

THE BEST WEBZINE FOR SCI-FI, FANTASY, AND HORROR!

Schlock!

WEBZINE
VOL. 12, ISSUE 13
10TH DECEMBER
2017

CHARNEL

BY CT BEESLEY—
ADULTS, WHEN
MARINATED, ARE
SAVOURED FOR
PARTY
OCCASIONS...

THE KINDLY SPIRIT

BY DAVE LUDFORD—
AT TWELVE YEARS
OF AGE I KNEW VERY
WELL WHAT FEAR
WAS...

LADY BY STEVEN HAVELOCK

QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT IN HAMSTERS BY STEVE LAKER

WWW.SCHLOCK.CO.UK

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Edited by
Gavin Chappell

PUBLISHED BY:
Schlock! Publications
(www.schlock.co.uk)

Schlock! Webzine

*Copyright © 2017 by Gavin Chappell, C Priest Brumley, Gavin Chappell, Dave Ludford,
Gregory KH Bryant, HP Lovecraft, HG Wells, Steve Laker*

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Welcome to Schlock! the webzine for science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

Vol. 12, Issue 13
10th December 2017

Schlock! is a weekly webzine dedicated to short stories, flash fiction, serialised novels, and novellas, within the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. We publish new and old works of pulp sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, dark fantasy, and gothic horror. If you want to read quality works of new pulp fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!

For details of previous editions, please go to the [website](#).

Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, graphic novels and comic strips, reviews and art. Submit fiction, articles, art, or links to your own site to editor@schlock.co.uk. We will also review published and self-published novels. Please contact the editor at the above email address for further details.

Any other enquiries, including requests to advertise in our quarterly printed magazine, also to editor@schlock.co.uk The stories, articles and illustrations contained in this webzine are copyright © to the respective authors and illustrators, unless in the public domain.

Schlock! Webzine and its editor accept no liability for views expressed or statements made by contributors to the magazine.

This Edition

This week's cover illustration is Beowulf and the Dragon by JR Skelton. All images within licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons, unless otherwise indicated. Graphic design © by Gavin Chappell, logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

[EDITORIAL](#)

[CHARNÈL](#) by CT Beesley— *Adults, when marinated, are savoured for party occasions...*

HORROR

[THE KINDLY SPIRIT](#) by Dave Ludford— *At twelve years of age I knew very well what fear was...* FANTASY

[LADY](#) by Steven Havelock— *"Hurry up and bring me my tablets."* HORROR

[QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT IN HAMSTERS](#) by Steve Laker— *Explosion of reality...*

SCIENCE FICTION

[SUPERNATURAL HORROR IN LITERATURE](#) Part 9 by HP Lovecraft— *The Weird Tradition in the British Isles...* ARTICLE

[ZOMBIE REVOLT](#) by Gavin Chappell— *Arise, my legions...* FANTASY

[THE BATTLE FOR CALLISTO](#) Episode Thirty-Six by Gregory KH Bryant— *Aftermath...*

SCIENCE FICTION

[THE WAR OF THE WORLDS](#) Book One: Chapter Two by HG Wells— *The Falling Star...*

SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC

EDITORIAL

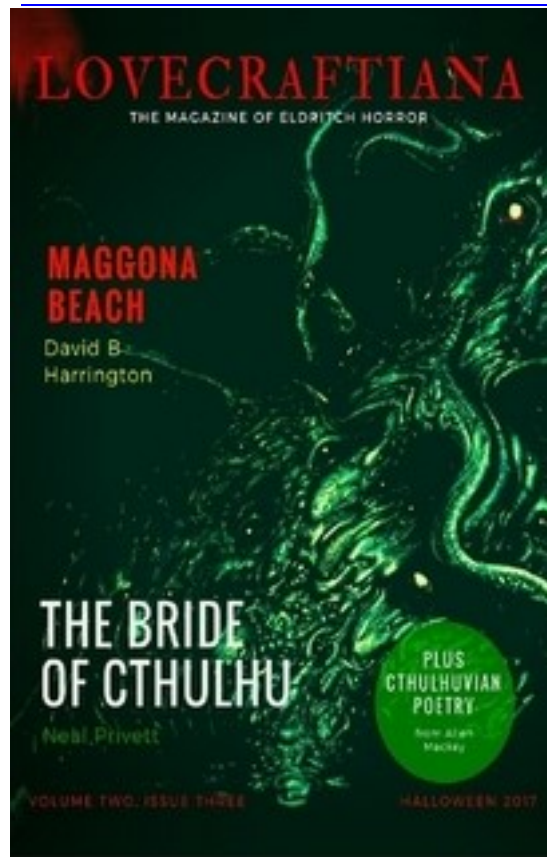
This week a young girl indulges gruesome tastes. A bullied boy finds he has an uncanny champion. A cat killer meets his match in a telepathic feline. And Simon Fry has a revelation.

Lovecraft moves on to the weird tradition in the British Isles. The adventurers lead a revolt of zombies against their bloodsucking overlords. On Callisto, the battle has ended but the adventure continues. And a star falls on suburban England in chapter two of *The War of the Worlds*.

—Gavin Chappell

Now Available from Rogue Planet Press:

[Lovecraftiana Halloween 2017](#)



[Return to Contents](#)

CHARNÈL by CT Beesley

This is a tale about an adorable little girl who is confident in colours I wouldn't normally go for. A girl whose practice it is that if you are to speak of something blue will ask why you do not talk of sapphire, thus why mention a shade of scarlet without the spilling of blood? The innocent's name is Charnèl, but not after her mother. As you will see, Charnèl likes to make friends; to take these friends back to her house, her own house, where, as you will also see, she eats them.

Her village wears its history on its straight-cut sleeve. It's a sleepy place where the dust, thicker in places, is made up of dead skin and crushed bone. It is here where Charnèl, a child, continues to lead the innocent ones to her home where she watches, forever in earnest, and with a thrill unlike any my ashen eyes have seen. She preys on children. Adults, when marinated, are savoured for party occasions, excessive company and biblical celebrations. Ear lobes, toenails and genitals make for a greater Easter feast if given time to grow. Charnèl has no feelings for the living.

I find her (as I have always found this family) beneath a mulberry tree planted by her mother, Elizabeth. She is attractive but not stunning and although I believe she feels empathy, struggles with a modern society. I pride myself on being well mannered and courteous when in her company but find that whilst trying to understand her ways, sometimes, like reading a hymn, I struggle to work out where I should rise and fall.

After following a rabbit warren of an entrance I am in her playroom, where for a long time I have been initiated into the mysteries of her house. The room itself is solitary and it hints at being cosy. Human skulls and skullcaps line the walls, inset between local stone and huddled in masses upon shelves. The candle-glow blankets them with supernatural warmth, warmth once buried alongside her mother. Never have I been to a place with so few windows. I sit and pool my thoughts by the pleasant light of an old oil lamp. This place has become immortalised. From reference books I knew it well as the house. Together we call it her house—her name lending it a certain Edwardian elegance.

Old bottles house used candles, allowing the wax to engulf the different shades of glass, night after night. The girl's face, also illuminated, is, although pale, a compliment to the rest of her features. With her square jaw framing neat, white teeth, which her red, full lips make threatening, she smiles a polite smile at her guests, all of them, old and new, dead and alive. They, in turn, return a tentative and pokey type of grin.

Charnèl speaks a different language to the local children through the fork in her tongue—another inheritance. Nevertheless, the sucking and licking and wetting of her bottom lip helps seek a translation regarding the future of the little ones she has gathered here tonight. It becomes clear from the shadows in their soft eyes that they should prepare for every eventuality.

Charnèl will always smear the conversation with healthy satire. For brief moments I feel sorry for the children, but find comfort in the fact that they do not understand. I feel it an act of heresy to mention such a phrase as: 'Can we let some go?' so I bite my own tongue and enjoy the fruits of my veins a while longer. Like catching too many fish and not throwing them back over the side before enjoying supper on the coast, we prepare; soon to be picking bones from our teeth impatiently.

The first child is beckoned to take a step forward, Charnèl's heretical behaviour maintaining ritualistic properties. The way I know her to kill her victims is random but the way she periodically arranges her skeletons is not. The child's friend stands keening in the background, a pool of water gathering at his feet and as the ritual begins I take a seat in my special chair. A stir of dust begins to float toward the candles.

All I can do now is pray. It is my turn to say grace.

As if they are a treat on a summer's day, Charnèl, forever the gourmand, impales her victims before my aching heart and like preparing a pot of tea; the pleasure is in the preparation. Their blood is kept cool in these stone cellar surroundings and so does not flow in haste down the erect posts. The wooden stakes act as small vessels on which the liquid can pour onto a patient tongue and into a waiting mouth, like sap from a tree. My host hands me a crystal goblet for me to fill. I oblige, sip, swallow, and conclude with a noisy sigh of assent. It is customary for the guest to try the beverage first. I approve, of course, before we help each other spread blood and cartilage. Our teeth crush them like gem stones. We needn't turn our blood into wine.

Whatever you, the reader, may think, my personality isn't quite as sordid and morose as it may appear. For it is the subject of bones that attracts me here tonight and on most occasions, as well as my hostess and her gracious company. I will return as long as I am invited, though how many repeat visits I have left is uncertain because however much Charnèl says she is enthralled and in love with the fabric of the limestone around her, I know she is not wedded to the idea of staying in this particular hideaway much longer. I hope that she does not choose my quaint and pure and rural idyll as the next dwelling for her clandestine nature, or yours for that matter.

This was a tale about an evil little girl: a small cup of sweetness that invites me to her house, and who continues to do so, just sometimes:

for tea.

THE END

[Available from Rogue Planet Press](#)

AUTUMN 2017

Schlock!

Quarterly

A Halloween
Celebration of
the works of
EDGAR
ALLAN
POE

**ELEVEN CLASSIC
TALES OF MYSTERY
AND TERROR**

ILLUSTRATED

BY
GREGORY KH
BRYANT

Plus Essays
and Poems from
Sandro D.
Fossemò



[Return to Contents](#)

THE KINDLY SPIRIT by Dave Ludford

At twelve years of age I knew very well what fear was. It was personified in the form of Duncan Robinson, in the year above me at Ashgrove Comprehensive School, and the beatings he meted out to me on a regular basis. Duncan was the stereotypical bully: heavily built for his age, low intelligence, and someone who loved inflicting pain and suffering for no other reason than that he could. And I was easy prey: small, thin and geeky-looking, bespectacled and a lover of books. Someone who paid attention in class, being eager to learn. My parents were indifferent to my plight; my alcoholic mother had retreated into her own sad world years ago and my father, disappointed that he hadn't managed to produce a son good at football or sports in general, had once told me that the beatings would "make a man of me." My cuts and bruises went largely untended.

The school library was my refuge, being a place I knew that Duncan would never follow me; it would be like the antichrist entering a church. I would spend my lunch breaks in there, often picking books off the shelf at random: anything from architecture to philosophy but mainly the horror and adventure stories I loved and would devour eagerly. The teacher on library duty the day that I discovered the book that would change my life was Miss Rufus, who took me for English. Miss Rufus took a keen interest in me, and suspected that I was being bullied no doubt—the cuts on my cheeks and bruised arms were a dead giveaway. I was never able to fully hide my wounds. But she said nothing, never broached the subject. Probably thought it would be character-building, too, I thought then. But I couldn't judge her too harshly. Besides, I'd heard a rumour that she would be leaving the school at the end of this term, having secured a position in her home town, the better therefore to help look after her ailing father, and I was sad at the loss of someone who at least, if only on the surface, seemed to give a damn.

It was a Thursday, a hot summer's day only a couple of weeks before the school holidays. I entered the library with shirt sleeves rolled up, revealing a fresh batch of cuts inflicted by Duncan a couple of days previously. I wore those cuts like stigmata, a certain stubborn pride, testaments to my suffering. As I pushed my way through the door Miss Rufus looked up from her desk where she had been reading her habitual Guardian newspaper.

"Hey, Brian, nice to see you! My first customer this lunchtime! Have you eaten already?"

I hadn't. My packed lunch—which I'd made myself the previous evening—had been snatched from my bag by one of Duncan's cronies in the playground that morning. He'd thrown my sandwich and apple on the floor and ground them underfoot. He'd then stomped on the plastic container, smashing it to pieces. Duncan and two other of his cronies had looked on approvingly, convulsed in paroxysms of hearty laughter.

I looked at the burgundy-coloured carpet of the library and shook my head, cheeks burning with humiliation, embarrassment and shame.

"You know, Brian, you really need to look after yourself better. You'll never grow up big and strong if you don't eat."

I remained motionless, still staring at the floor. Then Miss Rufus said, with a sudden change of subject:

“We’ve had some new books in, Brian. I’ve kept a couple aside for you that I’m sure will be of interest. Come here, they’re on my desk.”

I trudged towards my teacher, only lifting my head when I’d reached the desk. Miss Rufus pushed the two volumes towards me. The top one was a collection of Elmore Leonard’s cowboy stories, written in the 1950’s. It piqued my interest instantly; I loved those type of stories. Still do. Despite how miserable I felt, my face broke into a sudden smile. Pure escapism of the best kind.

The second volume was intriguingly entitled ‘Latimer’s Myths, Magic and Urban Legends’ and produced from me a puzzled, quizzical expression. I picked it up and randomly flicked through the pages; it was a thick book with beautiful colour illustrations of werewolves, vampires and the like. Spirits in human form. I felt a rush of excitement; this was right up my street. My smile returned once more as I muttered my thanks to Miss Rufus. She checked the books out on my library card and I took them to a nearby table, opening the book of cowboy stories first. Latimer’s could wait until later when I was safely home. It was something to look forward to.

I made a terrible mistake when the bell rang at 3.30pm, signalling the end of the school day. I decided to walk home through Dunmore Park; although it was open and exposed, somewhere I’d be vulnerable to attack, it was the shortest route home and I was eager to get started on the book of myths and legends. Sure enough, Robinson and two of his gang were there, idly sitting on the swings. There was no escape, no way I could outrun them. One of Robinson’s crew was Derek Harvey, the school athletics champion and long-distance runner for the county team. I was, once again, easy prey.

“Hey guys, look who’s turned up like a bad smell!” Robinson called to his mates. “If it isn’t our little playmate Brian Shaw! You ready for some fun, guys? Brian, I hope to hell you are, too!”

In no time at all my enemies had circled me, like wolves surrounding a wounded deer. Robinson, as always, had the right of the first punch, being the gang’s leader. His blow to my stomach made me sink to my knees; hot tears immediately flowed and stung my cheeks. Satisfied with himself, he turned to Harvey, who delivered a swift kick to my side. The force of the impact caused my glasses to fly off; Ben Hollis, the other of Robinson’s crew present, delightedly ground them underfoot. Robinson then pulled my bag from my shoulder, opened it, and pulled out the two library books.

He tore all the pages from the Elmore Leonard book in clumps of a half-dozen or so pages at a time and threw them into the air, thence to be scattered by the breeze.

“You know, Brian, you really should be more careful with school property,” he said when he’d finished his small act of cultural vandalism. “Now you really are in deep shit.” This statement provoked gales of hearty laughter from all three of my tormentors.

Next up was the Latimer volume; flicking through the pages, he seemed at first intrigued by the pictures therein (I have no doubt at all that he would have struggled with the words had he taken the time to read any of them.) After a few seconds of this he grew bored, snorted contemptuously, and prepared to repeat his page-tearing.

And that's when it happened.

Try as he might, those pages resolutely refused to be torn away. He screamed in helpless frustration which quickly turned to humiliation.

"What the fuck's... going on here...fucking thing... die!"

The book refused to oblige. Robinson looked at his two companions, as if seeking help, or some sort of help at an explanation. None was forthcoming; his comrades were looking on in stunned disbelief, speechless, motionless. But the book hadn't finished its resistance to Robinson's effort. My chief tormentor suddenly screamed and dropped the book, as one would when picking up something extremely hot, a dinner plate perhaps. He was now bent double, holding his right hand with his left, in the apparent extremes of some great agony.

"You weedy little fucker, Shaw, what have you done?" he screamed across at me.

Derek Harvey attempted to pick the book up from where it lay on the grass, pages flipping idly in the breeze. He couldn't, merely suffered the same treatment as his gang leader. So now I was confronted with the satisfying sight of two of my tormentors experiencing...what, exactly? I wasn't sure. Extreme pain, yes, certainly that.

I got up from where I'd folded to my knees, breath now recovered and tears subsided, walked over to the book, and picked it up, easily. No pain or hurt for me. I hadn't hesitated; it was as if I knew, was somehow subconsciously reassured, that I would come to no harm. I closed the volume, placed it back inside my bag, and calmly walked away, past Ben Hollis who put up no resistance whatsoever; in fact he even flinched as I went closer to him and meekly backed away a few steps, still with that look of stunned disbelief on his face. As for me, I felt calm; delighted with my tormentors' suffering, the tables having been well and truly turned. I knew with a deep certainty that I would never again be one of life's victims.

All well and good, you may be thinking. Another story with a happy ending, and you'd be right. But I haven't come to the really weird bit yet.

Upon reaching home I let myself in and walked into the lounge, where my mother sat staring at the TV screen. Some shit game show was on; insane, raucous laughter boomed throughout the room. I shouted at her to turn the volume down; she just turned slowly towards me, a blank, uncomprehending expression on her face, as if she didn't recognize the person who stood regarding her. There was little point asking what was for dinner, I knew there wouldn't be anything prepared until my father got home from work and that wouldn't be for another hour or so. I decided to go to my room and do a little reading to kill time.

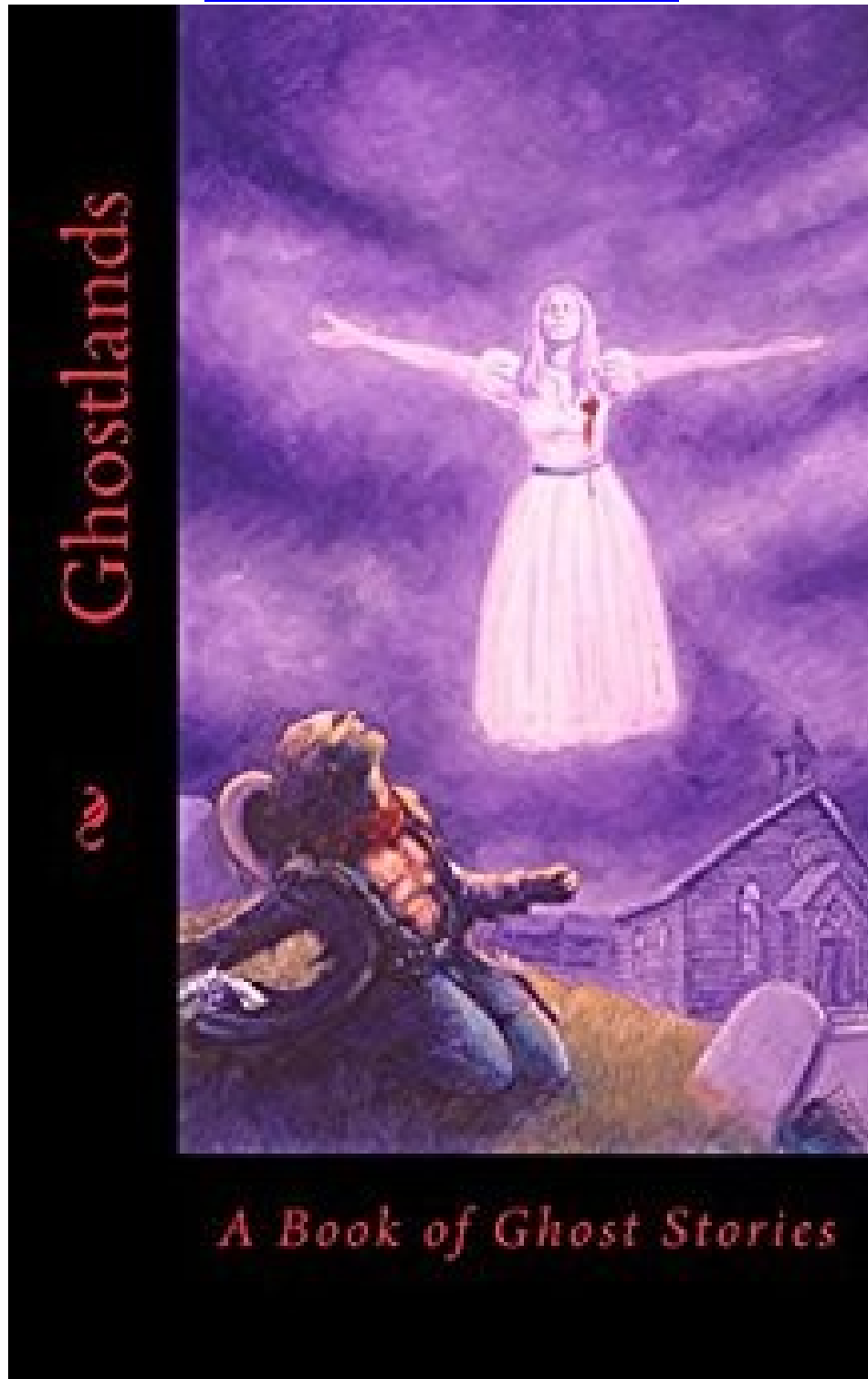
I sat on my bed, reached into my bag, and pulled out Latimer's. Opened it at random. Only...it wasn't at random. It was as if I was meant to open the book at that page. The section of the book I'd opened up at was entitled 'Urban Legends'. I stared in total disbelief at the colour picture that preceded this particular narrative. It was a full-colour print of a woman in portrait: long black hair, deep blue eyes, hands folded on her lap. The book stated that the name of this particular legendary being was Drusilla Hart, and a quick scan of the text revealed that she was said to have been a kindly spirit in human form who helped people in the hour of their deepest and direst need.

Drusilla Hart.

But I knew her by another name; for staring back at me was the smiling face of Miss Rufus.

THE END

[Schlock! Presents: Ghostlands](#)



[Return to Contents](#)

LADY by Steven Havelock

Clive was suited in a thick metal exoskeleton. It had rapid fire machine guns on each arm and shoulder fired rockets.

He saw the alien rushing towards him.

He opened fire and the alien exploded into a million pieces. Clive lived for moments like these.

All of a sudden, he felt a tinge of sadness. His diminutive 5ft2 frame would never have made it into the military. Hell he wasn't even any good in the soccer team he had used to play in...And eventually...Eventually they had let him go

Clive, we can't use you as a defender any more, you're just not any good. The strikers run rings round your defence...

Another tinge of sadness hit him when he thought about the pretty girls who used to stand at the side of the pitch, cheering on the players.

Why can't I be six foot? Why can't I be any good at physical activities? Why can't I get a girl like Julia...Oh, Julia...

He had dreamed about Julia ever since he had laid eyes on her all those years ago.

Instead, I stay home and play games that I should have grown out of years ago...

I've been spurned but once Aunt June pops it I will have a small fortune, I won't need to dream about Julia then. I will be able to get someone even prettier.

"Clive!"

His reverie was suddenly interrupted.

"Yes, Aunt June!"

"Hurry up and bring me my tablets."

The next night

Clive was playing on his games console. *I nearly completed this mission!*

"Clive! My tablets! You know I have to take them on time!"

What? Not now, you stupid old bat! Don't you know I've nearly finished the fifth mission!

“Coming, Aunt June,” said a flustered Clive.

Stupid old prune! The doctor said she wouldn't last two months and now it's been eight!

Hisss...Hissss...

“Out of my way, cat!”

“Clive, I hope you aren't thinking bad thoughts. You know Lady knows when you are.”

Lady this...Lady that...As soon as you kick the bucket I will have Lady put down.

“Clive! Where's my water! You know I can't take my tablets without my water!”

“Sorry, Aunt June, just bringing it now,” said Clive.

Stupid old bat, just drop dead and give me my inheritance. God knows I've worked for it long enough!

Aunt June took her tablets. Clive went back to playing his game in the next room. All Aunt June could hear were explosions and gunfire.

“Clive, you're wasting your life playing that thing!”

“Yes, Aunt June,” shouted Clive back. *Stupid bat, just let me play!*

To Clive it seemed like five seconds later but it must have been longer. *I been doting on this retard for the best part of eight months. I just want her to kick the bucket so I can get her fortune. God! What I wouldn't do with all that money, nice car, sharp clothes and then I would be able to get any woman I wanted, even Julia...*

He thought of Julia again.

Last Valentine's day, I spent a fortune on twelve red roses and chocolates and what did she do...Laugh in my face.

At first, she had found it funny, thought it was a joke but then she had noticed the expression on Clive's face and knew it wasn't a wind up. The words she had said then would always stick in his head.

I don't think we are right for each other.

Those words would forever haunt him.

Not right for each other?! His face had turned red with rage. *Not right for each other?!* He had repeated and then stormed off.

He felt angry. Julia had lived two houses away from his and they had been good friends when they were growing up. *That must account for something...But no...Not right for each other...*

I wanted to kill Julia there and then but I didn't even have the guts to do that! Instead I poisoned Sammi, her pet cat, with rat poison.

I tried being nice! I spend money and bought flowers, but once they find out I don't have a steady job and rely on a small handout from my great aunt each month, the women-just don't hang around!

"Clive!"

"Yes?"

"Now, Clive, bring me my insulin!"

"Yes, Aunt June," said Clive.

"No, I mean now!"

"Yes. Give me a second please, Aunt June."

Clive ran to the next room and picked up the quick pen insulin injection. He had injected Aunt June in the stomach many times.

What if? I turn the dose of the quick pen up and give her ten times the normal dose? She would likely die and nobody would question...After all I'm a devoted relative...And she is so very old...

With the idea in his mind, he picked up the insulin quick pen and went to Aunt June's room.

"I got your pen right here, Aunt June."

Hiss...Hiss...Hiss...

Stupid cat! Out of my way...I will be rid of you sooner rather than later now. Just got to remember where I put that rat poison, he thought.

"Clive! You aren't thinking bad thoughts again, are you?"

"No, not at all, Aunt June."

"Clive, you know Lady can tell when you are thinking bad thoughts!"

"I will give you your insulin now, Aunt June."

Aunt June pulled off the bedcovers. She was in her white night dress. Clive dialled the number on the insulin pen all the way to the top. Aunt June lifted her night dress slightly so a small patch of her stomach was showing.

This is it! I mean to get my inheritance from this old bat!

Just as he was about to inject Lady jumped up and scratched his hand making him drop the insulin.

“Stupid cat!” he screamed.

“Lady thinks you are thinking bad thoughts again.”

“Aunt, I will just go and put the cat outside the room.”

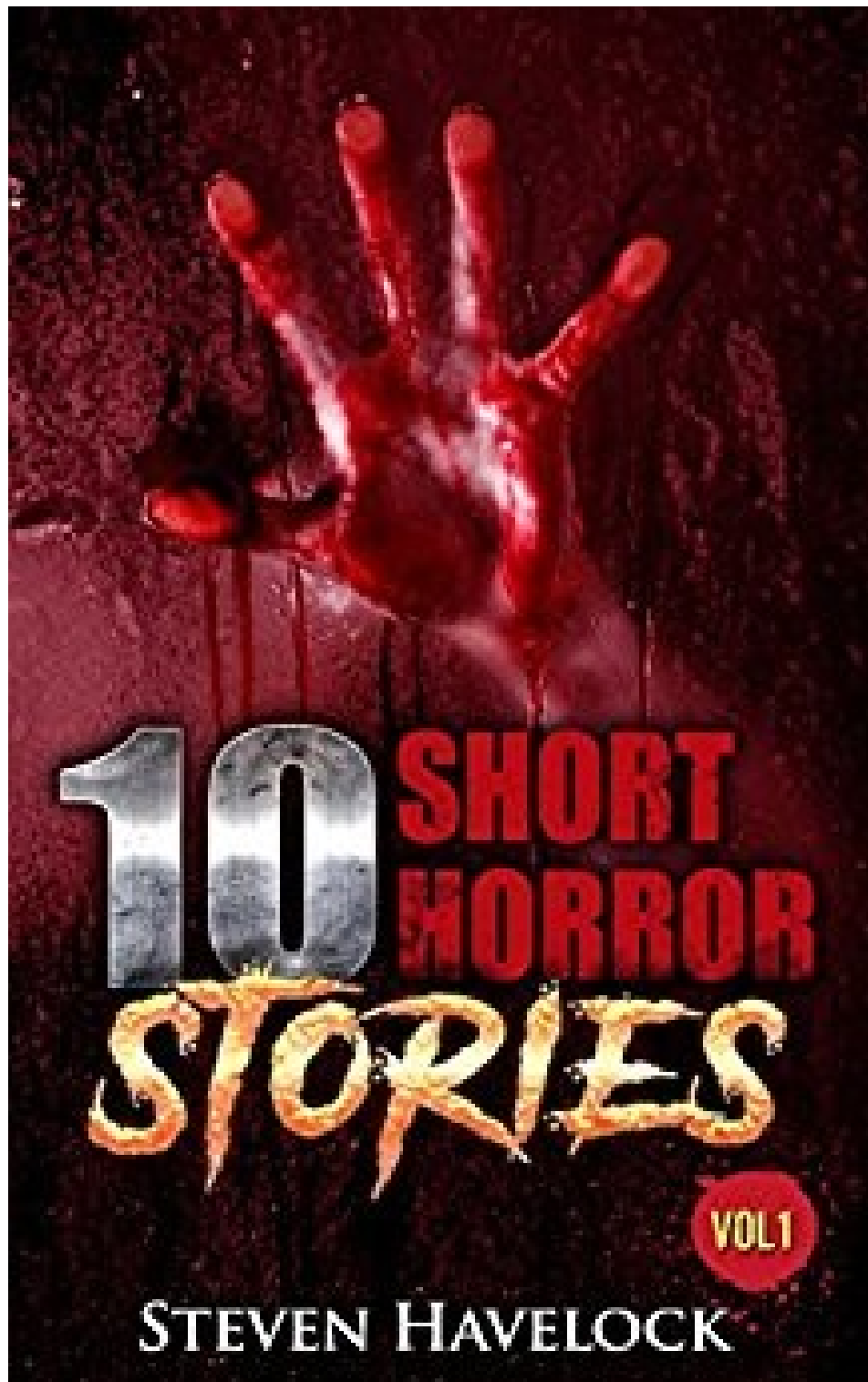
Lady jumped onto the window shelf. The window was open all the way and a cold wind was blowing in.

Clive made a hasty grab for the cat, but it jumped out of the way. As he missed his foot hit something and he stumbled forward.

He screamed as he fell through the second story open window.

THE END

Steven Havelock's books are available from [Amazon](#).



[Return to Contents](#)

QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT IN HAMSTERS by Steve Laker

Where writers write is usually assumed to be a solitary place, and that's true of me. My solace was to be found with a veterinary doctor, and a universal translation device called the Babel fish. How these came to be here could be found in two parents and other stories entirely. Their relevance to this story, was as my guides, both personally and as a writer.

A good story should be more showing and less telling, but to save much of the latter, it was specifically Doctor Hannah Jones' degree in human psychology (even though she's a vet), and my wonderment of the Babel fish (wondering how it actually worked) which are relevant to this fable.

So there I was, a writer with some powerful tools for fiction, waiting for the next story to walk in.

"Do you want to know who's next, Simon?"

"No," I replied, "I like to keep the suspense going for a while."

"But," Hannah said, "you read the patient list earlier, so I know you already know. I thought you might want to know for your story." I wondered for a moment who was writing this.

"Yes," I agreed, "but *they* don't know yet, the readers."

"Which is why," Hannah started. "Oh, never mind." She stopped. "What are you hoping to get from this one?"

"Well," I said, "besides the input of some animals, I'm always wondering what makes the Babel fish work."

"A quantum computer," Hannah said, "like that one." She pointed to a quantum computer which had been in her consulting room for as long as I'd known her, which wasn't very.

Before we'd met, Doctor Jones had invented the Babel fish, not all of a sudden, but she had. My understanding of its workings was sufficient for me to write plausible fiction, but I still wanted to understand what made it work, so that I could show I'd researched this.

The fish was reliant on the quantum computer, and my knowledge of the quantum world allows me to appreciate how those work: essentially, a conventional computer works on binary code, bits of data which can be either 0 or 1, yes or no, black and white. The quantum world is much more cosmopolitan, and in a computer, each bit exists as the two possible states simultaneously, until called into action by a computation. Ergo, a quantum computer is almost infinitely more powerful than the one I use at home.

The Babel fish is a quantum computer program, which uses that enormous processing power to detect frequencies outside of normal audible range, then process them against a mind-bogglingly big database of animal sounds and human languages, before decoding it all into an

audible form. I could talk to animals with it. I wondered how it *did* that, and how much of what I'd heard had to be accepted on faith, of the Babel fish doing a good job. If a dog had told me it loved me, for example, I had to accept that it did.

"So," I said to Hannah, "who's next?"

"Oh yes," she said, clearing her throat and picking her notes up dramatically (I told her it would work better this way). "Next," she continued, "is Hannibal Lecter." We both paused.

Hannibal was only one half, with Lecter his partner. They were Roborovski, which might pass as a cyborg Russian gang in another story, but in this one they were Roborovski hamsters, belonging to a girl called Nina.

Nina was a curious girl, both in nature and the story she didn't tell, perhaps because she couldn't. I almost did a double-take when she walked into the room with Hannah, as though a younger Hannah had walked in with her older self. So struck was I, that I kept looking at the door, to see if another Hannah toddled or crawled in.

I had to trust the Babel fish to do only as it was instructed, as it apparently worked on inaudible frequencies. When I'd tested it previously, it had picked up things which might not have been wilfully spoken by the translated subject; other voices, perhaps thoughts. I tuned it to simply translate from hamster to human, placing the Babel fish headphones on my head in such a way that only I could hear the hamsters in my right ear, while listening to the room with my left for context. As far as I could tell, the hamsters were in a box which Nina placed on Hannah's consulting table.

"That," Hannah pointed in my direction, and I looked behind me, "is Mr Fry. Try to ignore him." I turned back to smile, adjusting the headphones like Princess Leia struggling with her hair. "So," Hannah continued, "who do we have here?" even though we knew. "Hannibal and Lecter", which is what we knew, "hamsters", which we also knew. "May I ask, why?" We didn't know that.

"It's my favourite film," Nina replied, even though *The Silence of the Lambs* wasn't about hamsters. She lifted a cage from the box, and in the cage was another, smaller box, some sawdust, bedding, a food bowl and a water bottle. The box within the cage, within the box, struck me as a sensible carriage solution, ensuring the hamsters were safe, and effectively at home, to reduce stress. But as Nina lifted them from the small box, I was half expecting them to be wearing face masks and strapped to a trolley. "This one's Hannibal", she said, lifting the first hamster out. "And this is Lecter," which was entirely to be expected of the second one.

Now with the relative freedom of the cage, it was obvious which rodent was which. Hannibal seemed the dominant of the two, rummaging in the bedding, while Lecter was the more observant, blinking in the light and looking around.

"So," Hannah said, "what's up with these two?"

“Well,” Nina replied, “that one,” she pointed to Hannibal, “keeps throwing shit at that one,” at Lecter. “I think he might be bored.” Nina was very intuitive, and, I now realised, had similar mannerisms to Hannah. For a moment, it was as though I was even more of a spare part than usual: Hannah and Nina were somehow the same, and so too were the hamsters. All I had was the Babel fish, so I turned the volume up in my right ear.

“Shit,” was all I heard, from a small, male voice. Then a curious thing happened:

Hannibal had indeed thrown a turd at Lecter, who peered around through the bars of the cage. Meanwhile, Hannibal was back to rummaging in the bed, occasionally storing things in his cheeks, possibly more ammunition. Lecter continued to look conspiratorial, then, when he seemed sure no-one was watching, he flung the turd back at Hannibal. “Shit, you,” he said.

“So,” someone said in my left ear. It was Hannah. “You think one might be bullying the other.”

“No,” Nina said. She was quite assertive. “I think they’re playing shit tag.” Then Hannah did something unexpected:

“Fucking hell,” she said. “You could be right. Hamsters *do* learn quickly.”

“So they’re amusing themselves,” Nina said, “or it could be love”. That seemed an odd thing to say. “But that’s my worry,” which was even more unexpected, “that they’re bored. So I wondered if you’d have any ideas on helping them learn.” I wondered how much she knew about Doctor Jones.

“Once upon a time,” Hannah began a story I didn’t know I was writing, “Mr Fry,” that’s me, “there, used to be just like Hannibal Lecter.” I couldn’t disagree, that was a good opening. Nina looked at me, looking more like Carrie Fisher than Anthony Hopkins. “He needed something to keep him occupied.” I suppose that was one way to put it. “And now,” Hannah continued, “he writes.” And that was a nice way to both end and begin things. “So I wonder,” she began again, “if the Babel fish might help in this?”

So now I really was a spare part.

I suppose Hannah *meant*, use the fish to listen to the hamsters, to get a better insight into them. Ever since she’d overcome her initial reluctance to use the fish in her work (so as to be “less confused”), and she’d realised an insight might be useful input for her. It worked like this: The Babel fish translated the animals, and I listened in, but Hannah didn’t. It was up to me, as a writer able to do such a thing, to translate that further, sort of into only what she needed to know.

“Mr Fry?” The younger Hannah was speaking to me now, and I moved the settings around on the Babel fish, hoping to confuse it. For my part, I was very confused, as though I was somehow split over the fourth dimension, with ends 15 years apart. Knowing as I did, that

Hannah had a degree in human psychology, I could be looking into a mind's future, possibly that of a psychopath. I really hoped Nina turned out like Hannah.

"Yes," I said, because I wasn't sure whether to tell her to call me Simon.

"I read about the Babel fish." I assumed she'd read Douglas Adams' *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. This Babel fish was very much connected to that, so it didn't really matter which books Nina had read.

"Oh, good," I said. "Well, this one does exactly the same. So let's see what happens."

Everyone happens in their current position, so I tuned back into the hamsters:

"Do you ever think about the bars?" Hannibal asked.

"Most of the time, they're always here. Why?" Lecter replied.

"To imprison us, or protect us? Keep us together, or keep us away from others?"

"Simon?" This was Hannah.

"Yes," I replied.

"Are they saying anything?" Nina asked.

"Yes," I said, "they are," because they were. "I just need to translate it," which I did.

Hannibal Lecter spoke at length, about fava beans (we call them broad beans), and how nice they taste, and of how that's like sharing something made by the earth, like the breaking of bread. And how their water is like Chianti, like the blood which binds us all. And about their incarceration for no crime, when their wider family were free. Then about being grateful for the gift of protected life in the cage. They philosophised, about being great thinkers given sanctuary, but unable to spread their message. It was a problem which I and billions of others would empathise with, now it was countless trillions of others, unheard, but for the miracle of the Babel fish.

While this was all going on in my right ear, the young Hannah Jones spoke to her older self, first about game concepts, then onto computers, wildlife, and the human condition. They could both be noted philosophers themselves, outside of that room's sudden connectivity of humanity, when two people meet and click.

Quantum entanglement is that which we all have with the rest of the universe, and every living thing within it. All of the matter in the universe was born of the big bang, and at the point of that explosion of reality, every sub-atomic particle was torn apart. But each retained a quantum connection to its partner, quantum physics being that everything exists in two states simultaneously. Ergo, each of us is made of the Big Bang, and every one of us contains

those fragments which are still connected to their counterparts, all over the universe. What's even more mind-bogglingly, is that the hamsters are latching on to this. But what all the other unheard voices might have to say is something I've not found out yet, so that's for another time.

"Mr Fry?" Nina was calling me now, Hannah in a previous life. This was becoming surreal.

"Yes," I said, preserving the anonymity of my addressee. "I'm wondering how to decode this."

"Aren't you a writer?"

"Well, I thought I might be."

"Well," Nina continued, "there was this time, in a shed." What kind of story was this, and who was writing now? "My cat had been at my arm a bit, and I drew something on my wrist: a pair of scissors, with 'Cut here' in Biro. And this guy I knew at the time said to do it, to cut myself." Why was she telling me this? "It makes a nice story, because he said if I did it, he'd be sad. Just that, just sad. But sometimes words carry. And he had kids he didn't see much. And if he was sad, so would they be. So I didn't do it. I couldn't do it to him. But what he said at the end really stuck: "You can only do it to yourself." And I still remember. So it's a story."

"Everyone has one. It's a brave person who tells their own," I said, to the future.

"Simon." It was Hannah who returned me to the room.

"I was thinking," I said (I was, wondering if I'd just been abducted by aliens) "it's best to just keep talking. Hannibal Lecter here seems quite well balanced and in touch with things as far as I can tell. Just keep talking while you're around them. It engages them, and hamsters are quick learners."

"Such a shame they don't live for long," Nina said, which was both deep and dark.

Hannah showed her younger potential self and Hannibal Lecter out, then returned as a single entity.

"So?" Hannah's glasses tilted quizzically.

"I think I might know how the Babel fish works," I announced. "Both this one, and the one Douglas invented."

"Connection." I wasn't sure if Hannah asked a question, or had just made one, so I agreed:

"Pretty much," I said. "You were right about the hamsters, so was Nina: they're quick learners, looking to occupy their minds. Perhaps they'll one day have trouble containing

them. And somehow, both of you were able to see into the future, without my benefit of the fish, or perhaps that's just helped me interpret things this way."

"What way?"

"That the Babel fish really does work on telepathy. That's provable now with science."

"Quantum entanglement?"

"Everything is connected, Hannah. I think I've worked out why I write it all down as well. It's because they're stories, mine and those of others, and the beginnings of many more. And we only write them down, in case we die.

"The entanglement is in our minds, because we who think, long for knowledge. And it's in what we share with others, or in my case, write. I think there's more to hamsters than meets the eye. Never judge a book and all that. It's what's inside. But that's in all of us. So what I learned, is I'm not that special, but none of us should feel trapped, which is quite depressing. So I thought about it another way."

And then I myself said something which even I didn't expect, because it just occurred to me:

"It's entirely possible, to be in love with someone and not want to reproduce with them."

"Have you been out in the sun? Your face looks a bit burned, like Richard Dreyfuss in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*." And there I was thinking I was Princess Leia.

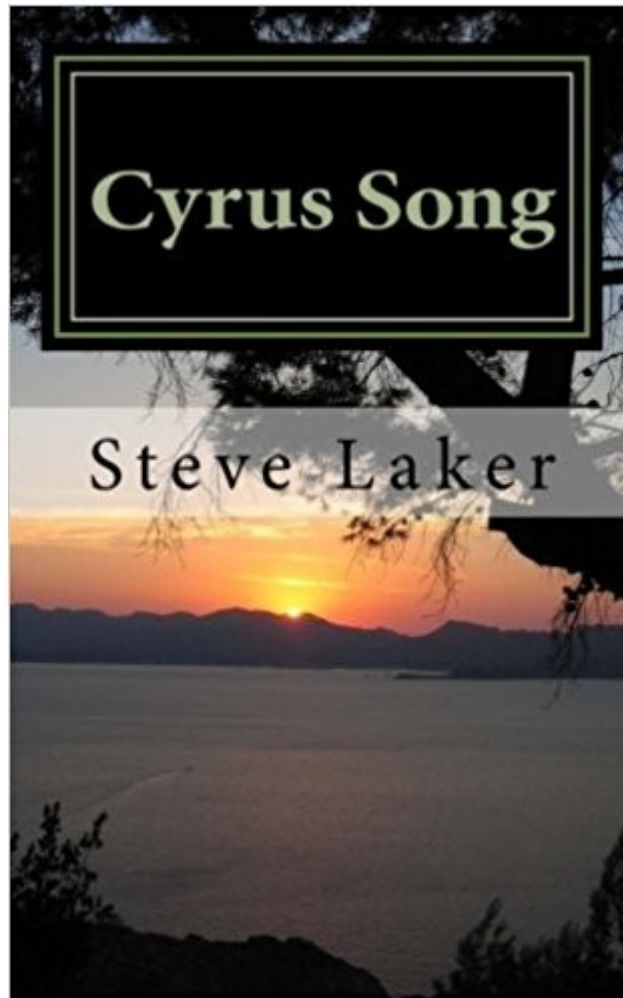
"Things happen," I said, "because people make them. The Babel fish could make good things happen much quicker, if we could all talk. Humans aren't ready to know what everyone else is thinking though, which is why I write this as fiction."

I hope Nina spoke more about this to Hannibal Lecter.

THE END

Now available from Steve Laker:

[Cyrus Song](#)



[Return to Contents](#)

SUPERNATURAL HORROR IN LITERATURE by HP Lovecraft

IX. The Weird Tradition in the British Isles

Recent British literature, besides including the three or four greatest fantasists of the present age, has been gratifyingly fertile in the element of the weird. Rudyard Kipling has often approached it; and has, despite the omnipresent mannerisms, handled it with indubitable mastery in such tales as "The Phantom 'Rickshaw", "The Finest Story in the World", "The Recrudescence of Imray", and "The Mark of the Beast". This latter is of particular poignancy; the pictures of the naked leper-priest who mewed like an otter, of the spots which appeared on the chest of the man that priest cursed, of the growing carnivorousness of the victim and of the fear which horses began to display toward him, and of the eventually half-accomplished transformation of that victim into a leopard, being things which no reader is ever likely to forget. The final defeat of the malignant sorcery does not impair the force of the tale or the validity of its mystery.

Lafcadio Hearn, strange, wandering, and exotic, departs still farther from the realm of the real; and with the supreme artistry of a sensitive poet weaves phantasies impossible to an author of the solid roast-beef type. His *Fantastics*, written in America, contains some of the most impressive ghoulishness in all literature; whilst his *Kwaidan*, written in Japan, crystallises with matchless skill and delicacy the eerie lore and whispered legends of that richly colourful nation. Still more of Hearn's weird wizardry of language is shewn in some of his translations from the French, especially from Gautier and Flaubert. His version of the latter's *Temptation of St. Anthony* is a classic of fevered and riotous imagery clad in the magic of singing words.

Oscar Wilde may likewise be given a place amongst weird writers, both for certain of his exquisite fairy tales, and for his vivid *Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which a marvellous portrait for years assumes the duty of ageing and coarsening instead of its original, who meanwhile plunges into every excess of vice and crime without the outward loss of youth, beauty, and freshness. There is a sudden and potent climax when Dorian Gray, at last become a murderer, seeks to destroy the painting whose changes testify to his moral degeneracy. He stabs it with a knife, and a hideous cry and crash are heard; but when the servants enter they find it in all its pristine loveliness. "Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognised who it was."

Matthew Phipps Shiel, author of many weird, grotesque, and adventurous novels and tales, occasionally attains a high level of horrific magic. "Xélucha" is a noxiously hideous fragment, but is excelled by Mr. Shiel's undoubted masterpiece, "The House of Sounds", floridly written in the "yellow 'nineties", and re-cast with more artistic restraint in the early twentieth century. This story, in final form, deserves a place among the foremost things of its kind. It tells of a creeping horror and menace trickling down the centuries on a sub-arctic island off the coast of Norway; where, amidst the sweep of daemon winds and the ceaseless din of hellish waves and cataracts, a vengeful dead man built a brazen tower of terror. It is vaguely like, yet infinitely unlike, Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher". In the novel *The Purple Cloud* Mr. Shiel describes with tremendous power a curse which came out of the arctic to destroy mankind, and which for a time appears to have left but a single inhabitant on our planet. The sensations of this lone survivor as he realises his position, and roams through the corpse-littered and treasure-strown cities of the world as their absolute master, are

delivered with a skill and artistry falling little short of actual majesty. Unfortunately the second half of the book, with its conventionally romantic element, involves a distinct “letdown”.

Better known than Shiel is the ingenious Bram Stoker, who created many starkly horrific conceptions in a series of novels whose poor technique sadly impairs their net effect. The *Lair of the White Worm*, dealing with a gigantic primitive entity that lurks in a vault beneath an ancient castle, utterly ruins a magnificent idea by a development almost infantile. The *Jewel of Seven Stars*, touching on a strange Egyptian resurrection, is less crudely written. But best of all is the famous *Dracula*, which has become almost the standard modern exploitation of the frightful vampire myth. Count Dracula, a vampire, dwells in a horrible castle in the Carpathians; but finally migrates to England with the design of populating the country with fellow vampires. How an Englishman fares within Dracula’s stronghold of terrors, and how the dead fiend’s plot for domination is at last defeated, are elements which unite to form a tale now justly assigned a permanent place in English letters. *Dracula* evoked many similar novels of supernatural horror, among which the best are perhaps *The Beetle*, by Richard Marsh, *Brood of the Witch-Queen*, by “Sax Rohmer” (Arthur Sarsfield Ward), and *The Door of the Unreal*, by Gerald Biss. The latter handles quite dexterously the standard werewolf superstition. Much subtler and more artistic, and told with singular skill through the juxtaposed narratives of the several characters, is the novel *Cold Harbour*, by Francis Brett Young, in which an ancient house of strange malignancy is powerfully delineated. The mocking and well-nigh omnipotent fiend Humphrey Furnival holds echoes of the Manfred—Montoni type of early Gothic “villain”, but is redeemed from triteness by many clever individualities. Only the slight diffuseness of explanation at the close, and the somewhat too free use of divination as a plot factor, keep this tale from approaching absolute perfection.

In the novel *Witch Wood* John Buchan depicts with tremendous force a survival of the evil Sabbath in a lonely district of Scotland. The description of the black forest with the evil stone, and of the terrible cosmic adumbrations when the horror is finally extirpated, will repay one for wading through the very gradual action and plethora of Scottish dialect. Some of Mr. Buchan’s short stories are also extremely vivid in their spectral intimations; “*The Green Wildebeest*”, a tale of African witchcraft, “*The Wind in the Portico*”, with its awakening of dead Britanno-Roman horrors, and “*Skule Skerry*”, with its touches of sub-arctic fright, being especially remarkable.

Clemence Housman, in the brief novelette “*The Were-wolf*”, attains a high degree of gruesome tension and achieves to some extent the atmosphere of authentic folklore. In *The Elixir of Life* Arthur Ransome attains some darkly excellent effects despite a general naiveté of plot, while H. B. Drake’s *The Shadowy Thing* summons up strange and terrible vistas. George Macdonald’s *Lilith* has a compelling bizarrerie all its own; the first and simpler of the two versions being perhaps the more effective.

Deserving of distinguished notice as a forceful craftsman to whom an unseen mystic world is ever a close and vital reality is the poet Walter de la Mare, whose haunting verse and exquisite prose alike bear consistent traces of a strange vision reaching deeply into veiled spheres of beauty and terrible and forbidden dimensions of being. In the novel *The Return* we see the soul of a dead man reach out of its grave of two centuries and fasten itself upon the flesh of the living, so that even the face of the victim becomes that which had long ago returned to dust. Of the shorter tales, of which several volumes exist, many are unforgettable for their command of fear’s and sorcery’s darkest ramifications; notably “*Seaton’s Aunt*”, in

which there lowers a noxious background of malignant vampirism; "The Tree", which tells of a frightful vegetable growth in the yard of a starving artist; "Out of the Deep", wherein we are given leave to imagine what thing answered the summons of a dying wastrel in a dark lonely house when he pulled a long-feared bell-cord in the attic chamber of his dread-haunted boyhood; "A Recluse", which hints at what sent a chance guest flying from a house in the night; "Mr. Kempe", which shews us a mad clerical hermit in quest of the human soul, dwelling in a frightful sea-cliff region beside an archaic abandoned chapel; and "All-Hallows", a glimpse of daemoniac forces besieging a lonely mediaeval church and miraculously restoring the rotting masonry. De la Mare does not make fear the sole or even the dominant element of most of his tales, being apparently more interested in the subtleties of character involved. Occasionally he sinks to sheer whimsical phantasy of the Barrie order. Still, he is among the very few to whom unreality is a vivid, living presence; and as such he is able to put into his occasional fear-studies a keen potency which only a rare master can achieve. His poem "The Listeners" restores the Gothic shudder to modern verse.

The weird short story has fared well of late, an important contributor being the versatile E. F. Benson, whose "The Man Who Went Too Far" breathes whisperingly of a house at the edge of a dark wood, and of Pan's hoof-mark on the breast of a dead man. Mr. Benson's volume, *Visible and Invisible*, contains several stories of singular power; notably "Negotium Perambulans", whose unfolding reveals an abnormal monster from an ancient ecclesiastical panel which performs an act of miraculous vengeance in a lonely village on the Cornish coast, and "The Horror-Horn", through which lopes a terrible half-human survival dwelling on unvisited Alpine peaks. "The Face", in another collection, is lethally potent in its relentless aura of doom. H. R. Wakefield, in his collections *They Return at Evening* and *Others Who Return*, manages now and then to achieve great heights of horror despite a vitiating air of sophistication. The most notable stories are "The Red Lodge" with its slimy aqueous evil, "He Cometh and He Passeth By", "And He Shall Sing . . .", "The Cairn", "Look Up There!", "Blind Man's Buff", and that bit of lurking millennial horror, "The Seventeenth Hole at Duncaster". Mention has been made of the weird work of H. G. Wells and A. Conan Doyle. The former, in "The Ghost of Fear", reaches a very high level; while all the items in *Thirty Strange Stories* have strong fantastic implications. Doyle now and then struck a powerfully spectral note, as in "The Captain of the 'Pole-Star'", a tale of arctic ghostliness, and "Lot No. 249", wherein the reanimated mummy theme is used with more than ordinary skill. Hugh Walpole, of the same family as the founder of Gothic fiction, has sometimes approached the bizarre with much success; his short story "Mrs. Lunt" carrying a very poignant shudder. John Metcalfe, in the collection published as *The Smoking Leg*, attains now and then a rare pitch of potency; the tale entitled "The Bad Lands" containing graduations of horror that strongly savour of genius. More whimsical and inclined toward the amiable and innocuous phantasy of Sir J. M. Barrie are the short tales of E. M. Forster, grouped under the title of *The Celestial Omnibus*. Of these only one, dealing with a glimpse of Pan and his aura of fright, may be said to hold the true element of cosmic horror. Mrs. H. D. Everett, though adhering to very old and conventional models, occasionally reaches singular heights of spiritual terror in her collection of short stories. L. P. Hartley is notable for his incisive and extremely ghastly tale, "A Visitor from Down Under". May Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* contain more of traditional occultism than of that creative treatment of fear which marks mastery in this field, and are inclined to lay more stress on human emotions and psychological delving than upon the stark phenomena of a cosmos utterly unreal. It may be well to remark here that occult believers are probably less effective than materialists in delineating the spectral and the fantastic, since to them the phantom world is so commonplace a reality that they tend to refer to it with less awe, remoteness, and

impressiveness than do those who see in it an absolute and stupendous violation of the natural order.

Of rather uneven stylistic quality, but vast occasional power in its suggestion of lurking worlds and beings behind the ordinary surface of life, is the work of William Hope Hodgson, known today far less than it deserves to be. Despite a tendency toward conventionally sentimental conceptions of the universe, and of man's relation to it and to his fellows, Mr. Hodgson is perhaps second only to Algernon Blackwood in his serious treatment of unreality. Few can equal him in adumbrating the nearness of nameless forces and monstrous besieging entities through casual hints and insignificant details, or in conveying feelings of the spectral and the abnormal in connexion with regions or buildings.

In *The Boats of the "Glen Carrig"* (1907) we are shewn a variety of malign marvels and accursed unknown lands as encountered by the survivors of a sunken ship. The brooding menace in the earlier parts of the book is impossible to surpass, though a letdown in the direction of ordinary romance and adventure occurs toward the end. An inaccurate and pseudo-romantic attempt to reproduce eighteenth-century prose detracts from the general effect, but the really profound nautical erudition everywhere displayed is a compensating factor.

The House on the Borderland (1908)—perhaps the greatest of all Mr. Hodgson's works—tells of a lonely and evilly regarded house in Ireland which forms a focus for hideous other-world forces and sustains a siege by blasphemous hybrid anomalies from a hidden abyss below. The wanderings of the narrator's spirit through limitless light-years of cosmic space and kalpas of eternity, and its witnessing of the solar system's final destruction, constitute something almost unique in standard literature. And everywhere there is manifest the author's power to suggest vague, ambushed horrors in natural scenery. But for a few touches of commonplace sentimentality this book would be a classic of the first water.

The Ghost Pirates (1909), regarded by Mr. Hodgson as rounding out a trilogy with the two previously mentioned works, is a powerful account of a doomed and haunted ship on its last voyage, and of the terrible sea-devils (of quasi-human aspect, and perhaps the spirits of bygone buccaneers) that besiege it and finally drag it down to an unknown fate. With its command of maritime knowledge, and its clever selection of hints and incidents suggestive of latent horrors in Nature, this book at times reaches enviable peaks of power.

The Night Land (1912) is a long-extended (583 pp.) tale of the earth's infinitely remote future—billions of billions of years ahead, after the death of the sun. It is told in a rather clumsy fashion, as the dreams of a man in the seventeenth century, whose mind merges with its own future incarnation; and is seriously marred by painful verbosity, repetitiousness, artificial and nauseously sticky romantic sentimentality, and an attempt at archaic language even more grotesque and absurd than that in *"Glen Carrig"*.

Allowing for all its faults, it is yet one of the most potent pieces of macabre imagination ever written. The picture of a night-black, dead planet, with the remains of the human race concentrated in a stupendously vast metal pyramid and besieged by monstrous, hybrid, and altogether unknown forces of the darkness, is something that no reader can ever forget. Shapes and entities of an altogether non-human and inconceivable sort—the prowlers of the black, man-forsaken, and unexplored world outside the pyramid—are suggested and partly

described with ineffable potency; while the night-bound landscape with its chasms and slopes and dying volcanism takes on an almost sentient terror beneath the author's touch.

Midway in the book the central figure ventures outside the pyramid on a quest through death-haunted realms untrod by man for millions of years—and in his slow, minutely described, day-by-day progress over unthinkable leagues of immemorial blackness there is a sense of cosmic alienage, breathless mystery, and terrified expectancy unrivalled in the whole range of literature. The last quarter of the book drags woefully, but fails to spoil the tremendous power of the whole.

Mr. Hodgson's later volume, *Carnacki, the Ghost-Finder*, consists of several longish short stories published many years before in magazines. In quality it falls conspicuously below the level of the other books. We here find a more or less conventional stock figure of the "infallible detective" type—the progeny of M. Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, and the close kin of Algernon Blackwood's John Silence—moving through scenes and events badly marred by an atmosphere of professional "occultism". A few of the episodes, however, are of undeniable power; and afford glimpses of the peculiar genius characteristic of the author.

Naturally it is impossible in a brief sketch to trace out all the classic modern uses of the terror element. The ingredient must of necessity enter into all work both prose and verse treating broadly of life; and we are therefore not surprised to find a share in such writers as the poet Browning, whose "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" is instinct with hideous menace, or the novelist Joseph Conrad, who often wrote of the dark secrets within the sea, and of the daemonic driving power of Fate as influencing the lives of lonely and maniacally resolute men. Its trail is one of infinite ramifications; but we must here confine ourselves to its appearance in a relatively unmixed state, where it determines and dominates the work of art containing it.

Somewhat separate from the main British stream is that current of weirdness in Irish literature which came to the fore in the Celtic Renaissance of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ghost and fairy lore have always been of great prominence in Ireland, and for over an hundred years have been recorded by a line of such faithful transcribers and translators as William Carleton, T. Crofton Croker, Lady Wilde—mother of Oscar Wilde—Douglas Hyde, and W. B. Yeats. Brought to notice by the modern movement, this body of myth has been carefully collected and studied; and its salient features reproduced in the work of later figures like Yeats, J. M. Synge, "A. E.", Lady Gregory, Padraic Colum, James Stephens, and their colleagues.

Whilst on the whole more whimsically fantastic than terrible, such folklore and its consciously artistic counterparts contain much that falls truly within the domain of cosmic horror. Tales of burials in sunken churches beneath haunted lakes, accounts of death-heralding banshees and sinister changelings, ballads of spectres and "the unholy creatures of the raths"—all these have their poignant and definite shivers, and mark a strong and distinctive element in weird literature. Despite homely grotesqueness and absolute naïveté, there is genuine nightmare in the class of narrative represented by the yarn of Teig O'Kane, who in punishment for his wild life was ridden all night by a hideous corpse that demanded burial and drove him from churchyard to churchyard as the dead rose up loathsomely in each one and refused to accommodate the newcomer with a berth. Yeats, undoubtedly the greatest figure of the Irish revival if not the greatest of all living poets, has accomplished notable things both in original work and in the codification of old legends.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK



[Return to Contents](#)

ZOMBIE REVOLT by Gavin Chappell

Something seized Gerald. In the darkness of the passage he couldn't see his attacker, but from the stench, and from the claw-like fingernails digging into his flesh, he knew it was a zombie.

'Get off me, you bastards!'

It was Brian's voice he heard, echoing Gerald's own thoughts. Percy was also audible, though his own screams were muffled. It seemed all three of them had been seized by the zombies the moment darkness had fallen.

Gerald found himself being hustled forwards by his captor. He tried to struggle free, but more clawed hands seized him out of the darkness and dragged him. His feet slipped and slid in the slime of the floor. They were hauling him towards the crypt whose entrance he had glimpsed before the carbuncle's light was extinguished. What time was it now? It had been evening when they left the inn and set out for the citadel. Night would be falling outside.

The padding of the zombies halted. They were in an echoing space now, but it was still pitch dark. 'Where are we?' Percy's frightened voice came from Gerald's left.

'In the crypt, I think,' Gerald replied, and Percy groaned.

'Let me go!' Brian was still snarling. 'Let me go! Where's my sword? I'll cut you up, you undead bastards!'

'You okay, Brian?' Gerald asked.

'They got my sword, Gerald!' Brian told him frantically. 'They got my sword!'

Gerald was about to reply when he heard a grinding noise, like stone scraping on stone. It came again. Then again. A crash reverberated through the darkness. Gerald gagged at a smell of rot and corruption that wafted towards him. He saw something moving in the darkness, two red fireflies. They settled to hover directly ahead of Gerald, glowing malignantly.

'Arise!' a voice resounded from the same direction. 'Arise, my legions. It is night.'

The darkness came alive with more and more fireflies, like a constellation of red stars in the all-encompassing night. They darted in pairs on every side. In the dim red light shed by the swarming fireflies, Gerald began to pick out details of the crypt.

With a shock, he realised that the red fireflies were eyes. Each pair gleamed atop a dark figure, a humanoid form. The light, though dim, grew strong enough for him to see the shapes of his companions, held fast—as he was—by two or more zombies.

The first figure approached soundlessly as if floating. As the stench grew, Gerald saw a tall man wearing a long dark cloak. What Gerald could see of the face was emaciated and scabrous.

‘Again, we have guests,’ the figure spoke. ‘It is well that we should have so many visitors. I thirst, now that this country is dry.’

It reached forward a clawed hand and touched Gerald’s chin affectionately. Gerald shuddered with horror and turned his face aside.

‘Who... who are you?’ he asked with a shudder.

‘I am Duke Overwold,’ the figure said. ‘I offer you eternal life.’

‘As one of your zombies?’ Gerald spat. ‘I don’t wanna be a brain-dead slave. Fuck that!’

Duke Overwold chuckled. ‘Such spirit,’ he said. ‘Would you live beside me in eternal undeath? Never dying? This could be your fate if you do not resist.’

Gerald stared into the face of death. ‘You look like you’re having such a great time,’ he said sarcastically. ‘You stink, mate, and you really need something done about that eczema.’

Duke Overwold flinched at his words; involuntarily he put a taloned hand to his face. Then he lowered it again, smiling coldly.

‘You do not see me at my best,’ he admitted. ‘But your blood will restore me to freshness and vigour!’ He went for Gerald’s neck.

‘Hold!’ came a voice from the assembled vampires. To Gerald’s surprise it was strangely familiar.

Duke Overwold halted mere inches from Gerald’s carotid artery. His firefly eyes darted to one side, then he rose.

‘What is it, Lord Gurak?’

Gerald’s eyes bulged as he stared towards the speaker. In the darkness he could make out nothing of this vampire, but the voice... and the name... It was his old companion, whose return from death had horrified them all. So Gurak had gone back to the citadel crypt!

‘We are equals here, your grace,’ said Lord Gurak. ‘You told me so when I joined you. Do we have no say as to who drinks the blood of these victims?’

‘I am your duke!’ Duke Overwold snarled. ‘We are equals, aye—in that we are deathless immortals. I gave you this gift of eternal life, milord. I gave it to all those undead in this crypt. We are equal in undeath. But I take precedence over all in matters of ... blood...’

As Lord Gurak and the duke argued, Gerald struggled vainly to free himself from the zombies’ grasp.

‘Looks like we’re fucked whatever we do,’ Percy muttered.

‘Vampire politics!’ Gerald muttered. ‘But I’m glad Gurak’s looking out for us.’

I am.

‘What was that?’ Gerald said.

‘What are you talking about?’ Percy asked. ‘I just said we’re fucked.’

Gerald groaned. He was hearing voices in his head now.

You are. Listen to them.

‘Who are you?’ Gerald asked aloud.

‘I’m Percy, you daft sod,’ Percy said, staring in his direction. ‘And this is Brian.’

‘Shut up,’ Gerald said. ‘I’m listening.’

I am buying you time, youngling. While I bicker with the duke, you have a chance.

‘For what? Are you Lord Gurak? How come you’re talking in my head?’

I am he. Now I am a vampire I can speak mind-to-mind. You must break free from the zombies. Your only hope here is to seize the circlet from the duke’s brows.

‘I was going to do that, but things got difficult. Can’t you?’

Were I to make such a move, youngling, the duke’s followers would tear me to pieces. I shall keep them distracted. Your task is to break free and seize the circlet. Do it now! I cannot keep them occupied much longer.

‘... I am your duke!’ Duke Overwold cried out. ‘You will all obey me! I know full well that some of you oppose me. But my decision is final—these visitors will glut my thirst, like the peasants of the duchy before them...!’

‘Brian, Percy!’ Gerald shouted. ‘Get them!’

He head-butted one of the zombies holding him. The undead creature staggered backwards, although Gerald was pretty sure its skull wasn’t ringing like his. He shoved wildly at the other, then tried to tear himself away. He heard a brittle snapping sound and looked down. In the gloom he saw that the zombies’ claw-like hand still gripped his wrist, but it had broken off at the forearm. He shuddered.

Percy and Brian had also fought free from the slow-moving zombies. They followed Gerald as he leapt over a slab and flung himself at Duke Overwold.

The duke was addressing another tall, dark figure, presumably Lord Gurak. Gerald hit Duke Overwold between the shoulders. It was like colliding with a sackful of dry sticks. The vampire hit the flags with a clatter and lay there like a dead thing.

Gerald looked down at the huddled shape. To his shock, it rose and went for him. As Gerald staggered back, he snatched at the vampire’s skull. His fingers closed on metal.

He hit a slab with enough power to wind him. As he lay there, gripping tightly on the circlet he had seized from the duke's skull, he saw the dark figure looming over him, the red fireflies of its eyes glowing as its clawed hand reached out. Wheezing, Gerald put on the circlet.

'Zombies!' he cried. 'Attack the vampires! Attack the vampires!'

As Duke Overwold shot fiery, angry glances to left and right, the zombies shambled forward to obey. The crypt became a battleground as the zombies attacked their masters. Two set upon Duke Overwold and bore him to the ground. The darkness filled with the sound of combat.

Another vampire approached Gerald.

'Youngling!' the vampire said. 'Some of these vampires are our friends! Keep them away from our allies!'

'We don't need vampires as allies!' said Percy as he and Brian joined them in the centre of the dark crypt.

'How are the zombies to tell our allies apart?' Gerald asked. All around them, the grisly crack of bone and the tearing of withered flesh was audible, but Gerald could see nothing of the fight. 'In fact...' he added, as two zombies seized Lord Gurak, 'do we really need them at all? And... do we need you?'

All that rivalry, all that tension between him and Lord Gurak, had led up to this point. As zombies sank their taloned hands into Gurak's flesh, the vampire stared at him.

Then, with a sigh, Gerald waved his hand. 'Leave him,' he said resignedly. 'He is on our side.'

'Thanks, youngling,' Lord Gurak said. 'You will not regret this.'

'If I'd kept hold of my carbuncle,' Gerald told him defiantly, 'I'd have flooded this crypt with light and killed all of you. Allies included. And maybe it would have been good riddance.'

His last words fell in the midst of a sudden silence. The savage noises from the surrounding darkness had ceased. Now only zombies remained of the undead, except for the vampire who stood at his side.

'That was well cool!' said Brian admiringly. 'Now what do we do?'

'Now we've wiped out all the vampires? Friends and foes? Apart from Lord Gurak here?' Gerald asked. He took the circlet from his head and put it down on a nearby slab. Then he mopped his brow.

'You have not killed all of them, youngling,' Lord Gurak told him bitterly. 'Many more still infest this duchy. Now that their duke is dead, they will know. A power struggle is coming. The surviving vampires will descend upon the citadel, each eager to succeed the duke. One vampire will triumph, and unless he is an ally he will lead the zombies to conquer Trinovant

and beyond. Unless...' Fear seized Gerald as he realised that those silent towers and castle—perhaps those oversized graveyards too—must contain legions of the undead.

'Unless?' he asked.

'Unless you begin a zombie revolt,' Lord Gurak replied.

He took Gerald to another slab, shaped like an altar and carved with mysterious glyphs. He cast his hand over its surface which came alive with a blaze of cold light. The vampire reared back and raised a hand to his eyes, but seemed otherwise unaffected.

'It was from here that the duke controlled the zombies,' he murmured.

As the light died down—it wasn't enough to do more than to discomfit the vampire—it resolved itself into an eagle's-eye view of the entire duchy, from the forest's edge to the mountain slopes down which descended the Trinovant road. It was moonlit night, just as it must be outside.

Visible all across the duchy were small glowing dots; most of these were white and concentrated around the villages. Others were red. These were mainly to be found among the towers and the graveyards.

'The red dots represent vampires,' Lord Gurak said. 'The white dots are zombies. As long as you wear the circlet, the latter will be under your command.'

'What's this, though?' Percy demanded, walking round the altar, pushing past two unmoving zombies. At the far end, where the forest stood, numerous black dots were flowing into the village on the duchy's borders.

'It must be the army!' Gerald panicked. 'The army of the king! They've finally entered the duchy!'

'Then we have not a moment to lose,' Lord Gurak said decisively. 'Order the zombies to rise against their vampire masters.'

Gerald put on the circlet again, went to the edge of the altar, and cast his arms wide. 'Zombies! Rise up against the vampires!' he called.

Slowly, the unmoving white dots began to stir. Like rivers of light, they flowed towards the red dots in the towers. The whole duchy was alive, and Gerald observed it from afar.

Percy turned at a noise from behind them. In the dim light of the crypt, two figures were visible in the archway. One of them smiled, revealing white fangs that glimmered in the dim light. The other figure shuffled awkwardly forward.

'Hi guys,' said Norman. 'Er, look...'

'Norman!' said Percy. 'What are you doing here? I thought you were in the inn, looking after Lady Candida...'

He shot another look at the vampire who accompanied Norman. The female vampire. He gulped. 'Milady?' he ventured.

'My lord!' Lady Candida, her face anaemically pale, her eyes glowing red, rushed across the crypt. Lord Gurak turned stiffly, then held out his arms to embrace her.

'You have returned!' he said.

Gerald looked up from the altar where he had been watching the progress of the zombie uprising. 'Hi there, milady,' he said. 'Gurak, stop cuddling your girlfriend and come here. How do I get a close-up on this thing?'

They gathered round the altar and watched as Lord Gurak made a series of passes in the air. The image grew larger, focussing on the edge of the duchy, and the village where they had first encountered the vampire plague. The king's army was marching through it. Gerald shuddered at the size of it.

'They've done some conscripting since last we saw them,' Percy remarked.

The image was roughly on the scale of a computer game. It reminded Gerald nostalgically of playing strategy games on his Xbox back home. The houses of the village stood out against the snow. The zombieified villagers remained where the adventurers had left them, in the lane that led up from the king's highway. Some of them were half-buried in snow. Gerald wondered why they had not risen against the vampires, but then he remembered that he had dealt with the vampires of that village. The manor house was a blackened ruin, burnt roof-joist poking up through the shrouding snow.

The king's army was passing on the highway below. Knights came first, Paladins of the king. In their midst was the king's banner and beside it, seated upon the wagon that also carried the gallows, was a black-clad figure that Gerald recognised as the bastard son of the king—now the king himself, since Lady Candida had killed his father.

Behind the knights marched the barbarians, blue-haired, iron-sinewed figures, bundled up in wolf-skins and bear-skins against the cold. But behind them came huge forms that Gerald had hoped never to see again. Nine-foot-high and three-foot broad, with matted hair, and great tusks for teeth, riding war-bison and carrying war hammers or battle-axes: ogres. Ogre after ogre; the army of Cragface the ogre king.

'Looks like the Bastard's negotiations were successful,' said Percy. 'That must be what kept them. He got the ogres on his side. Oh. Except he's not the Bastard anymore, is he? Did anyone catch his name?'

Gerald shook his head. 'He's the king,' he said. 'That's all we need to know.'

'Aye,' said Lord Gurak. 'The greatest threat to the peace and stability of the realm there is. United with the barbarians and the ogres, his powers are magnified.'

'But we've got bigger problems,' said Norman suddenly. 'When milady and I were on our way here, we saw movement beyond the settlement. Vampires. Dozens of them. Some coming from the graveyard. Others down from the hills. Coming straight here!'

‘What?’ Gerald exclaimed. ‘Why didn’t you say so before?’

‘Nobody was listening to me,’ Norman complained. ‘Nobody ever listens to me. I tried to say it but everyone was more interested in Lady Candida...’

‘Shut up!’ Gerald blazed. He shook his hand at the altar without any effect. ‘Gurak, what do I do? I want to see the citadel.’

Lord Gurak made a pass over the altar and the image changed focus, returning to an overview of the duchy. Red dots surrounded the middle of the duchy, where the citadel stood. He made another pass, and the image swooped down to show the citadel itself, and the dots of about twenty or thirty vampires bearing down upon it.

White dots were visible in places; the zombies. Some were in this very crypt. Gerald put the tips of his fingers to the circlet, and commanded: ‘Zombies! Surround the citadel. Kill all vampires who try to enter!’

They watched as the white dots slowly began to move. The zombies in the crypt began to shuffle outside.

Soon a ring of white dots surrounded the citadel. The advancing line of red dots met it and recoiled. Then attacked. The white dots moved to surround the red dots. Distant sounds of fighting filtered down into the crypt from the citadel.

‘Closer!’ Gerald ordered. Lord Gurak made another pass and the image focussed on the struggle between zombies and vampires at the citadel gates. It was a hideous, tooth-and-nail battle, undead versus undead. Vampires fell, to litter the snow with their twice-dead bodies.

‘Now out again,’ Gerald said. ‘I want to see the whole place.’ The image changed to show the whole duchy. Red dots and white dots were visible in several places, yet the white dots prevailed. The zombie revolt was in full sway.

But the army of the king had passed the first village and was crossing the plateau towards the citadel.

The countryside was up in arms, zombies rebelling against their vampire lords, but the greatest threat had yet to be faced. Gerald remembered the methodical way the king’s army had sacked Ogres’ Gate.

‘Those zombies in the village,’ Percy said. ‘They’re not doing much, are they? Just standing round like a bunch of zombies, really.’

Gerald shrugged humourlessly. ‘So?’

‘Send them against the king!’ Percy said.

‘The king will twat them all,’ Brian said scornfully. ‘There’s not enough of them. Not enough to fight those barbarians, or the ogres. They’ll be slaughtered!’

‘They’re already dead,’ Percy pointed out. ‘Anyway, it might slow the king down. If they get here straightaway, they’ll smash through the place like a bulldozer.’

‘Okay,’ said Gerald thoughtfully.

He gave the order. Soon the white dots were moving after the black dots. The black dots outnumbered them massively, but Percy was right; it was vital that the king didn’t march across the duchy without resistance.

The white dots started attacking the black dots at the rear of the column. It really was like a computer game; a pretty retro one, Space Invaders or Pacman or something. Gerald didn’t think much of the graphics. Like in a game, he felt distanced from the whole business. But when the king reached the citadel, it would be a game no longer.

The rear-guard of the king’s army slowed as the zombies continued to attack. After a while, it broke off from the main group to fight the remorseless attackers. The rest of the army continued undeterred. They were heading straight for the citadel as dawn broke over the eastern mountains.

The ring of metal on stone awoke Gerald. He saw the circlet spinning on the stone floor and realised he had dozed off, leaning against the altar. He looked at it. The whole picture was changed. It was light now, and the red dots of vampires had almost been wiped from the board. But the white dots representing zombies were scattered about the place. He looked back at the village to see that the king’s rear-guard had defeated its attackers and was hurrying to catch up with the main force.

He looked around the crypt. Percy was slumped over the altar on the far side, blocking Gerald’s view of the west of the duchy. Brian and Norman were snoring on the floor nearby, Brian mumbling aggrievedly at the sound of the still spinning circlet. Gerald snatched it from the floor. He gagged as he realised that the room was still scattered with the gory fragments of vampires. Rising, he saw that Lord Gurak and Lady Candida both lay in the duke’s sarcophagus, in each other’s arms. Neither of them was breathing. Gerald found it difficult to believe they had both become vampires.

Perhaps the only vampires left in the duchy. He could see no red dots on the map except two at the citadel: he could explain them. But the black dots of the king’s army still bore down on the citadel. Gerald panicked. He thrust the circlet on his head.

‘Zombies!’ he cried. ‘To the citadel! Now! Protect me!’

The others woke suddenly, staring round in shock, except the two vampires who remained asleep—or dead—in their sarcophagus. Percy frowned at Gerald.

‘What happened?’ he asked.

‘I nodded off,’ Gerald replied. ‘We all did. Now the king is closing in on the citadel.’

‘Call the zombies, then!’ Brian shouted.

‘I have done!’ Gerald shouted back. ‘But it’ll take time! And they’ve been fighting vampires all night!’

‘Okay, okay!’ said Percy. ‘Where’s the king?’ He looked at the image on the altar. ‘Shit,’ he added. ‘He’s really stolen a march on us. Why didn’t someone stay awake?’

‘I reckon we just find some horses and ride the fuck out of here,’ said Brian. ‘No point hanging round.’

‘We can’t do that,’ Gerald said. ‘We’ve got to defend this place.’

‘Why’ve we got to do that?’ Percy asked. Gerald rounded on him.

‘What do you mean, why?’ he demanded. ‘We’ve got to stop the king!’

Percy shrugged, indicating the map. ‘Everyone in this place is dead or undead,’ he said. ‘Most of the undead have been killed, if that makes any sense. What can the king do here?’

‘He’ll destroy the place,’ Gerald said. ‘He’ll destroy everything.’

‘That won’t bother anyone,’ Brian said. ‘Everyone’s dead. We should clear off before we join them.’

‘We need to warn Trinovant before it’s too late,’ said Norman. ‘And the quicker we get out of here, the better.’

‘Leave the zombies to it,’ Percy urged. ‘If they defeat the king, great. If they don’t—well, at least they’ll have weakened him. But if we don’t get out of here pretty quick, Trinovant will have no idea what’s coming its way. They’ll destroy the city like the barbarians did Kashamash. We couldn’t save Kashamash. But if we stop hanging round uselessly, we might just save Trinovant.’

This decided Gerald. He had been feeling bad about the sack of Kashamash ever since they’d run away from the place. Immiel had left him because he had failed when he tried to rescue the city from the barbarians. Now he had another chance, it seemed. Another chance to save a city from destruction.

‘What about Lady Candida?’ Norman asked suddenly. He was standing by the sarcophagus in which lay Lady Candida and Gurak. Gingerly, he reached out and touched Lady Candida’s neck. He looked up. ‘No pulse,’ he said. ‘They’re dead.’

‘They’re undead,’ Gerald corrected him. ‘They won’t return to life until the sun goes down.’

‘Shit, Gerald,’ Percy complained. ‘That’ll be hours.’

‘Leave them here,’ Brian said impatiently. ‘We can’t wait that long! The king’s coming.’

‘I’d have thought you’d want to go and fight them!’ Gerald taunted him. ‘Not run off like a fucking coward and leave our mates.’

‘You hate Lord Gurak!’ Brian said. ‘You beat the crap out of him in Ogres’ Gate! Yeah, I’ll fight those bastards, but I can’t find my sword.’

‘We can’t leave Lady Candida,’ Percy said, ‘isn’t that what you mean, Gerald?’

‘I agree with Percy,’ said Norman, pouting. ‘We can’t abandon her.’

Percy shook his head. ‘You don’t agree with me, Norman,’ he said, ‘because I agree with Brian! We should get the fuck out of here. They’re both vampires. They can’t come with us. And we can’t wait, anyway.’

Gerald pointed at Percy triumphantly. ‘They can come with us!’ he said. ‘Remember Dracula? We put them in coffins and cart them off with us.’

‘Oh, come off it,’ Percy started, but Norman broke in: ‘Gerald’s right. We can do it.’

‘It’ll slow us down if we have to carry two coffins!’ Percy said. ‘There’s an army out there. No way are we going to run about the place weighed down by coffins.’

Gerald was about to reply when he heard a padding of footsteps from outside the crypt. He turned to see dark shapes shuffling through the archway.

‘It’s the zombies,’ Norman said. ‘Why have they come here?’

For a moment Gerald couldn’t think of an answer. It looked like all the zombies in the settlement had come down here. As far as he could see in the gloom, they had already been in the wars. Some were missing limbs. From the fight with the vampires? Or had they already met the king’s army?

‘I told them to come to me,’ he said as realisation dawned. ‘Go back up!’ he ordered. ‘Guard the citadel again. Outside! Attack anyone who comes near!’

As the zombies shuffled back out, Percy said despondently, ‘There aren’t nearly enough of them to stop the king.’

‘Are they going to fight with their bare hands?’ Norman added. ‘They’ll be cut to pieces by those knights!’

‘He’s got a point,’ Percy said. ‘They may be undead, but they’re not invincible.’

Gerald shrugged. ‘What do you suggest?’

‘They must have an armoury somewhere in the citadel,’ Brian broke in. ‘Arm them! Then they’ll stand a better chance.’

This seemed worth a try. They followed the shambling zombies back out of the crypt, leaving Gurak and Lady Candida lying in the sarcophagus, united in the sleep of death. As the zombies issued out of the citadel gates, they began hunting round the dank passages.

Brian came hurrying back into the main hall. 'Reckon I've found it, guys!' he said, his eyes bright. 'They've got one fuck of a big door round the back. It must be the armoury.'

The others followed him to an ironbound oaken door at the back of the citadel, near a postern gate that led out into a narrow alleyway between spurs of rock. Gerald eyed this speculatively. Brian tugged his sleeve.

'In here, I think,' he said, pointing at the door.

Percy had found some keys and was unlocking it. It opened to reveal a dark, dust-covered room lined by shelves on which lay spears, pikes, axes and swords.

It hadn't been used for some time. 'Not since the vampire plague began,' Percy suggested.

Brian seized a big war hammer. He'd not been able to find his bastard sword in the darkness of the crypt. But now he had a big weapon again, he was happy.

'Okay, grab as many as you can,' Gerald said. 'Especially those big ones, those pikes. The zombies will be fighting knights on horses; they'll need something like them. Carry them out to the front.'

They grabbed as many pikes as they could each carry and lugged them off down the passage to the citadel gates. Here the zombies stood in a motionless mass, staring with dead eyes out across the plateau. Gerald started handing out the pikes he was carrying. Then Percy said, 'Look, Gerald!'

Gerald turned to see Percy was pointing towards the snow-lined escarpment beyond the settlement. Crossing it were several horsemen. Gerald sighed. He continued to hand out pikes as the scouts of the king's army gathered on the ridge.

'Looks like the army isn't far off,' said Percy.

'I don't think we've got enough zombies to fight them,' Norman said worriedly. 'We've got, what, twenty? That army is massive.'

The riders began to thunder down the ridge, splitting up to ride round the settlement. More mounted figures came over the rise, knights, and ogres. The barbarian infantry marched relentlessly in between them.

Gerald shook his head. 'We're really fucked,' he said.

'I think it's time I showed you what I found while I was looking round the citadel,' Percy said.

Gerald shot him a look. 'What? We've got to stand and fight!' Already the barbarians were advancing, the knights and ogres fanning out on either side.

'We'll die if we fight them,' Percy said. 'Simple as. But come with me.'

He led them back inside, leaving the zombies to defend the citadel. They managed to close the doors behind them. Then Percy took them across the courtyard to a stable. Inside, several mangy-looking horses were standing in stalls.

‘Looks like the zombies kept on feeding them,’ Percy said. ‘Maybe the vampires used them, but these aren’t undead, just a bit neglected. We could ride the fuck out of here.’

‘What about Lady Candida?’ Norman demanded.

Gerald scowled. ‘Lady Candida’s a fucking vampire, Norman,’ he said angrily, although in a way he was trying to persuade himself. ‘You can’t have the hots for her, unless you’ve turned into a necrophiliac. We’ve got to warn Trinovant, right? We can’t wait for nightfall. We can... come back for them later, maybe.’

‘Later?’ Norman bawled. ‘When this place has been burnt to the ground and everyone killed...’

‘Everybody’s undead, Norman...’ Percy tried to interrupt, unsuccessfully.

‘... I’m not putting up with it!’ Norman continued. ‘We’re going to fight! Those zombies are going to fight and we’re going to fight beside them...’

He broke off suddenly, and fell into a pile of straw. Brian dusted off the end of his war hammer and looked with satisfaction at the unconscious form.

‘Brian!’ Gerald shouted.

‘What?’ Brian said. ‘I used the butt! He’ll be out cold for hours. No more complaining.’

‘I don’t believe it!’ Gerald said. ‘How are we going to escape now?’

Percy grabbed Norman’s feet. ‘We’ll just chuck him over Brian’s saddlebow,’ he said. ‘Get those horses ready. We’re getting outa here!’

“Getting those horses ready” proved to be a struggle in itself. The beasts had grown unaccustomed to being ridden, and the adventurers’ only experience of horses was during their campaign against the ogres, when most of the hard work was done by mercenaries, paid for the purpose. After an epic struggle, they led three unwilling horses out into the courtyard. The sound of fighting was audible from outside the walls.

‘We’ll never get out,’ Gerald said.

‘Not that way, dickhead,’ Brian said impatiently. ‘The other gate. The one by the armoury.’ He leapt up on the back of his horse, took Norman’s comatose form from Percy and slung it over the saddlebow. Then he spurred his horse and rode straight into the building.

The other two mounted and followed, riding through the halls and passages of the citadel until they came to the postern gate. Brian dismounted and flung open the gate. ‘Come on,’ he said.

They rode out of the citadel down a narrow passage hewn from the living rock. At last they came out into the open. Stretching away before them was the sloping plain that led to the high peaks beyond which the king's highway led down into the lowlands where stood Trinovant.

Riding across the plain towards them was a group of knights and mounted men-at-arms. They were the riders who Gerald had seen earlier, circling the citadel. They had seen the open postern gate and were galloping for it.

'Back!' shouted Gerald. 'There's too many for us. Back into the citadel. And get that fucking door shut behind us!'

Sawing at the reins, he persuaded his horse to turn and ride back the way they had come. The rock passage thundered with the pounding of hoofs. The noise grew as the knights pursued them. Gerald rode straight through the postern gate, ducking to avoid the lintel.

The other two rode in. Gerald leapt from his horse and slammed the door shut. As he pulled the huge bolt into place, the door began to reverberate as the attackers tried to smash it in.

But it had been too well made. After a while, their efforts ended abruptly.

'Great, Gerald,' said Percy, looking down from the saddle of his horse. 'Now we're stuck in here.'

Gerald's own horse had galloped off into the citadel. Rubbing his bruises, he said, 'Looks like we're defending the place, then. This door will resist anything short of a battering ram. We should get some zombies guarding it though, now all the king's horses and all the king's men know about it.' With a sigh, he added, 'Looks like we're in for a long siege.'

He walked away down the passage. Getting down from their horses and leading them by the bridles, Percy and Brian followed. Norman's unconscious body still hung over Brian's saddlebow.

They left him with the horses in the courtyard when they entered the gatehouse. Above the gate was a largish room that contained two arrow slits looking out upon the battle in the blazing remains of the settlement outside the citadel. Zombie pike men fought knights and ogres while elsewhere, barbarian marauders were attempting to scale the walls without success.

'Fuck,' said Percy. 'Those zombies aren't enough to keep back the king's army.'

On the ridge beyond the guttering settlement Gerald could see the wagon containing the black-clad figure who was the new king. 'We need to defend that other gate,' he said, 'but if we take any zombies away from this position we'll be weakening it.'

'Look!' Brian shouted. He was looking out of the left-hand arrow slit, down the length of the wall where barbarians had lifted a crudely-constructed ladder up onto the wall. They were scaling it with terrible speed.

'Come on!' Gerald drew his sword and led them down the parapet to the ladder.

The moment they reached it, a barbarian scrambled over the battlements. Gerald ran towards him, sword out. The barbarian grinned insanely, and flung himself at the youth. Gerald stepped to one side and the barbarian fell to his death in the courtyard below.

He saw that another barbarian had reached the top of the ladder. Percy ran forward and grabbed the ladder itself, trying to push it back. Wildly, the barbarian grabbed him by the collar and tried to drag him back. They struggled until Brian came up alongside. With a swing of his war hammer, he dented the barbarian's skull and the man fell to his doom.

Gerald pushed past and got hold of the other side of the ladder. More barbarians were coming up it. He nodded to Percy.

'Heave!' he said, and they both pushed the ladder outwards.

The ascending barbarians tried to grab at the wall as their ladder fell backwards. The one closest to the top almost succeeded in seizing an outcropping rock, but his fingers slipped and the ladder went toppling backwards, flinging angry barbarians into the snow.

Further up the wall, more barbarians had got the same idea. Brian ran towards the new scaling ladder, swinging his war hammer as he did so.

'Come on,' Gerald panted. He was about to follow Brian when the first ladder appeared again. He looked down and saw that the surviving barbarians had lifted it up again. 'Second thoughts, we'd better stay.'

The ladder slammed down a short way down the wall from its original position. When Gerald and Percy went to push it back they found themselves subjected to a hail of crossbow bolts. They flung themselves down on the parapet.

'What now?' Percy gasped.

'Looks like we're fucked,' said Gerald. It was impossible. He slumped against the wall while Percy peered over it. 'How can we hope to defend this wall, only three of us? They'll be breaking through the other gate soon, anyway.'

'Don't forget the zombies,' Percy said. There was an odd note in his voice. The sound of battle from below was increasing.

'I told you,' Gerald said. 'There's too few of them for us to withdraw...'

Percy tapped him on his shoulder and pointed. Gerald peeked over the parapet.

A long line of shambling, undead figures topped the rise, and now the king and his warriors fled towards the citadel. The zombies Gerald had called hours before.

What were they waiting for? he wondered.

Then it struck him. They awaited new orders. He had told them to come here, but he hadn't told them what to do next.

‘Zombies!’ he shouted. ‘Attack!’

The battle continued until evening. By that time, Norman had recovered and come to join them on the walls. He looked puzzled by his recent nap, but Brian told him that he had been knocked out by a passing barbarian.

‘Are we winning?’ he asked, rubbing his sore head.

‘We’re keeping them busy,’ Gerald said. ‘That’s the main thing.’

‘Why don’t we just ride off, then?’ asked Brian.

‘I’ve realised something,’ said Gerald grimly. ‘These zombies need someone to give them orders. If we ride off, they’ll be useless. The king will destroy the citadel and ride on to attack Trinovant. For the moment we’re keeping them busy. But it won’t last if we ride off.’

‘It’s getting dark,’ Percy said in the silence that followed.

‘So what?’ Gerald asked impatiently. ‘It won’t stop the zombies... Hey! Where are you going?’

‘Come on,’ Percy said. ‘Follow me, you lot.’ He led them into the citadel, down the steps and into the crypt.

‘So now we’re stuck here,’ he was saying a moment later, as the freshly awoken Lady Candida and Lord Gurak listened from the sarcophagus. ‘We can’t leave the zombies to fight without us because they’re useless without someone telling them what to do. The moment we ride off, the king will defeat them and get going on the road to Trinovant. Probably pick us off on the way.’

‘Someone has to stay behind,’ said Lord Gurak.

Gerald looked up. He scowled angrily at Gurak. ‘You know I’m the one who controls the zombies! Are you telling me I’ve got to stay here while you all ride off?’ The idea of being left behind in a doomed castle defended by the living dead horrified him.

‘No,’ said Lord Gurak. ‘Lady Candida and I will remain. You must give me the circlet. I will become the new vampire lord. I will control the zombies. We will fight on. We are all dead, but there is still life in you younglings. Take horse and ride for Trinovant.’

Lady Candida rose from the sarcophagus and took Gerald’s hands.

‘Ride fast!’ she said. ‘I had hoped that I would be in Trinovant for the season, but it is not to be: milord and I have joined the undead. We shall remain in the mountains, reigning over the undead, guarding the pass against the king and any other threats. You will live, you will survive. And you will warn Trinovant. If we fail, if the king rides on to Trinovant, the city must be ready.’

Despite the deathly chill of her hands, Lady Candida's eyes were warm and kind. If only things had worked out differently...

Gerald took his hands from hers.

He snatched the circlet from his head. It had never really suited him, he told himself as he handed it to Lord Gurak. Rising from the sarcophagus, the vampire placed it on his head and went to the altar where the battle raged in miniature.

'Okay, get the horses,' Gerald said. 'We'll try the back way. It looks like most of them are fighting the zombies at the front right now. We'll grab the opportunity while it lasts.'

He led his fellow adventurers from the crypt.

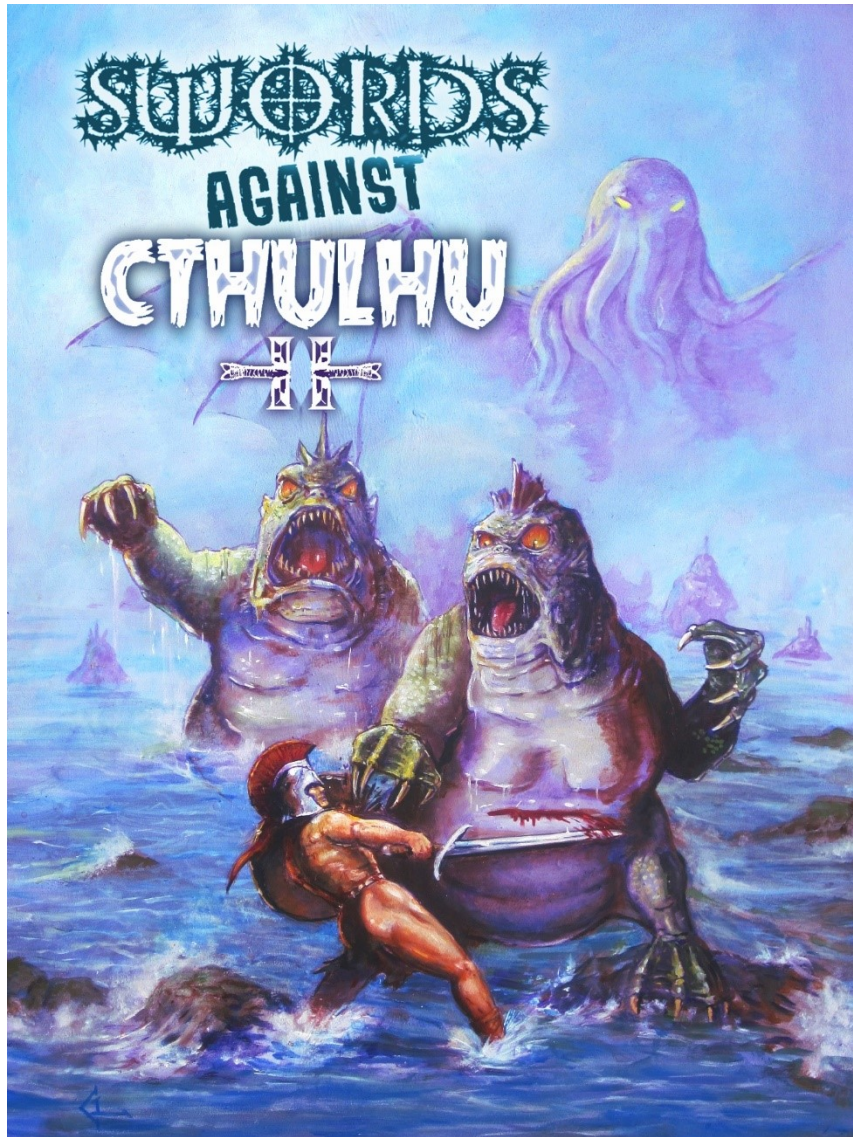
Lady Candida joined Lord Gurak at the altar. They watched the images of the four youths as they got horses from the stables and rode out by the postern gate. After a skirmish with mounted men-at-arms, they broke free and galloped away into the night. Down the king's highway.

On the road to Trinovant.

'But will they get through?' Lady Candida whispered gently.

Lord Gurak did not answer.

TO BE CONTINUED



[Return to Contents](#)

THE BATTLE FOR CALLISTO by Gregory KH Bryant

Episode Thirty-Seven

Illara cast her eyes to Ward. Ward said nothing.

“I have to go. We have to go,” she said. “Pod 3... that’s where Story lives... Joyce... Emily. We have to go back We have to help.”

Ward stiffened. He had done his part, and was ready to collect his pay and go. Clean-up was someone else’s problem. Anyone else’s. But that kid. Emily. Ward had come to like her. Tough little kid. Cagey, too. She did good on IPS-3, when Turhan Mot had taken it over.

Carter Ward had only a few friendships beyond Mud, Illara, and Dimara, and a few scattered others. That was how he wanted it. But Emily had squirmed her way into what little he had in the way of a heart.

“Yeh,” was all he said.

He locked his ship down, with his usual request to Dimara to ‘keep an eye on things for me, will ya, babe?’.

“It’s gonna be a long march,” Illara said.

Ward and Mud simply grunted, and without another word, the three of them began the march to Callisto Base 1.

They threaded their way through the vast clutter of ships on the tarmac, some of them still smouldering with billows of smoke arising from their blackened hulks, others having somehow survived the battle that had raged quickly through here but only half an hour before.

Everywhere the bodies of dead Scroungers lay in heaps. Among them, the bodies of the defenders, the forces of Jovian Security, in their uniforms of purple and black. And as they came near the surface tunnel that led to Callisto Base 1, they found, here and there, broken pieces of the ‘mice’, the experimental pursuit ships launched from the “Bellerophon”, and to which Lieutenant Danton had been assigned.

None of them spoke, except Mud, who hazarded a mordant “Man, this is all going to stink like hell on a cracker.”

Ward grunted.

“Greenhouse for these guys,” he answered, kicking the headless corpse of a Scrounger as he stepped by it. “Make fertilizer outta them.”

“Sure,” Mud replied with a short laugh that faltered.

They came at last to the rail tunnels that led to Callisto Base 1. This end of the tracks was ruined, destroyed by Captain Waverley’s troops to impede the Scroungers, early in the battle.

The roofs and walls of the tunnels were of transparent steel. The base was clearly visible through the walls of the tunnels, as were Jupiter and its greater, inner moons, Europa, Ganymede and Io. Walkways for maintenance crews lined both sides of the tracks, and every hundred yards was a tiny way station built into the walls of the tunnel. These way stations stored emergency supplies such as medical kits, flashlights, hammers, wrenches and other such tools. These stations could also be locked down from inside, in the event of a failure on any part of the walls of the tunnels.

And lying on the tracks, and the walkways, and among the broken pieces of the ransacked way stations, were countless hundreds of corpses of the Scroungers. Torn, charred, mutilated and rendered into shapeless bloodied pieces, the bodies and the pieces of bodies carpeted the tunnels.

The sounds of engines came to them from the landing bay behind them.

Knowing that it could only be forces sent by Colonel Westland from the “Bellerophon”, they waited. Moments later, a vehicle with inflated, metallic spheres taking the place of wheels pushed itself through the space craft on the tarmac. It was followed by two others, and then by a platoon of soldiers wearing Earth Space Forces uniforms.

The foremost vehicle slowed to a stop. A crewman, her face painted in camouflage, challenged Ward, Illara and Mud.

“Who are you?” she demanded. A dozen plasma pistols were pointed at their heads.

“Captain Illara Fain,” she said. “Jovian Security. Headed for Pod 3 to give emergency assistance.”

The camouflaged crewman gave Illara’s uniform a close and careful study. Though her uniform was worn from battle, charred and bloodied, it spoke for itself.

“And you guys?” the crewman asked, turning to Ward and Mud.

“Mercs,” Mud answered. “Just a coupla mercs. We’re with you guys. We’re goin’ with her,” he said, indicating Illara with a nod of his head in her direction. To Pod 3. If there’s anything left.”

“That so?” the camouflaged crewman demanded.

“Yes, it is,” Illara answered

“You all look like hell.”

“Thanks,” Illara snorted.

“You guys need a ride?”

Illara, Ward and Mud cautiously eyed the camouflaged crewman.

Mud spoke up and said, “Sure!:

“Okay, climb on in back. We’re going to Pod 3 ourselves. You look like you could use a break.”

“Sure, thanks,” Mud said. He strode to the back of the vehicle and clambered aboard. Illara and Ward followed.

The back of the vehicle was open, and packed with men and women in the blue and red uniforms of Earth Space Forces.

Mud, towering over everyone, forced his way in and made seats for Ward and Illara.

Once they were settled in, the camouflaged crewman banged on the roof of the cab of the vehicle. The engine revved and began moving toward the railway tunnels.

“What kinda thing is this, anyway?” Mud asked the trooper sitting next to him.

“ATV,” the trooper grunted.

“ATV?” Illara asked. “And what is that?”

“All terrain vehicle,” the trooper answered. “It travels over any kind of terrain you can think of. They use `em mostly for science stuff.”

“Asteroids and comets?” Illara asked, again.

“Yeah. Moons, too. And they got them on Mars, I heard.”

“Must be new,” Mud said. “I hain’t seen these things before.”

“Dunno,” the trooper replied. “They just said, get in there, so we did. The rest of them guys, they gotta march.”

“So we lucked out,” Illara said.

“I s’pose,” the trooper answered.

“So how fast do these things go?” Mud asked.

“Dunno. Maybe twenty miles an hour. That’s what I heard.”

“That so?” Mud replied. “We’ll be getting to Callisto Base 1 real quick that way.”

“Depends on what it has to get over,” the trooper said. “But maybe an hour. Maybe half an hour.”

“In that case,” Mud said with a grin, “Y’all with excuse me while I close my eyes and catch a nap while I can. We got no idea when we’re going to be able to get any sleep again, eh, Carter?”

Mud gave Ward a nudge, but Ward did not reply. He was already fast asleep.

“Looks like your friend has the right idea,” the trooper remarked.

“Yep,” Mud agreed, closing his eyes and laying his head back. “He does.”

And in only a moment, Mud was also sound asleep.

“This way! This way!”

It was the commander of an emergency crew, standing only a few paces away from Emily and Jeffrey. He bent to one knee as several other members of his crew clustered around, laying in with strong backs and muscular hands to assist him.

Between them, they were able to force open a hatch in a sidewalk that opened to a utility tunnel, one of many that stretched throughout the colony, below the streets. The hatch was narrow, permitting no more than a single person to climb into it at a time, and then down the precarious ladder that led to the tunnel.

The commander knew full well that there was not time to crowd everyone into the tunnels below Pod 3, nor was there any guarantee that those who did manage to crowd down into the cramped tunnels would survive themselves.

But it was a chance. A last, desperate chance. And if even only one person survived the catastrophe, that was enough to make the desperate effort worthwhile.

The commander slapped the helmet of each member of his crew.

“Down with ya!” he ordered. “Get on down there. Show these folks the way outta here! Except for you, two,” he said. “You go open up those other tunnels. See if you can’t get these folk into them before this whole thing comes crashing down.”

A loud screaming groan of tortured metal rang through the pod. A beam overhead bent suddenly downward.

“Get going!” the commander shouted. Two of his crewman dashed off to where they knew the manholes opening to other points in the utility tunnels were. The other four climbed quickly down the

“Come on, come on with ya all,” he said, turning to the many people who had crowded round.

“One at a time. One at a time.”

The commander’s cool calm and his efficiency had much to do with keeping the crowds from panicking, though everyone there in Pod 3 was but moments from death. Each person, in

turn, followed the first into the manhole, and all moved with silence. No screams of terror filled the air, only but a heavy silence, as each person counted the seconds to escape.

Jeffrey and Emily waited while their parents made their way with the crowd to where they stood. With Story Talbot and Joyce, there came also Ellen Bridgemont, Alyshia Stern and her fiancée, Antoni Zimmerman.

The time passed with an agonizing slowness. Several times, Jeffrey and Emily, who was them but barely conscious between the pain of her broken arm and the morphine that only barely masked that pain, lost all sight of their parents in the throng. And, sometimes, Story Talbot and Joyce lost sight of their two children.

But finally they found each other in the crush of the crowd.

“Emily!” Joyce cried out, throwing her arms around her daughter. “And Jeffrey! We are together, at last!”

“Keep it moving,” the commander shouted, not just at Joyce, but at everyone. “Down with ya! Into the hole. It’s your only way outta here!”

Zimmerman helped Alyshia into the manhole, then followed behind her, with a glimpse toward his friends waiting their turn.

“Awrite, ma’am, in with ya,” the commander said to Ellen Bridgemont. An elegant woman, and one with little experience climbing ladders into deep manholes, she hesitated, but only a moment. Then, gamely, she sat on the street, swung her legs into the manhole, and then grasped the flimsy ladder in both her hands. She clambered down, and disappeared into the tunnel, below.

Emily and Joyce, equally unaccustomed to manholes and ladders took their turn. They were followed by Jeffrey. Story Talbot was the last of his little group to climb down into the utility tunnel.

He had no chance to acclimate himself to his surroundings. One of the emergency crew workers stood at the base of the ladder, and, with a hand to Talbot’s shoulder, he gently prodded the man to take a step.

“That way, sir, if you please.”

Talbot saw the form of his son Jeffrey hurrying down the very narrow tunnel.

“Thank you,” he said, and he moved on, following Jeffrey’s form.

And just behind him came the footsteps of many others.

Talbot hurried to catch up with his son. He had just caught up with the boy, and was about to place his hand on Jeffrey’s shoulder when a gut-wrenching rumble echoed loudly through the tunnel.

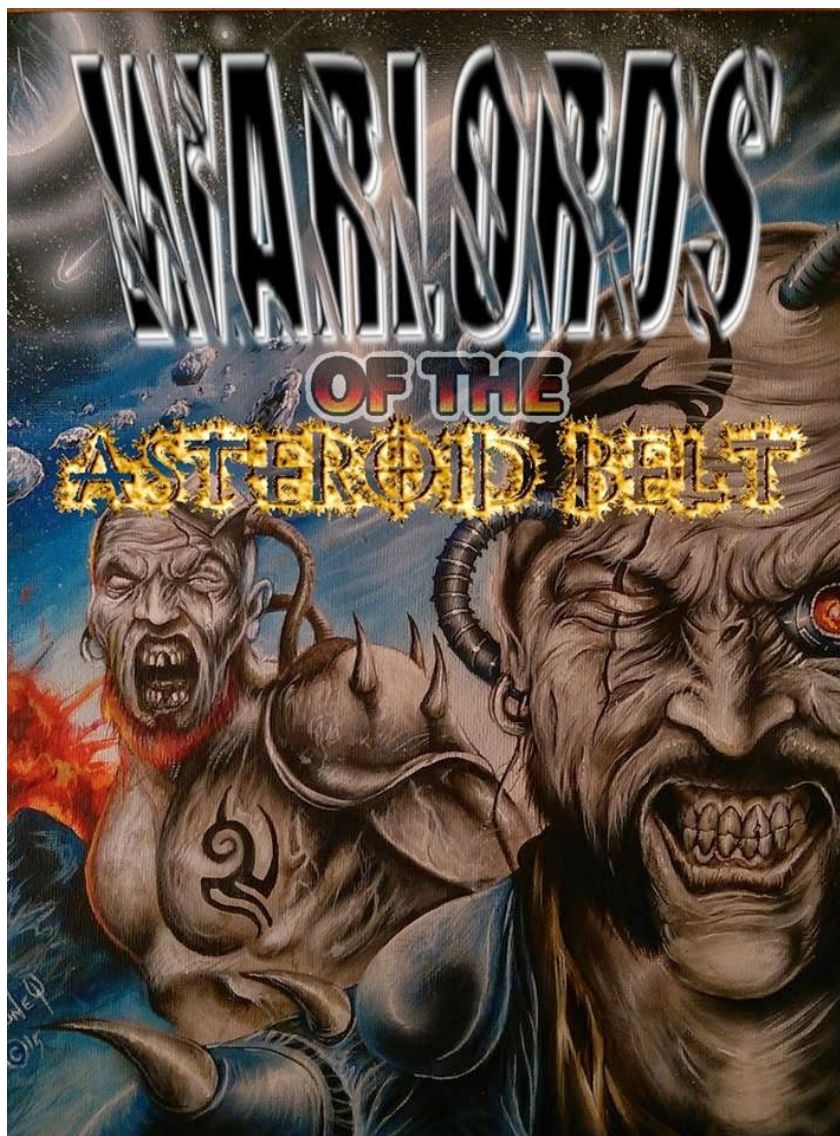
Talbot looked back, only in time to see a huge cascade of cement and asphalt crashing down into the tunnel.

“Run!” someone shouted. “Run! Run!”

From above, the muffled sounds of emergency sirens rang through the collapsing tunnel. All went black. The last thing Story Talbot saw before the darkness fell was the silhouetted forms of those behind him crushed under tons of cement and steel.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK

Carter Ward's earlier adventures, along with those of other interplanetary rogues, are chronicled in [Warlords of the Asteroid Belt](#) and [Deep Space Dogfights](#).



Out now from [Rogue Planet Press](#).

[Return to Contents](#)

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS by HG Wells

Book One: The Coming of The Martians

Chapter Two: The Falling Star

Then came the night of the first falling star. It was seen early in the morning, rushing over Winchester eastward, a line of flame high in the atmosphere. Hundreds must have seen it, and taken it for an ordinary falling star. Albin described it as leaving a greenish streak behind it that glowed for some seconds. Denning, our greatest authority on meteorites, stated that the height of its first appearance was about ninety or one hundred miles. It seemed to him that it fell to earth about one hundred miles east of him.

I was at home at that hour and writing in my study; and although my French windows face towards Ottershaw and the blind was up (for I loved in those days to look up at the night sky), I saw nothing of it. Yet this strangest of all things that ever came to earth from outer space must have fallen while I was sitting there, visible to me had I only looked up as it passed. Some of those who saw its flight say it travelled with a hissing sound. I myself heard nothing of that. Many people in Berkshire, Surrey, and Middlesex must have seen the fall of it, and, at most, have thought that another meteorite had descended. No one seems to have troubled to look for the fallen mass that night.

But very early in the morning poor Ogilvy, who had seen the shooting star and who was persuaded that a meteorite lay somewhere on the common between Horsell, Ottershaw, and Woking, rose early with the idea of finding it. Find it he did, soon after dawn, and not far from the sand pits. An enormous hole had been made by the impact of the projectile, and the sand and gravel had been flung violently in every direction over the heath, forming heaps visible a mile and a half away. The heather was on fire eastward, and a thin blue smoke rose against the dawn.

The Thing itself lay almost entirely buried in sand, amidst the scattered splinters of a fir tree it had shivered to fragments in its descent. The uncovered part had the appearance of a huge cylinder, caked over and its outline softened by a thick scaly dun-coloured incrustation. It had a diameter of about thirty yards. He approached the mass, surprised at the size and more so at the shape, since most meteorites are rounded more or less completely. It was, however, still so hot from its flight through the air as to forbid his near approach. A stirring noise within its cylinder he ascribed to the unequal cooling of its surface; for at that time it had not occurred to him that it might be hollow.

He remained standing at the edge of the pit that the Thing had made for itself, staring at its strange appearance, astonished chiefly at its unusual shape and colour, and dimly perceiving even then some evidence of design in its arrival. The early morning was wonderfully still, and the sun, just clearing the pine trees towards Weybridge, was already warm. He did not remember hearing any birds that morning, there was certainly no breeze stirring, and the only sounds were the faint movements from within the cindery cylinder. He was all alone on the common.

Then suddenly he noticed with a start that some of the grey clinker, the ashy incrustation that covered the meteorite, was falling off the circular edge of the end. It was dropping off in

flakes and raining down upon the sand. A large piece suddenly came off and fell with a sharp noise that brought his heart into his mouth.

For a minute he scarcely realised what this meant, and, although the heat was excessive, he clambered down into the pit close to the bulk to see the Thing more clearly. He fancied even then that the cooling of the body might account for this, but what disturbed that idea was the fact that the ash was falling only from the end of the cylinder.

And then he perceived that, very slowly, the circular top of the cylinder was rotating on its body. It was such a gradual movement that he discovered it only through noticing that a black mark that had been near him five minutes ago was now at the other side of the circumference. Even then he scarcely understood what this indicated, until he heard a muffled grating sound and saw the black mark jerk forward an inch or so. Then the thing came upon him in a flash. The cylinder was artificial—hollow—with an end that screwed out! Something within the cylinder was unscrewing the top!

“Good heavens!” said Ogilvy. “There’s a man in it—men in it! Half roasted to death! Trying to escape!”

At once, with a quick mental leap, he linked the Thing with the flash upon Mars.

The thought of the confined creature was so dreadful to him that he forgot the heat and went forward to the cylinder to help turn. But luckily the dull radiation arrested him before he could burn his hands on the still-glowing metal. At that he stood irresolute for a moment, then turned, scrambled out of the pit, and set off running wildly into Woking. The time then must have been somewhere about six o’clock. He met a waggoner and tried to make him understand, but the tale he told and his appearance were so wild—his hat had fallen off in the pit—that the man simply drove on. He was equally unsuccessful with the potman who was just unlocking the doors of the public-house by Horsell Bridge. The fellow thought he was a lunatic at large and made an unsuccessful attempt to shut him into the taproom. That sobered him a little; and when he saw Henderson, the London journalist, in his garden, he called over the palings and made himself understood.

“Henderson,” he called, “you saw that shooting star last night?”

“Well?” said Henderson.

“It’s out on Horsell Common now.”

“Good Lord!” said Henderson. “Fallen meteorite! That’s good.”

“But it’s something more than a meteorite. It’s a cylinder—an artificial cylinder, man! And there’s something inside.”

Henderson stood up with his spade in his hand.

“What’s that?” he said. He was deaf in one ear.

Ogilvy told him all that he had seen. Henderson was a minute or so taking it in. Then he dropped his spade, snatched up his jacket, and came out into the road. The two men hurried

back at once to the common, and found the cylinder still lying in the same position. But now the sounds inside had ceased, and a thin circle of bright metal showed between the top and the body of the cylinder. Air was either entering or escaping at the rim with a thin, sizzling sound.

They listened, rapped on the scaly burnt metal with a stick, and, meeting with no response, they both concluded the man or men inside must be insensible or dead.

Of course the two were quite unable to do anything. They shouted consolation and promises, and went off back to the town again to get help. One can imagine them, covered with sand, excited and disordered, running up the little street in the bright sunlight just as the shop folks were taking down their shutters and people were opening their bedroom windows. Henderson went into the railway station at once, in order to telegraph the news to London. The newspaper articles had prepared men's minds for the reception of the idea.

By eight o'clock a number of boys and unemployed men had already started for the common to see the "dead men from Mars." That was the form the story took. I heard of it first from my newspaper boy about a quarter to nine when I went out to get my Daily Chronicle. I was naturally startled, and lost no time in going out and across the Ottershaw bridge to the sand pits.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK

[Return to Contents](#)