

E
PULP

ePULP

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Sampler

VOLUME 1

DEAD RECKONER

by MATTHEW J DAVIES

RURIK of the **DEMONWATCH**

by RUSS BOPP

WILD MARJORAM

by N.R. GRABE

PANDORA DRIVER

by JOHN PICHA

SKYRACOS

by JOHN PICHA

FANTASY · WEIRD WAR · ALT HISTORY · SUPERHERO · SCI-FI

FIVE FANTASTIC TALES

ePulp Sampler Volume 1

Created by John Picha, Matthew J. Davies and Russ Bopp, and N.R.
Grabe

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WELCOME

You may not realize it yet, but you're actually holding a time-and-space-machine in your hands, and we're about to go on a journey. Whether you're reading this ePulp while commuting to work, between calls at your desk, on the toilet pinching a loaf, or in bed as your significant other sleeps off a headache, we are leaving the doldrums of the modern world behind us.

Get ready to explore strange worlds, visit forgotten pasts, and delve into parallel histories. Prepare to encounter an eclectic mix of heroes walking the line between life and death. Duck as Rurik's blade carves demons in the Celtic landscape of dark fantasy. Witness the Dead Reckoner, a battlefield ghost looking for absolution in a weird war tale. Face Nazi occupation of the USA with Wild Marjoram in an alternate past. Race through the Great Depression on an errand of mercy with Pandora Driver, a noir superheroine. Fly across the universe with the Skyracos in a retro sci-fi adventure.

This action packed ePulp anthology unleashes 5 new tales inspired by the pulp magazines of the 1920s - 1940s. They are not for the faint of heart. Things will get intense and stuff on these pages can't be unread. But whether you're a nostalgian, dieselpunk, pulp or pulp-curious fan, sci-fi and fantasy aficionado, or ebook spelunker, there's something in this collection for you. However, I suggest you sample them all.

Oh, I almost forgot to introduce myself. I'm Kilroy, the ghost in this machine, the messenger between the lines, and the spirit of pulps past all rolled up in one. I'm the phantom voice dwelling the pages of this ebook. I'll be your host and time-and-space-travel-agent. As we

voyage ahead, I'll reappear between stories to help you acclimate as we open and close doorways between worlds. I'll also offer insights, tidbits and extra info about each story. I'll even try to bring you back in one piece, but I make no guarantees. You might be different on the other side.

Our journey awaits. All you need to do is touch, tap or click to continue. I hope you have as much fun exploring as we did inventing.

Now let's talk pulp...

E PULP

WHAT ARE ePULPS?

Sex! Murder! Crime! Corruption! Hard-boiled action! This was the stuff of the pulp magazines of pre-World War II America. These adventure serials were called pulps because of the inexpensive, “pulpy” stock paper they were printed on, as apposed to the “glossies”, or “slicks”. The forerunners of comic books, pulps were inexpensive escapist entertainment for people in hard times, at a cost they could afford.

The original Pulp stories of the 1920s - 1940s were a lot more spicy and violent then people would expect. Some were even banned or placed behind the counter due to their content, still they hid behind the innuendo of cryptic noir-speak to soften their content for a more ostentatiously genteel audience. Our ePulps re-imagine the world of the pulps in modern language, for a modern audience. You'll find no

“heaters squirting lead through some joe's mug” in our ePulps, but they but maintain a distinctly retro feel. They are unflinching in their depictions of violence and graft, and seek to show the “good old days” as they really were. By unmasking the true visage of a romanticized era, we hope to reveal a doppelgänger of our own time.

Our ePulps are independently produced and published stories, they are the raw creations of their authors, beholden only to you, the audience. They are the attempt of a few writers and authors to hold the human condition to the light to dispel the darkness of corruption that haunts us through the ages. EPulps are a product of their times and of their creator's sensibilities just like the original pulps were. They are produced and distributed electronically not only from a practical zeitgeist, but also from an environmental concern. Pulps killed trees, ePulps just kill bad guys.

The Pulp Magazines of the 1930s and 1940s became outlets for the frustrations of a culture beaten down by the greed and ineptitude of the elites. Sound familiar? Our ePulps carry on the real pulp family legacy, with an eye to reveal the stark realities of evil and corruption without the restrictions of corporate censorship. Want to see the truth? Join us on our duty-bound quest as storytellers to show the hidden nature of power's true intent, and marvel at the courage and inner conflict of the heroes duty-bound to fight it.

Our journey begins...

RURIK OF THE DEMONWATCH

Our first story spills us into a dark time when horrible creatures infest the Hinterlands, and the barbarians of the Demonwatch patrol a nightmare beat. They solve problems when they face them as judge, jury and executioner to stave off a madness infecting their realm.

As a rite of passage young Rurik faced a Demonhound. During his trial the creature's flaming tentacles scarred Rurik leaving a mark coiling up his arm, shoulder and chest. After he triumphed in battle, Rurik carved a bone from the slain creatures body then sharpened it into a strange looking sword. Now he patrols the badlands for more monsters and slays them with the very remains of their dead brethren. As the man grew so did his legend.

Rurik of the Demonwatch was forged in the mind-fires of Russ Bopp. It's pulp inspirations lead us back to the works of Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft where Russ seems to have uncovered a hidden connection between Bronze Age lore and Cthulhu Mythos.

Let's find out what happens when Celts and Demons unleash hell on Earth in a time of dark-fantasy. I hope you packed your battle axe...

RURIK

OF THE DEMONWATCH

Arena of Death

By Russ Bopp

The Empress Sabula lounged upon her pedestal throne of velvet duvets feasting off a food plate made of gold. Her jet skin glistened in the torchlight and would never be as black as her heart and the void where her soul would have floated. She was in the incarnation of evil - only the lords of the abyss would be written in history as fouler. Before her stood Rurik.

He is from Rodmar – the Northern Steppes from the civilized lands. His stock is hearty. Jet locks run off his head to a thick neck like that of an aged tree. His eyes are equally obsidian peering from beneath the coif. Wind burned skin covers his iron cabled muscles. A scarlet scar serpentines down his right arm. Never healing its pink wrinkles make the strongest take note and caution. Kilt and hide girdle make his garments while his feet are bound with raw, hide boots. It is as if

the mighty winds have cast him from their icy bosom.

Her munching at the goodies below her sweaty flab disappeared into her floppy jowls leaving juices, crumbs and bits to bounce, adhere or dribble from the numerous rolls attached to her neck. Rurik's stomach turned as the sounds of her eating ebbed at his constitution. Never had his intestinal fortitude been so challenged at the present sight.

Slaves, half naked and half starved, stood like upright skeletons at her wings awaiting the bellowing gurgle from their mistress of malign gluttonous revulsion. "Now, savage, what is it that you seek in my domain? My scouts observed you sighted on the borderlands at an unreasonable hour, with an equally unreasonable armaments carrying an unreasonable appearance. There must be something of great importance for you to attempt such a deed."

"I only wish safe passage through your lands. I mean no harm or spite."

No answer, save the crunching of food between her ivory teeth, emitted from the Empress. A large gold nugget of a tooth beamed at Rurik while Sabula snacked.

"Passage? But my honorable cache of guards inform me that your are armed with a most stunning array of battle-tackle that they have ever seen."

"I only travel with all that I require to protect myself. My war is of my business."

“Surely a sword is enough for many a foe for someone piled as mightily as yourself. You have been outfitted for war,” she snapped dropping clean bones from greasy fingers onto her plates.

“I have fought many foes that have slipped passed our world’s borders not just travellers marching through kingdoms into another.”

Ignoring Rurik’s rebuttal, Sabula continues picking through the foul buffet. Her eyes falling upon Rurik's crimson ripple of a scar cursing along his right arm. Few know of its origin and the mantle it holds. For he is Rurik of The Demonwatch. Sworn protectors of the known world from the shadow realm. Crazy wizards and necromancers seeking absolute power use their vile skills to breach the gap of this plane and that of inhuman blasphemy. Rurik's seeks out these hosts and their conjurations unbeknown to rest the world. She knew all too well the prize she held before her. Mere humans would not fare well against the devil-slayer. She needed to be cunning as rumors had placed her.

“Well, my dear emissary from the hinterlands, we will have to see for ourselves how just and honor bound you are. Take him to the dungeons and prepare him for the morning's sport. He will truly be a worthy game piece!”

Before Rurik could defend himself from further captivity, six large brutish warriors donned in golden mail brandishing net and lashings enveloped Rurik. Their strength was inhuman. Rurik had fought the beast men of Kracken-Bur before – an unholy stock of man and beast.

In between slurps Sabula gulped another order, “If you serve us well

on the field of battle we will see what other fields I allow you to tread.”

“Heed my warnings your royalness – I have but short time and even shorter patience!”

He is dragged away by the bronze plated guardsmen of the laughing Sabula. It was a lie and Rurik knew it. In his journeys he knew deception when it presented itself. Enemies of The Demonwatch had been alerted of his capture – why else was he not executed immediately as the bloody crucifixes on Sabula's borderlands had shown?

Within the deepest recesses of the bovine majesty, Rurik is tossed into a dank pit. Its walls sweating with moisture and effloresce. His eyes begin to adjust to the dim light from blackened torches wedged in the brick outside the gate.

Skulls and bones, devoid of filth picked cleaned by a larger prey, lie strewn about the damp earthen floor. Rurik is alone. Food is slopped into the same wooden bowls he is to use for waste. He does not eat - rage will feed him.

At dawn, Rurik of The Demonwatch, is hauled out of his prison before the bloated queen once more. And once more he denies her satisfaction - an act she seldom encounters.

Instead of his cell, Rurik is led to a large iron cage raised pinioned on barrel-like wheels. It is a barred cart driven by eight horses. Inside is littered with stinking offal speckled hay - stained red with blood and rust.

Locked inside, Rurik's eyes scan the landscape before him. A city in tears. No sun shines in the cold morning air. After a time the horses are whipped and the cart moves along the bumpy muddy paths used as streets and avenues. Quiet melancholy drones linger like shadows of their former selves along the roadside. He has never seen such strife. A glimmer of what the city used to be can be seen under aged crud. Faded walls of color appear beneath its dank visage.

Having bore witness to the condemned parade of woe, the carriage slams to a halt. A squad of armed guards in glistening mail and polearms gather him from the cart. He is led again into more halls of pitch. Corridors echo with cheers, cries and calls opposite the stone tunnels. Beyond a thick iron door, he is placed in front of racks of weapons and armor. His eyes widen at the chance of escape only to spy two large ogrish women at the room's only portal. Shoved by his escorts to the racks Rurik begins choosing his tools - knowing full well what the slovenly queen wishes of him.

A woman emerges. Her globular shape lumbers into the room and eyes Rurik hungrily. She slurps from a head-sized goblet with a sheepish grin as she spies Rurik with lust.

"Her royalness Empress Sabula wishes you to be her champion for today," slurs the woman spilling both wine and saliva from her fat lips as cheers ring out in the coliseum. "Her great nation has need of you today. Should you succeed, you will be spared," exclaims the woman running a thick hand down her sweaty neck stopping on her spilling bosom.

Rurik ignores her as he fastens the last of his battle-worn armor

donning a rusted buckler. His face disappears behind a shielded helm marching off with the two female guardians.

Rurik is led into a dank hallway littered with rusted weapons, skulls and bones. At its end a bleak sun shines through a gnarled portcullis. Barbed teeth twist along its edifice. Beyond the bars he spies the cold wind swept landscape. Clanging of metal is heard and answered by a tumultuous roar of cheers. Rurik's eyes adjust to the sights before him at the portcullis.

Twenty or so men and women are battling in a colossal primitive arena of stone. Along the earthworks hold the crowd. A massive throng of jeering bloodthirsty onlookers. Their roar is deafening, fueled by drink and death they are at near-frenzied state.

Spotted with slobbering oafs and gangly imps the audience is a worse lot than those appearing before them. Speckled throughout are the rich land barons, dukes and manor whores under Sabula's governance. Richly clad Rurik can smell their bloody gold stained souls over the carnage of the earthen stage.

As their gladiators wage a mini war the spectators suck on fruit and tankards of wine. They yell with full mouths dribbling the waste down their gullets. Scantly clad concubines also writhe and chew upon their patrons flesh during the blood-orgy.

Rurik is horrified not by battle but by the gruesome audience observing.

At the rusted rise of the gate before him he snaps his helms face plate down. On cue with the lull the crowd draws forth Rurik of The

Demonwatch steps into the gore riddled field. His crimson scar a contrast against his allies. His jet eyes glint from beneath his helm seeking his captor.

All heads swing toward a parapet littered with food waste and stained satin. Stretched out for all to see her ebon hide rolls Sabula. Skinny albino eunuchs fan her with palm fronds and feathered stalks.

“As you know Northman I have need of you and if you serve me well you may go free. If you do not you will, well how should we say it politely, be disposed of?”

The crowd ushered a chuckle at Rurik’s expense. He watched the other pit-fighters pant, catch their breath and re-ready their weapons.

“But, I will not waste my time or fighters with watching you bring them down. As I know all too well of Rurik sworn to The Demonwatch.”

On that note some of the gladiators pushed out their chests while others snickered making their way to a gate opposite Rurik’s entrance.

“Mmm, mmm, mmm – how delicious will this be? I know you think that we are fat beyond our means – pigs I heard you utter in disgust. Well, here are the true pigs of the land. Northman – meet a real challenge!”

A series of low gates beneath Sabula’s parapet fell forward when the two female guards let loose a mighty chain. As the chain dropped they leapt into the stands.

Low wet grunting came forth from the pupil-like culverts. As Rurik watched the last of the pit-fighters exited the arena floor two pairs of yellow eyes pierced the gloom below Sabula.

Twisting the haft of his axe in his hand Rurik scans for more tools to aid in his fight.

Broken remains lay scattered where the melee raged earlier. Darting to the piles, his opponents charged also.

Two pale skinless boars the size of cattle fly to Rurik's position. Gathering a spear half he spun wildly for the faster of the two hogs. Glistening with purple hideless fury full of hungry rage it charged.

In lightning form Rurik launched the spear tip at the boars shouldered hump. Squealing madly as the iron tip plunged into its flesh resulting in a black geyser of blood gushing parallel with the spear. Grunting to a halt causing a trench to be cut while its weight and speed came to a halt.

Ignoring its partner the second boar snorted wildly continuing the charge at Rurik. Readying his axe the Northman waited for the beast. Deafening was the cheers from the stands. Rurik could see Sabula standing beyond the attacking pig. In a split second he thought of loosening his axe for her thus canceling his chances with the beast. Instead as the pig galloped closer Rurik went low on the boar cleaving a hoof from under its massive weight. Not escaping completely Rurik felt a dull bite in his thigh. The boars tusk grazed his flesh enough to peel back a length of flesh from his leg.

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