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The Bloody Key Society Periodical

Based in Montreal, Quebec

THE BLOODY KEY SOCIETY PERIODICAL

ISSUE 2

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*With works by
Josephine Bruni Lori Hahnel Rena Lesué-Smithey
Stephen O'Donnell Luke Emile Williams
and cover art by Alexandra Meyer*

BKSP Issue 2

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This issue's cover art is by **Alexandra Meyer**—a digital artist living in Canada who enjoys spending most of her time either sketching or creating digital paintings. More of her work can be found at:

<http://almeyer.wixsite.com/portfolio>

STEPHEN O'DONNELL

NOW COMES NIGHT

They slept in a ditch those last nights. No fire. Trucks all night rumbling past, bound for the line. The line somewhere ahead of them in the dark jungle. Hauling howitzers or laden with dull-eyed men. Spraying the vines with mud. He sat with Diego watching this flow of material.

They'll be going past all night, he said. Get some sleep.

He sweated with mosquitoes at his ear until sunrise.

When he tried to rouse Diego all he got was protest.

You never shoulda left the coast.

You never shoulda come down here, dickhead.

Yeah yeah, you making breakfast?

She had been bleeding since the last checkpoint. It was the short young guardsman who shouted halt and a half dozen rounds ripped through the back window. The seat full of blood. Three bullet holes in the passenger door, stitched five inches apart. He had been whispering into her ear but now he sat silent, holding her head and watching the country pass them.

The car rounded another corner and they passed a market square. Deserted in the early light. Diego would look back through the rear-view mirror, his too-bright eyes against his burnt skin. He didn't say anything.

Just drive, the man in the back said. His voice was hopeless.

They buried her in the red clay, in a small pit at the edge of a village. It was evening when they had finished digging. The bats were diving soundless among the trees. Deeper in the jungle a gibbon screamed. They stood their shovels in the dirt and bowed their heads. Diego took both shovels and slung them into the trunk with the planks and the rope. The other man heard him turn the key in the ignition. The motor turned over and then fired out to a low rumble. He looked at the mound of the grave once and then he walked toward the car.

They had stopped again to fill the tank.

We need gasoline, Diego said.

We might get caught.

Yes. But we still need it.

This fucking country.

There are no countries like this any more, Frankie.

No, Frank said.

Get some sleep, eh. It's a hard run to the coast.

They were down out of the mountains. The air thicker now, the roads all hard, packed dirt. The jungle encroaching the road on both sides. They passed scorched villages, burnt out plantation houses. The fighting in the lowlands now.

Morning and the mist-like rag across your eyes. Far out to the west a column of black smoke rose high into a cloudless sky.

Ammunition dump.

Frank raised his head from the backseat, nodded and shut his eyes again.

The old man leaned in the doorway of the shack. He spoke pidgin English in the guttural lowland accent. He had only one eye. The blind eye like clouded marble. He picked at his beard and spoke about rains that might come from the mountain. Then he looked at Diego with his good eye.

The floor is all I can offer, the old man said.

We will take it.

Only hide the automobile. He waved at the road. So they do not see.

Diego nodded again and opened the door and put the car in gear.

What's he say?

He says they will hang him if they find us. Wants us to hide the car.

Alright, Frank said.

These southerners, Diego said. Don't believe a word.

The car raising dust and everything inside already red with dust. The unbroken plain on either side of the road. They passed desolate cantinas and stilted houses in small clearings. Mud plugged signs. Beer. Gasoline. Water. Everything essential. No sign of either army. Way off in a blue haze: the mountains.

We keep going for the coast.

Frank looked up from the map where it was spread across the bonnet. They say there is a ferry still running there. Good an option as any.

What that take? A week?

Maybe. If they have not taken the roads. If they have they'll shoot us.

Frankie nodded. They'd shoot us here just the same.

The only traffic on those roads was flatbed trucks bound for the mountains. Laden with gold or furniture or any name of dreck. The battalion designations scoured away. Eyes of the gypsy drivers like punched holes staring down from the cab.

He saw tyre treads across the broken back of a python in the road.

She told him once: I didn't know it'd be like this.

The hell did you expect? I told you it was fucked. You never oughta left the coast.

That was when they had been shelling the city for days. Hidden in the basement of an old hotel. Most buildings on the thoroughway had been levelled. After the storm came in and washed away the jutting pieces of foundation, they shelled the mud. The main street was just a name on a map in the colonel's tent.

They stopped at a resort. Walled to keep the rich from the reality of the country outside. The heads on stakes, the dead piled in ditches. Diego found a wood-fired generator in the basement. The rebels had blown holes in several of the walls. There were vines on the ceiling and lilies in the swimming pool.

How bout some power tonight, Frankie?

They went through the rubble-filled halls until they found an intact room.

Luxurious, Frank said. He opened the fuseboard over the lintel and flipped the master switch. The cooling unit gave a long, uncertain groan and hummed to life. Jesus, he said. He heard Diego on the landing. How'd you like to stop sweating a few hours, you greasy bastard?

They lay in the cool air with the lights out, watching the black jungle before them. They made ice in the small freezer. Frank almost felt relaxed.

This is dangerous, he said.

Diego nodded. You think them generals drink like this?

Sure. They just don't pour their own drinks. Cleaner glasses, too.

Another?

Yes.

Here, I'll pour it for you, General.

They were on the road again before the sun rose.

Daybreak and the heat was sweltering. They had to stop twice with the steam rising from the edges of the hood like an omen.

The car broken down at the side of the road and the tracks of two men going west in the red dirt. The lieutenant peered into the pocked rear window of the sedan. He took out his kerchief and wiped his forehead.

They will be heading for the ocean.

Must be in a bad way to just leave it like this, the adjunct said.

The lieutenant nodded and dabbed his face.

They might find shelter with these flatlanders.

They might. A pity.

They were on a causeway between the rice paddies. They ran like honeycombs all the way to the coast. Harried by mosquitoes. Their faces and hands swollen with bites and the bites weeping.

Fucking sons of bitches. It's your fucking turn to swat.

Diego took the rag. He was about to wave it at Frank when he froze.

Frank turned his head and saw the cloud of dust rising in the distance.

They dropped into the dirt and watched the dust advance.

It has to be, Diego said. What else could it?

They found the car then.

Its no goddamn good, Frank said. Anyway you cut it. Look at them, burning rubber like there's no tomorrow.

What you want to do, Frankie?

What can we do? Keep going. You'll only get rolled into a ditch otherwise.

Diego shrugged and spat into the red dirt.

Frank moved down the causeway. C'mon man. We ain't waiting for 'em.

I still have the mine, Frankie.

Ain't you some new sorta sonuvabitch. Let's see it.

The dust cloud grew behind them, spreading like a buzzard's wing.

The lieutenant's jeep jolted to a halt behind the burning truck. His adjutant was out and pulling a man's arms from the wreckage.

The lieutenant sat watching them, grappling each other. There was no medic for fifty miles. Pull them out and line them up, the lieutenant said.

He got out of the jeep and picked four soldiers working the wreckage.

Take up the trail. They won't be far. I want you all to look around.

They did. The boy from the cab was curled, howling in the dirt. His face black and twisted from the fire and there was red clay all over his ragged uniform.

Look, the lieutenant said. Look and remember it.

They threw themselves over the jeep doors and worked quickly, the first man crouching at the low wall with the rifle, watching two men hurrying through the paddies through the iron rifle-sights.

The rounds passed them, high at first, then they started to come in slower, closer.

Jesus Christ, move it, Diego.

Someone had a magazine of tracers and they bounced around them, sizzling like fiery hornets when they hit water.

The big Spaniard punting hard through the water with Frank behind him. Then a splash. When he turned, Frank was lying facedown in the water. Bits of his skull floated in the reddening water around his body.

He crawled up out of the paddy and lay on the silt. The sun almost down. A sky the colour of coral. He peeled a leech from his scalp. Beat of his heart on that cold, wet sand. He thought about Frank, floating faceless in the paddy water, the leeches feeding.

Now comes night. He lies in mud, blind in the darkness. There is rumour of woodsmoke in the air. Boots on the road. Hard to tell the distance. The rot of the jungle, heavy with every breath. Slowly, slowly he moves to the crest of the ridge. He sees the small, bobbing flame of their cigarettes. When he looks out at the dark sea there is no trace of lamplight, nothing of the cutter. Way, way out the government flotilla glinted.

He waits until the moon is hidden to move. He crosses the seawall and moves through an abandoned caravan park, past the empty attendants' stall.

The remains of the pier, sunk and swaying in the surf. A wharf of black rubble where they had burned out the warehouses. No counter to the dread now. He put the pistol into the waistband of his trousers and went to look for a place to sleep in the long grass of the dunes, out of the salt wind.
