

Ballyhoo Stories (Number 4)

Reviewer: Don Bosan

Editor: Suzanne Pettypiece

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Web Address: www.ballyhoostories.com

What they Publish: Fiction, creative nonfiction and comics

Submission Guidelines: Unpublished stories of 5,000 words or fewer which revolve around the theme of the upcoming issue. Submit via e-mail attachment only as .doc or .txt files

Description of Publication: Perfect bound literary magazine published biannually. Covers and pages are printed in black and white.

Prose per Issue: Approximately 54% of the last issue. The remaining stories were comics.

Prose Reviews:

Goatsuckers by Stephanie Dickinson is a plainspoken, realistic story set in a domestic setting. Written in a subjective first-person, *Goatsuckers* is the tale of Marigold Winters, who is running away from the Christian cult-town where she has been born and raised after becoming the eighth wife of the cult-leader, Ulius—also known as “the Prophet.” In an attempt to reach her brother in North Carolina, she hitches a ride with a man she meets in Virginia. After a long journey, during which she has been drugged repeatedly, she realizes that she is a captive and the man is taking her straight back to Calico, Arkansas, the town she is trying to escape from.

As with most good stories, a summary fails to do *Goatsuckers* justice. While we are following the arc of the current story, we are expertly given flashbacks into Marigold's past. These flashbacks provide subtle clues into the life of the town and, as they begin to pile up, reveal that this is indeed a cult. At the same time, when we are in the “present,” we are also getting clues to the nature of the journey. And while I was able to piece together that she was indeed being drugged and taken back to town, it did not ruin the moment when it becomes clear that this is indeed happening, nor did I find the moment to be clichéd.

Cuff by David Barringer is a plainspoken, realistic story set in a domestic setting. Written in the subjective first-person, it is the story of a man and his wife, Tina, during a difficult period when she tries out a weight loss shock-bracelet. As with any diet plan, Tina has her ups and downs, yet with this plan, the bracelet measures the downs and provides a painful electric shock to get her back on track. This causes difficulties in family life when she becomes moody and has to plan her day around trying not to get shocked in public. In the end, Tina completes her diet/exercise plan and the bracelet comes off.

While we get the names of the wife and children of the narrator, we never get the narrator's name. In many cases this would stand out, but during my initial read-throughs of the story I didn't even notice. There is strong characterization throughout which helped make up for the fact that the bracelet could not be physically removed before the set goal was completed--something which I thought would be highly unlikely in a “real” situation.

Rating: 7. While all of the stories in this issue were written by previously published authors, some of the comics were from unpublished writer/artists. It would seem that an emerging prose writer is also likely to be published here. The stories written were of high quality.