

Hub

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Torchwood Season 1 - We watch things, so you don't have to.

When our review copy of Torchwood season 1 found its way into the office (not entirely sure how that happened, as we had wards created to avoid such an incident), there weren't that many people keen to take on the awesome responsibility of reviewing it. After all, we'd all seen it before, and pretty unanimously dismissed it as tosh. A brave Scott Harrison stepped forward and offered to rewatch it all, so you don't have to. This afternoon I received a text from him (when watching things of this nature it's standard practice to call in every two hours so we know our reviewers are safe). He actually seems to be enjoying it, second time around.

When it first aired everyone had preconceptions, and it didn't fit any of them. Is that why the majority of genre fans hated it (though everyone else thought it was actually ok)? Did our idea of what it would be spoil our enjoyment of it so much that it never stood a chance when it turned out to be something different? Read Scott's review soon, and find out.

About Hub

Every week we publish a piece of short fiction, along with at least one review and sometimes a feature or interview. We can afford to do this largely due to the generosity of our sponsors over at **Orbit**. If you like what you read here, please consider making a donation over at www.hub-mag.co.uk. We pay our writers, and anything you donate helps us to continue to attract high quality fiction and non-fiction.



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The Game

by James S. Dorr

Click!

That was the fourth ball. Two more in play – the fifth one spinning, right up on the edge. Michael Warren felt his palms sweating.

Steady now . . . easy now, he told himself. His nerve mustn't falter. He pulled his left hand back – the guillotine blade thunked down, right where his thumb had lain – then thrust it forward. The button. Wobble it.

Change the wheel's pitch so the fifth ball . . .

"Earthie!"

The fifth ball clicked in place. Gears whirred and rumbled. He pulled his hand out again – the right one this time – then snaked it back onto the game's control surface at a different angle.

The sixth ball . . . he had never gone this far before . . .

"You! Earthie! Yes, Warren!"

He tried to ignore the voice. That was a part of the game as well – to try to distract him.

Why "Earthie?" he wondered. *He'd never been to Old Earth himself. Had never known anyone...*

No! Concentrate instead. The sixth ball. Higher. Pull out his hand – thrust it back. Higher. Up the rim.

Wobble it. Let it circle...

CLICK!

It was over.

The croupier caught him as he collapsed, straining under the weight of his human frame. Guided him to a chair.

"You, Michael Warren."

He looked at the croupier. Looked up now into faceted bees' eyes, at spindly legs supporting a vee-shaped, chitinous body.

"That's my name," he muttered. As if the Aztairan didn't know him. As if he hadn't come in each month to gamble the pay he got from odd jobs around the spaceport.

To play games he couldn't win . . . except *this* time...

"I want to congratulate you, Spaceman Michael Warren. Your friends will be proud of you. Shall I call Fleet Central. . . ?"

Warren shook his head. "You know I'm not FleetCen. I'm merchant space corps. Except..."

The Aztairan croupier held a chit out to him, folding it neatly in one of its pincers before he could take it. "Yes, I know, Spaceman Michael Warren." It thrust the chit out again, letting him have it.

Warren laughed. The croupier had tried its best. Tried to distract him. To rig the game its way. Was even now backing away from him, scanning the neon-lit casino to find a new player in danger of winning.

To cut its losses.

But Warren, in the meantime, had *won*. Won at a game already so stacked against anyone playing it that the payoff it gave was enormous.

It only then sank in – started to sink in. He walked in a daze to the cashier's window wondering – *that crack about calling FleetCen* – wondering what he would do with his winnings.

"Shall I just transfer it?" the cashier asked him. He looked up, recognizing the voice, and saw it was Angela. Someone he'd known once.

He shook his head. "No." If he *had* been connected with FleetCen, humankind's military arm as well as its government on a mixed-race planet like this one, he could have had his winnings transferred to a base account automatically. Not that gambling was strictly legal, but FleetCen took care of its own against natives, so no one would complain. But...

He looked up, suddenly, seeing the croupier reflected in the cashier's window, talking to someone. Another human, and not a player. He shrugged, then thrust his chit through the slot in the fake marble counter.

"Sir?" the blonde cashier – Angela – prompted. He shrugged again, wondering if she remembered him. Years ago, when she had first come to this planet, with him an "old hand" of scarcely more than six months' stay himself, already falling into the routine of those that were grounded.

He'd been surprised then that she had stayed on herself – she hadn't *had* to – but people settled on off-the-beat planets like this one for all kinds of reasons. They...

"*Sir?*" she asked again.

"Oh, sorry," he muttered, then added more loudly, "I'll take it in credits."

"It's a lot of money," the woman said, thrusting a bundle of paper through to his side of the window. "Be careful getting home."

"Yeah," he said, shoving the bills in his jumper pocket. Feeling their weight in the slightly less than Fleet-standard gravity.

It sank in further.

People didn't win. They weren't supposed to.

#

It continued to sink in after he'd left the gaming house. What was he going to do with the money? It had never occurred to him that he might win something, other than the small pots the house let go now and again just to keep people playing.

The point was the game itself. Playing the game had up to now been just for entertainment – something he did, like eating and sleeping, to keep himself going. Like scrounging odd jobs at the spaceport's perimeter, neither entirely accepted by the planet's natives nor willing, himself, to accept his own people. Not since he had been...

Been what? Cashiered from the space service? That's what the FleetCen officer told him – even though he had been in the merchant corps. Grounded for loss of nerve?

But now he had more money than even an off-world tourist. He could go to the best human bars, if that was his pleasure. Buy women at an officers' joy house. Drugs or implants, whatever he wanted. Whatever he asked for.

Except people didn't win.

Except he didn't know what he *would* ask for.

A memory. His memory...

He shook his head, clearing it, breathing in the planet's warm, thick air. He smelled incense, perfume, musk, sweating women. Both human and native. The smells of meat cooking in human-trade restaurants, the fish-like odors of native cuisine.

Ahead, neon flashed – to his right, five blocks west, was the steadier silver-flecked purple glow that curtained off the native quarter, warning off-worlders like him to stay outside.

"Hey! Earthie!"

He looked up. A person approaching from his left side, a half block away from him. A human person.

"Earthie, yourself," he grumbled back. He didn't want company. Not tonight. He just wanted to get home to the room he rented, to count his winnings, then stash them somewhere. To sleep on the question of what to *do* with them. But the man who had called out to him was closing fast.

"Hey, Earthie," the new person said again. "Word's out on the street that you've come in some money. You know, around here a guy's gotta be careful."

"So?" Warren said. He stopped to face the man, looking him over. Tall, but thinly built, like a person who had been raised in gravity even lower than this planet's. If it came to it, Warren could take him.

Except – to his right, he saw a shadow. A bulkier shadow.

"You got friends, mister?" he asked his assailant.

This time the man laughed. "Like I say, a man with money ain't always safe walking in this district. Now, me and my buddy, we could escort you wherever you want to go. Maybe for only a ten percent cut – that is, for each of us – 'less, of course, you want special services..."

Which, no doubt, he would, Warren thought. After they'd let him lead them to where he lived, no doubt the word would get out about that too. Or maybe they themselves would rob him then – FleetCen wouldn't mind. The port police might investigate, sure, but when it came back that neither natives nor people in uniform had been involved – just on-the-dock space scum like him who scarcely, officially, even existed – FleetCen's Colonial Service would wash its hands. It wouldn't matter.

But FleetCen's indifference worked both ways. Warren lashed out with his foot as he spun, pulling his work knife out of his belt. He heard the first man go down, moaning as if his kneecap was broken, then turned to the second.

The second man backed away. "Hey, Earthie, no reason to be unfriendly. But, like my associate said, these streets are dangerous. You ought to think twice about..."

"See to your friend's health," Warren replied. He backed to let the second man pass him, then put his knife away. Once, as he continued on, he turned to make sure he wasn't being followed. But, as he walked, he found himself deviating from the route he had intended.

Even if these men had been scared off, he thought, others were watching. They *had* to be watching. His thoughts went back to the croupier's reflection in the hard plastic payout window, spreading the word itself, offering anyone a percentage to get it its money back.

And so, it wouldn't be safe to go home. At least not until daytime – and maybe not even then. But in the meantime he had to think.

He passed a smoke house and, glancing inside, he saw a flash of familiar blonde hair. Why not? he thought. He still just wanted to be by himself, but if that weren't possible. And if she *did* remember from back then.

They had loved each other.

He went inside.

The place was hardly filled to its capacity, having most likely only just opened, but haze from the customers already smoking was already making vision difficult. Still he steered himself to a back booth, elbowing past the approaching attendant, and plopped himself down across from Angela.

"Off duty?" he asked.

"Huh?" she said. Her speech was slightly slurred.

"From the casino. Remember? A half hour or so ago? The one who won the Game."

Blue eyes gazed up at him through the thickening, sweet-smelling mist. He waved the native attendant away a second time as it came up with a mouthpiece to offer him. "Don't you remember? We knew each other before once, too. Michael Warren?"

"Oh . . . Warren," the woman answered between taking puffs of smoke from her own mouthpiece. "Yeah, I, uh, I'm off duty. Just got in here. But you don't smoke, do you."

Then she did remember – at least that much. The arguments that had finally led to their separation.

"I need my memory," he had said then – he said *now*. The smoke, taken bit by bit, over the weeks and months, made forgetting the past too easy. And it was *everywhere* on the planet, not just in the houses where one paid to breathe it in its pure form. One couldn't avoid it.

But one could resist it.

"I don't," she'd answered, back when they had argued. "Not all one's life is worth remembering. The smoke helps select things, things that are more pleasant, and, even if it changes them somewhat..."

One could *try* to resist the whole planet, and yet he, too, had been trying to blend in. To live with the natives.

"You know they can read minds," Angela said now as they sat across from each other. "The native Aztairans – at least a little. I mean we like to think it's just a rumor, but when you feel one of them like the croupier stare in your eyes, you know they're not just finding out your thoughts either, but trying to manipulate them."

He nodded. "Yes." That was why the croupier had shouted out his name while he was playing – not just to distract him, but so he'd look up. It was part of the fix. And the drifters who'd tried to mug him outside...

But what about FleetCen?

He glanced behind him, nervously looking back toward the street door. The haze was thickening – dangerous in some ways, since he had to breathe it too, but at least shielding him from unwanted eyes.

"The Colonial Government," he said. "You mean you think the natives manipulate them as well?"

She nodded back, then scowled when he took the mouthpiece from her to force her to concentrate. "The natives get what they want, don't they? In return for FleetCen's enclave, they get our money. They get trade goods from us. They even get people, like you and me. And anyway, FleetCen rotates its own people out, before *their* memories become too affected."

She stopped and reached for the mouthpiece he'd taken, but he held it from her. "Go on," he prompted.

"So FleetCen gets what it wants too. An outpost planet, in case it's needed. Cooperation." She reached out suddenly, twisting the mouthpiece out of his grasp and clamping it back between her teeth. She sucked in its smoke, then released it slowly through her nostrils.

"But sometimes," she finally said, "something breaks down. Like you winning, Michael. But that's not important – at least not right now." She paused again, but this time instead of taking another puff from her mouthpiece, she looked in his eyes. Long and hard.

"Michael?" she asked, after several seconds. "What were you going to do with the money?"

He looked at her, thinking – no, *remembering* – how it had been before with them. Maybe she had been right, he thought. That some memories were ugly. Were best forgotten.

Like losing his nerve . . . his ship diving through a planet's atmosphere. Him...

Someone accusing him. Passing sentence...

Not just for loss of nerve...

"I-I don't know, Angela. I hadn't thought – I mean – hadn't expected I'd actually *win*. But..."

He looked in her blue eyes, remembering how they had once loved each other. Wondering if she remembered too.

"I – I mean I suppose I *should* make plans for it. Maybe for you and me?" He thought she smiled then, at least a little, though with the haze and the tube in her mouth he couldn't be sure.

What did he want to do? Open up his own place, maybe? Now that he could afford to do so. A human-style bar, with a back room for card games – not heavy gambling, though. Just a place where spacers could have fun before shipping out again. Like he used to...

The memory slipped away – he forced himself to look at her again, gazing into the depth of her eyes. *Perhaps with her helping him, owning it with him...*

He saw a shadow. Some sort of thickening in the haze, to the left where the booth opened out to the narrow aisle.

Two thickening, approaching, spindle-legged forms.

"You know they won't let you," Angela was beginning to say when Warren launched himself off his bench. He kept his head low, feeling more than hearing sharp pincers clash shut just above him.

He heard a woman's scream – Angela screaming. He tried to ignore it. Knowing that they wouldn't dare hurt her.

If natives caused *any* harm to a human, he knew that would cause FleetCen's intervention. Because it would be a Colonial matter – FleetCen's justice would have to take measures. And that meant killings. Retaliation. Closing down houses like the croupier's, if a connection could be proven. Or even if FleetCen just *said* it was proven.

He scrambled away from both booth and shadows, swimming through smoke to the door to the street. By the same token, natives would not dare cause any physical harm to him either, not that he couldn't defend himself easily given their spindly frames and weak muscles, compared to his own higher-gravity muscles. But with their brittle external shells, he could cause harm to *them*, far, far too easily – which he would not do unless he was willing to give in to FleetCen. To be just like FleetCen.

Why had he thought that?

While, on the other hand, *human* assailants, like out on the street before...

He realized then that that was the idea. It made sense in one way to send natives in for him. They at least could see through the smoke. And, even if they couldn't kill him themselves, if there happened to be humans waiting, perhaps just outside the smoke house door...

He kept his head down, half running, half crawling, finding paths where the roiling, sweet-scented smoke seemed the thinnest. He had an idea – *if* he could get outside. He found a table that wasn't filled and grabbed an empty chair, launching himself up and swinging it with him. He pushed it through the smoke house window, then followed it outside, grabbing it up once more to throw it into the knot of

just-now-turning men at the door.

He ran across the street, dodging traffic, up the roads he had come down before, heading for the shimmering curtain he'd passed when he'd been attacked by the first two men. The one that marked off the native quarter.

Humans, as a rule, did not go through it. Dared not go through it. But – *shreds of a memory crashed back to him, just for a moment* – Spaceman Michael Warren had been known to break rules before.

#

He'd made it. He lay on the other side, a dome-like, seemingly solid light curving up and over him. Except it curved so high that when he blinked and looked again, suddenly the dome seemed to shatter, giving way to trackless black, while fragments crashed over his head like fireworks.

He flinched – he knew it was only illusion. It made sense to native eyes, just not to humans.

Except he could see it. The fragments crashed over him, doubling and tripling, more like a meteor shower now as they glowed and smoked from the heat of their passage. Except...

He nearly rolled back to the other side, even though he knew his attackers would still be waiting. Single-surfaced human eyes weren't meant to cope with the sights manufactured for native enjoyment.

Except when he had first come to the planet, wanting not to forget but to blend in – to learn to *think* like the planet's natives – he'd entered their sector on two occasions.

Before he had given up.

He'd learned to squint – he remembered it now – to block out the most intense of the illusions. To look out the corners of his eyes, never looking directly.

To see only shadows. And what lay beyond them.

Like now – three moving shapes. Native-sized shadows. A larger one also. And more just beyond them. Hovering. Circling. Waiting for him to move.

It didn't matter. FleetCen's justice could reach even here, in the native sector, if it had cause to. The natives would know that.

He got to his feet, looking at first only down to the pavement – even it shimmered and shifted beneath him – and elbowed his way slowly through the first shadows. He felt more than saw them ripple like water out of his way, then fill in behind him as he moved onward, holding his arms out in front like a swimmer, parting the darkness. The light. The bright silver.

The darkness again, this time purple and indigo. Then blue, like Angela. Blue, and shattering, like Angela's eyes, broken up into facets.

"You! Fleetie!"

He heard a voice – that of the croupier.

"I'm *not* with Fleet Central. You know that, damn it."

A sound. High-pitched laughter. Aztairan laughter, rocking around him, as all-encompassing as space itself.

"You! Fleetie! You hear me?" I have your friend."

This time he looked straight at where the sound came from. Saw a blinding screen of yellow. The lights of the spaceport.

He'd walked clear through the native sector – at least the curving, octopus arm of the part he had entered – and come out the other side. Here, though, the only humans he saw at first were silhouetted behind the wire barrier that marked the boundary of FleetCen's enclave.

"I have your friend, Fleetie." The croupier again.

His eyes adjusted. He saw *her* now. Between the croupier and two other natives, Angela stood, her eyes blindfolded, taken with them from the smoke house and dragged through the native sector behind him.

"If you've harmed her," he started to threaten.

"We haven't harmed her, Fleetie," the croupier said. "She volunteered. To make you see reason."

"I'm not a member of Fleet Central. I..."

"Yes, it's true, Michael," Angela broke in. She took off her blindfold. "The croupier told me. About your past – the things you've forgotten. The things you've *wanted* to have forgotten. Like Wexford's Planet..."

The memory came back then. He had been a civilian spacer, but he and his freighter had been conscripted. He'd been assigned to bomb a city, because there had been a native uprising. They'd needed a lesson.

But he had been in the city before, back when the planet had first been discovered. He'd known its beauty. He'd known that the natives of that planet were peaceful in nature. That any rebellion had been provoked.

And so he'd refused...

"You know what it's like, Michael. FleetCen, the natives here, they get along. They have a system. Except, every once in a while, something goes wrong. Like you winning, Michael, when people like you and me aren't supposed to."

They hadn't known he had been to Wexford's before and had known its people. And so, when his ship screamed out of space, and only then he had realized where the coordinates FleetCen had locked in his ship had taken him to, he'd over-ridden the ship's computer. He'd pulled the ship up and back into space, signaling FleetCen he wanted a transfer. As was his right, since they hadn't told him...

"You know what will happen," the croupier broke in, "if you refuse to surrender your winnings? Oh, no, we won't harm you. But word will get out not to have anything else to do with you either. No native will speak to you. No one will touch you. No one will let you in their establishments. Not even humans, if *they* want to get along, except maybe the ones in Fleet Central."

"The ones you hate, Michael..."

But he had been a member of FleetCen, at least on a temporary basis, and on active duty. And when he'd arrived at his new command, the story was out that he'd frozen in action – that his refusal had cost men's lives – and so he had been pressured, first from the service, and later, as more stories grew around him, he found himself blacklisted from civilian employment as well.

He had been accused – of what? it didn't matter any more – and he had been grounded on Aztair, his last port of call. This planet.

Begging for jobs outside FleetCen's spaceport. Gambling his money...

"You can't win, you know that. Not in the long run." The croupier again. "Tell him, Earth-female."

"He's telling the truth, Michael. It's not the money – not *only* the money. It's the example..."

He made up his mind then.

"Excuse me," he muttered. He shouldered past them and waved to a guard at the spaceport's perimeter. He nodded toward the gate.

"Wait!" the croupier yelled. "Look at me, Earthie. You hate your own kind – do you think they'll take you back? Give you a berth and let you back into space?"

Warren turned and faced the croupier one final time. He looked in the native's eyes.

"It's not my fellow humans I hate," he said. "It's just the system. Granted they're part of it – maybe the biggest part. And that I may be part of it too since, after all, I *was* part of FleetCen. But now they don't have to give me anything. I have your money to *buy* my passage."

"Where? To Old Earth? Back to Wexford's Planet?" The croupier waved its pincers in his face. "You don't understand yet, do you, Earthie? No matter where you go, it's the same system."

Warren shrugged. He looked at Angela, motioning toward the spaceport entrance.

She shook her head slowly. "You still can't win, Michael. People like you and me – all of our lives it's a kind of game. It's rigged against us."

He shrugged again, then turned back to the spaceport. Yes, the system *was* rigged, he thought, as he strode through the gate alone, not looking back. Except for one thing.

He touched the bulge in his jumper pocket – the croupier's credits.

He had just won at the game once already.

About the Author

James Dorr's new book, *DARKER LOVES: TALES OF MYSTERY AND REGRET*, is due out from Dark Regions Press (www.darkregions.com) as a companion to his current collection, *STRANGE MISTRESSES: TALES OF WONDER AND ROMANCE* (Dark Regions, 2001), while other work has appeared in such venues as *ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, *NEW MYSTERY*, *ABORIGINAL*, *FANTASTIC*, *FUTURE ORBITS*, *SHADOWS OF SATURN*, *GOTHIC.NET*, *CHI-ZINE*, *MARSDUST*, *LENOX AVENUE*, *DARK WISDOM*, *ENIGMATIC TALES (UK)*, *FAERIES (France)*, and numerous anthologies. Dorr is an active member of SFWA and HWA, an Anthony (mystery) and Darrell (fiction set in the US Mid-South) finalist, a Pushcart Prize nominee, keeper of a gray and black cat named Wednesday (after Wednesday Addams of *THE ADDAMS FAMILY* and whose favorite toy is a plastic fake spider), and has had work listed in *THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY AND HORROR* eleven of the past fifteen years.

REVIEW

Captain America Omnibus reviewed by James Bacon

Issues: Captain America 1-25, Winter Soldier, Winter Kills and Capt America 65th anniversary special.

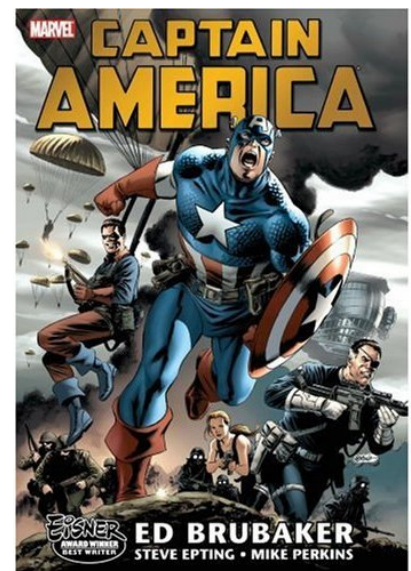
Writer: Ed Brubaker Artists including Steve Epting and Mike Perkins.

744pp Hb Marvel Comics Sep 2007

RRP £49.99 Amazon UK £34.99

Captain America is an iconic comic character. Like it or not, the character has always been steeped in politics, making his first appearance just over a year before Pearl Harbour. Hitler was the bad guy, the Red Skull was the ultimate villain, and Captain America was the defender of all things American and proper.

There have been no shortage of reincarnations of the character, and the story of Captain America's origin has been rewritten and manipulated to suit the times. Some versions are brilliant; other



versions are just so disappointingly derisive that one tries to forget they existed.

Captain America has insidiously permeated culture. For instance, there has been a superb American-style burger restaurant in Dublin called Captain America's since 1971. They claim they brought the burger to Dublin, which they may or may not have done, but I remember frequently choosing to eat there. The place had huge murals of Captain America: the artwork was put to good use in a modern commercial setting.

Ed Brubaker took on this character with all its history, and in this work has produced what I consider to be the perfect adventure, history lesson and characterisation of Captain America. With the fresh start, there were huge expectations from the very first issue. Even so, no one could have imagined he would have done such justice to the character.

Brubaker uses each issue to develop the character of the hero as Captain America reacts to the ongoing action-packed story. At the same time, he builds in a considerable amount of history through stylistic flashbacks. This does not detract from the story, but allows the creation of a nice level of depth that previously has eluded the title.

Brubaker essentially creates a new character; while referring to other versions of Captain America, he includes the most important and interesting aspects and melds them into this wonderful version of the character.

While all this is going on, we watch a number of villainous nemeses come out of the woodwork to take on Captain America, such as Dr Faustus, Sin and HYDRA in strange chemical costumes and all coupled with the subsequent Civil War which sees some interesting revelations about Captain America's mindset and his understanding of right and wrong.

There is a decent level of intrigue and complexity, including Captain America's own love interest and the feelings he has for another person close to him, that one expects from a comic aimed at a mature audience.

The Red Skull is at the centre of the action, but reflecting current real-world politics, we also have a Russian oil mogul, who happens to be in the military, playing an integral part in the complex political machinations.

The artwork is completed by a selection of draughtsmen, but Steve Epting and Mike Perkins are the key players and they are consummate professional artists who pay attention to detail. They know when to use older styles during moments of reflection, be it a simpler cartoon style or grittier black-and-white, as if you are viewing the action through a movie reel. All the artists involved do well, though, and the artwork complements this excellent story. Some of the final pages and comic covers are just wonderful.

This is a complete story; one feels that the whole tale has been well crafted from the outset with all permutations and strands ready to be drawn together as it comes to the climax.

This graphic novel contains the first twenty-five Captain America comics and two specials, a sixty-fifth anniversary special, and *Winter Soldier Winter Kills*. There is a selection of goodies at the back: the script pages for the final issue 25 with a commentary, layouts in pencils, rough covers, a number of pieces, looking at the character and what Brubaker brought to the table in a very insightful interview and a look at the media reaction to the man who brought a comic story to a definite end.

This is a Christmas present. It's not cheap, but is fantastic value as it is finely packaged and presents the life and untimely death of one of the greatest icons of American comics in one hardbound book.

Spaniels Everywhere!

The Production Diaries of The Brightonomicon Audio Series

By Neil Gardner

They told me I was crazy... They said it couldn't be done... They warned me that I would go insane... They may have been right! It is now November and there is just over a month to go until I have to deliver the final masters of all 13 episodes to the big cheeses at BBC Audiobooks. That's 6.5 hours of full-cast, full-on comedy drama.... Aaaaarrrrghhh! Now, radio and audio are fairly solitary media to work in; unlike TV and film, much of what is produced is made by one or two people. However, a series such as *The Brightonomicon* would normally have more than one person doing everything. But then again, this is something special. This is, as the head of Radio 4 would put it, a 'passion piece' for me. I have spent over 12 years trying to bring Robert Rankin's unique universe off the page and into other media. I'm not going to let go of the reins now! So call me Mr Producer, Mr Editor, Mr Publicist, Mr Web Designer, Mr Director - but actually, damn it all, just bring me another pint of Large and lemme get back to work!

So here's something of an update on the series in production so far:

The cast is now complete, and what a cast! David Warner as Hugo Rune, Rupert Degas as Rizla, Andy Serkis as Count Otto Black, Mark Wing-Davey as Fangio, Jason Isaacs as Tobes de Valois, Martin Jarvis as Colonel Mortimer, Rich Fulcher as Chief Whitehawk, Kevin Eldon as Norris Styver, Katherine Parkinson as Kelly Anne-Sirjan... and... well, go check out the website for the full, incredible list. I think it is safe to say we have a cast that rivals any Hollywood movie, big-time TV series and even some major conventions! Working with these guys has been a dream. For me, one of the highlights was the afternoon spent with Mark Wing-Davey, Mr Zaphod Beeblebrox himself. Mark has been one of my top 5 radio inspirations all my life, so to work with him was a bit of a fanboy dream come true (and yes, I did get him to sign my H2G2 box set!).



I've been slowly-but-surely building up the episodes, so that right now, all 13 are roughly edited together. All are far too long, but hey, that leaves room for a director's cut version one day! I still have a few voices left to record, so as November moves on, I'll drop those recordings into the edits and start tightening things up. It is very strange to almost have the series done after so many years of hard work!

The publicity machine grinds on, with a lot of press attention falling on us in recent weeks. We have been helped by a lot of people across the SF universe - especially *Hub* - and word is

spreading bit by bit, and people are beginning to realise that something big is on its way (it might be a giant spaniel...but you'll have to wait and see!). I have been having a great time talking with you all via the facebook group (www.facebook.com - hokus bloke or *The Brightonomicon Audio Series*). And our podcasts have proven to be extremely popular, and there are more still to come, oh yes. We have set up a YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/brightnomicon) where we have a series of fun short films starring Robert. And there is a fantastic 8 minute promo film all about us showing over at the Sci Fi Channel website: thanks to them for the support!

One of the real pleasures of the past few weeks was running a competition for one lucky blighter to win a small speaking part in the series. After weeks of promotion, and hundreds of entries, the winner was chosen by Robert at random, that winner being James Francis. You'll be able to hear James in episode 12, just as Rune and Rizla enter the heavy metal nightclub in Hove.

Very excitingly, we have just received the designs for the CD box-set - and the design gurus at the BBC have done something wonderful. It really will stand out on a shelf and be something well worth owning. At the same time, we are now partnered with The Stroke Association, using the

release of the series as a way to build awareness of how strokes affect people under 40, and hopefully to raise a little money for them too - very worthwhile I think you will agree.

Keep an eye and an ear out in January for a heap load of publicity, including something exclusive and fantastic for *Hub Magazine*. We'll be plastering the airwaves with promotional blurb and there will even be a celeb-tastic launch event to which we hope you will all come. I for one will be looking forward to a few weeks where I don't spend 15 hours a day in front of a computer screen editing audio and searching for bizarre sound effects... But then again... Elliott and I have already begun writing the sequel... And then there's TV, film options... But that would be ruining all the fun of the future if I told you everything now, eh?

So get ready for Hugo Rune, Count Otto, Rizla and Fangio... Prepare for Spaniel Involvement, naked rock stars, Atlantis, cloned cabbies and the possible end of the world as we know it. The Brightonomicon is coming...14th February 2008!

www.brightnomicon.com

Neil Gardner, London, 9th Nov 2007

Next week:

- An interview with one of the stars of TV smash hit, *Heroes*
- More reviews (including our pick of the best of the current crop of small press anthologies)
- Alan Moore – A Profile
- Another superb piece of short fiction.

If you have enjoyed this week's issue, please consider making a small donation at www.hub-mag.co.uk. We pay our writers, and your support is appreciated.