



## Mardock Scramble

*Tow Ubukata, Edwin Hawkes (Translator)*

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*Why me?* It was to be the last thought a young prostitute, Balot, would ever have... as a human anyway. Taken in by a devious gambler named Shell, she became a slave to his cruel desires and would have been killed by his hand if not for a private investigator and his self-aware Universal Tool, Oeufcoque. Now a cyborg, Balot has not only physical powers, but the ability to disrupt social environments. She chases after Shell, his partner-in-crime Boiled, and faces down a variety of insane villains in this pulse-pounding cyberpunk noir adventure.

## **Mardock Scramble Details**

Date : Published January 18th 2011 by Haikasoru (first published January 4th 2011)

ISBN : 9781421537641

Author : Tow Ubukata , Edwin Hawkes (Translator)

Format : Paperback 775 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Cyberpunk, Cultural, Japan

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## From Reader Review Mardock Scramble for online ebook

### Bryan says

I didn't actually finish this book. I may go back to it at some point, but for now I am done with it.

It's hard to assign fault when reading a translated novel. Is it a bad novel or a bad translation? I have a feeling that with Mardock Scramble it's a combination of the two.

The book has lots of good ideas going on, but the actual flow of the story and the writing style is boring. A hundred pages in and not caring at all about any of the characters or what's happening in the story generally means that I'm not going to finish a book.

One of the most glaring problems with Mardock Scramble, which other reviewers have mentioned, is the over-abundance and reliance on egg metaphors. *Rune-Balot* our heroine, named after Balut, the asian egg delicacy; *Shell-Septinos*, the bad guy; *Ouefcoque*, Balot's companion; Dr. *Easter-as-in-egg*, Ouefcoque's partner; *Dimsdale-Boiled*, another baddie, as well as other characters named after various states of cooked eggs- hard, medium, etc. The endless references to shells and all things eggy grows utterly tiresome within a hundred pages, I can only imagine how much I'd be pulling my hair out after 700 or so. Heck, it's right there in the title, *Mardock Scramble*!

Metaphor is useful, effective, good, enjoyable, but when taken to such ridiculous and contrived extremes, it's off-putting.

Sorry Mardock Scramble, but you're going to the bottom of the pile.

As a side note, the Mardock Scramble manga now being published, volume 3 soon to arrive, is far, far better than the source material, at least the first two volumes are.

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### Tara says

I probably would have enjoyed this a bit more as an animated thing. But the level of depravity this sinks to was utterly and completely horrifying. I don't think you can be too prepared for that going into this. I had to stop after the first book.

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### TinyNeuron says

Weird, sad, up-lifting and action packed. I love the characters - their resilience, their will to survive. It makes me empathize with them.

Something kept bothering me about the translation. I wish a better translator was hired. I felt that some points that needed to come across from the author were lost in translation.

Despite that I still enjoyed reading it. This book is definitely not for everyone because they would say it's boring, they don't understand, badly translated and so forth. However if you are planning on reading this, read it without judgement and do so in a leisurely pace. It's not a book that bombards you with so much adrenaline every time you turn the page. It's one of those books that asks for patience and understanding of the story and the characters.

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### **Peter Marendéak says**

Na ez pontosan olyan volt, mintha egy animét olvastam volna (nem véletlen, hogy van is belül adaptáció), annak minden erősségével és gyengeségével együtt. Ami inkább zavaró volt (a megszokott kliséken túl), hogy volt benne egy nagyon elhúzott műfaji váltás. Mintha visszaugrottunk volna pár évszázadot és a szerző az alapján kapná a fizetését, hogy milyen hosszú a megírt történet. Fele ilyen hosszan bőven elegendő lett volna.

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### **Gustav Bertram says**

I'm always amazed at how intense and dark Japanese "light novels" are. This is a cyberpunk novel in the best sense of the genre. Large megacorporations, amoral hustlers, innocents with great power, everyone scrambling for a place in the world.

If you like cyberpunk Anime, I would egg you on to read this book.

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### **Evan says**

I can honestly see why there's a bunch of mixed reviews for this novel. This novel actually consists of *three* parts.

The first part was amazing, and I remember being fascinated by all the technology and the characters, especially Balot and Oeufcoque. I actually had read part of the manga first, and I was completely mind-blown by the fact that there was a novel and rushed to read it. But honestly, this was a really lengthy novel.

The second part is where the novel fell short of my expectations. I had read several reviews before starting it, and I was aware of the dreaded "casino" section. Wow, I could see why people DNF'd at that point. Ubukata strangely describes how the casino works, how Balot could "conquer" each game easily. Sounds cool?

No, not when Ubukata starts giving out a bunch of textual mumbo-gumbo stuff. He basically explained all of the mathematical aspects and how chance could be taken advantage of, blah blah. It was a boring mess. All the magic from the previous chapters had completely disappeared, and I found myself reading something almost akin to a textbook. A textbook that told me how casino games worked. I got a bunch of numbers and percents and formulas.

At that point I was barely reading and just simply skimmed through. I understand that Ubukata wanted to show the reader how it worked, rather than do something like "Bam! Oh, look, Balot totally won all these games somehow!" But seriously, he could have found a better balance between the two.

The third part was a bit better, but the beginning was still on the casino part (ugh). But the feeling I had while reading the first part wasn't really there anymore.

If you read this book, do yourself a favor and just skim the casino part. Don't even try to understand it. On a final note, I did love this book, just not the casino part.

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### **Osiris says**

Pues este es un poco diferente a los que había leido, se trata de una onda cyberpunk-noir (por llamarle de alguna manera) sobre Rune-Balot, una prostituta de 15 años a quien Shell, su "dueño", decide asesinarla al quemarla viva dentro de un carro, las cosas no funcionan como quería y Balot es salvada por el Doctor Ester y Oeufcoque-Penteano (un ratón dorado [¡en serio!]) quienes le dan una segunda vida dentro de la iniciativa Scramble 09 (algo así como protección a testigos, solo que utilizando tecnología casi ilegal con el fin de lograr que la víctima viva), y es así que se inicia una historia de venganza de parte de Balot que la lleva a averiguar quienes son realmente el Dr. y Oeufcoque, como surgió el Scramble 09, quien es el misterioso asesino llamado Boile que Shell contrató para que lo protegiera, y bueno, muchas cosas más.

El autor no se tienta el corazón en pintar un mundo decadente y enfermo, empezando con Balot como una prostituta a su corta edad, la acción es interesante (cuando la hay), aunque algunos dialogos no son tan buenos, lo que si empuja mucho el libro es la relación entre Oeufcoque (el ratón dorado) y Balot, por otro lado, espero que les gusten los juegos de azar porque leerán mucho al respecto.

Y pues bueno, a mi me gustó mucho, lo recomiendo a quien quiera algo que le recuerde a Blade Runner pero con un toque de anime.

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### **usagi ?? says**

Book 1 of 3:

Since the US edition was published with all three books in one (yay omnibuses!), I decided to break down my reviews book by book since there is a LOT of action in each different volume. I also used the original art for each volume since it's not included in the US edition and I like this art better.

That said, this first book in the first trilogy of the “Mardock” saga is a refreshing slap of cold water in what's been a rather tepid pool of sci-fi novels around the world within the last decade, and I'm just so glad it FINALLY got translated into English (since, for me at least, there are some parts of the book that are still hard for me to interpret from Japanese to English, but that's my failing with kanji understanding and all) so more people can enjoy Ubukata's awesome story.

First, it's wonderful to see the usual idea of what can be called the “Ghost in the Machine”-inspired cyberpunk of girls-remade-as-cyborgs genre being twisted with the use of Rune-Balot, a child prostitute/porn-star being turned into something at her own request, though the full ramifications of this request don't hit home with her (and with the audience) until the end of this first book. Balot has been used and abused her entire life, and now she has a chance to take it back with the help of Dr. Easter and Oeufcoque, the Golden Mouse (who later becomes her partner).

Unlike the policewoman Katsuragi from the famed “Ghost in the Shell” who is a cyborg from the start, this is the story of a human girl becoming something more – a reverse process which is interesting to behold in of itself. Ubukata takes this abused girl who has hidden inside of her “shell” her entire life and brings her out of it to show her how to protect herself against those who would keep abusing (as in Shell, the actual villain here in these books), but trying to temper this with not abusing the power that she’s been given so that she doesn’t become what she hates.

This series of books at its very core is the question of what it means to be human with a very untraditional cast of inhuman characters – Boiled, the first Scramble, an assassin, Oeufcoque the Golden Mouse, the Living Tool, Dr. Easter, the mad scientist, and others that appear throughout the tale. We find that in the theme of “being useful”, we are at our most human – as shown by Oeufcoque and Balot, who bond very intensely as the hunt of Balot’s (second) life begins. The idea of the Scramble 09 system is to be useful so that the technology that enables Balot (and sadly, Boiled as well) to keep on living does not become abused.

One could take this theme one step farther – as a metaphor for addiction. Addiction of any and all sorts. If you ask any addiction specialist (Dr. Drew Pinsky would come to mind as the most accessible of this department of medicine), the idea of “being useful”/”providing service” to others heals many addicts on their road to recovery. Just like Balot is broken in both body and spirit upon her reboot in life through the Scramble system, Oeufcoque and Easter’s teachings of being of service to others helps heal her and gives her purpose in life.

My final note, for this volume, is how wonderful the translation is. It made clear all of the muddy parts in my own head when trying to read the source material on its own. The adaptors/editors made this very, very easy to understand with all of its philosophical parts along with the usual sci-fi story attached, and makes it all balance out very nicely. Even if you’re not a fan of this genre, I really recommend you pick up this omnibus of the first “Mardock” trilogy (the second has not yet been licensed for translation into English, as far as I know as of this moment). You won’t regret it.

Book 2 of 3:

Oh man, that ending from the first book. I admit, I was crying by the end of it and feeling like I’d really bonded with all of the gang – Balot, Easter, and Oeufcoque – and felt like I’d been facing down Boiled and his henchmen along with him. So seeing the “bleeding gun” version of Oeufcoque there in the beginning of this second book was almost more than I could handle.

That said, this is an excellent continuation from where the first novel left off. We get some answers (finally!) about Easter’s past and Balot’s present, as well as who Boiled really is (though more of that is detailed in the prequel, “Mardock Velocity”, which came out after this first trilogy was published). We see Boiled evolve as well through his lust for regaining Oeufcoque (but not as a partner) and his willingness to stop at nothing to retake the golden mouse.

Happily, there isn’t much about Shell in this book (I’m hoping that’ll be saved more for the third book) aside from the fact that he’s about to make a major power play at the top of the Mardock social pyramid – and that even though he’s stored his memories away on a chip, Balot’s death still haunts him every single night. That was really satisfying for me. Tow really knows how and when to give his readers information, and that was proven again and again with this second book.

And then, of course, the cliffhanger – which really isn’t a cliffhanger in this case, but at least I’ve learned how to gamble according to data modeling on how dealers behave. I guess what really is wonderful about

this second book (at the end of the day), is Balot's willingness to push forward in her quest for justice against Shell, no matter how much it hurts her. We see the evolution of her as a person, regardless if she's more than half metal at this point. Her love of Oeufcoque and her wonder over making friends in Paradise was wonderful to behold, and I hope that Tow continues on this cant for the rest of the series.

#### Book 3 of 3:

You know, I was pretty sad when I finally got to the end of this series. I kept wanting more adventures with Easter, Balot, and Oeufcoque, and the end itself was really touching. I mean, I was actually kind of crying. I'm not sure if it's my wacky hormones or what, but the end itself was a total emotional cliff-hanger. And even if painful, the ride was absolutely wonderful.

We finally get to see Boiled and Balot's final showdown (as well as seeing Shell finally get his own through a strange twist of fate via Boiled, Oeufcoque, Easter, and Balot) – and that in itself was pretty thrilling and satisfying. The final chapters of the book are spent in the epic gun battle, much like a showdown like you'd find in a western, between Boiled, Oeufcoque, and Balot – and even though it was really, REALLY violent (and pretty graphic – body parts everywhere!), the entire trilogy was really building toward this. Balot needed closure, and not just with Shell, just as Boiled grew increasingly unhinged and likewise needed closure with his old partner Oeufcoque.

And now, I really REALLY want to read the prequel trilogy, "Mardock Velocity", which is pretty much all about Boiled's origins and the invention of the Scramble 09 technology. That hasn't been optioned yet for US translation, but I hope it will be soon. I'm also kind of pissed that this series got ignored by US sci-fi awards this year – it won multiple awards in Japan, and the translation has been overlooked. And that's really sad, because this translation is pretty fantastic, if I do say so myself. If I can find the prequel trilogy via book-off or ebay or something, I might just try to read it myself, confusion over kanji or not.

At the end of the day, this book is all about one thing – the will to live. Does one have it? What does it take to have it? What is the cost of having it? "Mardock Scramble" explores this question very consistently all throughout the trilogy, and the evolution of such a decision (to live) through the character of Rune-Balot and her relationship with Oeufcoque. It really is a masterpiece, and I'm not just saying that. Ubukata did a great job in his emotional hook, and I literally could NOT put this book down.

Lucky for you, Haikasoru/Viz has released all three books in one omnibus format. If you want to try something fresh and new, please, please, please try out this series. You won't be sorry, and you won't look at sci-fi the same way ever again.

(crossposted to [librarything](http://librarything.com), [shelfari](http://shelfari.com), and [witchoftheatregoing.wordpress.com](http://witchoftheatregoing.wordpress.com))

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#### Jason Seaver says

Tow Ubukata's sci-fi thriller starts out with a bang, throwing a crew of vicious criminals, cool tech, and nifty sci-fi ideas together in a motley stew and moving it along with a variety of nifty, ultra-violent action sequences, but it eventually bogs down with long bouts of philosophizing and inaction, nearly grinding to a halt with an interminable sequence wherein the heroes enter a casino with the intention of cleaning it out; it's something like 300 pages (out of 775) that falls terribly flat for audiences that don't buy into the glamor and mystique of such places. It's a huge chunk of a large book that could have been spent on much more interesting parts of its future world or developing the main character.

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## Buse says

Tells about a young girl who was abused by her father and became a prostitute. The scene is a dytopia, in which the heroine is saved from death and now has a physically advanced cyborg body. We see a sad world filled with incredible high-tech. The storyline was jarring: It includes child-abuse, violence, hopelessness, rejection by society, murder and twisted characters in every possible way. The characters are unique. The heroine's strength and the relationship between her and the universal tool Oeufcoque were impressive.

(In my opinion) The book is about her fight to accept her own existence and value herself, perhaps about finding a place for herself in the world. She tries to win against the guy who took advantage of her and forced her to become a prostitute.

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## Staticblaq says

I'm not really sure what happened with this series of 3 stories. It only takes a few pages before the readers brain settle comfortably into the futuristic world of the story, but the subject matter was anything but comforting. Initially, this marked the story out as an edgy perspective. A fifteen year old babydoll prostitute with a sad background of paternal sexual abuse, is intentionally burnt alive by a psychopathic man who deletes his memories. Like the 6 million dollar man, 15yo Rune is rebuilt into a superhuman cyborg and partnered with a strange dimensionally flexible mouse.

Rune battles to find purpose in her life, to feel human emotion where she had numbed herself so long, to overcome the lure of the new power she now wields within her abilities. There are some interesting threads which weave throughout the early parts of this story.

Rune's rebirth finally falters when she confronts another like herself; Dimsdale Boil, another engineered cold creation who seeks to prevent Rune from testifying against her attacker by whatever means necessary. Dimsdale singular focus is on killing, but yearns to be reunited with his former partner, and now current partner of Rune - the odd mouse.

All of this sounds fantastic and it really sets the story up early. However, once Dimsdale enters the narrative, the story settles back into a Bourne Identity kind of action packed one-dimensional pursuit. As if sensing that the story is getting away from him, the author abruptly ends the first book almost mid thought, without any resolution of any of the events. I was initially only intending to read the first volume before deciding whether to continue or not. Yet, with the way the first part is severed off, there really as little choice but to continue straight into the next part.

Oh.

I don't want to speculate too much, but I suspect the author at this stage may have been abducted by aliens. In a panic, the book's editors thought they could sneak in a rebranded copy of Gambling 101 for Dummies and hope that no-one would notice.

Seriously W.T.F.?

The \*Entire\* second part reads like Sophie's World for breaking a casino. The level of minutiae on game theory and gambling strategy; the level of excruciating detail we are told including what each hand people

hold in a game of poker. Not helping is the ridiculous premise that our three intrepid heroes enter a casino with a few thousand dollars with a strategy to win their way to a million dollars in order to get their hands on the case-cracking prize evidence. That in itself was laughable. I kept waiting for it to end, but it went on and on. I skipped and skimmed pages, but it went on, story cast aside somewhere. It only mercifully breaks when you realise you've hit the third installment. That's right - an entire volume of this series is devoted to a bullshit pantomime in a casino.

When the third part picks right up at the casino, I was ready to gouge my own eyes out.

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### **Mariam says**

#### **....Wow**

it's a good book, it really makes you think about life, death and the point of living. if you are into Sci-Fi and Slightly horrific....things then it's for you. though as a warning it is not very censored and has stuff that will make you go, say what? and want to hide in a broom closet Mardock Scramble is thrilling, murderous and at times seems to be falling of the deep end. for fellow readers who would enjoy stories like this. it's philosophical, scary, and at times will make you sit on the edge of your seats in anticipation. the characters are well developed and though the translation at times is somewhat awkward, the writing really will transport you into the characters thought process.

the story line itself is one heck of a ride, but... you might need a stomach of steel and have a good mind that isn't easily influenced. I can not stress this enough. if you don't have the guts for this, don't read it.

I must say though I especially loved the relationship between the doctor, Balot, and the yellow mouse that I can't spell the name of...at moments it seemed familial and at others...well, everyone has a different point of view.

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### **Svein Lund says**

Interesting plot, but much too long. Good characters.

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### **Neko Neha (BiblioNyan) says**

This book started off really strong. It sucked me into it with its interesting descriptions of everything, but mostly with the female character that we are introduced to. It was quite fascinating reading about how she survived a very fucked up incident in her life. I was very excited to read about how she would go on from that point in her life and what she would do to exact her revenge, or justice.

The first book does a great job of really instilling the sciencey and futuristic elements of science fiction that I enjoy. The world that Ubukata creates is simply weird and every bit wondrous. However as the first book comes to a close and the second installment begins, the story starts to run a bit dry (at least for me). It goes

into the technicalities of gambling in casinos, mostly in relation to card games. At first I found it interesting and at times amusing, the mathematical elements a bit awe-inspiring. But then it just kept dragging on until it became difficult to push through this portion of the book. I wanted to read past all of it, but I felt that I might miss out on some story development since it all relates to plot in one way or another.

Suffice to say that the second installment became brutally boring after a short amount of time. The third installment begins with a continuation of the gambling repertoire. Midway to about the last third or quarter of the book finally had a change of scenery which brought back some of the tantalizing excitement and intrigue that I had felt at the very beginning.

I don't think that Mardock Scramble is by any means a bad book. Like I said earlier, I thoroughly enjoyed all of the science-fiction elements of the piece, especially in relation to the atmosphere and world created. I just believe that the author may have lost a touch of focus half-way through, maybe he felt that he needed a filler-type of section to fill it out to a trilogy (which is what it is in Japan, not here in the US). I think if he kept certain elements clean and short, and to the point then it would have given the story a much more fluid and complete feeling.

I do recommend it if you would like to read something that is different to say the least, but just be wary of the slow mid-section. My overall rating for it is 3.5 out of 5 stars.

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