

FORESHADOWS

THE GHOSTS OF ZERO



**EXCERPTS FROM SELECT STORIES
AND EXCERPTS OF THEIR SOUNDTRACKS**



an excerpt from

TOO MUCH IS NEVER ENOUGH

written by **Don Basingthwaite**

music and lyrics by **Bilian**

The bullets hit before Marco even heard the guns that fired them. The first ones slammed into the back of his shoulder as he ran, burning like hot wires, only heavier. The impact almost knocked him down. He managed—in his mind at least—to take a few more long, terrified steps before wires lanced through him again. His legs went numb and stopped working. Marco did a face plant onto the hard tile floor, the fall knocking the wind out of him. Adrenaline and terror kept him going, dragging him along on hands and elbows in a slick trail of his own blood. His tie, caught under his chest, pulled at his neck with every movement.

You got greedy, Marco. They were waiting for you.

Footsteps echoed through his dying. He saw their boots. Corporate security on either side of him. They didn't fire again or try to stop his slow escape. Marco kept crawling. He'd shit himself. The smell of it mingled with lingering traces of floor cleaner.

"He's down, sir." One of the security guards on his comm. "Yes, sir. No, sir. Bleeding heavily. Lower spinal damage, I think. Still fighting, though. Definitely a fighter." Pause. "He probably will." Pause again. "I understand." A click as the guards changed comm channels. "Clean-up, standby."

That was it, then. At least you're making a big mess for them.

Marco slid a little farther.

Along the hall, a door opened. New footsteps clipped along the floor. The guards fell back.

Marco crawled.

A man in a blue suit crouched down beside him. Marco twisted his head against the noose of his tie to look at him. The man had a plastic smile.

"Marco Cole," he said, "how would you like to live?"



an excerpt from

BEST SERVED FLASH-FROZEN

written by **Ed Greenwood**

music by **Michelangelo** plus **Thee Crumb**

They call me Flash.

It started as mockery, jeering because my lame right side makes me limp, always dragging my right arm and leg behind me, half my body too wasted to keep up with the rest.

Watching me hurry across a small room is a hilarity of slow, stumbling clumsiness. “Flash” indeed.

It was my own brother who first started calling me Flash. He sang it, actually, chanting a song from an ancient movie that proclaimed me “savior of the universe!” He could never resist adding that line.

Until I killed him.

Don’t believe me?

Don’t believe a foot-dragging cripple can take down a tall, strong, handsome, and square-jawed anal-gape?

Well, think again. My brother was Mark Steelweather.

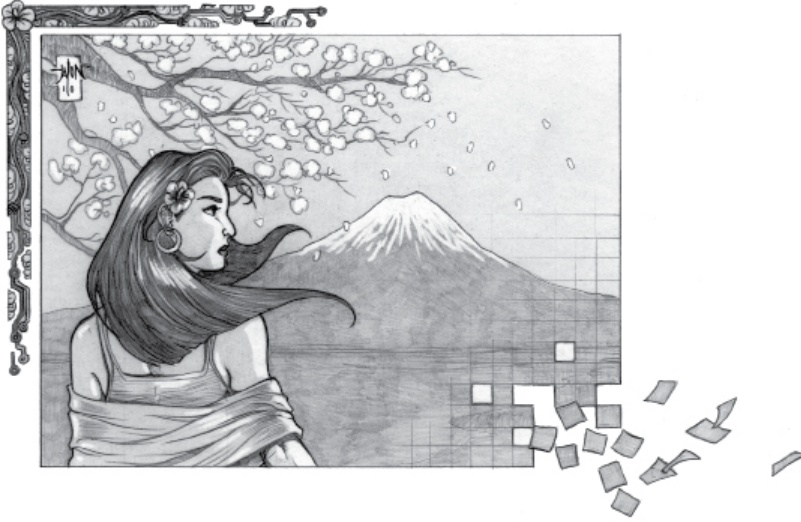
Yes, *that* Mark Steelweather. Leader of the Polity, wealthiest young exec of Steelweather Industries, trendsetting sponsor of hundreds of popular vids, impregnator of thousands, some of them willing . . . that Mark Steelweather.

You knew him, from the galacasts and the proximity ads and all the buzz, so you know how he died. Or rather, the mystery of how he died—convulsing and gurgling, terrified and helpless, before the watching eyes of millions.

I did that. Or rather, my Nails did. Working their little disruptions in his bloodstream at my command. Making armies and orbital satellites and even corporate flightcraft full of battle-modded mercs obsolete.

I am now all the destroying army Earth needs.

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an excerpt from

MADE IN BRAZIL | LIVING IN JAPAN

written by **Jaleigh Johnson**
music by **Gene Pritsker** and **Bilian**

“Those aren’t lamps,” I said irritably. “It’s a fluorescent, cotton candy forest designed to scorch your retinas. I’m surprised the pictures aren’t bleeding.”

The pink, stinging light came from inside dozens of artificial cherry blossom trees lining a concrete path. Intricately sculpted, their faux wood branches arched above my head in a too-symmetrical shape that nature would never have tolerated. The cold spring air carried a thick, chemically floral scent that came from a ventilation system installed beneath the path.

There hadn’t been a living tree on this stretch of ground for over twenty years, not since the last of the Himalayan cedars died out. The re-creation of Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden angled away into the distance, the faux trees diminishing and eventually, blessedly, they stopped and revealed Tokyo Tower and the city lights. I didn’t mind *those* artificial glows. They weren’t pretending to be something else. Good old electric wonderland.

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an excerpt from

TWENTY-ONE-OH

written by **Ari Marmell**

music by **Michelangelo**

I hate the Unders.

Not the people; got nothing against the people—or at least *most* of them—stuck down here. The *place*. I hate everything about it. It's all grime and shadows, the Unders. The power's sporadic, so even though it was evening topside, it was already midnight here. The walks and the tubes are cracked and still made of concrete—yeah, *concrete!* Even breathing's nasty, with the spillage leaking from above and God-knows-what sort of old wastes leeching up from below. And even if you can see past the tubes crossing overhead, you can't ever see the sky; just the glass facades of the ivories, stretching up higher than the people here could ever hope to imagine.

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an excerpt from

GEIST EIDETIC 3:4

written by **Jeff LaSala** and **John LaSala**

music by **Dylan Leeds** plus **Alternate Modes of Underwater Consciousness,**
Thee Crumb and **Ali Kilpatrick**

The first thing Gav noticed when he reached the small building was a tangle of wires and ribboned steel. The power shed had been ripped open and gutted. The scene was utterly silent. Gav heard only the distant sounds of the streets below.

He aimed the light on the torn machinery. Krakt!—there would be no fixing this mess. Rave, no

Then a disquieting sensation fell over him, something he couldn't name or ever describe. Like he was being watched. He felt—or imagined—a rustle in the dark.

He looked up, right above the shed, and froze. There was a shape there, bigger than a man, silhouetted against the city lights. Or maybe it was further off, a large chimney on the next building? Some sort of oddly-placed statue? He lifted the light to be sure. The shape moved.

“Shit!” Gav stumbled back, startled by the motion, his light going wide.

By the time he had the penlight targeted again, the shape was gone. No—now it was on his level, five meters away, half hidden by the shed itself. Gav squinted, trying to focus on what he was seeing: a form of utter blackness slightly taller than himself, barely resolved from the torn machinery itself. Perfectly camouflaged beside the wires, but darker than the shadows.

Gav pointed the penlight directly at the thing, but the beam seemed to dissolve or slide right off the surface, as if refusing to reflect properly. Gav deduced a three-dimensional shape, but it was like looking through a thin sheet of water. Then the thing turned, and somehow it gathered the shadows like garments around its form.

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an excerpt from

DEEP IN THE DEEP : REACTION-DIFFUSION DIES TONIGHT

written by **Rosemary Jones**

music by **Jeremy Simmons**

When Mia got off the elevator, the Librarian marked her place in her tattered paperback with a proper bookmark. She had never, in all the years that Mia had known her, dog-eared a page or turned a book upside down and open-faced on a table.

“What are you reading?” Mia asked automatically. She couldn’t pass a reader without wanting to know what they held in their hands.

“A classic, one of Vlad’s last progeny, at my request,” answered the Librarian. With a sigh, she patted the book’s faded cover. “But I was thinking that Bradbury’s rebels lived in easier fictional times. After all, they only fought against book burning and mind control. It’s far harder to mount an insurrection against good intentions. Who could be so heartless as to argue that access to a sonnet was more important than feeding a hungry child? Or heating a shelter for the homeless?”

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