

Queen and Country

The Complete Series

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Queen and Country: Operation: Broken Ground

ISBN: 192999821X

By Greg Rucka

Art by Steve Rolston

Oni Press 2002

This is not James Bond. This is not "The Bourne Identity" or Tom Clancy. This is better. Operation: Broken Ground establishes the world of Queen and Country, a grittier darker look at what it means to be a spy in the modern world. Tara Chace is Minder 2 in the SIS, a British intelligence agency roughly equivalent to the CIA. She is an operative, aka a spy. She is tough and good at her job. Her boss is Paul Crocker who has the unenviable task of walking a line between keeping his agents safe while getting an inherently dangerous job done, dealing with governmental superiors who don't understand the business he is engaged in, and potential misinformation from supposed allies. In this instance misinformation from the CIA sets Chace up to perform an assassination which leaves her a target for the Russian mob. Greg Rucka explores not only Chace's reactions to having been used as a hired gun, but also her fear at being a target. There are very few black and white issues here; the world of Queen and Country is made up of shades of gray. It is good people doing bad things, for maybe the right reasons. Complementing Rucka's story line is Steve Rolston's art. The pen and ink drawings are done with minimal background detail, focusing instead on the character's expressions.

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Queen and Country: Operation: Morning Star

ISBN: 192999835X

By Greg Rucka

Art by Brian Hurtt, Bryan O'Malley and Christine Norrie

Oni Press 2002

This is the second in the series of Queen and Country graphic novels written by Greg Rucka. When the Taliban arrests foreign journalists in Afghanistan on the suspicion that some of them might be passing information to British intelligence, SIS has to react. Tara Chace is outraged at the Taliban's treatment of women, and is furious that she is not chosen for this mission, despite the obvious truth that in Taliban controlled Afghanistan she will not have the freedom of movement she needs to get the job done. While she is coping with the frustration of being left behind on a mission she feels a personal connection to, she is also forced to deal with the aftermath of events from the previous volume and her feelings of fear and vulnerability. In this volume Rucka again demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the current events shaping today's world. He also acknowledges that actions have long term consequences. Chace does not emerge from her experiences in the previous volume unmarked, her actions then continue to affect her decisions now.

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Queen and Country: Operation: Crystal Ball

ISBN: 192999849X

By Greg Rucka

Art by Leandro Fernandez

Oni Press 2003

This is the third volume of Greg Rucka's Queen and Country series. Again drawing from current events, Rucka explores the threat of terrorist groups and the fear of biological weapons. When an Egyptian with potential links to a terrorist group walks into the British Embassy and announces that he has information of interest Tara Chace is dispatched to verify his claims. What ensues is a part spy-part detective story while Chace and her colleagues try to authenticate the information and find a biological weapons plant hidden in the Sudan. Rucka also explores another side of Chace's personality through her evolving relationship with Ed Kittering (Minder 3). The strength of this series rests not only in Rucka's understanding of the complexities of international politics, and tension between those who are on the front line of the war on terrorism and those in the government who direct their actions, but also in the deft development of characters over time. Leandro Fernandez is a relatively new artist, and this is an impressive debut. His Chace is a little sexier than previously, but fortunately that doesn't mean that she has lost any of her edge or her attitude.

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Queen and Country: Blackwall (vol. 4)

ISBN: 1929998686

By Greg Rucka

Art by J. Alexander

Oni Press 2003

A British media mogul is being blackmailed by the French government for media contract rights. The

French have set up a honey trap using his daughter, Rachel, as bait. They have compromising video footage of her with a man they hired to seduce her. Tara is chosen to go to Paris because she used to know Rachel at school. In some ways it is an opportune time for Tara to be out of London, since she just broke up with Ed and things are a little tense between them at work. In other ways, this is an intensely personal case for Tara because Ed fell in love with her but she was just looking to not be alone for a little while, and her guilt over that is affecting how she deals with Rachel and her paid seducer. This is a less action packed volume of **Queen and Country**. There is more of a focus on introspection, and who the characters are on their off time, and perhaps most importantly on who they aren't. J. Alexander's black and white line drawings in this volume are exquisite. He pays a lot of attention to the shades of expression, and to what is not being said out loud by the characters. Tara particularly is not a character who is particularly verbally expressive, and J. Alexander had made her body language and her face speak for her.

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Queen and Country: Storm Front (vol. 5)

ISBN 1929998848

By Greg Rucka

Art by Carla Speed McNeil

Oni Press 2004

Reading this volume it occurs to me, not for the first time, that I don't want Tara's life. When Minder 3 dies unexpectedly in Caracas everyone in the department is affected, none more so than Tara who was sleeping with him and possibly a little in love with him. There is an immediate assumption that he was murdered, and it is almost harder to accept when his death is revealed to be a result of natural causes. In the midst of this shake up Tara and the new Minder 3 are sent to Tbilisi to observe and investigate the kidnapping of Lasha Karpin, Vice President of a Russian technology firm and son of Valery Karpin (see **Queen and Country: Declassified**). When things go pear shaped, as things are wont to do, Weldon orders Crocker to call them back, but Crocker manages to play the game better. I didn't like the artwork in this particular volume. Tara looked a little too rounded to me, but when I expressed that opinion to Robin she disagreed with me and liked the art work a lot, so it's a matter of opinion. The image I have of Tara is always angular because that, to me, is a reflection of her character. This Tara was still tough as nails even in grief, but she wasn't particularly visually angular.

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Queen and Country: Dandelion (Volume 6)

ISBN: 192999897X

By Greg Rucka

Art by Mike Hawthorne

Oni Press 2004

Sometimes your enemy doesn't come from the outside. Sometimes your enemies are the very people you should be able to trust the most. When C has a stroke, it opens up the position of Chief of S.I.S. Crocker and the Minders get caught in the vicious competition between different departments in the service to grab

the influential position. On top of internal political machinations there is upheaval within the Minders. Ed (Minder 3) died of an aneurysm and his replacement was killed during his first mission. Wallace is thinking of leaving the Minders, leaving Tara as Minder 1. She insists that she doesn't want the job, but Wallace calls her on it. Ultimately she wants Crocker's job, and this volume is an interesting insight into what that will mean for Tara. I was as ever impressed by Greg Rucka's economy of language and complex plotting. Mike Hawthorne also impressed me with his artwork. His characters are long lean people, who are distinctly British without being caricatures. He has captured the nuances of Tara and the differences in her face and body language when she is working a case, when she is just working and when she isn't working at all.

N/B -- as far as I can tell *Gentleman's Game* falls sometime after this volume in the chronology of *Queen and Country*

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Queen and Country: Declassified

ISBN 1929998589

By Greg Rucka

Art by Brian Hurtt

Oni Press 2003

There aren't many career advancement opportunities for Minders, assuming you survive long enough to need them. One of the only options for Minders is to become Director of Operations which makes this book particularly interesting as an indication of who Tara might become, and an examination of why Crocker is who he is. This volume of **Queen and Country** takes you back to 1986, during the height of the Cold War when Crocker was still a Minder and his mission was to help Valery Karpin escape from East Germany. The consequences of what happens that night will reverberate through the years and are influential in shaping how he acts when he becomes Director of Operations, and perhaps explains some of the leeway that he allows his Minders. Hurtt's artwork is full of detail, without being overwhelming. He is particularly skillful when it comes to showing the toll that being a Minder exacts on both the Minder and their family. The faces and body language of his characters are exhausted and weighed down with the things that they can't or won't say.

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Queen and Country Extra!

A Gentleman's Game

ISBN: 0553802763

By Greg Rucka

Bantam 2004

Just to be clear, this is not a graphic novel. Greg Rucka started his career as a mystery/spy novel author. He has had astounding success in the graphic novel/comic field, but he also continues to write non-graphic novels (although I have no idea where he finds the time). **A Gentleman's Game** is a spy novel set in the **Queen and Country** universe. You don't have to have read the graphic novels to follow the plot, and I

doubt that you will have to have read this novel to follow the plot of the next volume of **Queen and Country**. However, if you're looking for a **Queen and Country** fix, this is a good place to get it. Greg Rucka again demonstrates his finely nuanced understanding of both foreign politics and the internal chicanery of inter-departmental politics. **A Gentleman's Game** is a well written, fast paced and smart political spy thriller.

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