

Subterranean By Design

An issue by issue synopsis

by Trent Drake

By now you're probably wondering what all the hype is about. A local comic is all well and good, but why buy it if you don't know what's in it?

Well folks, *Subterranean By Design* is an anthology magazine. In smaller words, a comic made up of short stories. It's also a kind of pulp fiction mag in the tradition of *Tales From the Crypt* in that many of the stories feature monsters or twist endings or both. Lastly, *SBD* is a showcase for Island talent. You may be suprised at how much talent we have out there amongst the potatoes.

But what are the stories like, and are they worth reading? In the best tradition of *Starlog*, the *X-press* now presents a series of *Reader's Digest Condensed Reviews* for the first four issues of *Subterranean By Design*. Take my hand and strike a match, it's dark down there, and you don't want to get lost.

Subterranean By Design #1: Gruesome cover by Robert "Vern" Harrison depicting Sue and Jeff Smith (owners of the *Comic Hunter*) posing with guns amongst crates and various body parts. Nice. The weirdness quotient of this comic has been high right from the start. Interior pin-ups by Sandy Carruthers and Rob Harrison depict the Norse storm hammer god and a street gang, respectively.

The first story, "Blood on the Tracks," is a *Twilight Zone* suspense tale with some very good artwork a la Murphy and Carruthers. A police detective is haunted by a past mistake involving a train... The ending is very *Twilightish*. The story's only weak point is that it's short, robbing it of some effect; however, it's still fun to read.

"Fool for Love": Brett Taylor drew this John MacKenzie twist on the vampire myth. Four pages tell the tale of a vengeful Fearless Vampire Hunter who learns the hard way that vampires aren't all as stupid as the goons from 'Salem's Lot. Extremely funny, but the art's a little uneven.

"Da Pogeys Bais": J. Jeffrey Lawless takes all the blame for this brutally funny satire. Four ordinary teenage Island half-wits try to get together enough money to get drunk. They hatch the plan of using their last loony to play

the poker machines at a local bar. But the gargantuan Junior wants to play those same machines, and Junior annoys easily... Marvelous cartoony artwork and a great ending.

"Once An Island": Cautionary tale about the fixed link. Subtle as a kick in the head and about as appealing. Avoid, not because it's political but because it seems too reactionary for its own good. A more subtle approach could have got the point across much better.

There are a few problems with this issue. The stories are short, which hurts some of them, and the fixed link story is a bit of a faux

Lawless included at no extra charge.

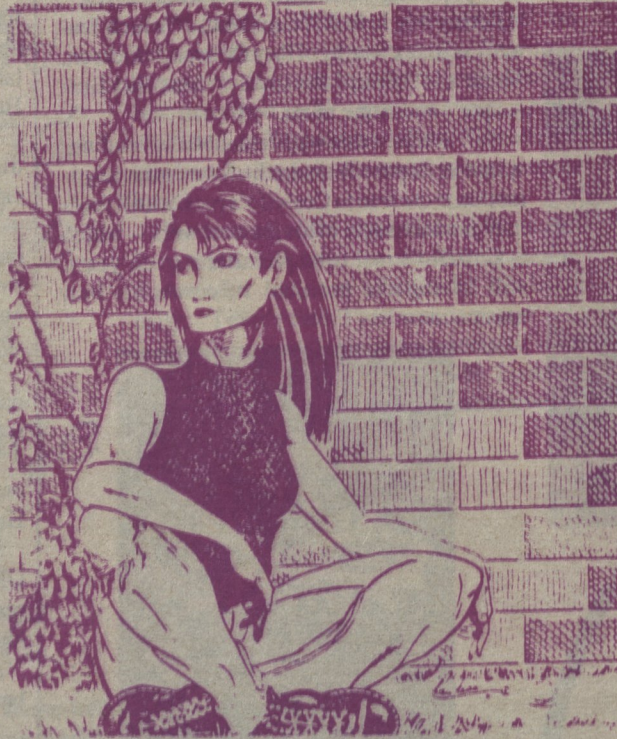
"K' Dahver, P.I. in Bad Blood": Peter Murphy wrote it, Peter Murphy drew it. K' Dahver is a detective who was "set up, murdered and brought back as a zombie". Now he walks the night, solving murders and trying to unravel the mystery of his own weird fate. In this instalment, vampirism takes centre stage as the dead night detective investigates a bizarre string of murders. Murphy's artwork is dark and sinister, and amazingly clean. The writing's good too, but the third person captioning could use some work. It occasionally distracts from the eerie mood set by the gothic illustrations. Otherwise the scripting is above average and even humorous. Check out the vampire who thinks he knows all the tricks in the book. Wonderful tongue-in-cheek ending.

"A Dream of Wings": No, it's not a Bloom County story, it's Gordon MacPherson's haunting visual poem about magic and matter. Strange yet wonderful prose backs up the striking (if confusing) imagery of falcons and guitars. Don't try to explain, just enjoy.

"Dr. V and the Violent Commandos": Keith Callbeck wrote and Steve "Taz" Callbeck illustrated this odd superhero tale. The setting is T.O.P.E., a government installation for imprisoning "extra-normals". The story's pretty good. How many supergroups can you name that started out in prison? Steve Callbeck's art is promising. It could really be great with a little practice. My only real problem with this story is that it doesn't live up

to its great title. There's no fights at all. However, this is only part one. Cast thy glance toward the future...

"Return" is an unintentionally funny tale (written and drawn by Brian Linkletter) about a post-nuclear Canadian wasteland. The wasteland is a home for vagrant families searching for peace. Unfortunately it's also a home for roving bandits who prey on the weak travellers. Enter Corporal Albert Smythe, R.C.M.P. He wears the old red uniform, drives a skinny motorcycle and talks to himself in Punisher-style first person captions. He stalks the bandits and wipes them out in a violent shoot-out. Now, perhaps it's just all those *Road Warrior* movies



pas. However, "Da Pogeys Bais" and "Blood on the Tracks" are more than worth the price of admission. The biggest problem with this issue is you can't buy it. It sold out! If you can find a friend who has a copy, read it. If not, pray for a reprint.

Subterranean By Design #2: By this point, readers were wondering who the hell the creepy guy who graced the inside front cover of every issue was. Turns out his name is Philip K. Dahver, and he's the creation of one Peter Murphy as well as *S.B.D.*'s unofficial mascot. The front cover was a weird design by Gordon MacPherson that looks like three face-shaped inkblots. Pin-ups by Brett Taylor and Jeffrey