



Berzerkoids

M.P. Johnson

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In the first short story collection from Wonderland Book Award-winning author MP Johnson, disgusting little toys become the key to a father regaining his son's love, a caterpillar crosses dimensions via peoples' insides, punk rock blaring from a woman's breast leads to her gruesome self destruction, a grizzled hardcore singer travels through time to save his future child, a drag queen goes to battle against her childhood teddy bear and more. These stories are so shockingly, oozingly awesome, you just have to read 'em all!

Berzerkoids Details

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Author : M.P. Johnson

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From Reader Review Berzerkoids for online ebook

Rodney says

A cool nostalgic feel dominates the cover art and overall theme of this collection. I was happy to see a few stories that were only available previously within rare and out of print chapbooks. As a whole, these short pieces primarily focus on pushing the weird element to the max, using odd creatures from other dimensions, time travel, and toys that come to life.

Below are my favorites of the bunch:

I Summoned a Demon with a Vagina Mouth - I had the pleasure of experiencing the author read this one to an audience. A hilarious revenge tale with plenty of detail packed into a small word count.

Loving Arms - A stuffed bear and his childhood tormentor (now in drag) are reunited. There will be drama, there will be violence.

Killer Nails - An artist creates fingernail designs that are out of this world. When the reader discovers just how this is achieved, multiple WTF's will certainly follow.

Groupie - Probably the most cringe-worthy thing I have read. How far will a woman go to find the source of the music that is coming from her chest? Remember that you will not be able to unread this one.

The Final Failure of a Professional Small Animal Inside-Outer - The oddity of this man's profession is unforgettable and fascinating. The way he becomes a family man, and the ensuing dynamic of that family are so strangely original. I will not forget this.

The Songwriter's Fingers - A touching tale of a man's severed fingers giving a woman the strength to persevere through all of life's trials, while maintaining a surprisingly positive demeanor through it all.

With Berzerkoid's charm and zaniness still intact, I can say that there were a few of the stories that did not do it for me as much as I had expected. Considering the book spans many years of writing, and adding that I hold the author in such high regard, some pieces either ended a bit too quick or just lacked what I deem the MP Johnson magic. That being said, this is a fun and memorable collection that I am happy to have on my shelf.

Christopher Payne says

In the first short story collection from Wonderland Book Award-winning author MP Johnson, disgusting little toys become the key to a father regaining his son's love, a caterpillar crosses dimensions via peoples' insides, punk rock blaring from a woman's breast leads to her gruesome self destruction, a grizzled hardcore singer travels through time to save his future child, a drag queen goes to battle against her childhood teddy bear and more. These stories are so shockingly, oozingly awesome, you just have to read 'em all!

Devin Anderson says

Once I cracked the spine of this book, it was all over. The book had me in its diabolical clutches. I could hardly put it down.

Some stories grossed me out to the MAX! Some delighted me with humor and graceful character arcs. On the hole, this is the Preparation H of short story collections. So cool! So refreshing! Love it!

Benjamin Anthony says

You don't need me to tell you that *Berzerkoids* is a fantastic book. It won the Wonderland award last year and rightfully so, it's a collection of short stories bizarre in the extreme. The cover is made to look like a package of toys, the insane monsters that are depicted inside. All of the stories are horror or borderline horror, some are about the toys themselves while some are about strange creatures that torment the characters in here.

The book is written by Emma Johnson who has a plethora of previous books that are about imaginary VHS movies from the 80s, dungeons, drag queens and murderers. The stories themselves draw you into their world almost imperceptibly while giving your conscious mind a pause, the sustaining of disbelief. Emma does this seemingly with ease, every story would end and I would start on the next and still be longing for the last one to continue then find myself in the next story, completely engrossed.

There is a definite punk rock attitude throughout the book and the stories sometimes focus on punk rockers both new and old, from jaded old school crusts to little baby mohawks and death growlers. My only complaint is that the book is too short, the stories are too short. I wish that Emma would start putting out gigantic, thousand page epics along the line of Anne Rice and her doorstep sized novels. So my advice to you is to buy this book, like I did. I downloaded a free sample and was hooked, ordering the paperback copy shortly thereafter with my first big check from my new job. Hopefully Miss Johnson will find one of those giant doorstep novels inside herself and put it out for us to enjoy her vision.

Pedro Proença says

Review soon at culturedvultures.com!

Jeremy Maddux says

I think I prefer MP Johnson's full lengths better. Last year's *Cattle Cult! Kill Kill!* was unforgettable. The *Afterlife of Pork Knuckles Malone* actually made me sad when Pork Knuckles was abandoned by his childhood friend and forced to become an evil force of nature. *Death Warp* was also pretty Raimian in scope. But the stories here just seem to start and end too abruptly. I appreciated a glimpse into the lifestyle, but I also thought there were too many protagonists that shared the same lifestyle. That's not a critique of the lifestyle at all, and I have great respect for Matt, having met him, but I guess I was just looking for more

diversity. Still, the cover art is great for its nostalgia factor as anyone who grew up in the kid demographic of the crowded 80's and 90's action figure craze. I think I was expecting another Tony Rauch with these short stories and while some were interesting, they needed more polishing and fleshing out.

Christopher Lesko says

All kinda weirdness going on here. Like boom bing wing wang chung ding dang bing poom pow hi-ya fing fang foom. Oh yeah. Just like that.

Ian Muller says

The stories in this vary from waaaaaay gross (Groupie) to shockingly sweet (Feed my corpse to sharks). MP Johnson is one of the best. This collection is no exception.

David says

Johnson has quite a way with telling a unique kind of fun story. Just that right mix of 80s commercial mixed in with human pathos, gore, and the grotesque. Definitely a collection to be enjoyed.

Autumn Christian says

If Berzerkoids was a food - it'd be a crunchy dragon sushi roll made by robots. I'd been meaning to read MP Johnson ever since I saw her in glorious heels and makeup better than I can ever apply it reading from "Dungeons & Drag Queens" at Bizzarocon, and even bought one of her books "Cattle Cult Kill! Kill!" at ANOTHER con and had her sign it. But I didn't take the plunge until Berzerkoids, and I'm glad that my first introduction was a short story collection. It really shows the humor and multi-faceted aspects of her bizarro writing. The writing is visceral. Yummy. Crunchy. Gross. Johnson doesn't shy away from gore, demons, humor, writing sentences that are like a slap straight across the face. The words roll off the page in almost 3-dimensional shape.

The collection starts off with short, funny punchy short stories like "Berzerkoids" and "I summoned a demon with a vagina mouth." but Johnson's depth and emotional range is revealed in later stories at the end of the collection, while still maintaining the classic bizarro logic of a world gone askance. My favorite story in the collection was probably "Feed My Corpse to the Sharks," which is a story about female friendship that is simultaneously hilarious and touching.

Berzerkoids are supposed to be crazy, silly toys and just like its namesake this short story collection is meant to be fun, varied, exciting, and surprising and delivers on all counts.

Janie C. says

This author must be a magician, because she transforms each of these stories into a gooey twist of bright colors, pathos and mutated life forms. Flawed humans meet toys, freakish demons, giant caterpillars, life-sucking bands, and discover inner-body music. A man desperately attempts to craft the perfect inside-out life form, while a pop star pays the price for the ultimate nail polish. Time travel unites a father and his future son, if the calendars are correct. A discarded board with a natural finish gets the chance of a lifetime and bonds with a hero. The title *Feed My Corpse to Sharks* speaks for itself. One of my favorite pieces, *The Songwriter's Fingers*, touches a pulse that will prevail. Finally, *Berzerkoid Glorg* pushes his luck a little too far. Humans, plastic, blood, insects and music have never melded together in such an evocative way. Real punk will never die.

Bob Milne says

Imagine if you will, a bicep-bulging, long-haired, spandex-clad wrestler leaping into frame at the end of an 80s toy commercial. Now, before we get to the catchphrase, put him in drag (most 80s wrestlers weren't far away as it is), stick an alien on top of his head, wrap a monster caterpillar around his leg, and stick a sentient zombie-bashing board in his perfectly manicured hand. Now, as he leaps into frame, get ready to scream along with the sound of his explosive landing.

"Berzerkoids! Gotta eat 'em all!"

M.P. Johnson's first short story collection embodies that sense of cheesy nostalgia, and wraps it up in contemporary bizarro horror. These are strange little slices of fiction, ranging from the merely surreal to the truly bizarre, that entertain from beginning to end. Honestly, there wasn't a single story that didn't get at least an appreciative nod or chuckle, and more than a few that had me grinning from ear-to-ear.

BERZERKOIDS ARE HERE and *RISE OF THE BERZERKOIDS* book-end the collection, giving us two very different takes on our childish obsessions. The first seems incredibly dark and unnecessarily cruel, until you get to the final twist, while the last is a tad predictable, but an amusing twist on the theme.

LOVING ARMS was a definite favorite, as a long-neglected stuffed bear finds himself caught between a desire for revenge against the boy who tortured him, and twisted desire for the drag queen that boy has become. *HEARTS AND CATERPILLARS* takes an unorthodox look at love and obsession, complete with monstrous caterpillars, horny old men, cheating girlfriends, and kinky cartoon mascots. *KILLER NAILS*, on the other hand (pun intended), taunts you and teases you with threats of the bizarre, before exploding in a grotesque fury.

I THINK I'LL DONATE THIS SEVERED HEAD TO THE SALVATION ARMY may be the best title I've ever come across, capturing the essence of a story that's deceptively simple. *THROUGH TIME*, *KNUCKLES FIRST* was another favorite, with a man dragged through time by a half-rotten alien head in search of a drag queen who just may be the daughter he doesn't yet have. *THE FINAL FAILURE OF A PROFESSIONAL SMALL ANIMAL INSIDE-OUTER* is probably the second best title I've come across, leading off another story that's simple, straightforward, and somewhat sadistic.

As much as I enjoyed the teddy bears, time travel, and drag queens, *STORY OF A BOARD* was the

highlight of the collection for me. Zombie apocalypse stories may be a dime a dozen nowadays, but how many of them are told from the perspective of the wooden board that, between instances of being tossed to the curb, is used to bash their skulls in (and save the world)?

Bizarro stories often work best on a small scale, in stories that can explore the twisted concepts without overstaying their welcome, and that makes *Berzerkoids* the perfect read. Yes, it's often disgustingly amusing, and sometimes even horrifyingly arousing, but it's always original, and consistently entertaining.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Disclaimer: I received a complimentary ARC of this title from the publisher in exchange for review consideration. This does not in any way affect the honesty or sincerity of my review.

Arthur Graham says

Appropriate for ages 6 to 666!

When I was a little kid, M.U.S.C.L.E. figures were like the dopest shit ever. Knowing Matt, I'm willing to bet his *Berzerkoids* take that same level of dopeness to previously uncharted heights, so I'm definitely looking forward to this!

Daulton Dickey says

Berzerkoids are here! And this book is here to stay. If you love weird, intelligent, and entertaining short fiction, than this book should feature prominently on your bookshelf.

Loosely centered around the antics of toys--as a sort of anti-Toy Story--this collection also features several stories only tangentially connected to its titular themes. It's thematic in the way Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band is conceptual: some stories follow the overall theme and some could fit into any collection. But one thing is certain: every story in this collection is entertaining.

Say what you want about MP Johnson--and why the hell would you say anything negative, you prick?--but he has a wicked, pop-culture-infused, and, at times, minimalist imagination and sense of humor. His approach to the short form reminded me--as improbable as some readers might find this--of the best short works of Hemingway, as well as Joyce's stories in *Dubliners*. Some are only a couple pages long; some build slowly, then hit you like a freight train; but none overstay their welcome, which is, to my mind, the strength of this collection.

The stories hit hard and fast. Realized worlds are developed within the matter of a few pages, characters are presented and developed well, situations go from weird to weirder, and the stories end, often without

resolution, often without explanation--a sign of a confident writer.

Johnson doesn't waste paragraphs or pages justifying the worlds he's creating; instead, he drops you into them, creates weird or funny or intense situations, and leaves you wanting more. But there's little confusion. You're never dropped into a world in which you are confused or lost. You're always viewing the worlds through the eyes of characters you care about, or through characters or high concepts so weird or funny or clever that you assent to take the trip, and oftentimes you can't anticipate where you're headed.

This is a great collection of stories by a strong and confident writer.

Frank says

Berzerkoids are here! Yes, it is a catchy phrase. One you are sure to keep repeating even when you are enjoying the plethora of other non-Berzerkoids short stories contained within this collection of MP Johnson short stories. With this collection, Johnson solidifies himself as the punk rock master of Bizarro, bar none!

This is a wonderful way to introduce yourself to everything MP Johnson. These stories span his professional writing career. There are punk rock stories, drag queen stories, graphic gore stories and then there are mash-ups of all those stories in which MP Johnson nearly crafts a genre unto himself. It is disgusting at times, hilarious at others. Sometimes thought provoking and sometimes heartfelt.

Always, unmistakably, MP Johnson. BERZERKOIDS ARE HERE! COLLECT EM ALL!
