

GULACY • GRANT

TRICKSTER

WESTERN LANDS



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Mini-series

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CONCEPT

"Steed & Peel" go to Twin Peaks.

The one thing that truly separates Man from other animals is stories. We are the only species that makes stories. Sometimes they're true, most times they're fiction, but we take them for true and build our existence around them: heaven, soul, country, destiny, honor, identity & a million other stories that form the basis of our cultures, our civilizations, our lives.

Control the stories and shape the world.

Two broken rogue CIA agents track an "urban legendary" terrorist across the Mexican border into the American Southwest, to prove themselves by putting an end to him and the plots they have yet to uncover. Unaware that he has found his way into a lost other America, hidden from most eyes, supernatural and ancient, a desolate landscape pocked by small settlements and populated by lost souls and pre-Columbian horrors.

He hunts for the elusive master of the land: a capricious, shapeshifting monstrosity from myth widely known as M'ii, the trickster. He intends to feign fealty, and open up to M'ii the land once taken from him so he can take it back, and through this create his own legend and become a creature of myth himself: a god of terror for the 21st century.

But neither terrorists nor agents recognize they're trapped in their own unconscious stories, or what M'ii really is and wants: the true face of terror.

CHARACTERS

ANSATA "ANN" CROSS:

Late '20s, looks much younger. Our focal character. Ann is of mixed Irish and Navajo descent, and while having a relatively normal American childhood growing up in San Luis Obispo, she has spent much of her life being viewed not as an individual but as a cultural representative and fighting being defined/pigeonholed by the clichés other people, particularly authority figures, impose on her Native American heritage. (Few people, by contrast, expect her to "act Irish.") A gifted linguist, she joins the CIA to prove herself, but runs up against the Old Boy Network that still controls it and finds it difficult to keep her other "gift" – for irreverence – in check, resulting in her banishment to/training with Charlie Martel in Mexico. She appreciates the informality of her new post,

but recognizes it dims her long term prospects. She fails to recognize with her new freedom she's becoming more reckless.

CHARLIE MARTEL:

Career CIA agent, late '30s. Once a top agent, now a victim of one too many managerial shifts. Still loves the job, has little stomach for Company politics. Riding out contract in relatively cushy North Mexico post, keeping tabs on drug dealers and terror suspects. Neither lazy nor burned out, but eager to avoid friendly fire, he keeps his profile very low and takes his work very seriously, while passing on his experience to a string of rookie agents, Ann Cross the latest. Sees himself as an old fashioned good guy in a world that still needs good guys but no longer wants them. He faces the uncertainty of post-CIA life with both resentment and relief, his one great desire to thumb his nose at the bureaucrats who buried him by taking down some great threat to America on his way out the door.

SANGREMANO:

Despite the nom de guerre, Sangremano (loosely translated: "Bloody hand") is a New Zealander who has reinvented himself as a phantom terrorist, becoming enough of a bogeyman that the CIA dismisses him as a fictitious cover for other terrorists to hide behind. It has gotten so seriously mentioning him is like saying you believe in fairies and Bigfoot. But his desire to be a legend feed his ambition and scope. He is not political. He imagines terrorism as the ultimate performance art, and has nothing but contempt for those he manipulates.

M'II:

The trickster spirit of pre-Columbian North America. Known by each tribe under different names and avatars – Coyote, Bluejay, Spider, Raven, Chirich, Wisaka, Iktomi, Skeleton Man, Maasawu, Hagondes and hosts of others – he can be playful or malicious, helpful or deadly, according to whim. He fathers monsters and twists realities. He has no certain name or form because he neither needs nor wants them, but all the legends agree on one thing: never trust him. If he answers to M'ii here, it's only because that's his name in Navajo culture. He and Ann recognize each other, but neither Charlie nor Sangremano can initially recognize him. He is endlessly hungry for only one thing – stories – and believes everything exists for one reason only: his entertainment.

EVERETT:

Everett Reuss, legendary figure from the '30s who went vanished into the vastness of the American Southwest and was never heard from again. He genuinely loves the "wide empty place" and has no problem with staying there forever – he still looks as he did in 1930 – but has a sense of identity so strong the land can't overwhelm it. Everett and the land are so good a fit it becomes his perfect camouflage; you can look right at him and not see him. Even M'ii is unaware of him. He's the only one who has found a way out, he just has no interest in leaving. A gentle man, he holds no malice for anyone.

STORY

Operating out of the career limbo of Nogales, Mexico, as their penance for various sins against The Company, Charlie Martel and Ann Cross spend low-impact days scanning for potential terrorism and keeping tabs on drug and human smugglers. This changes when they start hearing of a terrorist named Sangremano arranging to be smuggled into America. Unable to convince Langley that their report isn't a prank and Sangremano might be real after all, Martel and Cross try to stop the border crossing and capture or eliminate the terrorist themselves.

The coyote guiding Sangremano outmaneuvers them, and the agents are forced to pursue him across the border, into an oddly different American Southwest rife with monsters and small settlements filled with strange people. Communication beyond the area becomes non-existent. More aware of what to expect but still unprepared for it, Sangremano hunts for M'ii, the god he intends to seduce, while Martel and Cross hunt him. Strange creatures that disappear if they approach dog them from the shadows. Locals turn out to be untrustworthy. Little seems to make much sense but as the pursuit continues the players find themselves falling into recurring patterns, while losing focus on what they're doing there.

They are becoming part of the landscape. The effect grows worse when the two sides finally come to blows, resulting in them being scattered, so that none any longer have the others for an anchor. In their wanderings, their purposes, even their identities, slip from them. A violent encounter between agents and terrorist ends with all three scattered. Absent the presence of each other and the continuity/context that brought, they each fade further into "the world," their new roles of total importance, their original goals forgotten.

Though Ann momentarily succumbs, she has spent a lifetime refusing to lose herself, and that habit kicks in. But this attracts attention – from Everett, who befriends her, and from M'ii, who finds such an event very curious. Everett gives her insight into M'ii's nature, and tells her to escape if she can. But she won't leave her partner behind or leave Sangremano unneutralized.

It's too late anyway. Intrigued by her behavior, M'ii reveals himself to her, and Ann realizes he has been playing tricks on them all ever since they entered the land. M'ii precipitates a fight between Ann and Sangremano to determine who will receive an audience with him. Sangremano wins, but M'ii kills him after hearing his pitch, for no other reason than he find the terrorist boring. But he finds the notion of an "outside world" intriguing and wants Ann to show him how to get there. She fully understands how capricious and dangerous M'ii is, how he loves them like a dog loves its

toys, and can only imagine the havoc he could wreak “out there.” With Everett’s help she escapes M’ii’s view, sending him into a rage. Ann has a new quest now: to find Charlie and seal closed the door they came in through.

Everett continues to help her, taking her to Navajos who know how to seal off the other Southwest, and using his contacts to help her find Charlie. But Charlie is now under M’ii’s watchful eye, waiting for Ann to show up. Everett sacrifices himself to help Ann rescue Charlie. The agents race for the door, with M’ii hot on their trail. To make sure Ann gets out to seal the door and warn the Company of the threat, Charlie ends up staying on the other side, cut off as the door closes, leaving her with his final words: “Make them believe.”

Ann makes her way to Langley, makes her report. She has been gone for weeks. The CIA finds her story suspect, locks her up while they decide what to do with her, interrogates her steadily. She sticks to her guns, expecting to be either rendered or committed.

Then, just like that, they fire her and let her go. No more discussion. Bewildered, Ann travels across an America that now seems strange and dreamlike, transitory. Arriving home to virtually nothing, she is greeted by...

M’ii, the trickster, looking for appreciation of this trick. At first she thinks she’s still in his realm, but then she realizes the true horror of the situation: he was never trapped in that realm, he has always been here. He was, in fact, the coyote that took Sangremano across. Her ex-bosses know all about him, have since WWII, since the first mushroom cloud tore open the skies of New Mexico. We are all his toys, our world is his entertainment, and as the full numbing horror sinks in, she can only sit on the sofa next to him and watch as he gleefully sinks into the sofa to watch TV...

An espionage-modern psychedelic western-fantasy quest-horror mashup.