

RUTHLESS PEOPLES MAGAZINE

REVOLUTION!

RPM 07, 28 August 2009

A Penny Dreadful for Nothing

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RUTHLESS PEOPLES MAGAZINE

~ABOUT RPM~

Ruthless Peoples Magazine is a free, internet-distributed general fiction magazine. We are not tied to any genre. Please note the reader guidance at the start of each piece, for this edition especially.

Signing up to our [newsletter](#) gains entry to Readers' Choice competitions (when we figure out how to run them) and the War on Error. Following our [Twitter feed](#) will keep you updated on the latest stories accepted.

Submissions

For full details, see our [guidelines](#). In brief, we consider short fiction of up to 3,500 words, serial works with movements of three to five episodes and poetry of up to 40 lines.

We are not getting enough flash fiction in. Send some.

RUTHLESS PEOPLES MAGAZINE

~WAR ON ERROR~

In strife, we rush. In love, we miss the mark. But the subscriber who spots and submits the greatest number of typographical errors by 23:59 British Summer Time on 31 August 2009 will win US\$20 and a small electronic medal.

Send entries to editor@ruthlesspeoples.com. The Editor's decision is final. You will need a Paypal account to receive any financial prize.

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The Best Damned Posthole Digger in the World

James Peak

Localisation

US English

Reader Guidance

Strong language. Alcohol. Violence. Nudity.
Crime. The damned thing's got it all.

I hadn't thought about any of this for almost thirty years, but yesterday afternoon, just like the fancy writers say, the door opened into my past. It was really the door into Rocky's but somehow it sounds a lot more portentous to call it something else. Rocky's is our town's version of Clyde's of Georgetown or Elaine's, or Spago, or one of those other places you read about in magazines.

On the inside it is like being in someone's family room. All cheap pine paneling and TV sets in every room. The decor has gone over to the Old West look. We've got leather couches with brands burned in on some famous ranch in Taiwan or someplace, and we've got the stuffed head of a long-horned steer hanging over a phony fireplace. Rocky got it from a beer company in Texas.

I was sitting in the main room drinking a Coors' when the door opened. There stood Steve, blinking in the sudden darkness. Steve always looked like an old-time gunslinging sheriff even

when he quit wearing his gun out in the open. He's worn those big aviator shades so long that he has a permanent pallor around his eyes and semi-circular tracks on his cheeks where the wire frames rest.

When my folks met a semi on their side of a rain-slick highway one night, folks didn't approve of me and my brother Johnny living alone out there in the country. Steve's folks offered to take us in, but Johnny was six years older; considered himself pretty much an adult, and was adamant he was going to do it his way. We lived on the folks' insurance and Johnny's farming. Steve and I were always close.

He joined the Army with me and he went south while I went north, but we both went to the 'Nam. He ended up in an M.P. company in Saigon and I humped ruck in the far northern reaches of I-Corps.

Five years after the Army I was farming a half-dozen rented places and driving a well-used Corvette to commute between them. Steve was in the Highway Patrol. He cut me some slack a couple of times and we stayed friends. Ten years ago or so he moved to Topeka and became a detective for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation.

* * *

"Hey, half-ass." His head snapped around at the sound of my voice. "Hey. Over here."

"Be Goddamn. How you doin' Billy? I wondered if I was gonna run into you." He was wearing a big hat and a western-cut khaki-colored suit.

"Yeah. Ain't as likely now you're drivin' a detective's desk, huh? I used to dread seein' that gumball machine of yours pop up behind me." I motioned him to a seat.

“Well, that old Corvette was a fast sumbitch. A real silver bullet. I gave up plenty of times when you shoulda been locked up.”

“So what you doing down from Topeka?”

“Little business at Coffeyville, and I thought I'd come over to see the folks.” He tipped the big hat back and propped his Tony Llamas up on an empty chair. His coat fell back from a Colt 1911 in a fancy, tooled leather holster. “You gonna set there and let me die of thirst?”

The beers went down real easy, and we slid back to the old days and the old ways without a lot of struggle. “You remember when Johnny got killed?” he said.

“Worst day of my life, never forget it.”

“D’jew know they found Howard Fargo?” Did he look at me a little more directly?

“They did? Where at? When? Are they bringin’ him back?” I thought I’d just play along.

“Not hardly,” Steve shook his head, he’s been buried over there in Elk County for almost thirty years. “He wasn’t ever hidin’ out though; somebody shot him. They found him the same year as Johnny and Lallie got killed; it just never connected.”

* * *

If Johnny were still alive these days, we’d call him a “gadget freak.” He had a deep, instinctive love for anything that promised to save human sweat. That’s how he came to own the posthole digger.

Johnny’s red ’59 Impala was the fastest thing in three Kansas counties. It had three two-barrel carburetors and three hundred and thirty-five honest ponies under the hood. He turned twenty-one that summer, and the Chevy was the joy of his life. I heard

him come rumbling home one afternoon, and when I went out to see, he had the gigantic trunk lid up and he was head-down in the cavernous space.

“Got it.” He stood up proudly with his newest acquisition, it was mostly of shiny aluminum, and it had a vaguely aerospace look about it.

“What’s that thing?” I was used to his gadgets.

“Hang on a minute, Squirt.”

“Set that thing up there.” He handed me a bundle of shiny metal legs pierced through with big holes like something from a race car. “It unfolds.”

It made itself into a three-legged stand; the skeleton of a high-tech Indian tepee. In the middle, a stainless steel rod extended halfway to the ground.

“Okay, now this thing jist clips on here.” He fastened what looked like the nose cone of a rocket onto the stainless rod. It pointed straight down. It was three inches in diameter, and threaded at the blunt end.

“Now here’s the trick,” he grinned, teeth shining in his tan face, “you jist put a half-stick of dynamite and a cap in here and screw on the plug. Plug’s got a hole in the end like a rocket nozzle. Best damned posthole digger in the world.”

He was right. When we fired it off, the bang was muffled by the heavy steel of the rocket-nose; it smacked into the bone-hard dirt, and made a hell of a hole.

“This’ll help you, Squirt. Here’s the deal though, this ain’t to loan out to your buddies or anything.”

“What? Is it a secret or something?” I had been caught up in Johnny’s schemes before.

“The guy I borrowed it from, he’s thinkin’ about a patent. Y’know, big money. So just dummy up.”

“Yeah, Okay, sure.”

You know I gotta take off tomorrow. You gonna be okay?”
For a second he became serious.

“Yeah.”

Johnny was off to follow the wheat harvest. He would start way down in Texas and end up in Canada at the tag end of the summer. We needed the money he could make to stretch through the winter, and to make the payments on the Chevy. I would stay home and do part-time work for our closest neighbor for partial board.

“I don’t want you to piss Howard off, Squirt, nor the missus neither.” Howard Fargo, our neighbor, was born pissed off. There was nothing I could do about that, but the “missus,” well; I’d die before I did anything to make her mad. In my own fifteen-year-old way I loved her. Howard was snake-mean even when he didn’t drink, and he was old. He was a big, bluff man with a pinched red face and a forehead that was always white as bone—farmer’s tan we called it. He must have been fifty, and to me he seemed on death’s door.

The only thing old about the missus was her name--Eulalie. She never used it though, because everybody called her Lallie. “Say it like *lollie*,” she used to say, “Jist like a big old all-day sucker.” She was a natural flirt, but she wasn’t mean about it, at least not to me. I don’t know how old she was that year, probably half Howard’s age. She was a grown woman, but I could talk to her.

It was before the hippie time, but Lallie’s summer wardrobe never saw a brassiere, and she couldn’t see why it was okay for a man to fan his shirt back to cool off and not okay for her.

Howard sometimes bitched her out and called her a “hoor” when she did it around me, but she didn’t much care. I remember

one day when I saw her leaned over, splashing at the stock tank to cool off; shirt gathered up and tucked behind her in the waistband of her jeans, blonde hair piled on top her head.

Her breasts swung out over that green water and her nipples were as pink and defined as the erasers you only ever have on your pencils for the first day of school. It wasn't my first sight of a woman's breasts, but all the aureoles I had ever seen were brown, and I said it to her.

"It's 'cause I never had any babies yet. Haven't you ever seen a young girl's titties?" My blush could have given her a sunburn from twenty feet. "Well don't worry about it; you're going to see plenty in your time. You won't even want to look at these saggy old things."

She made a playful grab at my crotch as she passed by. Half erect, I dodged desperately to keep her from knowing.

My hormones were revved beyond the redline that summer, but Lallie was so open and natural about everything that, except for the fantasies that sometimes came at night, I never thought bad thoughts about her.

It wasn't the same for Johnny. The attraction between those two was so fierce it was like one of those black-hole stars where not even light can get out. Sometimes I caught them looking at each other in ways that just compressed time and space.

It was about five or six weeks after Johnny left that Howard joined another crew. By then the combines were working in Oklahoma, and it wasn't impossible for Johnny to make it home occasionally when a job ended.

He had to pass our house to get to Lallie's and there was no way I could mistake the sound of that three forty-eight Chevy motor. I heard it sometimes as I waited for sleep, thinking about her.

He was always gone by the time I went up to her house for breakfast, but I could tell he'd been there. There was something about her eyes and the way she walked. All the other days she would be wearing jeans. On those days she would still have on a cotton robe and nothing else.

Howard came home too, but not so often. The only change from normal was sometimes I found two more empty bottles in the tractor shed.

One evening in late July the harvest was close. I had been building fence with the magical posthole digger, stringing woven-wire on hedge posts to keep the hogs out of Lallie's tomatoes. That damned thing really worked. I was going through a lot of dynamite but not too much sweat.

About ten o'clock I heard the Chevy rumble up the road toward Lallie's. I wanted to go see Johnny, but I drifted off before I could decide to get up.

I never heard him leave, and in the morning, when I drove up in our pick-up to finish the fence, I saw the red Impala parked slantwise behind the house. The combines were as close as fifty miles by now, but he should have been gone two hours ago.

I jumped out and ran to the back door, and then I saw them, Johnny and Lallie. Their bodies were splayed on the top step of the back porch. Johnny was dressed for work, but Lallie had only the gaped open white cotton robe.

Their blood was all mingled together. The bullet had gone through both of them. I think they had been kissing goodbye. There was a small, neat hole in the back of Johnnie's white T-Shirt, but the bullet must have tumbled. The hole between Lallie's breasts was nearly as big as my fist. There was a big ragged gash in the wood where the spent bullet hit the pine porch post.

Something hot burst into in my mouth, and all at once I saw the world through kaleidoscope eyes. I was gasping for breath and puzzling over a terrible keening sound. I found myself on my knees in the gravel of the driveway and I realized the keening sound was coming from me.

I looked back along the bullet's trajectory, and there sat Howard's big grain truck, hard up against the tractor shed. He was flat on his back right in front of the bumper and I thought he was dead too.

When I got closer I saw, and smelled, that he was only drunk. There was no more than one big swallow of whiskey left in the half-gallon bottle of J .W. Dant, and he had puked all over himself. It was in his eyebrows and across his chest. The flies had turned the bib of his overalls black with their tightly packed little bodies.

I retched and everything turned red in my vision, my jaws clamped shut involuntarily and I gasped to force back the vomit.

I saw the rifle then, an old 30-'06 Springfield with baling wire tight around the stock to stop a spreading crack. A piece of junk fit only for coyotes. He must have had only one cartridge; the bolt was open and the action was empty.

Howard squirmed on the ground and farted. He was spread-eagled right where my next course of fence was going to go. I wondered if there was a box of .30-'06 bullets somewhere. They would be hard to find; Howard kept a messy barn. I saw right then what I needed to do. When I finished, I used the winch on the front bumper to lift him up onto the motor hoist, and then I dumped him into the back of his own truck.

I didn't know where I was going when I left. I just wanted to go. He had the grain boards on the truck. I probably could have driven it to the West coast without anyone ever seeing him.

I went blindly for almost two hours and found myself three counties away and right on the edge of the combining area.

I stuffed Howard in a culvert, drove the truck a couple miles farther west and pulled it off the side of the road. I hiked catty-corner across a couple of sections and hitched a ride toward home.

I was back home before noon. I set a couple more fence posts and then called the Sheriff. They asked me a lot of questions, but they didn't pay much attention to my answers. They asked me if I knew where Howard was and I said I didn't.

In a couple of days a guy from the KBI came with his little fingerprint kit, but like he said, he hadn't seen man or boy without gloves for three weeks. It's like that in the middle of haying and combining season.

It's funny. Some honest citizen stole that truck from where I left it. When the harvest is on, an idle truck means lost money, so somebody just decided to put it in service. They recovered it up in North Dakota sometime in November.

The county home got after me with Johnny dead, but I got my uncle Sid down from Kansas City where he was doing a star turn as a wino on South Troost or somewhere, and I got him pumped so full of coffee one afternoon that the social worker reckoned he could be my guardian.

I enjoyed Johnny's big Chevy, and just like Lallie said, I saw my share of little pink titties in the three years before I left for the Army.

* * *

"No kiddin'," I said to Steve, "Elk County you say? All this time, I'll be damned."

He nodded, hitched the gunbelt and took another good slug of his fresh beer.

“Got the damndest pictures you ever saw that they took,”

“Um. What kind of pictures?”

“Well, the coyotes had got after him pretty bad, but they did a half-assed autopsy on him anyhow. Said he was killed with a cannon.”

“Yeah, right.”

“No, I mean it. That’s what they said. I don’t mean I buy it.”

“What did they mean, a cannon?”

“Well, whatever it was, it went clear through him. Two and a half, three inches in diameter. You remember the seventy-five millimeter recoilless? Like that, except it didn’t explode.”

“Saw something like that happen up in Eye-corps. M-79, y’know, the little grenade launcher?”

“Yeah.”

“During Hue. Went right through some dink First Lieutenant. Helluva hole. I guess it didn’t fly far enough to fuse, so it didn’t go off, but it sure as hell wasted him.”

“The M-79 was forty millimeters, wasn’t it? No, this thing was twice that size, damned near.”

“So you got an investigation goin’ on, Steve?”

“Nope. Just readin’ some old evidence files. I’ll probably give it up one of these days when I get busy again. It just caught my eye when I remembered about Johnny. That was one gadget-lovin’ sonofabitch wasn’t he?”

“Yeah, he was.”

* * *

I came home last night and I found the posthole digger. It hadn’t been used since that day. I looked at the little rocket-nose and it

didn't look like it ever had anything on it but dirt. I decided to throw it into the pond anyhow. It's a heavy little devil; I expect it'll sink right into the mud.

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Virginia, USA

James Peak is a native Kansan who lives elsewhere.
(Associate Editor – Jon Shrike)

American Underwear

Patricia Tompkins

Localisation

US English

Reader Guidance

No cautions needed.

The novelty of sewing extra-large cotton panties faded by late morning. Earlier that Tuesday, Sanetha laughed at the size of the pieces she joined. They could only be American underwear. Such fat women in the United States and so many of them. The white panties made her think of sails. Plain, without peak-a-boo panels of lace or frilly trim. Sanetha wondered: with buttocks so large, she would have cushions to rest on wherever she sat. Sometimes the fabric was black or the color of mud. Dull, never a vibrant green or blue, no mango or kumquat. And her friend Anneela said a pair of the panties cost as much as they earned in three days. Sanetha doubted that.

Last week she had sewn thongs, skinny strips of pale pink. So silly. And uncomfortable — at least they looked that way. Why would a nice girl wear such a thing? Sanetha never had. Was America full of strippers and bar girls? That was what Anneela said. Her cousin in the next village had a television and Anneela said American women went to the beach in what looked like underwear, only it was more colorful and called bikinis. Sanetha's mother said it was worse than wearing nothing, to wrap breasts and private parts in bright bits of cloth, drawing attention to them instead of modestly covering the body. Anneela

said many American women were not married. Sanetha's mother said no man would buy a horse when he could ride one for free.

Sanetha wondered if they were unmarried because they were so large. Yet there must be large American men, too. Anneela would marry before the year ended and she talked about it often, as though her life would be transformed. That was part of her charm; Sanetha envied Anneela's ability to dream. She was older than Sanetha yet acted younger. But Anneela had only sisters. Sanetha was the sole girl among four brothers. She did not see that men were so wonderful. They had trap doors in their underwear. When Mr. Gupta yelled at her, as he did with all the factory workers, she pictured him in his cotton drawers, with his stick legs and potbelly. That turned his lion's roar into a frog's croak.

At least the panties and thongs were simple, unlike the brassieres. Anneela giggled when they first worked on them. She called the big ones coconut holders. Sanetha could not imagine any use for enormous breasts; she felt sorry for women who carried such weights on their chests. Sanetha hoped her breasts would stay small, like her mother's. Be satisfied with what you have — how often her mother had said that.

Today, she reminded herself to be grateful that she had easy panties. But by noon, the heat and noise of the factory had made her head feel heavy. And her eyes were tired from squinting. Sanetha dropped a finished piece onto a pile and sighed. The underwear would travel far, disappearing like kites. And the women with it would be happier — wasn't that a promise of new clothes? What if these were magic panties? If she wore them, she would be transported to America. She would live among the huge, immodest people, and while wearing the panties, she

would have three wishes granted. Any three of her choosing. What three would they be?

Three did not seem like enough, but that was always the number in tales and legends: three princes, three goats, three birds. She must beware of tricks. If she wished for money, more than she needed, then her brothers would pester her for loans and gifts. Perhaps to live forever. But what good would it be to live long only as an old person, feeble and cranky? To be young forever—and watch her friends and family age and die? She would wish for good health. A sensible choice. "How boring," Anneela would say and sigh dramatically. To be beautiful, a movie star — Anneela would wish for such things. To be loved by a handsome, rich man, one who was also kind and made her laugh and stayed faithful. Was that one wish or too many? To never work at the factory again. Sanetha's smile dimmed as she realized that the wish needed to be more specific; to lose her job by itself would not help. But that was why she had three wishes.

She sat feeding fabric to the needle until the *brrrrnnnnng* of the shift bell reminded her to switch off the sewing machine. Then she saw that her machine was out of thread. How had she not noticed that recent seams held only rows of tiny holes? She bit her lower lip and glanced around, but Mr. Gupta was not in sight. Sanetha stood up, relieved. Magic panties, three wishes — what was she thinking? They would never fit her. She wished, but no; enough of such thoughts.

Wishes could lead to trouble.

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California, USA

(Associate Editor – Ben Jacobson)

The Man with the Masonic Girdle

Ashley Arnold

Localisation

Australian English

Reader Guidance

Sexual and scatological content. Strong stuff all round, really.

Mike lay on his back, legs spread as wide as his stone chastity girdle allowed, and applied No-More-Rash to the insides of his thighs. “There’s nothing at all like the pain of getting an erection in your stone undies,” he said.

Tara, the journalist writing a *where-is-he-now* article on the Masonic Girdle, nodded and scratched in her notebook.

Mike took care not to get aroused while applying the lotion lest he crack rock and clash pillar on stoneware. He invoked images of spiky blowfish and John McEnroe in Wimbledon shorts to prevent any attempted jailbreaks.

“You do this every day?” Tara seemed genuinely interested, even hungry, for his answers. As a freak story he’d long been old news, but every now and then a newspaper or TV station would send out a reporter greener than the mould on his stone girdle to check up on him.

“Most days,” Mike said. “I’m the world’s single largest individual consumer of chafing relief creams.”

“Have you tried ... you know ... breaking it with a hammer?”

“My Dad nearly broke my hip when I was younger. Tried a sledgehammer. If you need a quote, here’s one: Never take Peter Gabriel’s advice — he doesn’t know shit.”

“Tell me about the curse. How did you come to be the target of a master mason powerful enough to do this?”

Mike finished rubbing in the balm. He tossed the empty tube into the pile in the corner and dragged up his oily tracksuit pants. He wondered if he should have washed before the journalist came, but decided his natural four-days-without-bathing odour provided a more authentic experience. “My Dad was out boozing one night and needed a leak. Unfortunately, he chose the wall of a lodge. The mason who laid the curse was an old drunk as well, and he screwed it up. The curse came down to me.”

Mike pushed himself up from the floor with all the grace he could manage. Although long accustomed to people staring, he didn’t want this new reporter to think having stone undies made him a complete cripple. They made him a laughingstock, the butt of every joke, but that didn’t mean he should have to lose his dignity.

“You must have a lot of female friends, since they know you can only have a platonic relationship.”

Mike whirled on the reporter. “I can do everything a normal man can do with a woman — fingers, toes, nose — except for that one final thing.” He grinned a lewd, suggestive grin. “Would you like to try me out?”

She might not have been much of a looker, but he loved her body: stick thin and skin so firm it could have been armour. Probably a vegetarian. But even if she took him up on the offer, he’d never go through with it.

Tara’s mouth opened and closed a few times, but no words came out. Mike couldn’t tell if her grimace was a mild form of

the usual disgust, or an attempt to hide some inexplicable desire, which he assumed existed but had not yet experienced. Either way, she might have been another species for all he could read her expressions.

Years of experience told him that the pain of becoming aroused outweighed any benefit from it. He scuttled over to his chair and sat down, snapping on the TV. It didn't do well to think about the impossible.

Tara scribbled in her little notebook. He caught a glimpse of the arcane symbols, but found them meaningless. "You don't like me, do you?" she said without looking up.

"You journalists are usually like big insects — you take what you want from your victim and then eat the carcass. But *you* seem nice."

She lacked the cynicism and boredom of a more experienced journo. She still had the hunger of someone fresh on the job. Still, that didn't mean she was going to escape earning her story. Mike decided to have some fun.

"Sometimes I wish I could jump inside the TV and live in there."

She stopped scribbling. "You do?"

"You know, just to live in that world. Get away from all the attention. It looks so much more normal than my life."

"That's so sad." She looked at him the way people must look, he imagined, at lost puppies. All big-eyed, and a little hollow.

He knew he'd sucked her in when he saw that look. "I wish I had someone to talk to, to help me around the place. You know, a normal friend? Even going down to the shops for an espresso is too much for me. What with all the staring." He made sure she still had the puppy look. "And hooting."

By the end of the day she'd bought him two coffees, lunch, a Where's Wally paperback compendium and a dozen roses. For the last hour she'd been glancing at her watch every five minutes. Meant to be back at the office by lunch time, Mike guessed.

"Well, I've got to get back to work now."

"Oh." He put on his most crestfallen face. "So soon?"

"It is nearly three-thirty."

"It's just ... having you around has been so uplifting. It's made me feel really normal."

Tara looked confused.

He didn't want to go too far in case she realised she was being mocked. "Well, before you go, could you do one last thing for me?"

She rubbed her forearms together, obviously conflicted in her desires. "Okay. Sure."

Mike forced himself to maintain a straight face. "There is a prophecy about the Masonic Girdle." He stopped and waited, hoping she would prompt him.

"I haven't heard of a prophecy."

"Oh, I don't tell everyone about it. You see, the prophecy says that if I'm kissed by a woman who is pure of heart and body, the curse will be lifted."

"Oh." Tara twisted her little notebook in her hands. "Well, I'm not exactly a ... you know."

"I don't think you have to be. Please? One kiss?"

She fiddled a little more, but then her arms fell to her side with a determined slap. "All right, one kiss."

Mike strode over to her, the shag carpet almost burning his feet. He took the notebook from Tara's hands and tossed it on the couch.

“I’m sorry, I’m not very good at this.” He grinned like a lecher.

Tara closed her eyes and parted her lips.

He licked his teeth. How long since he’d brushed them? Seven days, or eight? It didn’t matter. The reporter was about to get a kiss she’d never forget.

Mike pulled her close, pressing the symbol at the front of his stone girdle into her groin. He pressed his mouth to hers, pushing her lips a little further apart.

He felt wet tongue against his own, let it go on a moment longer, then stopped. It wouldn’t do to get aroused, and she must have had enough of his flavour by now, even if her response was a little abnormal.

Mike tried to pull away, but Tara grabbed him hard and drew him in even closer. She sucked and sucked at his tongue until he thought she would tear it right out of his mouth.

He tried to tell her to stop, but it came out as muffled squeaks. He beat at her back and head, but she wouldn’t release him.

Then she reached down and tapped his Masonic girdle. It shattered as if made out of corn chips.

Finally Tara pushed him away. She wiped away a long line of drool with the back of her hand.

Mike stared at his groin. Through the crust of filth and dried faeces he saw his manly package for the first time in his life. It looked small.

“I’m so sorry,” Tara said.

Mike looked back to her. The skin around her mouth peeled back to reveal an insectoid beak.

“But you made me go and get all those things,” she continued, “and I’m so hungry and then you gave me a taste, and I now can’t help myself.”

She looked at his groin. Mike twitched at that ravenous gaze.

“I love spoiled meat.” Her beak opened in a caricature of a smile. “Relax, you’re finally going to get to answer the age old question.”

Mike swallowed. His tongue was so dry it stuck to the roof of his mouth. “What question?” he whispered.

“Which is worse: wearing a pair of stone underpants for twenty years, or being devoured from the groin up by a journalist?”

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South Australia

(Associate Editor – Stewart Baker)

Zombie Consciousness

D. Jason Cooper

Localisation

Australian English

Reader Guidance

Apart from the presence of the undead, no guidance is needed, I think. Little bit of brain eating, little bit of sexual stuff.

Rhythm's gonna get ya.

Music far away moving into dreams made wrong, sound not dying, growing louder shaking dreams apart while feet above begin to stomp pounding sending waves down until dreams and sleep shatter. Arise, claw the cloth around, tear the pillow this was sleep, go up and tear away more arise, see the others, see ... him. Arms up singing and dancing with light glinting on his chest, the pretty amulet on his chest as he dances and sings. He stops dancing, is silent. Stand still and wait so he will sing again.

Instead, there is his voice.

“They'll obey me. They'll all obey Papa Shango de la Mere.”

He sings, bright metal pretty shining light stomping a dance try to follow pass him by pretty singing far behind pushing forward toward the sound like his dancing stomp stomp turn sing hump hump pretty singing inside must get inside not singing any more new singing.

Ohmigod ... ohmigod Jeff ... whatarethey whatarethey? Ohmigod!

All press on windows. All press, all press. Bones break, windows break, grab and pull, bite the neck, tear the head free. Break the skull. Eat the brain, the soft, spongy brain. Bloody images fill the mind, stray memories fill desiccated beings.

A cheerleader showing flesh to catch an eye and not just any eye. A happy face hiding an angry heart and a plan. A dumb jock from a wealthy family, strip slow before fellatio and catch him where it hurts. Take him far from the others to reward him for the big game. Put a pinhole in the condom. Get pregnant, get a bundle for the baby bundle and put it up for adoption. Cash in hand to start a new life not in this small town.

Memories fade, leaving a momentary afterglow of opinions that remain when all the facts are gone. Gone to some other place, leaving the singing behind. The singing drives from far away behind pushing forward bright and pretty like metal on his chest as he sings and dances stomp stomp beautiful singing stomp stomp dance stomp stomp we all dance his dance as we sing his tune and the bright shiny metal he has bang bang.

What the fug? What the hell are you groanin' suckers

He sings bang bang pretty flashes bang bang. Flesh tears and flies away and it is no matter. Open wounds with no blood as we press on. He sings bang bang and heads jerk as he sings and some of us are fallen. No matter.

Fugging weirdos, get back. Get back.

Shiny metal swings, cracking skulls. More of us are fallen. Press forward, take the shiny metal. He fights, clawing flesh as he falls. Bite and tear, pull open the head and eat the brains and remember.

Remember a line of sight, a perfect shot. Remember to stop breathing, lungs empty. Just like a deer, perfect shot, headshot, put the brains away. Instant death. The Negro falls, slumping like something had kicked his legs out from under him. Serves him right for trying to bring city ways to this town.

Bury the body. Police say they'll never look out here. Head back and no one will ever know. Then the things show up.

Eat the brains and march on. Town first, then the city. Hear the song of Papa Shango, far away, far behind. He says to eat the town and wait. That is the nature of the song, stomp stomp. We listen as we shuffle forward, dancing to the tune that is in our heads.

Dawn comes and we stop not far from the town. In the light we fall and do nothing. No song disturbs our dreams, no sound goes wrong. Papa Shango sleeps, we sleep, daylight is for sleep with its many sounds and things moving from place to place.

The brightness goes, we hear the singing. It shakes our dreams and makes us rise. Papa Shango has the metal that shiny metal as he dances to make us dance. He sends us forward. We hear his song from far away, and see his metal, and do as he says. We go, we dance, we head into the town, stomp stomp. Many more of us than before, stomp, stomp, stomp.

He is there, early morning anger, leaving a woman, sneak, sneak. He does not see us, ignores when he hears us, stomp, stomp. We are near him and he strikes. Thinks we are her husband, smash, smash.

We surround him and he fights. He stabs with pens. We move toward him, stomp, stomp, and Papa Shango is very far away. He tears out eyes, he cuts up flesh. We break open his mutton-chopped head, stomp, stomp, eat the brains and remember. So many memories.

Stab with pens he kept to do that with . It is just like what he did with manuscripts; pick the eyes out and see how good it is, cut it up to get rid of the bad bits. Stupid woman not just want sex, wanted him to read her manuscript. Lots of women, over the years, and making people famous.

Papa Shango far away, singing song we could do better, stomp, stomp, he dances his dance to make us dance, he shows his shiny metal. We know shiny metal, we know the dance, we ate and we remember, we don't care what Papa Shango say, we remember and we will go where we want. Soon there will be so many of us, stomp, stomp.

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Western Australia

(Associate Editor – Mechele Mede)

NEW SERIES: Bad Territory

Tom Sykes

Localisation:

UK English

Reader guidance:

Strong adult language from the outset which only gets stronger. Strong themes throughout. Sexuality and sexual content, hetero and homo. Graphic images. Controversial subject matter. Irreligious. Deliberately callous at points. Some cruelty to animals. Sexual violence.

Are we all clear? This is not *Hambone Sizzlewitt's Big Rock*.

This is *Bad Territory*.

Part I – *Dead Territory*

This morning everything was unfamiliar. The objects around Ernest didn't justify their usual names. He tapped an avian abortion until the membrane spurted over the hog slice. *Bacon is the clinching argument against vegetarianism*, he thought. A jar of Camp coffee sat half-empty — no label depicting the Sikh and the Highlander, just a black market stencil. No-one had touched the glucose snacks in purple sachets laid on as a Sunday morning treat. Still peckish, Ernest took a stiletto to the India rubber ball of recon meat, the blade bending as he carved. While he ate, his eyes traced the line of furry mould along the skirting board. At certain points, frayed electrical wires gusted from holes in the wood.

Geraint was at the mesh window watching dust trails hit the bare spots of sunbathers. He tugged the hem of his kimono.

“Of course I’m not interested in them,” he purred. “I’ve always batted for the other team. Ahhh, Steven Beamon. He was thirteen, I was fourteen. It was 2 a.m. at the Cenotaph. Amongst the inscriptions of the dead we got as near as we could to procreation.”

The sunbathers were canal pals, semi-legal sex workers getting UV rays before their tricks arrived. Their eyes streamed behind mirrorshades – no pain, no gain. They were careful to avoid overexposure; most of them were waiting to go to Asia where a white woman had the value of black gold. Ernest nodded hello to them on his way to work in the morning, seeing in them kindred symptoms of the blues.

“Skanky bitches,” said Paul even though he hired one each weekend. He’d entered the kitchen from the only ‘studio’ room in the hangover: six square feet of musty attic floored with a sleeping bag. The others paid less for coffin beds and tarpaulin duvets. The hangover was a tolerable place to stay, Ernest’s only real objection being the smell that arose from male close quarter living. Even so, compared to his life before, it was sheer luxury.

He had spent a year trekking through the Barrens, everywhere the sweet and sour smell of particulate emissions. He kipped in industrial parks emptied by the economic plunk, washed in still-dead toxic rivers and warmed himself by scorched earth fires in oil refineries. He passed a trillion deserted structures: multi-storey lines of DIY centres, half-collapsed helix car parks, Astroturf driving ranges countermanded by flash-flooding, Warner death camp chalets trashed to ground zero, nuke plants chilled redundant by the last cold breath of the Cold War. And he hadn’t been the only one. Necessity had forced

thousands to roam, like the days of Enclosure, to find employment. A popular option was the meat-packing plants where diseased cows were kept in cells, a communal shit-chute running under their tails. At the end of their lives they'd be jabbed in the head with steroids and fed half-conscious into an industrial mincer. Ernest lasted a few weeks at a plant in the northwest of Anglo-Terra.

When he came south, he joined a gang of 'chafers', those who worked polluted arable land to make it fertile again. The days were long and hard, afflicting him with mud-ulcers and surging cramp. One morning his shovel threw up a human skull the size of a conker. His colleagues started to find larger body parts.

The foreman shouted down from his gantry.

"Used to be a dodgy abortion clinic over there. They had a deal with a local gravedigger who'd chuck the foetuses in with whoever he was burying that day. Tight cunt used cardboard coffins which degrade too quick. Before long those bits you found got pushed up near the surface by plants.

"Now, fuckpigs, stop gawping and get back to work."

In a provincial town he soon forgot the name of, Ernest worked for the Guber Project — a beautification scheme, hygiene measure and law enforcement agency rolled into one remarkable piece of technology. It comprised several hundred metres of piping laid out under the town alongside the pre-existing web of sewers. On every street corner were placed grey vents which connected to the piping below. The vents were the size of telephone boxes and contained motors similar to those found in vacuum cleaners, only far more powerful. At exactly three o'clock each morning, the motors would be switched on and various objects on the street would be sucked down the

vents. Everything from beer cans to stray cats would be drawn in and whisked to the Central Sorting Office, a bubble-shaped depot supported by concave steel arches. Scaffolding hugged the walls and ceiling, from where masked workers like Ernest leaned into the waste as it arrived, sifting for valuables. The ninety per cent of it that was useless got sent to an incinerator.

On one occasion, Ernest had to body-bag the corpse of a vagrant. When he questioned the official line that such accidental deaths never happened, he was sacked instantly. Two days later, the entire project was terminated nationwide, for financial rather than ethical reasons.

The lodestar, the ideal that had kept him going, was London. As soon as he got here he knew things would be all right. Now he had three hots and a cot, and the work was easier and better-paid. His daughter, Judy, was here too, doing well for herself in television.

Geraint started a sentence in his mind but only vocalised the second half of it.

“... so it’s hard for me to find companionship these days.”

The popular theory was brain damage caused by the hangover’s lead water pipes. Tears leaked from Geraint’s top-heavy eyelids.

“Cheer up, you big poof,” said Paul, sipping a shandy of wood alcohol and embalming fluid. Although Paul had used this term in jest before, Geraint decided to take issue with it now and stormed out of the kitchen.

An alarm beeped on five hidden speakers. The diners had ten minutes to tidy the kitchen and leave.

“Been here six months,” said Paul. “And I still feel like a little boy rather than a valued customer.”

He took a troubled, asthmatic breath and cursed the damp patches bleeding through the wallpaper. He chased the rest of his booze with a folded slice of bully beef and hauled himself up into his room.

Ernest rinsed his teapot, plate and Swiss Army knife. A terrible screech blew apart the soft strum of traffic. It hardly sounded human, yet it was. He leaned out of the window and looked down to the pavement, framed by neighbouring towers, smoke and roadworks. He saw a blonde head and leather feet. Then they jerked suddenly out of sight. There was a clang of dropped money, or worse, a weapon.

The lift was out, so Ernest wheezed down four flights of stairs. He shoved open the double doors and was in the cramped yet strangely muted streets. The odd pucker of rain — a prelude to a full-on shower — banged out avant-garde rhythms on a tin can. Letterboxes and parabolas for tethering bikes reclined on the pavement. This part of the city always seemed subdued, as if stuck in a never-ending day of national mourning. Puffer jackets loaded with mobile phones plied their trade in whispers. Families in tents ate ready-meals in silence. A copper stood at ease, glazed stare rested on his own shock baton. He didn't seem to register Ernest yelling at him, "Did you see that woman?"

"Get back to the loony bin," the copper said, drawing his own conclusions about this sweaty, pyjama-clad man with the hedgehog hair who looked like he'd only just rolled out of bed.

Ernest searched for the alley she'd been pulled down. It was tricky to correlate a bird's eye view with what could be seen on the ground, but he recognised the roadworks; a gratuitous gouging of a bus lane. Beyond that was a scrap of uneven odds. Blonde plaits had been seized by two thugs with generic videogame faces; wedge jaws, dot eyes, matte cropped hair.

They forced the girl to her knees with no let-up on the hair-pulling. Bending and shaking, she pleaded in telegrammar; bare rinds trimmed by urgency. *No Christ Don't I Please.*

Ernest U-turned to the copper who showed him a negative palm.

“Sorry, mate. No chance.”

Beat police were rare these days; most of them were being sent to hot spots of urban insurrection. The ones that remained were effectively security guards, hired out to protect and serve private interests only.

Ernest panicked at the situation in the corner of his eye. Thug #2 stuffed his crooked cock into her mouth. Thug #1 waved a machine pistol at the public who hurried past, ogling the tarmac.

He squeezed the copper's arm. “Well she's — she's just a girl. Can't you—?”

“More than my job's worth.”

Ernest never believed people actually used that phrase until now.

“If you wanna, I'll turn a blind eye,” added the copper with a wink.

Ernest took this open endorsement of vigilantism with overworked hands and wondered what he, an old coward, could do with it. The girl had curled up into a ball, denying both thugs. They hobnailed her kidneys.

“Oi!” squeaked Ernest, then wondered what on earth he was going to do. Thug #2 advanced, mallet raised.

It stung. Badly.

Ernest's field of vision rolled back forty-five degrees. A corporate zeppelin on jerky autopilot hovered, its spotlight

busting open the eternal dusk of the city. An HGV, its roof loaded with scarf-faced hitchers, just avoided him.

Blackness.

Ernest saw a version of himself morphed by fairground mirrors, smiling lips stretched to harlequin limits. Then the opposite effect and he was a twenty foot beanpole. A tar-coloured landscape of yawning tectonics materialised around him, a sky just as dark sinking towards it. In the midst of this were objects and scuttling life forms but, tantalisingly, Ernest could see nothing more than outlines.

* * *

Then there was light. It increased with such measured rhythm that a hidden technician might as well have been moving a fader. Instead of illuminating things, the light refracted into countless tiny beams which collided with one another until the whole world was a shitstorm of blinding chroma. Blazing petals floated down from the explosions of geometric fireworks and fractal burps coated with fuzz, so self-similar as to be totally alien, their come-hither complexity drawing him in like a siren. "It's just too much to take," said a voice somewhere.

Then another voice, booming, deific: "Mr Lipton, are you awake? Blink once for yes, twice for no."

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United Kingdom

Editor's note: Tom Sykes' *Bad Territory* continues in RPM08, due out 28 September, 2009.

The Man

Karen Dent

Localisation

US English

Reader Guidance

Supernatural elements.

When I was barely two he appeared and stood by my crib staring down at me a long, long time. I'd screamed in fear the moment I saw him, my eyes spilling tears the size of marbles. He glided back and slipped into a thin slit of shadow in a corner of my room where he stayed.

The first time, my mama had come in and tried to comfort me, cradling my shivering body and walking the floor. No matter which way she walked I kept my eyes fixed on his spot. Finally she said, real gentle like, "Don't you worry honey, they won't hurt you none. They just get real lonely and want a little company like regular folks is all." Then she put my stiff little body down and wiped my face dry. I clutched at her apron but she plucked my fingers off crooning "Shush now and be my little angel." Then she looked over to where I still stared and saw nothing. Nothing with her eyes that is, but she could feel him. Then she shuddered, patted my blanket, kissed my fingers and

left. He remained and watched my life play out in grueling, tedious detail.

It's hard to remember a time when The Man wasn't a part of my life. As a child he seemed to be taller than a shadow and just as dark. He wore a tall black hat, pointy beard and eyes – eyes that I could never quite see in the deep shrunken hollow of his skull. He wore black clothes with a black cape and when I was a few years older, I named him Inquisitor after a movie I saw.

Mama used to see things too until she passed down Grammy's legacy to me, her ninth child. She called it a blessing, but she seemed real happy it had moved on to me and left her 'blessedly quiet'. Anyway, it ticked me off her giving me her gift. Most people just get an old dresser or cameo.

My mama would take me aside and try to explain how I was gifted and shouldn't let people know. Then she'd go on and on about how hard my row would be to hoe. I didn't figure that one out till I was six.

The Man stayed and seemed to be a perpetual blackness in the corner of my room. He'd watch impassively at all my childhood games, my beatings and the nights my Uncle Charlie would crush me under his sweaty fat arms with his needs. The last time he tried to do more than grope, the Inquisitor slithered out from the shadowy depth of his corner and touched Charlie's temple. That man shot off me with a scream of pain I won't ever forget. The smell of burnt flesh filled the room and ever after there was a mark on the side of his face that mama called the sign of the Devil. I called it Salvation. Uncle Charlie never came around no more and mama said good riddance anyways. Pop-pop was mad we lost a free babysitter and blamed me for ruining his life again. I felt the strap almost every day after that before

mama finally kicked the bastard out. But she had another man waiting to take his place. She was weak and got lonely. I can't blame her. We all have our ways.

My Man didn't leave and eventually I got used to him. He never left my room or spoke until that one time when he screamed in my ear "Jump!" Some low life almost ran me over with their truck. I was so shocked, I leaped and landed in the bushes and struggled home with scratched up knees and briars stuck all over me. People can be real hateful when they think you're different.

I gave up trying to find out what Inquisitor wanted from me and just figured he was as cursed as I was and had to endure. I ignored him, he seemed to ignore me. In my thirteenth year, I was told I was too old for Halloween trick or treating unless I wanted to take some little kids. As I was a surprise baby in the last flower of mama's youth, there were no little sisters or brothers in my family to take. All the others had grown up and had run as fast and as far away as their feet could take them.

My few friends, all too old like me, also wanted to go get free candy. We were hungry for the sugar high and tortured cavities a night knocking on doors would bring; except there was an unspoken rule around our neighborhood. No one over twelve was allowed to poach candy meant for the young'uns.

So, Callie, Harriet, who we called Harry, and Jess cooked up a plan to invade the other side of the river, the rich side. No one over there ever checked to see how old you were and no one over there knew our faces either. We hid our costumes and make-up in an old decayed hollow of a tree the day before and brought mirrors and flashlights to dress up with. Our master plan was, first, to hit old Fogel's place, high on the hill. Then, we'd catch a bus to the big lights across the water. Fogel was known for his

cookies and sweets, sometimes letting a small group in for some soda and ice cream. He seemed to like older kids, maybe 'cause they didn't have parents trailing them and telling them to hurry up. So we trooped up the hill at dusk and waited in a pine grove while batches of ghosts and goblins rang his bell. Their high voices echoed in the chill wind with "Trick or Treat" and giggles of pleasure as he dumped large handfuls of candy in their bags. He kept looking over at the pine grove like he could see us waiting and I could swear he smiled.

Callie and Jess were cold and wanted to hurry and ring his bell then move on but Harry was on my side. I explained Fogel wouldn't let us in if we were with a big group. If we could get all our candy here, why pay the bus fare from our hard earned babysitting money if we didn't have to? Callie whined some more but shut up when the last of the fairy princesses floated away with squeals of joy and talk of swapping her gummy eyeball for a lollipop.

Finally we trudged up the hill and stairs. I looked over and saw Inquisitor standing in the shadows and stiffened. Except for that one time warning me, he'd never been out of my bedroom. "What are you doing here?" I whispered feeling like I just got sucker punched.

My friends all turned to where I was staring. Harry slapped me in the arm "Quit it, you freak. Stop messing around. Hey Jess, ring the bell already. I'm freezing." Jess lifted her hand but the door opened before she got the chance. Mr. Fogel stood there looking down at us, smiling that smile.

I couldn't take my eyes off Inquisitor who just hovered over some dead brown leaves in the blackest part of the porch, and stared at me mournfully.

Mr. Fogel's grin got big and toothy as he looked down at us. "Well well well. Only four?" He leaned out and looked around for our moms and Harry pushed to the front.

"Just us, Mr. Fogel. Trick or treat," and opened her burlap bag. Hopefully, she craned her neck around his body and looked into his living room. Piles of candy and cookies winked at her from huge glass bowls while hot cocoa steamed on a table, beckoning seductively.

Mr. Fogel's eyes gleamed as he said, "Then why don't you come on in. I've got a pot of imported hot chocolate I just made and a batch of cinnamon cookies fresh out of the oven."

"Thanks!" Harry said and lunged into the room, followed quickly by Jess and Callie. Their whispered squeaks of joy snaked out to me as they ran to the table and greedily grabbed handfuls of candy from the crystal bowls and dumped them in their bags.

Mr. Fogel looked down at me impatiently, "You're letting out all the warm air. Come in already."

I looked back over at Inquisitor who seemed to ooze a black puddle of grief and sadness.

Mr. Fogel grabbed my shoulder and tried to wrangle me into his house, "I've been waiting for you. No need to be afraid, I saw you in the grove and you seemed like nice young things, wanting a little something extra. I made the chocolate just for you, so come in and have a cup."

He seemed a little too anxious so I dug in my heels and refused to budge. I looked at him then, real hard. His eyes were like glass, such a soft faded blue you could almost see through them. His hand had a thick ribboned vein that seemed to twitch and jump right before my eyes. I stepped further back and away, and the wind whipped my hair as I watched my friends laughing

and happily eating cookies while they sat on his couch. The light was all golden yellow and sparkly and I desperately wanted to join them. I turned and reluctantly walked down the steps, noting as I did the flash of surprise on Mr. Fogel's face.

"Come back here, you ungrateful little bitch!" he barked. Now that kind of language I understood and I picked up my pace. He quickly followed down the stairs and I saw the shadow of his hand reaching for my pony tail. I ducked, darting to the side and ran down the hill at breakneck speed, stopping only when I didn't hear the thudding of his footsteps behind me. I turned and watched. He stood looking down at me, then turned and stiffly walked up his steps. He paused at the top and turned to the dark corner where Inquisitor had been standing. He viciously kicked at the dead leaves then turned back to stare at me. I sucked in my breath as his eyes glowed orange then red before he entered his house and slammed the door. It was creepy how those faded blue eyes could reflect light like that, but then I thought – what light? There was only darkness. Beads of sweat gathered on my upper lip and I felt slightly sick.

I waited. If my friends didn't get kicked out right now I would pick up a couple of rocks and break his windows. If he came out, I'd throw one to break his nose. If they still didn't come out I'd go to the police even if I did get into trouble. I bunched up my muscles to run back up the hill and scanned the area for rocks big enough to pitch and do some damage. Abruptly Callie, Jess and Harry came flying out, him in the doorway yelling, "And tell your friend she's never to come back here either! I labored long and hard on your treats and this is the thanks I get? Bitches!" and he slammed the door again.

I sobbed in relief. I was running to meet them when Harry pushed me down and screamed, “Are you out of your mind, you psycho? Why’d you go and do that? Why?”

“Yeah,” Jess piped in. There were piles of cookies in there!” She was quivering, cookie crumbs still clinging to the corners of her mouth.

I got up slowly and looked at them like they were all crazy. “Are you kidding?! I saved you. He was some sort of demon or something and—”

Harry blurted, “You are such a freak! I should never have come with you. Lorraine fessed up that she and Dodger were going Trick or Treating and asked me if I wanted to go with them,” she grumbled, “and I shoulda!”

Callie said slowly, “Actually Harry, I’m sorta glad he kicked us out. He didn’t feel right.”

Jess turned on her, “What do you mean? He had cookies! Hot stuff to drink! We could have stayed for hours.”

Harry bunched her fist up, “You saw that stupid Man, didn’t you?” At my look, she let out all her breath, “Oh, for cripes sake he’s not real! Food is real! Free food is extra real.”

I turned and started walking home, no longer interested in celebrating Halloween. “I’ll see you guys tomorrow.”

Callie called, “Wait up. I’ll walk home with you.” She paced beside me and we walked home in silence.

The next day Lorraine and Dodger were missing. We told the police about old Fogel but they said he was in Europe where he stayed till April; told us the holidays got him down ever since his wife and three children went missing 30 years ago.

Harry and Jess never talked about that night and they stopped hanging with me too.

Callie's parents moved so I don't see her much anymore either, but we try and write as much as possible.

When I came home that night, Inquisitor was there in his usual spot and I went right up to him and said, "Thanks."

Every day now I say "Good morning" and "Good night" and sometimes I'll read some of my school books to him. He seems to like that, I think. Maybe it's my imagination but I think his dark corner is getting a little lighter these days.

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Massachusetts, USA

(Associate Editor – Carol Anne Lawry)

RUTHLESS PEOPLES MAGAZINE

~AFTERWORD~

Good Lord! Well, if this edition isn't enough to make you drop your monocle, you are made of tougher stuff than your noble but hirsute Editor in Chief. To you: the garland.

“What's that?” you say, “Editor *in Chief*? Are you not getting a little above yourself, you strange oik of South London?”

I shake my head: not so. Heavy is the head that wears the crown, for RPM is expanding and is in the midst of Revolution. This edition showcases the first deployment of our crack associate editing team: Ben, Carol, Mechele and Jon join with myself, Stewart, Josiah and Babs to bring you these assorted works. I think it's therefore fitting that we bring out some of the more insurgency-ready stories from our submissions list.

But soft – I hear hammers at the gates. I have one small request to make of you, before the hordes appear: Golden Visions Magazine have asked me to make the RPM readership aware of their current competition: they are looking for stories involving strange alien life. Their website is [here](#), if you would consider taking a look.

Viva! & toodle pip,
Yours truly

Dominic Hamer
Editor
London, 2009

~ TEAM RPM ~

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