0. Read the series Derrick Ferguson (*Dillon And The Voice Of Odin*) calls "Fun, light-hearted superheroics with a hint of darkness at the corners."

<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/5114>