



The First Bird: Omnibus Edition

Greig Beck

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EXTINCTION IS CONTAGIOUS

Matt Kearns, linguist, archaeologist and reluctant explorer from *Beneath the Dark Ice* and *Black Mountain* returns to help save the world. And this time he doesn't have Alex Hunter to save him when the stuff hits the fan.

When a fame-hungry scientist brings an impossible, living specimen of a creature long thought extinct back from the wild jungles of South America he unwittingly brings along a passenger. Something with the potential to destroy every living thing on our planet.

The infestation begins, rapidly overtaking medical resources and resisting all treatment. One woman knows the danger, Carla Nero, chief scientist of the Center for Disease Control. She makes Matt an offer he can't refuse and together they join a team heading to the deep jungle in a desperate race to locate the hidden place where the specimen was taken.

Only by finding the location of the specimen can the team – and the world – hope to uncover the secret of how to survive the ancient, horrifying parasite that has been released.

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From Reader Review The First Bird: Omnibus Edition for online ebook

Mitch says

I enjoyed this book, I would even recommend it..... so why three stars? If you haven't already noticed the trend of the other reviews here, there seems to be a common thread of agreement, and that is the problems with Third Act. The book progresses along nicely, giving you everything you might want from a Monster thriller: an interesting disease, a reason to actually seek out these dangerous animals, a healthy scattering of tense and exciting moments, and it reads exceptionally well. The story rather unfortunately seems to self-destruct in its third part. Everything about the final Act in my opinion feels like a different book, the characters seem to change personalities, going from scientists to plot vehicles. The book changes tone and becomes a kind of "zombie-apocalypse" thriller, losing all that momentum that made the first two Acts great. It honestly feels like a completely different novel tacked onto the end, and that is the most frustrating part... this secondary story isn't badly written, or a bad story.. it just isn't the same book and it definitely is not the ending this book deserved.

I want to stress, I really did enjoy this book overall, I even enjoyed the third Act (when taken as a separate novel), and I would encourage you to sample Mr Beck's other novels as he is clearly a talented and creative writer. Just be aware that this novel narrowly avoids being fantastic, and that is why it is so disappointing.

Cyndy Hemminger says

Riveting

A real page-turner! An original "science-gone-mad" story that sort of comes in the back door from the typical story in this genre, it's Jurassic Park and the Walking Dead plus a few other scary stories thrown in. It's tightly written, plot-wise, and the author has a real gift for tightly constructed, multisensory description that makes the reader feel a part of the story.

Only one criticism: I cannot for the life of me understand why an author of this caliber would continually use such labored epithets. "The small Brazilian," "the large bodyguard," the older man"- it was maddening, and I would have stopped reading a lesser story by the second chapter. Sir, your editor sorely failed you in this area. Once a character's name is known, use it, or a simple pronoun, like "him." They do not become repetitive, as the reader skims right over them. Epithets are jarring and can distance the reader from the character. Don't use them.

Jonathan Wilson says

4.25 Stars

Matthew says

After reading Beck's excellent Primordia 2, I NEEDED more lost, ancient worlds and creatures. I read a few book with prehistoric critters but none satisfied my craving until this one.

This book, all three First Bird episodes, entails a parasite being accidentally brought out of isolation in the jungle and unknowingly unleashed on the modern world. The CDC gathers a small team and retraces the steps all the of at back to an area that the natives fear. There's very little in the the way of "expected" prehistoric creatures, instead, Mr. Beck unleashes his imagination and conjures up stuff from nightmares.

If the bloodthirsty jungle denizens weren't enough, the team emerges to find the world has changed. Drastically. The parasite is highly contagious and nearly impossible to contain, leading to society breaking down in the coming apocalypse.

This is only the third book by Mr. Beck that I've had the pleasure of reading (Primordia and Primordia 2) but he's quickly becoming a favorite author. He has quite the talent of being able to draw the reader into the story and keep them there.

If you've never read anything by him, do yourself a favor and check him out. You won't be disappointed.

Neil says

For anyone who has read the author's Alex Hunter/Arcadian series, they will be familiar with the character of Professor Matt Kearns. He appeared in 'Beneath The Dark Ice' and 'Black Mountain'. This is the first book where he is cast as the central character. It was originally released in 3 episodes, but I chose to read the Omnibus edition containing all 3. As I have come to expect from the author the characters are solid, the unusual location is well depicted, and the plot is well thought out.

It begins with a professor returning from the Amazonian jungle with a startling discovery, something which will immortalise his name amongst his peers. Unfortunately he brings back something else, which triggers a nationwide epidemic. In turn this creates a global problem. Matt Kearns is roped into things by the CDC, who mount their own expedition to find a cure.

The first 2 episodes were the usual riveting reads, but for me the 3rd episode spoilt things. It depicted the breakdown of society, in an almost zombie apocalypse fashion. With religious fanatics even quoting the goddess Angelina Jolie. However it did provide for an unusual climax, which I will not spoil for a potential reader.

Tasha says

Other than the fact that an entomologist called spider venom "poison" repeatedly, this was a good read! Very hard to put down and thoroughly unsettling.

Pamela says

Yeah, the *Librarian* movies were silly, but they were cheekily poking fun at the whole Tomb Raider / Indiana Jones action genre, and I loved them. I also have always found Noah Wyle to be much more attractive than George Clooney.

ducks

Ahem. Well, remember that scene in the first movie, when Noah Wyle's character speaks a lost bird language? It's hilarious. Possibly the language of the archeopteryx, the "First Bird" of the title of Greig Beck's omnibus about linguist Matt Kearns. Everything that *The Librarian* has going for it: wit, charm, humor, well, that's missing in *The First Bird*. Also missing: a coherent plot, likable characters, and any world/timeline continuity within Beck's work.

So, *The First Bird* is actually an omnibus of three shortish-stories that would have been pretty decent had he stopped after the first two. The third one, is, to be blunt, a hot mess. The main character was in (I believe) two out of the three earlier Arcadian books, although I don't much remember him.

Matt Kearns is a rock-star college professor who thinks it's perfectly acceptable to sleep with his students.

Um. No.

That was one giant, inky black mark against him right from the get-go. One of the "job perks" is having an undergraduate *paramour du jour*. Matt and Megan are having *teh sexiest times evah* in the pool (she ends up "kneading his groin" like pizza dough) when he's irritatingly called away to do that adult thing called Work. A mysterious woman named Carla Nero calls ... from the CDC, and begs for his help. For, as you know, Matt is the best and most brilliant paleolinguist on the face of the earth. He is the only one who can decipher a mysterious language used by a "Lost Tribe" of the Amazon. But why the rush?

Well, the last guy to visit that tribe? His skin ... fell off.

The CDC figures it's some sort of throwback scabies mite, except instead of being embarrassing, this little scabies guy shuts down your pain receptors and then liquifies your flesh, so you start going all Wicked Witch of the West. Death, obviously, inevitably follows. (Except for in the last third of the book but let's just ignore that now, mmkay?)

Unfortunately, the Brazilian government, alerted to a possible source of pandemic emanating from deep within the Heart of Darkness (whoops, sorry, wrong continent, wrong genre), has declared a quarantine. Even the CDC can't get in to help. But! Convenient plot device alert! A big-shot Hollywood director/producer named ~~Evil Stephen Spielberg~~ Max Steinberg charts one of his private jets, allowing the CDC team to tag along with his own group on scientists. You see, the chappie who started this whole business, Jorghanson (melted-skin man), sold the "rights" to the archeopteryx to Steinberg. Not quite sure how that works, but whatever. It conveniently means that Steinberg wants to go get another bird for a film to make gabajillions of dollars.

So, Steinberg, his team of Redshirt scientists, plus Matt, Megan, and Carla, zip down into the Scariest Jungle on Earth: "the Gran Chaco ... to its very heart--the Boreal--one of the last secretive, primordial areas in the world." Here, they boast such attractions as "two-foot long centipedes or the Brazilian Wandering Spider." It's basically like Jurassic Park for scary bugs. Except, instead of worrying about venomous snakes, dehydration, or, you know, the flesh-liquifying Scabies of Doom, Matt gets all peeved that Megan seems to be flirty-flirty with a buff dude on the expedition named Kurt. I mean, doesn't "Kurt" just scream "muscular manly-man"?

Unfortunately, they're soon set upon by Mesothelae spiders, giant and deadly, who kill a wee little horse ancestor and suck its bodily fluids out, kind of like an arachnid chupacabra with a more varied diet. And things only get worse from there.

History repeats itself in that they find the "lost tribe" completely wiped out because Captain Amazing (i.e.

Jorghanson of the Liquified Skin) was a measles carrier. The bodies, however, are all gone, and I don't think that that is ever fully explained. Matt and Megan magically translate the ancient pictograms and learn that the water inside this Special Area of the jungle nullifies the effects of the Scabies of Doom. Whilst in there, they encounter even more animals that should have died out millions of years ago, all of which are homicidal.

Anyway, long story short (jeez, this review is massive already), they get the cure, which is a vial of the *magical water* at the cost of pretty much everyone's lives except Matt and Megan (duh), Carla of the CDC, Kurt the Muscle Man, and a random Norseman (I think?) who is a scientist. They return to the US only to find that the pathogen has spread and basically completely wiped out life as we know it. There are roving bands of people with no flesh (wait, I thought once your skin fell off, you died. Isn't that how this usually works? Then how are these people alive???) who dress somewhat akin to Tuskan Raiders and murder, loot, pillage, and rampage (the cornerstones of any good downfall of civilization).

There's one particularly nasty subgroup who is under the control of a former preacher, and who has adopted REM's classic "It's the End of the World"* as their anthem, only with slightly changed words. Behold:

"This is the end of days. This is the end of your life.

Say goodbye to your husband

Say goodbye to your wife

You caused all this when you took our skins.

Now all off to hell, for your terrible sins...

This is the end of your world-ddd"

I'm sorry, but that does not scan AT ALL. And although I had nothing to do with it, I would like to apologize to Michael Stipe.

They also worship "the great goddess Angelina Jolie, may her name be forever blessed."

Sooo, in the last third of the book (I'm talking the last novella here), the tone totally changes from Quest in the Jungle/Surviving Anachronistic Beasts to Apocalyptic End-Times with Bonus Deadly Diseases. I guess now somehow the mite is airborne so you can't go anywhere unless you're doused with chemicals, and yet Matt, Megan, and Carla are prancing around and making generally Poor Decisions. The last sequences had me praying for the end of the book because it just made no sense.

I really question the 90-degree turn that this story made after books 1 and 2. Sure, the first two novellas were silly, but they were at least readable. Book 3 was just ... no. I mean, so much no in that one. If I had to give an example of everything that was ridiculous this review would take me another three weeks to write. I also don't know why Beck chose to use a character from his Arcadian universe and then create this wholly incompatible universe at the end of *The First Bird*. The world is totally destroyed. I haven't read *Gorgon* yet, but I'm pretty sure it's Alex Hunter as usual (thank you thank you thank you). How does one reconcile the two series?

Bottom line: Skip this for the love of Cthulhu and all other Old Ones. If you like the Alex Hunter/Arcadian books, you really don't need to read this. I promise.

*Fun fact: The only words I know to this song other than the title are "Leonard Bernstein!" which I yell out à la Homer Simpson.

Keith says

The third part of the omnibus ruined this one for me. The first two were a great story of adventure, exploration, discovery and lost treasures. And the third part? What amounted to a zombie apocalypse and extraordinarily stupid character decisions, particularly Carla the cdc person who nearly gets everyone killed by stopping their transport a mile from the cdc because she sees a random infected child. I wish the author limited the scope of the novel to the ancient jungle storyline.

Per Gunnar says

As you can see above this is the omnibus edition of what was initially released as three separate books. The three books are not very long though so this edition, at around 440 pages, is not really much more than one reasonably big sized novel.

It is a fairly enjoyable apocalyptic horror/thriller novel. I quite liked Greig Beck's Alex Hunter series so I thought I would have a go at this one as well although Alex Hunter himself is absent in this book. The story is a variant of the "someone brings disease into country, disease spreads, world goes to shit" theme with a few nice twists. As I wrote it is generally enjoyable reading, especially the first two parts (or books). The third part is dragging down the rating quite a lot though.

In the first two parts we get on a tour of discovery deep into the South American jungles trying to find the source of the disease and, of course, a cure. As we have become used to with this author nature have a few nasty surprises for us and not everyone that goes out comes back. The writing is good and it is nice reading.

Then we come to the third part. Here the setting changes and we more or less enter a zombie apocalypse back in the US due to the spread of the disease. Okay, I could have lived with that but the author also throws in an insane old senator and religious nutcase which I could have been without. My worst gripe though is that the team, especially Carla who is supposed to be a professional employee of the CDC, starts to behave in an utterly idiotic and unprofessional way.

The ending have a nice twist, suitable for this kind of apocalyptic story, to it although you could see it coming rather early. The book was on its way to a 7 or 8 out of 10 rating until the third part. The third part really dragged it down.

Doc says

When a fame-hungry scientist brings an impossible, living specimen of a creature long thought extinct back from the wild jungles of South America he unwittingly brings along a passenger. Something with the potential to destroy every living thing on our planet.

The infestation begins, rapidly overtaking medical resources and resisting all treatment. One woman knows the danger, Carla Nero, chief scientist of the Center for Disease Control. She makes Matt an offer he can't refuse and together they join a team heading to the deep jungle in a desperate race to locate the hidden place where the specimen was taken.

Only by finding the location of the specimen can the team – and the world – hope to uncover the secret of how to survive the ancient, horrifying parasite that has been released.

This title is a novella-length episode of The First Bird. It is also the best book in the series.

Mark Carver says

You usually know what you're going to get with a Greig Beck book. Exotic locations, horrific monsters, random sprinklings of macho trivia, and 3 out of 4 characters ending up as hamburger meat. And for the first two volumes of The First Bird, we get just that - ridiculous but fun jungle action/horror.

Then comes Volume Three. In just a few pages, the story shifts to a viral apocalypse back in the US. Serious plot whiplash, made worse by several new characters, fanatical religious cannibals, and a nightmarish view of Atlanta (home of the CDC) that feels like it's riding in on the Walking Dead's tattered coattails. I did not like this third installment at all...perhaps it could have been a self-contained book or sequel, but the significance of "the first bird" and terrifying mystique of the jungle got lost in the apocalyptic violence and prayers to the goddess Angelina Jolie (no fooling!).

Naomi Lam says

As others have said before me: the last installment is the most ridiculous semi-zombie apocalypse story out there. Oh, and whatever decision-making abilities the characters had left? Yeah, those go POOF.

I came into this book after reading Warren Fahy's Fragment series, which despite its faults was pretty great about world building - and making up creatures that go bump in the night. This? Not so. Besides the spiders - consider me automatically afraid - there was nothing in this book remotely genetically interesting.

The three-line "archaeological-genetic discovery" at the end was pretty stupid, too.

Robert Bowers says

Absolutely loved parts 1 & 2. Part 3 was a real downer. Readers of this author's Arcadian series will recognize the main character in this story. Part 3 takes place after the characters return from the jungle to what remains of the civilized world.

Other than part 3, the only other reason for the mediocre rating is one phrase the author uses in this story. The phrase "pulled a face". This phrase is used in this story a LOT. Took me a while to even figure out what the author was trying to convey. I'm still not sure, but I think the author uses this phrase instead of "made a face". I've never noticed this phrase in this author's other stories. It really makes no sense.

Lee Willie says

Good adventure novel

Really enjoyed the previous novels by Greig Beck and was not disappointed when I started this. Good cast of characters and a really interesting story made it a great read.

Kathy says

This is a horror story. Set in the same world as the author's "Arcadian" series it radically changes everything, to such an extent that for me at least it really upsets trying to fit the earlier series into the same timeline as this book. I would have to say its my least favorite book by this author so far but it would be enjoyed by anyone who likes lost worlds or apocolypse stories.
