

# THE **Babylonian Trilogy**



SÉBASTIEN DOUBINSKY



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INTRODUCTION BY MICHAEL MOORCOCK



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## War

The explosion blossomed in the distance. A huge fireball rolled over the dark trees in yellow fury. Steve hid his eyes behind his hand. A gust of wind enveloped the men, filled with dry heat and the scent of gasoline. He wondered how many they had killed this time—he meant a true number, not the absurd figures announced every evening in the propaganda bulletins. He wanted to know whether they were winning or losing this goddamned war . . . He would try to count the bodies when he got there—what was left of them, at least. Another group of planes zoomed over their heads, shaking the ground with their dark laughter. Some of the men applauded. Everybody had lost a



## Coitus Interruptus



Bill reached his orgasm the very moment the phone began to ring. His sperm turned into sparkling electric stars as it sprayed inside the girl. “Shit” he grunted between clenched teeth, “shit, shit, shit, SHIT!” The girl moved over to the side as he made his way out of the sheets. “Sorry . . .” he mumbled, putting the receiver to his ear. The girl said something in response, but it was covered by Sheryl’s crackling voice.

“Yes . . . yes . . . where? Okay . . . yes . . . in fifteen minutes? But I . . . I . . . what? Okay, fifteen minutes . . . OKAY! . . . I said okay . . . Oh, one last thing, Sheryl . . . I hate your guts . . .”

“Who was that?” the girl whined, watching him get out of the devastated bed.

“My boss. A real bitch.” He had trouble putting his right arm through his left sleeve, so she helped him. “Sorry, baby, but I’ve got to run. You can fix yourself breakfast, if you feel like it . . .”

“At three thirty in the morning?”

He shrugged, and picked up the heavy strap-bag full of video equipment.

“I’ll see you later,” he managed to say before she slammed the door behind him. HIS door. Shit! He shook his head as he waited for the elevator. Maybe she would still be home when he came back . . .

Wishful thinking. How many girlfriends had he lost since he began working with Sheryl? Too many already. Sometimes, he really *did* hate her guts. And then again, sometimes he didn’t.



## Rejection Slip

Lee reread the short letter for the fifth time. It was typed, impersonal—and it hurt like hell. But there wasn't anything he could do about it: his name wouldn't be in print this year. He pinned the letter on the wall, next to the 57 others already hanging there like dead bugs, some of them yellowing with the years. Marian walked into the room, her wet hair hidden in a snail-like towel. He sat down on a chair, and contemplated his "conceptualist" wall, as he liked to call it. "Don't worry, darling," she said from the kitchen she had just stepped into, "you'll make it someday. You're the best." He let his head hang down. It weighed a ton. Nobody could understand him. Nobody at all. He felt empty and blank. He had been so sure about that one . . . He had had such a positive feeling . . . Marian walked back into the room in splendid nakedness, holding a glass of juice in her hand. She put the glass down on the little bed-table, and began to rummage in her drawer, looking for some clothes. He glanced at the bed. Maybe some animal sex would help heal the wound. It usually did. Marian caught his peculiar look, and swiftly pulled her panties up. "Sorry, Lee, but today I have my period . . ." He sighed and looked back at the wall. When things went wrong . . .

## D o g

“You’re a dog!” she said, and suddenly Waldo realized that it was true. He fell on his four legs and began to chase her out of the apartment, barking, drooling and growling. When she was gone, he curled up on the carpet and got ready for a nap. Right before falling asleep, he wearily looked up and saw that the world was much better when you looked at it from underneath.





## Bodies

The village was empty. Or rather, there wasn't much left of the village. The Air Force had done a pretty good job. Acrid smoke filled the air. Large holes poked the ground, surrounded by scattered bodies, torn and black like strange trees. Steve began to count them mentally. One, two, three. The captain moved cautiously in front of the column, gun in hand. Four, five, six, seven, eight. He told Steve to check a ruined hut. Nine, ten, eleven. Then another ruined hut. Twelve. And another. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. "How many did you find?" the captain asked a soldier who was coming from the other side of the village. "About twenty, Sir." About twenty, Sir. *About?* What in the hell did he mean by "about?" Steve felt a rage napalm his heart. What was the point in counting when he was the only one doing it seriously?

"Very well, then" the captain said, "Let's plant the goddamned flag and let's get out of here. The mission is over, guys. We've won."

Steve felt tears of frustration swell up in his eyes. How did he know they had won? How many enemies had they killed so far; did he know that? "About enough" was the captain's favorite answer. Was it really? Then how come they were still here, fighting, uh? When would they know FOR SURE? When would all this nonsense have its meaning finally revealed? He felt the captain's hand on his shoulder.

"That's it, sergeant. We're going back now. Everything is going to be alright." Sure. He nodded through his tears, flowing like quicksilver on his cheeks. Everything was going to be alright, and this war would have no end. If only there had been a way to count . . .

## Crime Scene



The blue and red lights gave an eerie look to the building. Electric voices crackled all around. Bill cut through the thick crowd and showed his pass to the policeman standing guard. Sheryl was already there. Her cellular phone hung under her left armpit like a science-fiction gun. She waved at him as he made his way through the scattered black-and-white cars. “Glad you could make it so fast. The ultimatum is almost over.” He began to unpack the heavy video-camera. “Who is it? What does he want?” An inspector Bill hadn’t noticed answered for her. “The bastard says he’s the famous Cartoon Killer, and we have reasons to believe him. We finally managed to corner him in there . . . This time, he’s disguised as the Wile E. Coyote, from the Roadrunner cartoons—you know them, don’t you? He’s up in some apartment, hopefully empty. That’s what we think, but he says he’s got an hostage. Go figure . . . We can’t take chances . . .” He paused and lit a cigarette. The flame flickered under his nose like a small explosion. “Anyway, he won’t surrender. He’s still up there, disguised and all, with a gun. We know that because the janitor got shot. The only thing he wants, he says, is to be interviewed on TV by this woman here—your boss, I gather. We asked her to cooperate with us, to see if we can get him out of the place, and she said ok. So that’s what we’re at. Good luck to both of you. You can wear one of our bulletproof jackets if you want, although they’re not much against an Uzi . . .”

Bill thanked him politely, although he wasn’t exactly sure for what. They were the bait for the shark, the goat for the wolf. He only hoped the hunters wouldn’t miss their target.

“Let’s go,” Sheryl finally said, opening the door to the back stairs, “we’re on a mission for BTV.”

Following her, he wondered if she was ever scared of anything.

Then, suddenly, he smiled to himself. Yes, there was one thing, one little thing that could scare the woman to hell: an unexpected drop in BTV's ratings. Especially during the news.



THE BIRTH OF TELEVISION ACCORDING TO BUDDHA



## Color N°1

Yellow: color of the sun, of blindness and summer. Color attached to the meaning of fear and fire. Too much yellow in a room can lead to mental confusion, schizophrenia or worse. On the other hand, it is said that if you dress up a baby in yellow clothes three days after he is born, luck will be with him all his life. Yellow is the color of the East and South. It is one of the three primary colors. It is only justice to start with it then.



## Dog Dreams

Waldo is dreaming now, sleeping on his favorite carpet. He is in a street, trotting along and sniffing his way through the city. The smells tell him beautiful stories that make him long and ache inside, wonderfully. The sidewalk is full of clues. No more riddles. No more labyrinths. No more fears of getting lost. Waldo is a good dog now, attached to his master—that is, to himself. Waldo smiles in his sleep and grunts with pleasure. He is holding his leash in his mouth.



## D o u b t s

He would never make it. He would never see his name in print. He would never be able to get beautiful young actresses in his bed, just because “they loved the book . . .” He hated his own name, typed in small shameful letters on the first page of the rejected monster. Lee Jones. What a stupid, stupid name. At twenty-seven, he was already a failure. Marian walked by, getting ready to go to work. He watched her move with growing self-pity. She worked as a secretary in a local bank, making barely enough money for the two of them. He had tried to get a job a couple of times, but it had always ended in disaster. His mind wasn’t made for trivia. And yet . . . Wasn’t getting published the most trivial thing in the world? Of course, you could argue that no, it was important, especially if you had a message to deliver. But he had no message. Nothing at all. His stories were like the rain, car fumes and elevator music. In a word: trivial.

It had to end, somehow.

He had to be courageous.

He had to face the facts, and come to the one and only conclusion.

He got up from the chair and wearily walked into the room where Marian was brushing her hair. A decision had to be made. He scratched his head and cleared his voice, trying to avoid her interrogating eyes.

“I . . . I think I’m going to quit writing . . .”

He paused, waiting for the effect of this melodramatic announcement. Marian gently pushed him aside as she walked out to the bathroom, and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Oh, cut the crap, dear. I’ve heard that one before. Go out, get drunk, and tomorrow you’ll feel better.”

## Weather Forecast

Ernest Hemingway put the gun in his mouth and cocked the trigger. “Looks like we’re in for some rain . . .” he mumbled, smiling to himself.



## Wile E. Coyote



They were standing at the beginning of a long corridor, dimly lit by a shady white glass globe. Large and dirty bay-windows gaping on the left-hand side completed the bleakness of the decor.

“Do you think we’ll have enough light?” Sheryl asked.

Bill shrugged.

“I brought an extra lamp, just in case. But it should be okay”

He lifted his free hand, and showed her the object. She smiled.

“Okay, let’s go, then.”

They resumed their careful walk, and stopped right under the yellowish globe. The door wa diresumlyas f730.6(e)19.6(w)30.6s f730.6(e-w



“You alone?” he growled suspiciously. Sheryl nodded.

“Mister Coyote, could you spare a few words for our viewers?”

Her voice was firm. Not a single sign of emotion—completely professional, Bill thought, admiringly.

The man nodded proudly.

“You can ask me whatever you want. I’m on TV now. That’s all I ever wanted, really. To be on TV, you know. I can remember, when I was a little boy, and I used to watch all those cartoons and . . .”

Bill hoped there wasn’t going to be too much trembling in the image. He didn’t want to film the woman’s head, but he kept returning to it, again and again. She was blonde. She had blue eyes. Wide open, now. Disbelieving. Blood was still oozing from the wound in the neck, shining softly in the dirty light. He zoomed in for a close-up. If they wanted blood, they were going to have plenty of it.

“I always wanted to be on TV. I wanted to be as famous as those cartoon guys, I wanted to live like them, do the things they did, like this, you know . . .”

He briefly lifted the head to eye-level.

“I went to the TV studios a couple of times, but they didn’t want me. They said they didn’t hire cartoon characters anymore. That they were all dead. That they didn’t even *exist*, can you believe that? It made me sad. Real sad. So I decided to avenge them. And here I . . .”

A window suddenly exploded, sending glass fragments all around, like a blinding galaxy. The Wile E. Coyote was thrown backwards against the door, repainting it with his own blood. A gun Bill hadn’t noticed fell to the ground with a dull sound. But the head was still in the man’s hand. He clung to it frantically as he slowly slouched to the ground, his yellow eyes flickering with life’s last gleams. Shouts and sirens burst outside. The wounded man began to vomit blood. Sheryl ran up to him, picking little pieces of glass out of her forehead and hair. Bill followed reluctantly, the wire of the microphone being attached to the camera. He almost slipped in the fast-growing blood puddle.

“One last thing, Mister Coyote, for our viewers . . . Why did you choose to kill all those women? I mean—only women?”

The Wile E. Coyote lifted a weak eyelid.

“I could never stand to see an animal suffer . . . ”

He smiled, coughed up a couple more times, and passed away. Two policemen from the Special Forces rushed into the corridor, guns in hand. They pushed the journalists aside and handcuffed the body, who was still holding tightly to the golden hair of his victim.



## Firecrackers

“Watch out!” somebody screamed, as hell’s fireworks began to fall in a deadly shower, suddenly turning the jungle into a tragic Chinese New Year’s party. The soldiers began to run in every direction, except the right one. The captain fell on the ground, holding his belly. Steve bent over to help him, but a violent shock on his back threw him to the ground. The wet earth felt sweet under his cheek. Little by little, chaos began to fade, and the world whirled slowly out of sight. Everything was peaceful and turning black. So black he couldn’t even see his hands. So black he couldn’t remember his own name. So black he had forgotten to count.

