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What do you do if the man you've vowed to kill dies before you can kill him?

In college, Tom Holbrook worshipped Shasta DiMaio from afar, but she married the arrogant John Atwater—and Atwater eventually murdered her.

All that's left for Tom is revenge. He has devoted the rest of his life to finding Atwater and killing him—but when he finally finds him, Atwater is in a bag in the Los Angeles County morgue.

How do you kill a man who has already died?

Down and Out in Purgatory Details

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Author : Tim Powers

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From Reader Review Down and Out in Purgatory for online ebook

Chris says

Tom Holbrook's goal in life is simple: find and kill his old college friend John Atwater, the man who first married and then killed Tom's college crush Shasta. The only problem is that John Atwater is already dead, but even this won't stop Tom's mission of revenge. He knows there are ways and means to enter the afterlife, and after meeting the occultist Martinez and having his head blown open by a shotgun, his goal in death will be the eradication of John Atwater from a shadow half-world. Purgatory, they call it, lacking knowledge of its true name; a halfway house for the shattered spirits that cannot progress further into the afterlife. Tom knows that John is there, he just needs to find him... but his quest through the surreal landscape will reveal some staggering secrets, changing him forever.

I first encountered Tim Powers through his masterful *Anubis Gates*, and have been a fan of his vivid imagination ever since. I must say that his novellas (like this one) can lack the depth and scope of his longer works, but are satisfying tales from his unique, unbridled creativity. *Down and Out in Purgatory* works as a cross between a neo-noir and a horror story, with Tom descending into a bizarre dimension where nothing is as it seems, a place where crazed spirits occupy a hallucinatory landscape. The reality and physics of this purgatory are quite malleable, yet adhere to their own logic—a fact that dovetails into the ending, which transcends the expected conclusion to the love triangle tragedy, instead opting for something stranger and more interesting. Powers' stripped-down, minimalist prose keeps the story moving at a fast pace, exploring human themes of isolation and vengeance. Most of all, it's an odd portrait of purgatory, shrouded in a dreamlike haze.

Down and Out in Purgatory is a short, strange read; it's only 120 pages, a strange blend of fantasy, horror, and gumshoe pulp in an equally strange world. The imagery and world-building are phenomenal, and Tom's metamorphosis as a character is an interesting arc to follow. This may not be Powers' most important works, but it's a great read that should appeal to fantasy fans looking for a fast read that's out of the ordinary. Tim Powers' strengths continue are his elegant writing and the phantasmagoric worlds his seemingly limitless imagination creates, and *Down and Out in Purgatory* is another solid entry in his oeuvre.

Aaron Bellamy says

Another WB TV show episode waiting to happen from Subterranean Press, this time written by Tim Powers. This novella has a decent pace and is written well enough to get the characters from the beginning to the end, but is otherwise shallow and predictable. At just over 100 pages of large text, the tale isn't worth the price, so thankfully Dave McKean did the jacket artwork, which like most of his work I've seen is stellar. I rarely rate a book higher due to the presentation, but with the jacket art and the open acknowledgment that Subterranean Press puts great care into their physical products (if not careful consideration into the content) I'm adding about three quarters a star to bring this to a solid 2. However, unlike some of my other two star reviews, there isn't much to dislike here, just not much I did like. Fans of Powers, of which I am not (having read and also disliked *The Stress of Her Regard*), may enjoy this brief outing and should proceed with caution.

Bradley says

This novella is a relatively quick read. It really just focuses on the imaginative bits that Tim Powers is known

for, and it finishes on a single relatively easy-to-predict premise.

It has a noir feel, which shouldn't surprise anyone by the title, but of course it's really about death and moving on. Literally, in this case. It might be billed as a literary piece turned into an UF turned into a dark and dirty streets gumshoe pulp. And why not? Purgatory isn't supposed to be a particularly *nice* place, and should it surprise anyone that the best it has to offer is the (view spoiler)? Of course not.

I can say, however, that the imagery is beautiful, the world-building is interesting, and while the incremental ticks of our MC's metamorphosis as he goes through his to-do list is really quite minimal, I'd expect more for a full-sized novel.

Thanks to Netgalley for the ARC!

Redsteve says

SOMEWHAT DIGRESSIVE REVIEW: I hate to admit this (because so many of my favorite books are by Tim Powers) but I haven't really liked anything the author has done since Three Days to Never (2006) - Hide Me Among the Graves (2012) was okay but not nearly as good as its precursor, Stress of Her Regard (1989) and pretty much everything else in the last 10 years has been a disappointment. Part of this is that I just don't feel that Powers is good at short stories; most of them seem to fall into two categories: mediocre stories or ones better expanded into full novel. format. Most of what he's written during this period has been more-or-less short fiction (except Medusa's Web - 2016 - which was a full-length novel with an interesting new premise, but somehow failed to engage me). All that aside, Down and Out in Purgatory is a novella that deals with ghosts and the afterlife, but less interestingly than Expiration Date. This book has a couple of interesting premises, but generally left me cold. 2.5 stars.

G.R. Forrest says

Interesting book, this. It enticed and frustrated me in equal measure, not necessarily - unfortunately - in a good way. The main setting, once we arrive there, is pleasingly bizarre while following its own comprehensible lines of logic: so far, so good. I think there could be a lot of mileage in this 'world', were it to be developed further for a longer story! I found some of the left-hand/right-hand-uphill/downhill elements of the description difficult to follow, and therefore to visualise, but that could be an issue unique to me. Beyond that, despite the fundamental, devastating issues which composed the main plot drivers, I found that the characters and their circumstances failed to engage me. It was only once I had finished the book that I realised what I was missing: more character detail, and the increased emotional impact that would come with it.

I am told that this author's longer work is excellent, and there's more than enough promise in this book that I would like to investigate further but - with hindsight - I wouldn't recommend others who might be new to this author to start here.

David says

This novella is the first Tim Powers story I've read. It's an imaginative, surreal, sometimes confusing little story, but the confusing parts are to be expected with souls wandering around in a Hollywood-like purgatory.

Down and Out in Purgatory is basically a revenge story. A guy was in love with a girl, but she loved another guy in their circle, and married him. Then he murdered her. So our protagonist decides he wants to kill the guy who murdered the girl he loves, but her ex dies first. Not content, he seeks out a Ouiji board-using spiritualist to send him to the Other Side where he can permanently **erase** his nemesis good and proper. And maybe hook up with the girl he loved too.

So basically, our protagonist is an obsessive Nice Guy mooning over the girl who chose someone else, and even after they're both dead he wants to ride in as a White Knight and save her in the afterlife. Needless to say, things aren't going to work out the way he wants.

The descriptions of seances, of purgatory, of the behavior of souls in purgatory, are all a bit eerie and atmospheric and appropriate. But I just wanted there to be *more* to the story.

Bob Milne says

Surreal, imaginative, and even a bit quirky at times, *Down and Out in Purgatory* is a strange journey through love and death. The journey through the underworld has been done so many times now that it's not easy to inject any sort of originality into it, but that's precisely what Tim Powers does here.

It all starts out with a somewhat perplexing trip to the morgue, followed by an even stranger trip off-road to a mobile home out in the middle of the desert. You see, when your entire life has been consumed by hatred for the man who stole (and murdered) the only woman you've ever loved, you can't let something as simple as death stop you from seeking revenge.

The mechanics of contacting the afterlife are central to the story, merging low-tech with the old-fashioned occult. As for the afterlife itself, it's a bleak and depressing landscape, populated by those souls who either aren't ready or who simply refuse to pass on. There's some philosophical discussion about what might come next, but this is not a story about Heaven or Hell, salvation or damnation. Instead, it's all about the revelations to be found in Purgatory.

Needless to say, this is a dark, often depressing read. There are moments of bleak humor throughout, but Tom's journey is not one to inspire hopes and dreams. If you're looking for triumph over evil and the realization of true love, then look elsewhere. It's a smart story, full of imagery and imagination, and the pulp-noir style of narrative really carries it along. It does suffer from a lack of backstory, making it hard to justify such desperate measures, but that also frees it from any expectations. The ending is just about perfect, tying up loose ends, but leaving a lot of answers to the reader's own imagination.

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.

Bandit says

It seems that at some point most genre writers want to try their hand at creating some form of an afterlife. With mixed results. This looked like fun and was short enough and free on Netgalley, but alas, not my thing. Just a basic incompatibility...I tried Powers, but despite objectively finding him to be a good writer, I can never really get into his books. Maybe it's because he always leans toward fantasy, which does nothing for me, but something just seems to fall flat. Even here, in what should have been a rollicking good ride through purgatory by a lovelorn man out for revenge. Revenge so thorough that he's bring it to a dead man. And yet, I just didn't really care, despite all the imaginative ornamentations and original premise. It was a decent way to spend an hour, but just barely.

Brian Rogers says

A fine collection of short fiction by Tim Powers. Powers is one of those authors who really works better when he has time to flesh out a world and its operating rules so the world-magic becomes sort of an unspoken character in the fiction, supporting or hindering the actual protagonists or antagonists in their plans. The pieces in this book fall into types: those building on the world-rules of one of his existing series, those with a very easily grasped set of world rules. Both are...slightly unsatisfying if you're comparing them to his larger more mythic works, but many of them land very nicely (closing tale with Thanksgiving with a family of psychics is great fun).

Also: Tim Powers is deeply Catholic. And Tim Powers either once had a drinking problem or knows someone who does. These deeply inform his storytelling in these short tales, often in fascinating ways.

Koeur says

<https://koeur.wordpress.com/2016/04/2...>

Publisher: Subterranean Press

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Genre: Fantasy

Rating: 3 meh's

Publishers Description: What do you do if the man you've vowed to kill dies before you can kill him? In college, Tom Holbrook worshipped Shasta DiMaio from afar, but she married the arrogant John Atwater—and Atwater eventually murdered her. All that's left for Tom is revenge. He has devoted the rest of his life to finding Atwater and killing him—but when he finally finds him, Atwater is in a bag in the Los Angeles County morgue.

Review: The cover art is good because of boob, but doesn't tie into the story.

This was a very short read and thrusts you right into the meat of the story line from the get-go. There is no build up to the characters in terms of a lengthy backstory. Just a truncated look at three people pasts with a heavy dose of emotion to give the relationship substance. Only you find yourself stretching pretty deep to find any empathy.

(view spoiler)

The writing is really good though and keeps you hanging in there as it flows nicely. Buy/Don't buy...meh.

Karl says

As the title hints at, the new Tim Powers book "Down and out in Purgatory" the book concerns an after death experience which is motivated by lost love. The point of view character Tom Holbrook is on a mission of revenge. He has been hunting John Atwater a former friend, who murdered Holbrook's beloved, Shasta DiMaio. He has been hunting Atwater for six years without success when he learns that Atwater has died, thus not allowing Holbrook to culminate his revenge.

Holbrook's obsession will not relinquish, so he seeks out and asks a sorcerer named Martinez how to destroy a ghost. Which after some hard decisions and bargains that need to be made brings Holbrook to Purgatory. And this isn't your grandmothers Purgatory either. A combination of Disney Land, Loony Tunes on acid and Roger Rabbit and a Kafka struggle create a rather wacky backdrop to Holbrook's search for the killer of his dreams.

Often funny, sometimes strange, always interesting and well told, Mr. Powers nod to pulp noir and his full use of imagery and imagination make this a worthwhile read. If I had any complaint it would be of the publisher, Subterranean Press, charging thirty bucks for the book, or one could pay sixty bucks for the signed version for this one hundred twenty page story.

Jacey says

I read this as a review copy from Netgalley.

Tom Holbrook is a man bent on revenge. The girl he loved in college, Shasta, married John Atwater instead of him. Atwater eventually murdered her and got away with it in court. Holbrook has spent the last six years of his life hunting Atwater down, only to be thwarted by Atwater dying inconveniently. Not to be deterred Holbrook arranges to have himself shot and follows Atwater to purgatory where he intends to wipe out Atwater's ghost as well.

Weird? Yes. A bit too surreal for me, I'm afraid. I've never liked overly long strange dream sequences and most of this novella feels just like that. The ending is a little predictable, but that doesn't really detract. The writing is elegant, as I would expect from Tim Powers, but ultimately, though I wanted to like it, I found this unsatisfying.

Scott Firestone says

What happens when the man you've been seeking revenge against dies? Well you follow him into the next life, of course...

Tim Powers is my 2nd-favorite author, so it PAINS me to say that this little story is just okay. It jumps right into the action, so you don't have a chance to get to know the characters before they're too busy moving the story forward to give you a glimpse into who they are. And he finds the man he's after quickly, too. Then it's wrapped up. It all happens too quickly, and the story doesn't have time to breathe.

It does have the "trademark" Powers world rules--those practices, baubles, talismans, and actions his characters must take to protect themselves, or open up a path, or make something work. If you've read a Powers book, you know what I'm talking about. It's one of my favorite things about him. But it's not enough to make this anything more than a lesser Powers story.

Leroy Rodriguez says

First a disclaimer: I would probably read buy and read a Tim Powers grocery list and enjoy it.

I will take time for someone who has to potential of making the floors of my imagination shake, as he did with Last Call/Expiration Date/Earthquake weather. Or give John Le Carre a scary run for his money in Declare. That being said there are some of his works where I'm left wishing there was more there...there. Down and out in Purgatory places itself firmly in a Post modern C.S. Lewis "Great Divorce" world. Dead is not dead, right? In the supernatural Powers universe the dead are still hanging around in Purgatory communicating and "haunting" the living. Their actions still carry weight that defies the eternal state of death. Standard stuff for Powers.

But something feels unfinished about this work. Is it because the brilliance of the ideas in this work are not given enough time to flesh themselves out? Is it the moral ambivalence exhibited by the main character who's passion is supposedly so overwhelming, even unto death? Could it be I was so excited by a new Powers work that I wolfed it down with out letting it digest?

Don't know why but I was left wanting. It wasn't the concept. It wasn't the drawing of Purgatory as a bell. Brilliant! As is Hubcap Pete who drives around the surface of the bell making sure it doesn't disintegrate into chaos.

I would love to see this fully fleshed out as only Powers can do where you're left with characters and actions that can even make you doubt history as you understand it.

Until then It's back to a re-read of Hide me among the Graves.

Taylor says

A short piece that oozes with Powers' style. I was not sure I liked it at the moment I finished it, but it has stayed with me, made me think, and I have come around on it: I like it quite a bit. Going into specifics would spoil it, I think, and it is short enough that spoiling any of it would be a shame.

