



POLU TEXNI

A Magazine of Many Arts



Summer 2009

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now all things have been used at least once
Camille Alexa

now all things have been used at least once,
garbage is Earth's greatest resource.
fighting, squabbling, thievery ensue.
trash barons rule every corner,
purveyors of junk are our kings.

when kings become invincible
they think themselves gods.
Gods of Garbage, Lords of Leftovers,
Sheiks of Shit, Rulers of All Humankind.
and the wars they fight . . .
it's become a bloody bath, our once tranquilish globe.
no matter: a corpse is rubbish too and there are
always more people than things; Junk Kings
can always send more and more and more.

what's a cadaver but parts to recycle?
precious water and organic fertilizer and
rare minerals all there for the taking.
dump-mining's the only employment but for war;
it's hardly a choice to agonize over.
either way we die in the end,
perhaps sooner or later but always.

though who doesn't? even our grandparents --
those prolific discarders of under-used goods,
those rampant and reckless consumers of everything --
all died in the end, not leaving much for the rest of us.

I go to work each day in the pits of their discards,
sort their barely-used refuse into viable piles
and try not to blame them.
I try.





Deep Space
by Megan Arkenberg

Some things you can get used to;
some you can't.

Weightlessness feels strange
at first—you'll soon adapt
to pushing yourself off walls
and landing moist-fingered
against the window glass.
The darkness takes a bit longer,
particularly the way
it never comes inside, but seems
to press itself against the walls,
longing to touch you
but afraid of how you'll feel.

The sounds will fix themselves
in the hollows of your ear,
faint buzzings and tinklings,
the click of machinery, gears
grinding, the ring of space junk
against aluminum walls.
Strange, yes, but in time...
the sounds, you can get used to.

The silence, never.

Book Reviews

Leisure Books - Evil by the Dozen

I. E. Lester

Dorchester Publishing's Leisure Books imprint is horror's metronome. Regular as clockwork each month two new horror paperbacks emerge, some reprints, some originals. So they get top marks for punctuality, but what of the books themselves?

2009 started with Jake's Wake (John Skipp & Cody Goodfellow, 08439-6076-0) and Black Cathedral (L.H Maynard & M.P.N. Sims, 08439-6199-6). Despite both books dealing with resurrection these two books are poles apart within the genre.

Skipp's & Goodfellow's Pastor Jake is in some ways the stereotypical bad-guy preacher - the holy-than-thou con-man type - taken to extremes. In front of his congregation he is considered closer to God than any man alive. Away from it though he is a womaniser, a drug taking criminal not adverse to violence.

His lifestyle has caught up with him and he dies following his latest hook-up, killed by the jealous boyfriend of the woman he picked up in a bar. His flock, though, still believe him saintly - right up to the moment when Jake the rotting corpse walks into his own wake intent on passing his own form of judgment.

Jake's Wake is violence on the personal level, driven by hatred. There's no mystery, no investigation to uncover the truth. The reader is treated to violence from the first chapter, violence that continues almost without pause to the end.

It's highly entertaining stuff though. The authors have managed not to step overly the line into total blood orgy. Okay the plot is not the most in depth, but the main characters are presented well and the get out doesn't feel like a cop-out.

Black Cathedral is closer to an X-Files episode. The British Government runs a secret department dedicated to investigating and fighting supernatural threats. The latest case centres on a deserted Scottish island where a group of corporate types, on a team building exercise, has disappeared. Department 18 puts together a team of psychic, scientists and soldiers to find out who or what was responsible.

The focus here is very much on the investigators, rather than the bad-guy. The reveal is slow, we only get to know what the team uncover when they uncover it. Some of the characters feel overly familiar - the jaded, but powerful, psychic at odds with the suits but convinced to come out of retirement for this case; the secret, centuries old organisation connected with the mystery somehow (surprise, surprise). But despite its flaws this is a compelling story.

February's two titles were Soultaker (Bryan Smith, 08439-6193-7) and Castaways (Brian Keene, 08439-6089-2).

The story in Smith's Soultaker, in essence, is one we have seen many times before - a community being taken over by incoming evil. But it doesn't feel a rehash of what we have seen/read before - this is certainly no update of Invasion of the Body Snatchers.

Here Myra, a demon in the body of a teenage high school student has gained control using sex - enslaving the young men of Rockville and recruiting the women as priestesses in her new religion. She has virtually full control of town - the only exception being Jake McAllister, the brother of Myra's first male slave Trey, and a bunch of high school outcasts.

This book is hard hitting, full of sex, sadism and violence. The torments to which Myra subjects Trey are truly degrading, bordering on disturbing. It's not a book for the faint hearted - fans of horror-lite (paranormal romance or dark fantasy) should probably steer clear. But it's the book you're after if the racks of teenage angst meets vampire lust that have taken over the bookstores are not to your taste.

Brian Keene's book is completely different. Although still violent it is much more light-hearted and at times approaching laugh-out-loud funny. Keene has chosen as his target pop-culture's current in vogue main entertainment - the reality TV show. His shows, "Castaways", sees a group of contestants left on a remote desert island with only a few dozen cameramen, soundmen and support crew for company, where they have to perform the usual mindnumbingly stupid tasks for the viewing public.

However the one thing they didn't count on was that the island chosen is also home to a tribe of cannibal pygmies - now there's a great combination. This book is out and out fun. It has its gory moments, some sexual violence when the pygmies decide to rape one or two of the contestants. But for the most part it's fun - you can't help wanting the pygmies to eat most of the castaways.

March's two offerings were *Crimson* (Gord Rollo, 08439-6195-3) and *Dark Mountain* (Richard Laymon, 08439-6138-4) are the first two of the year's reprints, *Crimson* being previously published in trade paperback by Prime Books in 2002

Crimson is almost a retelling of Stephen King's *It* - although mercifully not as long as King's book. Dunville, Ontario has a dark past. In 1945 local farmer Jacob Harrison murdered his family before killing himself. Skip forward to 1977, the farm is now home to ten-year-old Johnny Page. Johnny and three friends inadvertently awaken a creature. Skip forward once more to 1986 and the creature begins a killing spree, treating one of Johnny's friends to a psychic ringside seat.

There is pretty much nothing original about this book whatsoever. Nothing! That said, Rollo has made it entertaining. He differs from authors like King in that he's not about the gradual build up of tension; the action is from the off. It's a book that suggests we may get a lot of good horror from Rollo in the years to come.

Dark Mountain is the latest re-issue of Richard Laymon's early books, having first being published in 1987. In comparison with a lot of later Laymon this is a little light on gore. It still has some disturbing moments, but is not as regularly stomach turning as the author's later works.

The crux of the story (two families heading into the hills on a hiking holiday only to encounter a twisted old witch and her equally weird son) seems a little old reading it now, twenty-two years after the book's original release. And to be honest it probably didn't seem all that fresh when the book was first released.

Here it's the structure of the story that raises this above the average. Laymon has presented us with a three-act story, allowing him to build to three separate climaxes within the one novel - a trick resulting in a very fast moving compelling novel. Okay, not a contender for his best book - for that you could try *Funland* or *the Stake* - but evidence of why Laymon is sorely missed to the world of horror.

April's two were *The Golem* (Edward Lee, 08439-5808-1) and *Bestial* (Ray Garton, 08439-6185-6).

I'd never read an Edward Lee novel before picking this book up. I'd heard a number of reports of him being one of the hardest hitting horror writers writing in the mainstream, so I was expect a brutal, bloodbath of a novel. It isn't what I got though. There is some good horror violence to be sure, but far less than I am used to in most horror books. But what there is, is a good solid plot with two of the most sympathetic lead characters I've read in a long time.

Seth Kohn is a games designer and recovering alcoholic. His girlfriend Judy Parker is a former University Professor and ex-junkie. When Seth's first game makes them millionaires they decide to leave the temptations of the big city and move to Lowensport, Maryland to rebuild their lives.

The only problem is that they've moved to the home of an heretical Jewish cult who control a zombie-like golem, and Seth's new property has the barrels of Old-World clay they need to create more.

This book has two plot strands, a modern day strand (Seth & Judy) which is wonderfully written, and a historic strand set in the 1880s describing the battle between the incoming Jewish cult members and the original townsfolk. This strand is good but in comparison to the modern day action it's weak, and this has the effect of slowing the pace down. You certainly get tempted to skip through until we return to Seth and Judy.

It's still a good novel, but with a little less of the past it could have been a lot more.

Ray Garton's *Bestial* is a double-sequel. The action is a direct continuation from his 2008 novel *Ravenous*. But it is also an indirect sequel to his earlier novel *Night Life*, as once more paranormal investigators Karen Moffett and Gavin Keoph are on the case.

We rejoin the story shortly after the end of *Ravenous*, back in Big Rock soon after the werewolves had defeated and killed the hunter and sheriff opposing them. Keoph and Moffett arrive in town to find out if there is any truth to the rumour of werewolf infestation, only to find themselves in a pitch battle to save the town.

A sequel (an uncommon thing in horror novels) was pretty much inevitable when the first book ended in a victory for the werewolves, and there was a definite fear here of the author milking it. Fortunately though he's taken this into new areas.

For one thing we are witness to the birth of a werewolf, rather than a human conversion. And let me tell you they come out of the womb fast, strong and very hungry. Garton has certainly made up for the lack of the action I was expecting in the Edward Lee book.

May's pairing was *Death Mask* (Graham Masterton, 08439-5792-1) and *Sacrifice* (John Everson, 08439-6019-1).

Masterton is one of horror's most prolific author, responsible for many great horror novels over the past three decades. This is not, however, amongst his best. Per se it's not a bad book. It certainly has the kind of brutality you associate with Masterton. But there are a couple of things that hold it back.

The book starts with an artist, Molly Sawyer, sketching pictures of roses that miraculously come to life. Given that Molly and her mother-in-law Sissy both have a bit of a feel for the supernatural (Sissy seems rarely without her tarot cards), I don't get the fact that she would happily agree to create a image of a brutal killer before finding out if this image might also come to life.

It just seems to jar somewhat against logic. Allowing for that though, the two do realise what is going on and come up with a reasonably ingenious way of combating their evil creation.

Having said sequels were not common along comes another in John Everson's *Sacrifice*. This time however, unlike *Ravenous*, I have not read the earlier book, *Covenant*. Fortunately the story here is distinct enough to not require prior knowledge.

Ariana is an ex-nun intent on raising the Curburide, a race of bloodthirsty demons. In order to do this she is travelling around the USA sacrificing young men as she goes. Trying to stop her is reporter Joe Kieron, a man who has ended up bound to his own demon through his actions in the first title, and a young girl who seems to be able to control demons and may have killed her parents with that power.

This is a slasher-film in text form. Ariana is cold and calculating in her efforts to raise the Curburide, intent on using her slim body and good looks to lure her victims to her. Her opponents are jaded, bordering on reluctant. It's what you read horror for.

June sees another two reprint titles in *Pressure* (Jeff Strand, 08439-6253-4) and *Cover* (Jack Ketchum, 08439-6187-2).

Pressure, previously published in a limited edition hardcover by Earthling Publications in 2006, is a chilling non-supernatural horror tale. Following a childhood dare gone wrong, Alex Fletcher is sent to Branford Academy, a boarding school dedicated to bringing teenage tearaways under control. That's where he first encounters Darren Rust. Despite his initial misgivings about Darren, the two begin a kind of friendship.

This soon comes to an end when Alex discovers Darren dissecting the corpse of a dog, and an act of retaliation from their roommate and owner of the dog. When Alex does nothing to prevent Darren's suffering their friendship ends and Alex fears what Darren might do to get revenge. Their lives move apart soon after and Alex forgets about the whole thing until he meets an older Darren at College. However Darren seems to have changed and the two once more become friends.

Darren however has plans for Alex, intending to make him a partner in a serial killing spree. When Alex refuses, he becomes the target of Darren's anger.

For once having first person narration has worked. This book is seriously chilling. Its stop/start nature also helps build tension, resulting in the book having multiple scary highs, before things kick off again after time has passed. Truly a wonderful book.

Rounding out the half year Jack Ketchum's *Cover* has a lot to live up to if it's going to maintain the standard. Again a reprint, originally having been published in 1987 (under the pen name Dallas Mayr).

Cover is not a typical horror book. To be honest it's not really a horror book at all - more of a straight thriller. Lee Moravian is a Vietnam veteran, and one seriously mentally unhinged by the experience. He's isolated himself from civilisation, settling out in the middle of nowhere in California growing marijuana. But when his wife leaves him and he is warned of an impending drugs raid, his fragile grip on sanity finally snaps.

Unfortunately for a group of campers they've chosen this part of the countryside and this precise time for their get away from it all holiday.

This is a straightforward serial killer story, albeit with a more sympathetic killer than you normally get in crime novels. It has some seriously chilling moments, especially when the action is seen from Moravian's angle. Okay, for pure gorefest entertainment this is not a patch on Ketchum straight horror novels. It's not a patch on novels like *Girl Next Door*, but his portrayal of an unhinged veteran is intense.

I started this wondering whether such regularity could produce quality. For the most part it does. There are some top class horror reads here, and, although some don't quite reach the heights, there are no out and out duds. All in all you have to applaud them for their efforts.

July and August sees books by Brian Keene, Gary A. Braunbeck, Nate Kenyon and Robert Dunbar. I can hardly wait!

Awash in Sorrow

Paul Walther

The girl is in the bathroom throwing up again. Donnally doesn't care this time, though, because he's got other problems on his mind. The water dripping into the buckets has changed colors--something new is dripping from the ceiling and it's staining the water red, where only a moment ago it was merely brown and dirty looking.

Go figure, as that bastard Carlson, probably already home and dry, would say.

The girl doesn't care that the ceiling is leaking cold water like a sieve as the snow melts outside in unseasonably warm temperatures. The girl is afraid of Bobby Mack, and so she eats, and she throws up, and she eats, and she throws up. She just can't keep her stomach full.

Donnally's not afraid of Bobby Mack. He's seen his picture, of course. Seen the mug shot--the paid killer arrested in a whorehouse downtown. Mack stares at the camera vacant and disheveled, a thin faced maniac whose hair is tufted into twin curling horns on either side of his balding pate. Mack doesn't look menacing in that photo, just stunned and evil; evil without even trying, which might be what makes the photograph so memorable. His eyes are the chunks of frozen coal bad kids used to get in their stockings, when there used to be coal. His uncurving mouth is devoid of human emotion. And the girl is afraid of him, free now while he awaits trial. There is no plumbing the depth of his cruelty, they say, no lighting the dark reaches of his capacity to torment his victims before he kills them.

An undeserved reputation, Donnally thinks bitterly, unless you count him being responsible for Donnally being holed up on Christmas Eve in a dirty little apartment building with a part time whore down by the switching yard. Because search the city as he might, it would take Mack ten years to find this or any other given flea hole on the edge of the city. This is police protection at its best--even Santa wouldn't look for somebody here, unless he was tipped off.

Donnally can hear the other residents through the thin walls. The natives are restless on this holiest of nights--they are hollering at each other, cursing each other, banging things around, making sure Santa wouldn't dare slip down the incinerator chute even if he did find the place.

Donnally did his tour of the premises when he came on duty a few hours ago-- muddy entry way, dented mail slots, ruined door buzzers. The caretaker had laid big sheets of cardboard down where the roof was leaking dirty water into the hallways and Donnally squelched over those and into the filthy laundry room to peek behind washing machines and crusted dryers to make sure the Mack--infamous, imaginative Mack--wasn't hiding behind one, waiting to jump out.

Carlson, thirty year vet with a big blue pot belly, had met him at the door of the apartment with an ugly grin. "Check it out, Donny boy? Ready to move in?"

"It's clean," said Donnally, hating his own nervousness.

"You got your gun? You got your bullets? You got your bullets in your gun? That's the only way they work, remember?"

Damn him, because if Donnally didn't have any experience with squalor before he came on the force, he was getting it now, and not flinching. What more could they ask of him?

"I got everything," he told the bastard, pushing into the apartment, seeing for the first time how little furniture it had and how badly the roof was leaking.

"Ain't like home, is it?" said Carson, grinning, looking over his shoulder. "We seems to have misplaced the mistletoe, ain't we, deary?"

The girl hadn't even looked up.

"Sing her a carol if you get bored--you'd be a soprano, right?"

"Get out of here," said Donnally.

"Call the sector if you need back up, or some of that Perrier water."

"Get out of here."

Now the walls are suddenly leaking blood, and Donnally wishes to hell there was somebody he could call about it.

The girl comes out of the bathroom. She looks around the room, like she expects Mack to be there in spite of the police protection. She isn't badly built--though tired looking and wan with puking every fifteen minutes. A curling strand of dark hair hangs over her face.

"Leastways," she says with false bravado, "I ain't going to gain any weight, this way."

"There you go," says Donnally, sitting on the ratty bed. "Why don't you just not worry--the boy's nothing but a punk."

The fear in the girl's eyes tells him the truth. Bobby Mack is a legend on the street-- these streets, not Donnally's. His reputation is undeserved. They say he's like a cat, but he's not, unless you're counting the bulldozer variety. The Mack uses an automatic weapon, chopped off and deadly. He's not a sniper, this boy--oh, no--Mack sprays his victims with enough lead to kill an army; spreads the intended and everyone else in close range all over the landscape like fake snow in one of those shake-em-up bubbles. They had to scrub the blood off of this girl, before they could even bully her to testify.

Donnally waits to see if she will notice the color of the water leaking down everywhere. She looks around the room again but doesn't seem to notice anything out of place; sits down on the other side of the bed to light a cigarette and pull smoke through cherry red lips. A class act, this one--stops to put fresh lipstick on every time she tosses her guts into the toilet.

One of the buckets is nearly full with red liquid; Donnally inspects it gingerly-- dipping a finger, sniffing it. It's hard to tell what it is. If the girl hasn't noticed, he doesn't want to alert her-- she's scared enough already. He carries the bucket into the bathroom to dump it down the toilet and receives another shock: the water in the porcelain bowl is the same color. Donnally's stomach lurches. Through the walls, for the hundredth time, he hears a mother screaming at her children, threatening to kill them. He dumps the water, flushes, and watches the bowl fill up with blood red water again.

"Yo, Ace!" the girl calls from the other room, "get out here, Ace!"

He runs into the room to find her sitting on the edge of the bed, staring at the floor. Too late, he realizes that he forgot to put something under the leak when he went to empty the bucket. A giant, dark, red stain is creeping across the carpet.

"Way to go, Ace," the girl says.

Donnally squelches through the soaked carpet on his toes and positions the bucket under the leak. Something's still wrong, though. He was only gone a few minutes--two or three, at the most--and the carpet is soaked with what must be gallons of water, and the stain still seems to be spreading.

"Did you notice anything wrong with the water in the toilet?" he asks, trying not to sound concerned.

"What you talking about?" she asks, "Did I leave something in there for you?"

"No," he says, "it's--this place is just filthy, that's all."

"You got that right, Ace."

Somewhere upstairs a person is banging something over and over on the floor; pounding and pounding on the thin floorboards. The dark patch on the carpet is still spreading and Donnally looks down to find it almost to the toes of his shoes. He takes a step back and squats to touch the soaked carpet. Oddly, it's warm now instead of cold. His hand comes away bloody. The buckets, set here and there on the floor, are dark pools of red and somewhere, in an apartment above or below, a man laughs manically.

Donnally turns to the girl on the bed, holding up his stained hand. "Do you see this?"

She turns and smiles at him, her face pinched but pretty. A giant dollop of red water drops from the ceiling and hits her on the cheek, running down her face like a huge bloody tear. She touches her face and looks at the bloody smear on her hand, laughing. Another drop hits her smooth forehead and runs down the narrow bridge of her nose. She laughs again, her teeth wolfishly sharp and white, and flicks out a long tongue to taste the droplet.

"Jesus Christ," says Donnally.

The girl stops laughing; a look of terror comes over her face and when Donnally follows her gaze to the bare white wall of the room he is paralyzed with horror. A reddish stain is creeping down the wall in long, scalloping runners.

"Do you see it?" he asks, because as the stain spreads farther down the wall it is creating a perfect image of the foxy, rat faced Bobby Mack, his cruel mouth grinning below empty white eye sockets.

"Jesus Christ," says Donnally, "Jesus Christ!"

The giant red mouth is changing, moving; Donnally tears his gun from the holster and unloads it in a deafening frenzy that blows huge holes in the grinning face. The girls screams; the smoke and stink of gunfire mixed with plaster dust fills the tiny apartment; and from behind the bullet pocked face of Bobby Mack, Donnally can hear the keening wails of sorrow beginning.