

2014

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DIESELPUNK

ePULP SHOWCASE

NINE AMAZING TALES!



Dieselpunk ePulp Showcase 2

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WELCOME

In life, you can choose to be a creator or a consumer. I can turn on the telly and find something tolerable to pass the time, or I can let my discontent guide me to a better place. You see, I'm a dieselpunk. I'm not content with the contemporary, but I'm also not satisfied with reenacting the past.

The strange thing about discontent is you have to respect it like an explosive. Pack it deep inside and you'll blow yourself apart from nuts to knuckles. Find a way to guide that explosion, and you'll change the face of mountains.

The brave souls who donated their words and ideas to this ePulp are the creators. They're shaping how you think about dieselpunk, pulp, and speculative fiction. They're leading our world by example.

We learned a lot about our community from the 2013 volume. This year, we have twice as many entries, and our worldwide audience is still expanding. From sky captains and private eyes to the stars beyond, The ePulp Sampler: Volume Two is our gift to you.

Why?

We want to wake up one day knowing it was us who shaped the mountains.

For the future,
-Tome

Tome Wilson is the owner/operator of Dieselpunks.org, an online magazine and social network devoted to inspiring dieselpunks and steampunks around the world.

WILD MARJORAM

The title 'WILD MARJORAM' is presented in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The word 'WILD' is arched over the top of 'MARJORAM'. The letter 'O' in 'MARJORAM' contains a detailed illustration of a tree. The entire title is framed by decorative lines, including a horizontal line with a central knot-like detail and two diagonal lines extending from the top corners.

THE BIRTH

Created By N.R. Grabe

Raindrops tap along the tin roof of the building and even though he struggles, he can hear a faint meowing as a door opens. The light voice, a dazzling piano prance by the squeaky hinge, appears and talks to the animal. A can of deep sea turkey opens, the fishy scent mingling with gasoline and garbage. Raincoat rubbing swishes in the corner and falls, clinging to the floor.

“I found him outside, poor thing,” the voice floats through the dingy air.

A second voice echoes in the ceiling, more confident and stronger than the first gliding intonation, “We are not taking him back with us. You always collect strays.”

“It’s freezing outside, Honey. We could keep him for a few days and see if anyone wants a pet.”

“If you wish, I suppose. You look cute with that feline curling up to your neck. I should take a photo. I got a camera from the scaly one, the latest thing. Takes photos in the dark crystal clear.”

A fired camera flash lends its sulfur stench to the room. Double titterings of pleasure pepper the area as the camera’s gears crank into motion.

“See, the picture paper comes out here. It develops before your eyes. The toast of 1919’s Oddman’s Invention Market,” the stern voice explains.

“Remarkable, we must show my employees how to use it.”

Melodic notes whisper by his naked ears, yet there is no acknowledgement of his presence in the room. He ghosts along as if in a delusion. The chair clasps his arms. He tries to count sheep to pass the time, but he is not sure if it’s been minutes or hours. A blindfold forces his eyes into damp darkness. A tiny bit of water quavers from a metal funnel over his tongue into the back of his mouth. He moves his head and finds the device isn’t attached to anything he can feel. No hoses, no wires.

“Do you really want to do this?” cascades the first voice down his eardrum. The man tries to note any characteristics so he can tell his men once he frees himself. A dullness causes his ears to fail one moment and focus the next. An underwater plugged sensation leading to clarity. It could be a dream.

The second voice sinks low with conviction, “Of course, I don’t have a

doubt in my mind. Do you?”

“Won’t we become like them? Remember the Battle of Portland?” the voice has released the cat, who is purring and meowing, walking closer to where his chair is. His legs can’t move. Belt-like attachments, could be leather. Strong.

“You can’t compare that to this. Do you have the tools ready? Are they clean?”

“Amazingly so, given the squalor of this room.”

“Give me the butcher knife and the metal board. It will fit into the chair’s arm. And see that drainage area there...that’s genius, that will catch the blood.”

The man sits and listens to the voices. He tries to communicate, but his words mumble out and he sucks in a toxic, metal taste.

“There really isn’t anything you can say. You shouldn’t talk. Didn’t you take away communication from her? She can’t even talk now,” one of the voices addresses the captive man and his mind digs into his past.

The room rockets with a biting coolness as his ears dial in on the dual voices. One seems to be taller than the other. One is in command. He’s breaking down, his mind wandering instead of trying to hone in.

The taller voice remarks, “I have the tranquilizer ready.”

“Don’t give him too much of it. Enough to stop him from moving, but not enough for him to not feel pain,” the shorter voice answers. Is this the

ringleader?

A large needle injects into his popping vein, trailing out of his left arm. It makes him feel at peace. A sudden calm comes over him at the moment the butcher knife hits his wrist. It cuts most of the hand off, but the arm is still tied fast. Tears flow down the blindfold and around the edge of the funnel's bandage on his mouth. The desire to scream and curse his captors burns from his brain. It releases as a grumble, muted.

"I thought you said you wanted to hear his words," the lower voice reasons.

"What would they be? Telling us we don't have the right. Put-downs? This is much more zen. It is what Dragon would say. Zen. Get the cauterizing wand. He's losing a lot of blood fast."

An engine fires in the room and chugs to a stop.

Smoke and gasoline pour into his mouth in particles from the night mist bonding with the miasma. The voices sound less strong now. He fades a bit and can't differentiate between the people talking. It's like a flood of sound. Neutral neuter voices. Who's Dragon? Someone in the service?

"Blazes!"

"What?"

"The engine isn't working."

"Well, pop it again."

“See, this is why I need a proper lab. Here, I’ll try it again. Hold the wrist with this towel to stop the blood flow.”

“There it goes...wait.”

The engine runs and then peters out.

“Why today of all days? This is Redcrown garbage. We always make bad trades with them.”

“Anyone who makes a trade with a gangster called ‘Itchy Index’ ought to know better.”

“Hey, there it goes! Aren’t we lucky?”

The stagnant engine launches into a roar and revs into full power. Its bombardment of sound makes the cat screech and it runs across the captive’s ripped pant legs with fear, leaping onto the floor and heading into the unknown, the claws making the man’s legs twitch.

Distracted, the man feels a hot blast to his dead wrist from the makeshift weapon. The phantom hand still moves in the mind of the captive, though he smells smoke and knows the deed is done. He mumbles out as fingers push the funnel-gag in further, so he stops making noise. The claws linger. Time moves so fast.

“Poor baby,” the higher pitched voice wails. “If you wouldn’t do what you do, your hands could still be yours.” He hears a plop in a basin where his hand hits.

His mind runs foxlike. Battles have done that. He remembers following

her, gaining her trust. It wasn't hard, even with the war. She remained lovely even after her accident. He should have kicked her more.

“I need to empty out this basin. Where do you want me to put the hand?” the voice enquires intently The Maltese Spectrum.

“In that canning jar of formaldehyde there on the table.”

Another swish as he waits. A spark of feeling, other than pain, comes back and he tries to knock over the chair, finding it firmly screwed into the floor.

“We thought of everything, my sweet. Sit back and enjoy the show. Isn't that what you told her?”

“You can nod your head. You did tell her that, right?”

The man nods a “yes” without thinking. It was training. Why put him in this place? He should have gotten a purple heart for this, from the burns he received from battle from her. He shifts from side to side, trying to release the bonds.

“It is so nice you can be disgustingly forthcoming,” the higher pitched voice states. The blade sits lightly on the second wrist cautiously, patiently, so he can feel the next swipe coming even before it falls. “You did art before the army, right? Oh wait, you still took photos and newsreel footage too...we found those films you did.”

“There was no doubt it was you. You left nothing private and it was like an instructional movie.”

“We burned the copies. It was hard finding them all, but I am not sure why you would let that be in this world,” the voice informs, as the blade moves up and down the wrist. The skin parts to bone and warm liquid starts to lightly drizzle down the chair’s weather-beaten, oak arm. “I wish I could do this slowly, but you would die. The key here is to keep you alive to go back to your boys and tell the tale.”

“You don’t think of the retribution of this?” the other voice debates. The man sits still, listening to them, without a comment, thinking this has to a whimsy of his mind, if not for the burning, if not for the puddle of warmth down his arm, if not for the foul-smelling lake forming down his legs in fear. Be brave, he says in his head. Don’t let them know you are cracking.

“You think they think of retribution for what they do? They think it is glory. Bring the basin over. I am breaking the skin right now and he’s bleeding out. I need to chop the thing off now. If thy hand offends thee...” the voice lilts as the man’s ears start to feel plugged and ring from the clamorous machine pattering in the background.

A basin clunks and the blade sweeps. The pain thunders in. The fuzziness parades into his visible darkness, but the voices pour water on him and then the burning of the stub makes the tears flow again. A whimpering ripple, collected by touch and echoes. Life runs past and upon itself, foaming waves, memories swim by, churning buoys, red impulses, firing. Shaking and trying to pull his dead hand up, he goes passive in panic and his arm goes numb. Dead flesh is in the air. Soot. It reminds him of barbecue. He begins to black out.

He’s there at the camp and scans the vividness of its ruins, its dirty cells against the clean, white offices of sergeants, with their expensive wooden

furniture and maps. The charred scent reminds him of what they did to her. Ironing, they called it. They had ironed her. Her muscular legs kicked to release the grasps of guards and then the iron came, a brass iron, and her blood became a ribbon around the circumference as it did its job. No screams came. The guard's hand was over her mouth and she knew that screaming meant nothing. That no one would come to her aid. She became like the dirt, particles of a human, twirled into coiled frame, clutching herself with a soiled bed sheet, agonized by cauterized pains and fists beaten into her. Sobbing pathetically, a mouse thrown about like a tomcat's catnip toy. Never a sound, her mouth agape, motionless, finished.

It was the first step of many to control. First, working up trust. Second, giving them good food, work, and money. Third, rounding them up in the night to be rushed to the camps. It was protocol. They were young. If they ironed them, they would suit the purpose more. Though a few were spared for obvious reasons. They had to suckle and make milk until they found a way to create a substitute. It was their fault for saying "no", having an opinion. It wasn't for them to say, only to do...not even do, be. Seeing them as people only created more paperwork. He hates paperwork. One time, he had to fill out a whole stack of forms because that sad sack of a doctor intervened. Humanitarian. We'll get him back for stealing the next time he comes into our borders, the captive man imagines. It's a kingdom with barely a population to stand on, but it is still ours.

That city. It was hardly a city anymore. It was empty. Did these voices know how crackled their NYC was, how destroyed? Of course, they didn't. A wall had been built. That girl bemoaning her beau, Yves. She cried more that day than when the iron came down. They could have been happy if they hadn't joined the service. She was a vision with her dyed blonde hair and blue weekend case, the brass handle pulled with both her hands tight up to her chest as he picked her up to get on a train for the big

city. It wasn't always bad. His jokes made her eyes sparkle. Then her eyes fade to visions of the thunderous beating to her bust that once curved lusciously over the top of her ribcage. Puce bruises, pink trails of faded claret. Her body served as canvas for their bouts of raising broodmares. She was being punished for not being pure enough. Pure enough in blood. Now they only went after the natural blondes with blue eyes. The men had learned their lesson. All the years of non-stop war had made his band the enemy. Those Germans who had the strength to come here and make parts of the East Coast their own. He sides with the strong.

“Yeah, I want the tongue too,” a laugh rings out.

He can't tell the voices apart again. He runs to the safety of his inner sanctum, but the intense agony flows into his brain, throbbing.

“You will have to take the funnel-gag out. I don't want you to have a bad experience,” the first voice says to the other.

“It's ok,” the other responds, hesitant.

The funnel-gag is pulled free. Its metal cone pops free of the man's lips.

“Why are you doing this to me?” the man says. “Everything we did was for the government, the greater good.” The words mix with wails and sniffing. Water comes out of his nose and down his chin. Snot dangles from his reddened nostril down to his burned chin.

“You don't even know why you are here?” one of the voices demands like a sadistic radio game show host.

“I assume you are with the Resistance,” he pants. He can barely ease the

words out of his tight throat. He is trying to think of a funny radio show, anything to get out of this world and into his head, trying to make the host voice pleasant, human.

“You know Beryl Duiker?”

“Beryl, who?” fakes the man as the sweat on his forehead beads. The voices won’t let him go. They are as tight as the straps that lock his life away.

“I’ll be danged. They gave them numbers, not even names, right? Or letters?”

“Camp 923. You called them Field Cows eventually; she would have been FC 9237821. Kept in barracks #4931251.”

Finding the courage to speak like a soldier, the captive man says, “Yes, Madam or is it Sir? We had her help us with photography at first. Newsreels. We thought the girls could be put to use weaving film together. She was a good one. Hated to put her into the program. It was an order though. I did enjoy her. She was carrying one of mine.”

“She still is,” the higher voice says to the captive man.

The captive man whispers, “She’s alive?”

“Yeah, even after the violence you inflicted on her. Do you have any final words?” the voices merge again in the man’s ears.

“You are going to kill me?” breathes the tied man in a whisper as a tear lingers in the corner of his eyes under the dusty blind.

“Ha! What? And let you die? How humane. Save that for the little puppies and kitties and orphans who go hungry on the edge of The Knife. We aren’t humane here anymore. We used to be. But slowly we found out you army men only speak one language. If you felt anything for her, you could have helped her escape.”

“I was doing my job.”

“You won’t be doing that any time soon. Once we get the tongue out, try directing your screening crew or your underlings. Try to use a squeegee. She will most likely never create again. We rescued her, comatose. She woke up rambling and crazed. Why should you get the pleasure of using your hands when you abused her so with them?”

“There are two of you here, right?”

“Can’t you tell any more?” the voices layer.

The captive articulates, “No. Everything sounds murky.”

“I notice not once have you asked to be let go.”

“What would be the point of it? You wouldn’t release me. We are taught to handle pain. Look at my face, these burn scars. She did this to me. That woman blew fire over me when she escaped. Pain, I can take.”

“Are you handling it now?” the voice sounds like one person to him, even though it is two. He makes out a slight higher note from one of them, but they fuse like Siamese twins in a murky womb. Two headed Angel of Death. Hadn’t he heard of this before? Them? His nerves fire through his

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