

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

Schlock!

WEBZINE

VOL. 14, ISSUE 21
28TH MARCH 2019

DESCENDANTS OF THE AWOKEN

BY ALEXANDER R
MORGAN
ALONE IN A
DARKNESS THAT
WOULD MAKE THE
BLACKEST OF
MIDNIGHTS
QUIVER...

FECKED UP BY GK MURPHY

HUNTER

BY BRUCE
DAVIES
THE
ABOMINATION
OPENED ITS
MAW...

ROOMS BY IOANA BÎRDU

WWW.SCHLOCK.CO.UK

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Edited by
Gavin Chappell

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

Schlock! Webzine

Copyright © 2019 by Gavin Chappell, C Priest Brumley, GK Murphy, Rob Bliss, Bruce Davies, Ioana Bîrdu, Gregory KH Bryant, Alexander R Morgan, H Rider Haggard, C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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

Vol. 14, Issue 21

28th March 2019

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 no longer review published and self-published novels directly, although we are willing to accept reviews from other writers.

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 *Temple and Jungle* by [Greg Willis](#). Graphic design © by Gavin Chappell, logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

EDITORIAL

[IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!](#) *Horror Comics and Comic Horror* from Vincent Davis: CARTOON

[DESCENDANTS OF THE AWOKEN](#) by Alexander R Morgan—*Alone in a darkness that would make the blackest of midnights quiver...* HORROR

[THE CASTLE OUROBOROS](#) Part Two by Rob Bliss—*The stone monolith...* HORROR

[HUNTER](#) by Bruce Davies—*The abomination opened its maw...* CTHULHU MYTHOS

[ROOMS](#) by Ioana Bîrdu—'You have nothing to be afraid of. You will meet no harm here.' HORROR

[FECKED UP](#) by GK Murphy—*Reduced to mere offal and carrion...* HORROR

[THE SEARCH FOR ASTRA PALACE](#) Part Fifty Nine by Gregory KH Bryant—*Parking orbit...* SPACE OPERA

[ERIC BRIGHTYES](#) Chapter Eighteen by H Rider Haggard—*How Koll the Half-Witted Brought Tidings from Iceland...* SWORD AND SORCERY

[THE LOST CONTINENT](#) Chapter Three by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne—*A Rival Navy...* SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC

EDITORIAL

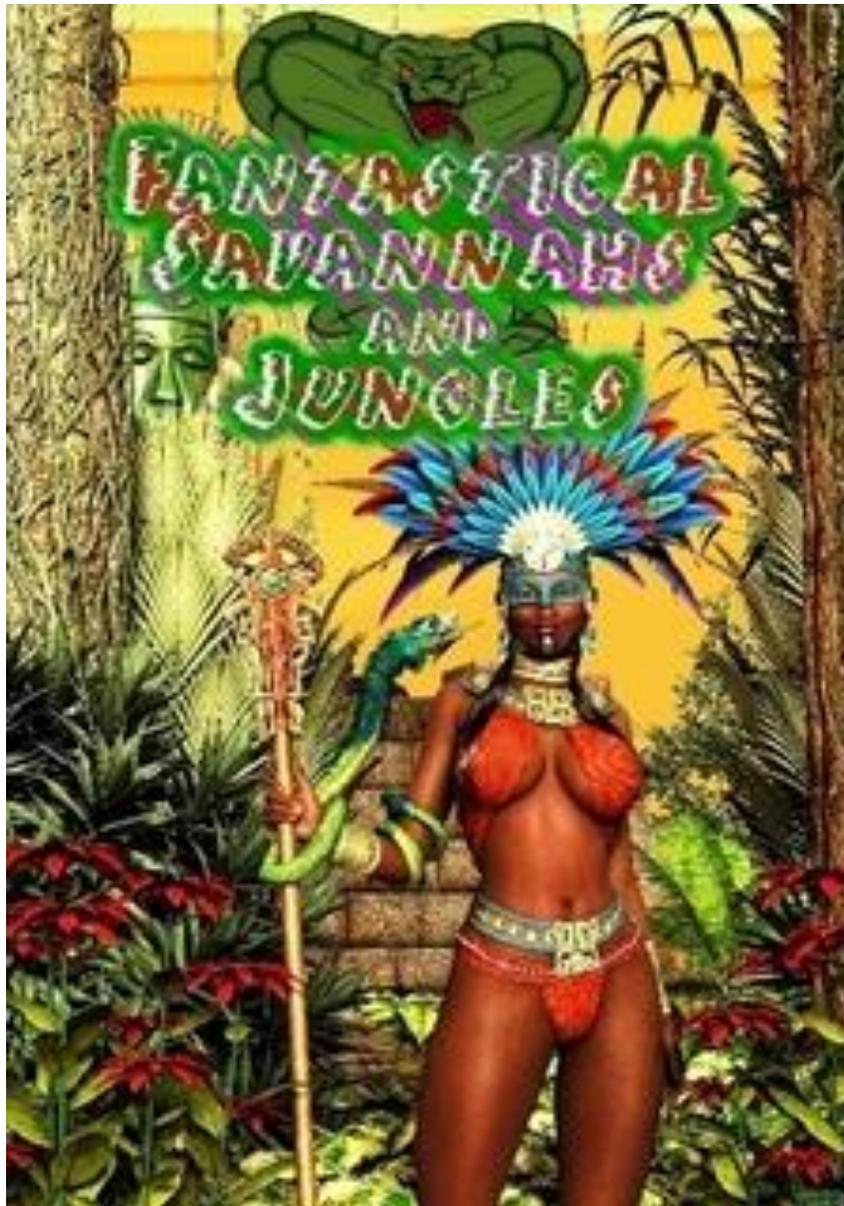
This week, a paranoid cocaine addict explores a terrifying ruin lost in a Central American jungle. Friedrich Heine is surprised by what he finds on reaching the Gothic estates of Kasimir Kohl. A priest receives a strange request from a criminal facing execution. An amnesiac awakes in a strange room, but who is he, and where? And a holiday in Ireland goes sour for Eddie Dicks.

Out in space, Dimara guides the O8-111A to Astra Palace. Back in the Dark Ages, Eric hears news from Iceland. And on returning to Atlantis, Deucalion fights a sea battle.

—Gavin Chappell

PS. For an update on how we will accept reviews for the webzine, please go to [Schlock! Reviews](#).

Now available from Rogue Planet Press: [Fantastical Savannahs & Jungles](#)



[Return to Contents](#)

IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

By Vincent Davis



ANOTHER HOLIDAY DINNER GETS AWKWARD WHEN UNCLE BOB'S POLITICAL OPINIONS REAR ITS UGLY HEAD.

Vincent is an artist who has consistently been on assignment in the art world for over twenty years. Throughout his career he has acquired a toolbox of diverse skills (from freehand drawing to digital design, t shirt designer to muralist). His styles range from the wildly abstract to pulp style comics.

In 2013, his work in END TIMES won an award in the Best Horror Anthology category for that year. When Vincent is not at his drawing board he can be found in the classroom teaching cartooning and illustration to his students at Westchester Community College in Valhalla NY.

He lives in Mamaroneck NY with his wife Jennie and dog Skip.

<https://www.freelanced.com/vincentdavis>

[Return to Contents](#)

DESCENDANTS OF THE AWOKEN by Alexander R Morgan

*Lost not only to memory, but time itself.
Awoken from a slumber that transcends comprehension.
Baring visions from beyond the darkest chasms of creation.
Visions so unbearable, the mind collapses under their weight.
A collective nightmare wrought by self-affliction.
Wrought by ignorance and greed.*

Perhaps, after all, the cocaine was to blame.

I spent a good portion of my drug induced adventure exploring more of the dense jungle surrounding the modest fishing village I was staying in. Venturing through it under the sun is one thing but seeing it in the moonlight appealed to me much more. In my excitement, I forgot to take into account the nocturnal creatures that stalk their prey in this region. I could feel their eyes upon me. Not only was I a potential meal, but a harsh storm was rolling in as well; it was only a matter of time before the elements would have gotten the best of me. Paranoid, cold, and tired, I stumbled upon ruins that looked to be of Mayan origin. Shelter. To my relief, my lighter still had some fuel in it. I was surprised to see how intact it was when I entered—there was minimal modern interference from both human and beast.

Murals and ancient carvings etched from a civilization long past covered the walls. The inside seemed much bigger than the outside as I explored the structure. The rooms appeared to be infinite in the scarcity of light from the torch I carried. With my thirst for adventure dying down along with the euphoric rush of the local delicacy I've come to fancy in my years following the war, I found myself a room that wasn't influenced by the outside breeze all that much. I did what anyone who was confused and tired while suffering from those dreadful aftereffects, sleep.

It was not a peaceful slumber. When I awoke, I felt even more exhausted, but I was sure it had to have been midday already. Spending what felt like hours looking for the exit, I became frantic when I was unable to retrace my steps. Unbeknownst to me, I was journeying deeper into the temple. Step after step, corridor after corridor, chamber behind chamber, I felt uneasiness overwhelm me as I became even more lost. I began singing to calm myself down, but the echoes my voice left did nothing but excite my paranoia further. It sounded as if someone was singing along with me. I foolishly dismissed it as a trick of the mind, but after having fallen into the predicament I find myself in now, I should have done anything else but continue.

The further into the monolithic structure I ventured, the odder its design became. The faces on the murals became twisted and unrecognizable, steps became larger and more spaced apart, and the construction was—to my knowledge—much more intricate than anything the Mayan civilization was thought capable of engineering. I asked myself what the purpose behind such architecture would be but was answered only with dying light. As it flickered away, I couldn't help but feel like it was taunting me—mocking my every movement through the temple. And then—then...no more.

That was it.

I was alone in a darkness that would make the blackest of midnights quiver with nothing more than the little bit of sanity I desperately clung to. I prayed it would not abandon me like my cheap flame. But what good the innovations of Man did for me. Forlorn, I looked to other deific figures from all corners of the world in hopes of receiving some semblance of comfort. I received none.

There was a point, I think, where I made an attempt on my life. I recall a period of delirium which, for an instant, allowed me to escape far away from this place. A peculiar vision where I could not help but gaze endlessly at a lone world decayed into nothing more than a dried husk. Around that lonely figure, stars formed constellations unseen by any astronomer and they danced through time in a non-linear fashion which resulted in an even more peculiar awakening—yes, I remember opening my eyes to my short, rapid breaths and an unbearable pressure around my neck. In my absolute shock at what I—or what something—had done in my momentary lapse in consciousness, I fastened my belt back around my waste as hastily as my trembling hands would allow and trudged on through the depths. I started to wonder if I was on my descent into Hell, and that what I was experiencing was the area that lies between there and Earth. I wondered if my hike through the jungle was nothing more than a symptom of my suffering through a fatal overdose, and the moment I entered this ghastly domain—these ruins assimilated from miserable stone, I had been on a well-deserved journey to my own personal circle of Hell. Then again, perhaps this is a punishment more fitting for someone who has done the things I have done. What I would give to walk alongside Dante and his poet instead of being subjected to things unfathomable by human reason. For no Minos or Medusa could compare to the horror I gaze upon during my, perhaps final, moments of reminiscence.

I could bear it no more! I ran—I ran! I did not care if my sense of direction was hindered, I only cared to not allow myself to become prey to something far more powerful than the fear I felt—feel. In my rapidity, I nearly knocked myself unconscious when I felt the unforgiving stone of a dead end stop every fibre of my being in one swift, painful moment. I was trapped. There was no way out. I was going to starve. I was going to become sustenance for some ungodly creature. I was going to die. Or so I had thought, and now wish were the case. When I came to, there was a pounding in my head that started as nothing more than tapping. Thud, thud, thud, thud. But as the pain receded, and as I found myself clawing away at that wall like a caged animal, it grew louder—louder than the machinations crafted from iron and steel employed in the great war. Bang, boom, bang, boom! I had to escape! Bang, boom, bang, boom! I tore at the cold stone until my fingernails peeled off, leaving nothing more than raw, sensitive flesh.

Bang, boom, bang, boom! I smashed my fists into the wall until my knuckles were rife with blood and throbbing with pain. Bang, boom, bang, boom! I screamed and cursed until my voice was nothing more than a hoarse cry. Then, the first and last miracle happened. Bang. I felt a block loosen. Boom. The sensation of pain was infinitesimal compared to my desire to see the light of day again. Bang. But what I saw...boom...couldn't have been anything further from my desire.

The wall's infrastructure toppled down, and an opening lay beyond the detritus. The first bit of light I had seen in what my mind still perceives as no less than an epoch. But in that light was something remarkable—something to behold...something that should never be seen. Not even with eyes like these—eyes of ash. Eyes of sorrow. Eyes of deceit—eyes that spent their existence gazing upon the tragedies I am—was tasked to document so that others would need not look closely at such things. What I witnessed beyond the stone was nothing short of unsettling. A chamber that looked to be older than human history that resembled more of a chasm than anything Man could ever be capable of constructing; the walkway that lined the parameter was layered with makeshift dwellings arranged similar to that of an insect-like hive. Torches aflame lined the path, spiralling along in a fashion that was organized not for sense of location, but for ritual. Below me, darkness. Above, darkness. For a moment, my heart was filled with excitement; I had just discovered an ancient, undocumented civilization! Oh, how eager I was in that instant—in my discovery. It gave me hope that this labyrinth was not, in fact, unending. I suppose, though, that hope was nothing more than a guise for my naivety.

The only way left to journey was undoubtedly the least welcoming path I could have imagined. I lifted a torch from its sconce and began my descent. The pounding thundered through the chamber and did so with every step I took. Perhaps my senses were submitting themselves to the horrors stirring in my mind, but the sound grew both in intensity and volume as I proceeded; with each succession, my thoughts grew murkier and more twisted. Unable to withstand such intense aural anguish, I sought shelter in one of the dwellings. Careful not to disturb anyone—or thing that may have been residing inside, I rested my torch on the ground next to another sconce. The hovels themselves were something researchers and archaeologists would consider fascinating. I, however, found them to be quite disturbing: fashioned from a metallic like substance, these...structures hardly shared any commonalities with any known architecture; no windows or any means of ventilation and in place of a door was a small hole shredded out of the metallic material. Inside, I felt around hoping to find something familiar—furniture or other cultural centrepieces but could find none, so I found myself a spot where the pounding was less agonizing and slouched against the wall. But my momentary escape from duress did not last. There was a gap, so to say, between each beat of the sound that haunted me so. And in that gap, I sought clarity. In that clarity came not a moment of profound realization regarding the life I chose to live, nor did it bring about an epiphany of my wrongdoings. In it came the sound of writhing flesh. In it came a bitter, stale taste that lingered on the tongue. And in it came a putrid odour I could not, for the life of me, identify with anything I've smelled before. Not even the corpse piles I found myself far too acquainted with during my time documenting the blood-soaked aftermath the war wrought could compare to the stench. My senses were overwhelmed, blurring together in an incoherent mess. All but one.

I tried so hard not to let loose a full shriek when I felt a soft, warm hand grab at my ankle. But my effort was in vain. Why, I ask, why must fear be the basis that drives Mankind's most basic instincts? If it had been any other primal emotion, perhaps...then perhaps my tale would be a different one. Before I had a moment to react appropriately, I felt another set of fingers wrap themselves around my other leg; what was most terrible though was the glow their eyes exuded. Two, then four—six, eight...more and more indigo hued eyes of twilight began piercing through the darkness. As they drew closer, I struggled, and as I struggled, their grip grew tighter. Nothing—and I do not use that term negligently—has ever made me feel so helpless than when I

was forcefully dragged out of the hovel. I was expecting creatures of abomination, but the torchlight revealed nothing more than mere people—tribals reminiscent of a long-aged Mesoamerican heritage. But their eyes and abnormal behaviour made it hard for me to believe they, in fact, were people. Not one of them spoke or used any sort of gestures, yet they still communicated effortlessly amongst themselves; even their movements were entirely uniform. With each of their steps perfectly in sync, they carried me down the spiral walkway. I screamed—oh how I screamed and cursed and spat and wept at them! But my cries were in vain, for the deeper we went, the louder that pounding grew.

The dark devoured us when we neared the pit's bottom. The only perceivable light came from those damned eyes floating around me like little lanterns. When they stopped bobbing up and down, I was brought to my knees. They maintained a firm hold on my body. I looked to a pair of those twilight eyes and begged for an explanation. The eyes whom I had been trying to reason with floated away from the rest of us. They shrunk into beady dots with the distance they covered. The hands that were upon me grabbed me by the head and forced me to look onward into the abyssal crater we were in. From there, I caught a glimpse of dim light. The light grew in intensity as the pounding—to my relief—began to die down. My relief, however, was short lived when I saw what the light had delivered unto me in my moment of affliction. Impressive in stature, grotesque in appearance, tendrils wriggled around its body as if each one was its own sentient being moving with their own unknowable purpose. This creature—this gelatinous mass lacked any orifice that should be necessary for any living creature to survive...but I did not need to see eyes to know its attention was entirely focused on me. Immobile in its abhorrent design, the creature bellowed out through the light it emitted. Its servants seized me once again and presented me to their master. I became nothing more than an offering facilitated by either worship or fear—perhaps both. Merely an arm's length away, its moist surface was more noticeable as it glimmered in the light. Had I not been starving, the stench emanating from it surely would have been enough for me to vomit; rotting flesh left to decay in a cesspool filled with an unmentionable mixture of waste would pale in comparison. Panicked and nauseous beyond belief, I shouted at the creature, demanding to understand its motives. There was a lingering quiet until a tendril emerged squirming from the top of its “body” and was gently lain on my forehead. And then it showed me.

It showed me everything.

Those deemed flawless march across Europe in a twisted crusade to lay claim to all of the world. Dark plumes rise from trains built from iron and steel colder than the harshest winter as they carry the cries of those branded for their beliefs. An empire that lies in the east vanishes in light and fire that poisons the Earth in its wake. A nation founded upon freedom meddles in the affairs of its neighbours. Jungles, villages, people—incinerated with a concoction of flame spewed from winged beasts of steel. Two nations wage a war of secrecy with the intent of reaching the stars before the other. Immaculate twin structures that scrape the horizon are reduced to rubble and ash. The deserts of Asia are pillaged by Greed, drenching ancient soil in black blood. Nations collapse from within. Those who sit above society revel in scandals while they lead civilization into a tunnel barren of higher reason. Gluttonous madmen cling to their seats, fearful of losing

the power those seats hold. And the Earth, she takes her final breath, unable to bear the strain of her children anymore. They scramble to find a new home to destroy yet are unable to work together to achieve their own common goal. Humanity, an eager victim of ambition, finally withers into dust. An infinitesimal speck in an infinite realm of existence. Gone.

My mind was fractured at what the creature had showed me, and I could do nothing but weep—not for myself, I determined my fate long ago—but for the souls who had fought in this great war with the hopes that it was indeed, the end to all wars. To the best my sobbing would allow, I asked the grotesque prophet why it had showed me what it had. Again, silence—then in one, singular instant, it uttered its answer within my mind in a thousand languages; some familiar and some impossible for the human tongue to comprehend. But amidst the slew of answers, there was one word I understood.

Mercy.

Unable and unwilling to struggle anymore, the tribals held me down as this thing—this all-knowing god loomed over me. I heard the sound of two damp surfaces parting and knew it was my time. The ordeal was, as best as I can describe, like childbirth, had the hands of time been reversed. As I was consumed, and as I felt the slimy walls of its interior close in around me, I noticed that it was spatially larger than what it appeared on the outside. Everything I've known and everything I've seen is becoming harder to recall the longer I sit in this abyssal prison. The nightmares that have haunted me since Brussels and Reims fade away. Maybe this ancient tribe sought the same shelter from their own demons years ago upon discovering their new god. I—I think that, perhaps, joining this community shines in comparison to the impending future this world will bring. Until then...the only thing I can do is close my eyes and slumber away until there is nothing left for me to dream. If there really is such thing as a merciful God, then I will wake up in Hell with at least some recollection of who I am...

Your name is Edward...Edward...Ed....

THE END

Short Writing Course

Only £30

A comprehensive course from Amazon's bestselling author Steven Havelock. Steven Havelock has read dozens of books on 'How to Write' to distill these writing gems.

**The course contains 18 videos, in total
packed with 164
writing gems of wisdom.
The course only costs £30.**

**To gain access to the 18 videos, which will
be yours to watch for life please email:
Stevenhavelock101@gmail.com**

or visit
WWW.dynamicink09.Com

[Return to Contents](#)

THE CASTLE OUROBOROS by Rob Bliss

Chapter Two

I boarded the Westbahn railway to Salzburg, and from there I would have to transfer to the Tauernbahn south to the Hallein district, transferring again at Golling an der Salzach, heading back east until I was in Hallstatt. The journey would be quite picturesque, and I reminded myself that I was on a vacation of sorts, so there was no need to rush.

Once in Hallstatt, I would still have a chore finding transportation to the estate of Kasimir Kohl, since his directions were a touch abstract, informing me that it wasn't particularly easy to arrive directly at his estate. It lay somewhere in the mountains, and one could become lost traversing mountain roads into barren, cold altitudes if one did not have a guide. The locals, he wrote, should be able to assist my direction.

I packed two bags: one for clothing, a shaving kit, the necessary accoutrements of a bachelor's hygiene and demeanour, and another as an impromptu medical kit. Then I settled in with my copy of *The Strand*, finalizing the serialization of a novella by Conan Doyle, entitled, "The Hound of the Baskervilles". I had read all of Doyle's stories published thus far, and the novella kept me in raptures. I was sorry that its last chapter was now printed, but I would eagerly await the next adventure of the intriguing Sherlock Holmes. I hoped to emulate his deductive reasoning in my own medical studies, but, alas, I feared I was closer to the misapplied logic of Doctor Watson.

I read the instalment three times before the rocking of the train lowered my eyelids and I used the magazine as an inadequate blanket.

It was not long before I was switching trains at Salzburg to head further south into the Berchtesgaden Alps. Once the locomotive was surrounded by the heights of majestic mountains, the rain began. A chilly November, with little snow, but much downpour. I exited the train terminal and immediately began to enquire with the ticket seller as to how I would obtain passage to the estate of Kasimir Kohl.

The old, ragged man looked at me with wide, blue eyes for a few moments, then cleared his throat. He looked back down at his hands fiddling below the line of the shelf of the ticket window and mumbled that I should head into the tavern adjacent to the station.

I did so, my bags weighing down my arms, my Inverness coat deflecting the rain as best it could. I informed the barman of my dilemma, who also stared at me for far too long before answering my query. He said he would inform a local man by the name of Axel, who would take me to the estate when he was no longer indisposed.

Ordering an ale, I sat and waited for my escort, enjoying the surrounding mountains, clouds haloed around their lofty heights, even the rain as it spattered against the iron-meshed window in the smoke-filled tavern. Nothing would lessen my joy at the vacation and the adventure I was on.

The man arrived, seven-foot and as massive as a bull, wearing a furred vest and a jacket made of worn leather, torn in places, as were his canvas pants. Not the type of guide I had expected, but I was in unfamiliar climes. He wiped water from his intensely blue eyes, and followed the barman's arm pointing to me as I waited at a table overlooking the cobblestone street. This was a small town, a village really, that had not yet caught up to the Twentieth Century, resting comfortably in time somewhere near the Eighteenth, or perhaps even Seventeenth, Centuries. (Which I couldn't really fault it, since the new century was but a babe.)

Axel spoke little, knowing my destination from the barman. I caught his scent as I followed him out of the tavern where he ushered me into a two-horse post-chaise. Smelled like the animal he wore as clothing. He tied my bags into the coach box as I ducked into the vehicle and closed the drapes against the downpour. The reins soon snapped and the chaise lurched forward, wheels rattling over stone.

A hard journey over cobbles, and then roads pitted by endless wear from footsteps, carriage wheels, and the incessant storms. I asked the driver if he thought the weather would last long, but he merely grunted in reply. I could only surmise that in the mountains one received an endless downpour for days. There was nothing to do, and it would adequately explain the sullen countenance of my driver. I did not want to labour his ear with questions, so I remained inside the carriage and buttressed myself against the endless tossing and bouncing over the trying roads.

Soon, the vehicle tilted at an angle upward. I peered through the window to see that we inched up an uneven and battered mountain road. Tall, thick trees encroached on either side of the single-lane path, broken only by massive walls of mountain stone. The horses bent their heads low to push hard with their legs as they climbed. Soon, I could see glimpses through the dense forest of Hallstatt grown small in the distance.

The rain strengthened and thunder shuddered high through black clouds. The drops rattled on all sides of the carriage like stones, and echoed a clamorous tumult inside the dry carriage. I felt as though I were locked in the carriage, barraged by the heavens. A screaming prison on wheels.

I felt the need to tell the coachman to stop and rest, to find shelter for him and his horse from the incline of the mountain path and from the storm, but I felt he would not respond to my charity. He knew his direction, and I'm sure the rain was no new pest to him. He sagged beneath the rain and kept his eyes forward up the road until it levelled off and the horse's legs relaxed into a slowed trot.

I peered through the drapes closing the windows on either side of the carriage. On one side, the town of Hallstatt was gone, lost to the heights. To the other side, a castle rose from forest and stone. Trees of a dark green rose as sentinels guarding the stone monolith, cloaking it from the outside world, making a world unto itself.

I doubted that I had arrived. Kasimir mentioned a 'family estate,' not a Teutonic castle. But at such a height what other abodes could rise? I reflected upon the years of him and his family. I had to be frank with myself and admit that the letter he had sent had told me the most of himself

that I had ever known. He had never mentioned a sister. He rarely spoke personally of himself. Always only of politics, history, philosophy, and the future of man's inquisitive mind.

He seemed to be a man with no history, I concluded in the carriage.

A handful of stone gargoyles above the portico witnessed my arrival, their demonic visages frozen as their sculptor cut them. The driver pulled the carriage to the large, iron-banded, double oak doors within the portico and halted the hooves of his steeds. I had arrived at the 'family estate' of a man I knew nothing about.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK



Rob Bliss' new book is now available from [Necro Publications](#).

[Return to Contents](#)

HUNTER by Bruce Davies

“Begin any time you’re ready, my son.”

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. I don’t remember how long it has been since my last confession. Since then, I have committed too many sins to name.”

“Do you repent these sins, my son?”

“I repent the harm I have caused to innocents in the name of protecting them.”

“What about the harm you have caused to your friend, Mark?”

“Nice try, Father. I did not kill Mark. What I did was a last kindness to a friend long gone.”

“You must repent this heinous and grievous sin my son. I cannot absolve you if you do not repent. Our time is running out, John. The guards will come to prepare you soon.”

“You needn’t worry about that father. I will be long dead before they can strap me to that gurney. They will never punish me for a crime I am innocent of.”

“You’re not planning of killing yourself, are you, John? Suicide is a mortal sin my son. I cannot absolve you of that. You’ll damn yourself.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Father. I have no intention of killing myself. Never the less, death comes for me soon and, I will not fight. I appreciate your visit father but, I think it’s time you leave.”

“Very well, my son. The blessings of the Father, Son and, The Holy Spirit, be with you.”

“And with you, Father.”

That was the last time I saw John. I inquired to the prison if his death was peaceful. I was informed that he died an hour before he was to be prepared for execution. I asked how he had died, for fear of suicide. The prison physician paused a moment before telling me that his death had been declared natural causes. No drugs had been found in his system and he had no injuries that they could find. At the time, I was unnerved by John’s eerie prediction of his death and the physician’s report but now, I understand.

Several days later, a package was delivered to my church. The messenger asked for me specifically and then handed the package to me. When I asked who it was from, he told me that he didn’t know. The package was dropped off at their office with instructions and a one-hundred dollar bill. The instructions were that the package was to be handed to me and only me.

My curiosity was piqued, so I took the odd package to the vestibule and opened it. Inside were

just three things, a hand-written letter, a small, silver-metal box and, a wax-sealed envelope of some weight. I wondered who would have sent me the package so I picked up the letter and looked it over. I was shocked to find that it was from the prisoner that I had given confession to several days before.

Dear Father Mc Coy,

I am sorry if this package finds you at a bad time. I wanted to ask something of you when you came to see me but, I could not chance the guards hearing and preventing this from reaching you.

Within the box that came with these letters, is some dirt from my home town. I wanted to be buried there but, all of the local churches did not want me buried there due to the nature of the accusations against me.

All I'm asking you to do is take the box to King's Rest Cemetery and find my grave. The cemetery is only about a mile and a half, south of the prison. Stand over my grave and scatter the contents of the box over it.

A simple task, yes? Nothing illegal or immoral.

If you choose to do this last thing for me then, find some place quiet, open my sealed letter and, read it. After you read that letter, you'll understand why I did all those supposedly, evil things. If I have, by some measure, misjudged you and you decide not to fulfil my last request. I beg you, Father, take the contents of this package and burn them until nothing is left of them. It is best for everyone involved that no one other than yourself reads the sealed letter.

*Thank you again,
John*

A strange request but, seemingly innocuous. I decided that since it was neither illegal nor immoral, that I could do as he asked, being his final request. I was interested in reading the sealed letter as well and perhaps, getting a better understanding of what would make a seemingly unassuming individual like John, murder his lifelong friend.

I drove back to the prison the next day and found the graveyard. It was a dismal and grim place, even for a cemetery. The markers for most of the graves were old and worn to the point of being unreadable and the very air seemed rife with a malaise that choked the very soul from the living. I found John's grave quickly, not wanting to stay for an extended time. It was not difficult to locate, being the most recent. I opened the silver box and was accosted by a flash of light so bright that it blinded me. I dropped the box and rubbed my eyes. Was this John's final jest, blinding the priest who had offered him absolution? It seemed not for, my vision cleared a few moments after.

When I was able to see again, I found the box on the ground and spread the contents on John's grave, closed the box and, set it on the marker. As I stood up and dusted myself off, I looked

around. It seemed as if a dark cloud had crossed the sun, sending the entire area into gloom. Looking up, I saw that the sun was still bright in a clear sky. The oppressive darkness seemed to loom over the cemetery despite the lack of clouds. I felt a shiver run down my spine.

I quickly made my way back to my car and pulled out of the cemetery's drive. I hoped that the change of scenery would alleviate the feeling of foreboding that hurried my pace. As I reached the end of the drive, I looked once more into my rear-view mirror. To my utter horror, I saw several large arachnoid creatures in the trees. I slammed my foot onto the brake and turned to get a better look but, there was nothing. I gazed into the mirror once more but still, there was no sign of anything out of the ordinary.

My mind tried to make sense of the horrific images I had just seen but, it could not reconcile them with the reality I had always known. I sat there, entranced, unable to pull myself out of the stupor that had befallen me. My foot slid from the brake pedal and the car lurched forward, jarring me. The fog of thoughts cleared from my mind and I was able to resume my journey.

The drive back to the church was less stressful as, the dark shroud seem to lift. The sunlight was a balm to my soul. By the time I returned to the church, the sun was setting and evening shadows lengthened. They seemed almost peaceful. I returned to my vestibule and sat down at my desk, mentally and physically worn. My eyes happened to catch sight of the red, wax-sealed envelope that had come in John's package. The mere sight of it now unnerved me. It brought up memories of the cemetery and the hallucinations that had so horrified me.

I was much averse to breaking the seal and read the letter within. With great effort of will, I took up the sharpened letter opener and cracked the ominous red, wax, seal. My hands shook greatly as I removed the pieces of heavy parchment from the envelope. The weight of the pages seemed too great for a work of its size. Dropping the parchment onto my desk, I tried to relieve myself of the onus of the letter. Thought it lay upon my other correspondences, I could not diverge myself of the dark curiosity I felt.

The parchment unfolded easily in my hand. The first words upon the page seemed to leap up and take hold of me. Like God himself pronouncing my undoing, the olde English script spoke.

“Father McCoy.”

I dropped the page and nearly had not the strength within me to pick it up again. I believe that it was the colour of the script, crimson red, that gave me pause. I ran through my meeting with John, trying to see signs of any recent wounds but, there were none. I nearly called the physician who performed John's autopsy, to question him on any recent injuries. I recalled then, that there had been no injuries on John at the time of the physician's investigation.

For several minutes, I stared at those first words, “Father McCoy,” unable to move my eyes forward. Finally, my stamina returned and I forced myself to read on.

Father McCoy,

I told you that this letter would explain the reasons for my actions and, so it shall.

Ten years ago, I was nobody. My life and existence were unworthy of note. I was a custodian at a university, one of a dozen or so people who held that position. During the summer recess one year, I agreed to switch shifts, on a Friday, with another custodian so he could see his daughter. He worked the night shift and I the day so, it was a simple matter. I relaxed that day, and went into work to cover my co-worker's shift but, when I arrived, he was there. I asked him why he was not with his daughter but, instead of answering me, he held out his hand, palm up. In his hand was a small, metallic silver box.

Suddenly, the box lid sprung open. There was a dazzlingly bright flash of light. I was blinded and backed away. When my vision cleared, I looked up and was horrified by the sight before me. I had not known my co-worker for very long but, to my eyes, he had always seemed hearty and hale. The emaciated thing before me was a terrifying caricature of the man I had known. The tattered remains of his uniform hung loosely off the desiccated body. I could see that beneath the skin, something writhed and squirmed. The black pits that had once been eyes, stared at me with such intensity as to freeze the very blood in my veins. The scream in my throat died upon my lips, drained away with my breath.

Try as I might, I could not make my limbs obey me. The thing that I had known as my co-worker, reached out and placed its palm upon my chest and suddenly, an unearthly and completely inhuman voice spoke to me. The voice told me that I had been chosen because I was strong of body and mind. The voice also told me that if I walked with it for a bit, I would have the choice to accept or reject its offer. I felt my body become mine again and had to fight down my instinct to run. My fear had abated though not my revulsion at the unearthly thing before me. I accented to it and followed through the halls of the university.

Eventually, we came to a halt before one of the large auditoriums. My companion gestured for me to remain silent and, opened the door. By the dim light of the hallway and lamp posts outside, I couldn't see anything. My companion then pointed to the far back corner of the room, near the ceiling. I looked intently and slowly, something came into view. I fell to my knees and nearly evacuated my stomach. Perched in the corner, amongst a patchwork web of pulsating threads was in ichor-dripping form of some massive arachnoid abomination. Littered amongst the abstract webs were cocoons, roughly the size and shape of a full grown human. Amongst the larger cocoons was a much smaller one. A single blonde braid of hair hung limply from the wrappings and, I heard a mewling cry coming from it. Apparently, the abomination also heard the cry. It reached up, plucked the tiny form from its spot and, brought it up to its many eyes. Upon seeing this, my companion signalled for me to remain in the hall and advanced into the room. The abomination opened its maw. I watched as monstrous, black, fangs unfolded from within the gaping mouth. My companion strode forward and spoke. The word crowded the air as if it were more real than the surroundings. The abomination took note of my companion and hissed at him. My companion spoke again, the sound grinding at my ears and sanity.

I struggled against the power of the word's reality, fighting to remain unchanged by the inhuman tones. The abomination was not as strong and was utterly unmade by the force of the word.

My companion picked up the small bundle and brought it up to me. I thought that he was going to release the child within but instead, he ripped the child-form's head from her body. I stood aghast until he split open the child's head. A slimy black lump spilled out, onto the floor. For a moment, the greasy blob simply lay there. A moment later, spines began protruding from the disgusting mess. The spines produced more spines from their end, as did the new spines.

"Legs!" I thought.

The thing turned on me, opening a mouth full of flashing, razor-edged teeth. Before the thing could pounce on me, it was speared through by a broken table leg. I looked up as my companion pulled the wooden shard from the alien horror. He went amongst the web threads, piercing each cocoon through the head until, none remained untouched.

When he finished, he returned to my side. In my mind's eye, images flashed, conveying a tale. The images revealed things to me. I knew why I had been chosen and what I needed to do.

I was shown, that a race of alien gods called the Great Old Ones had come to our world in its infancy. The abomination that I had seen was a parasite from the home world of the Great Old Ones. It had come to earth with them, infesting some of their servants. When the Great Old Ones noticed the infestation, they chose certain servants to exterminate the parasites.

When humans evolved, the servants saw an inexhaustible army of disposable exterminators and manipulated certain humans into parasite hunters. Eventually, the Great Old Ones passed into their death sleep beneath the mountains and the seas. Their servants left the task of killing the parasites to the humans they had changed.

Now, the changed humans sacrifice themselves to kill the parasites wherever they find them but, they also accept that the "partner" which gives them the ability to stand before the naked horrors and face them on equal grounds, will eventually kill them. Humans were never meant to contain such power. The "partner" feeds off its host while giving the host power and knowledge to combat the parasites. It is a sacrifice for the greater good.

By now Father, your partner is fully developed. I apologize for the pain but, it needs to bond with you....

Upon reading that, I ripped off my clothes and examined myself. I found nothing. My nerves were on edge. I picked up John's letter and continued reading.

The pain won't last too long and then, you'll understand. Your partner will explain. Again I apologize. Normally, when a human hunter chooses a successor, that person has a choice. I however could not find a suitable person to take my place and then, I was arrested. I thought myself lost until I met you. I could not make the offer with the guards watching. I had my lawyer transfer this package to you, hoping that you would understand and be strong enou...

I felt an indescribable pain in my chest and toppled from my chair. The pain became a pressure

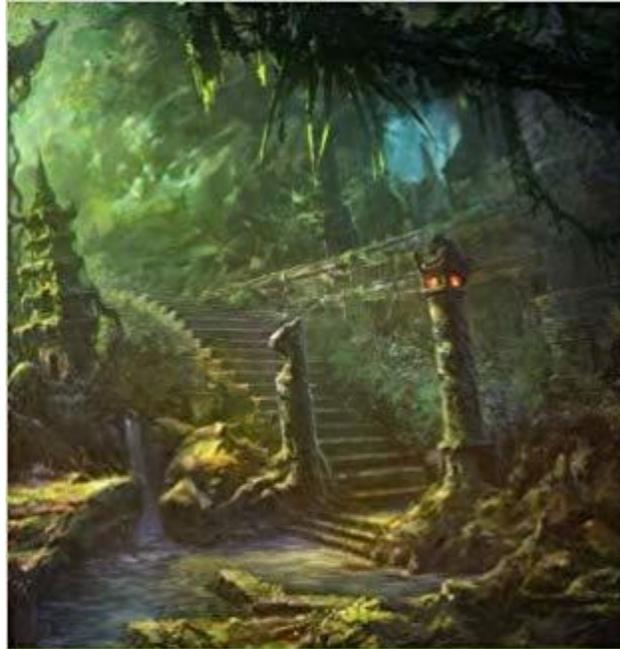
that built until, the skin and flesh of my chest exploded outward. I writhing mass of tentacles pushed out to cover the wound. The pain and pressure subsided but, I lay there upon the ground, my mind in chaos. I could not accept what my senses were telling me.

Images of things I have no words for, flooded my mind. The images pushed me to the brink of madness but, some force pulled me back from that black abyss. I waged a desperate battle to fight the absolutely inhuman thoughts that threatened to tear my mind apart.

How long I lay there, on that floor, fighting to remain myself in spite of the terrifying truths I was bombarded with, I do not know. When I was able to rise, I knew that I was changed. My senses were clearer than they had ever been and revealed to me a hidden world of things far older and more powerful than humanity.

I understood what had happened to me and what it meant to my existence. I gathered my clothes, dressed and walked away from the life that I had lived. The priesthood was a pale cover for the eyes of humanity. It protected them from seeing the true face of the universe and drowning in its black, abyssal eyes. I could no longer partake of that sheltered vision. I was part of a deeper reality now and never could I return to that innocence. I walked away that day, no longer a priest but now, a Hunter.

THE END



Sherlock Holmes

and the Beast-men of Atlantis

**Milly 'Mad Dog'
McGuigan**

[Return to Contents](#)

ROOMS by Ioana Bîrdu

Looking back on it all I can't say I remember much from the beginning, the time before the room. All I recall is pitch-black darkness and feeling immaterial and light. Something else was there too. A presence of some sort. I can't explain it, but I knew it was there and I also knew I was part of it.

I existed like that for hours, days, months even; how long it lasted I could not tell, for time there, as you've all seen, behaved in funny ways. After a while things began to change. The thought that something was about to happen took shape inside my head and little by little, as the feeling grew in intensity, I became anxious. Shortly after, something grabbed and pulled me hard towards the ground and instead of crashing into it as I expected, I kept falling and falling. While this happened, I hear muffled voices talking inside my head, but I understand nothing of it, then "He's coming," then everything goes blank.

When I woke up and opened my eyes it took me some time to adjust and understand the white surface above me was in fact the ceiling of a room. I found myself lying on a bed with sheets as white as the ceiling and I felt confused and disoriented. I pressed my palms into the mattress, pushed and rose, then leaned against the bed frame. I was in a large room which I did not recognize and found really bizarre. Everything inside, from the walls to the furniture to the smallest object were either black or white. Even my own clothes, a white t-shirt and a pair of equally white pyjama pants. The room had no windows, nor other sources of artificial light, yet it was luminous and clear and it smelled fresh. In the back of the room, to the right, was a door, white, and opposite from it on the same line was an armchair, tall and dark and velvety.

'Welcome,' said a sudden voice, so unexpected that I jumped out of the bed and looked around to find its source as well as something I could use to defend myself if needed.

As if reading my mind the voice said, 'You have nothing to be afraid of. You will meet no harm here.'

'Who said that? Show yourself,' I said in a voice that sounded less confident than I aimed for.

At that moment something moved in the armchair and my eyes set upon a small silhouette that was now walking towards me.

The woman was small statured and looked frail. She wore a black, simple dress with a white collar around her neck, like the ones our grandmothers used to wear when they were kids and later would crochet themselves. Her hair was silver white, held up in a bun and she wore cat eye glasses. As she got closer I could tell she was measuring me up and down, yet her eyes were gentle and unobtrusive.

'My name is Amelia G. Dala. You can call me Miss Dala. And you are?' she said and raised her hand to shake mine.

With my hand midway in the air, I opened my mouth to answer and stopped. I searched my mind for the name, but no matter how hard I tried I couldn't find it.

'I don't know. I can't remember it.'

'Can you tell me the last thing you remember?'

I thought and thought and nothing came to mind. I couldn't remember anything about myself or my life. My head was as blank as the ceiling above my head. I started to pocket myself hoping that I would find some source of identification and found nothing.

I looked at the woman almost sheepishly and admitted I couldn't remember a thing. She gave me a kind, unsurprised look, as if she already knew.

'Try not to worry too much about it,' she said. 'It's normal in your condition'

'What do you mean my condition? What happened to me? Where am I?' and before I could go on with my interrogation she made a slow gesture with her hand to stop me.

'You have been on a journey that now has ended. You are to remain here, in the room, until you recover.'

'A journey? I, I don't understand.'

'As I said, don't worry about it. It will come back eventually. It's part of the process.'

But I was worried. I had woken up in a strange room, with no recollection of myself and my past and the only other person there wasn't of much help.

I asked the woman to call my family, I must have had one or at least a friend, someone who knew me, someone who could come and pick me out and take me home and do the things people do in situations like that to help me get my life back. But she ignored me and blind to my arguments returned to her chair.

Perplexed by how disrespectful I found her behaviour, I was about to point it out to her when it hit me. Of course, I thought, in all the chaos and confusion I had forgotten the most obvious thing. I could just walk out of there. So I made my way to the door and turned the knob. It was locked.

'What is this? Why is the door locked? Am I being held prisoner?' I snapped and went to confront her.

'You are not a prisoner,' said the woman. 'But as I have already told you, you cannot live the room until you are ready. It is simply impossible in your condition.'

'I'm ready now, let me out.'

‘What you feel is fear, not readiness. When you’ll be ready you will know. But not right now. The door only opens when you’re ready.’

‘It won’t open because you’ve locked it. You’re keeping me here for who knows what reason.’

The woman sighed then said, ‘You do not listen.’

‘I can give you money,’ I said trying my luck. ‘Just get me out of here and I promise I’ll get you enough money you won’t have to work a single day in this place.’ Nothing. ‘Okay. Listen. I understand, you are afraid you might get in trouble. You don’t have to get me out, just give me the key and I’ll say nothing to no one. If anyone asks I’ll just say I don’t remember,’ I said, playing a humour card. When still she said nothing I began threatening I would turn the room upside down and break everything inside unless she let me out. Yet the woman remained unperturbed. Somehow she had managed to procure an arras and she was now working at it. One look at her was enough to realise I could have done everything I menaced to do and still it would have been the same to her. I decided to have one more attempt at the door. Same result. I kicked it, smashed myself into it to break it, called for help, but the door remained as sealed as did the woman.

Desperate, with no idea of what to do next I collapsed on a chair and all I could think about was how alone I felt. And even though I could not remember my past, I was sure I must have never felt as helpless and as hopeless as I felt in that moment.

I stood there for what felt like hours and, despite all the chaos that was taking place inside my head, I somehow managed to convince myself that someone will eventually notice I was missing, that they will call the police and they will come to save me. It was only a matter of time. The thought helped me relax a little. After a while I rose from the chair and took a closer look around. The room was simply furnished. There was the bed on which I had woken up, with two bookshelves on its left. In the middle of the room, a small, round table with a chair. On the opposite wall, facing the books, hung a black and white drawing of a tree. It must have been fall because its top was half leafed, while the other half covered and fed the ground beneath the trunk. Its roots went deep into the ground in never-ending connections and paths. Carved at the bottom of the trunk was a hollow, dark and deep and irresistible. A blink of the eyes and as my fingers touched the black surface on the canvas, I found myself standing in front of the pit.

The hollow opened into a tunnel which led me inside a very small, double levelled room. As I entered my eyes fell over a massive chair which stood in the middle of the room. Next to it was a projector and spread all over the floor dozens of boxes filled with rolls of film. The upper level only had a bed.

For unknown reasons to me then, I felt deeply compelled to find out what was on those rolls. I picked one randomly, placed it in the projector and hit play. As the film began, I made myself comfortable in the chair and watched. Then roll after roll, I kept on watching with no understanding of any of the scenes and moments happening before my eyes, for it looked like I was seeing cuts and fragments with no fluidity and chronology. Nonetheless, I was completely

captivated. It came to me then that I had arrived there for a reason and that was to create something out of all that material that lied at my feet.

It took me months to watch all the rolls and years to finish the film. Every day the same thing happened: I woke up watched the films, catalogued them, took notes on what happened in each of them and tried to make connections between them. I observed the name Oliver was repeated multiple times and I figured out he was my main character. I cut and pasted and put together frame next to frame. I followed Oliver from his birth, witnessed his first words, first kiss, first heartbreak. During all this time, Oliver became so intricately part of me that I forgot all about the black and white room. All that mattered was my need to create and my work, because by now I felt that I had earned the right to call it my work.

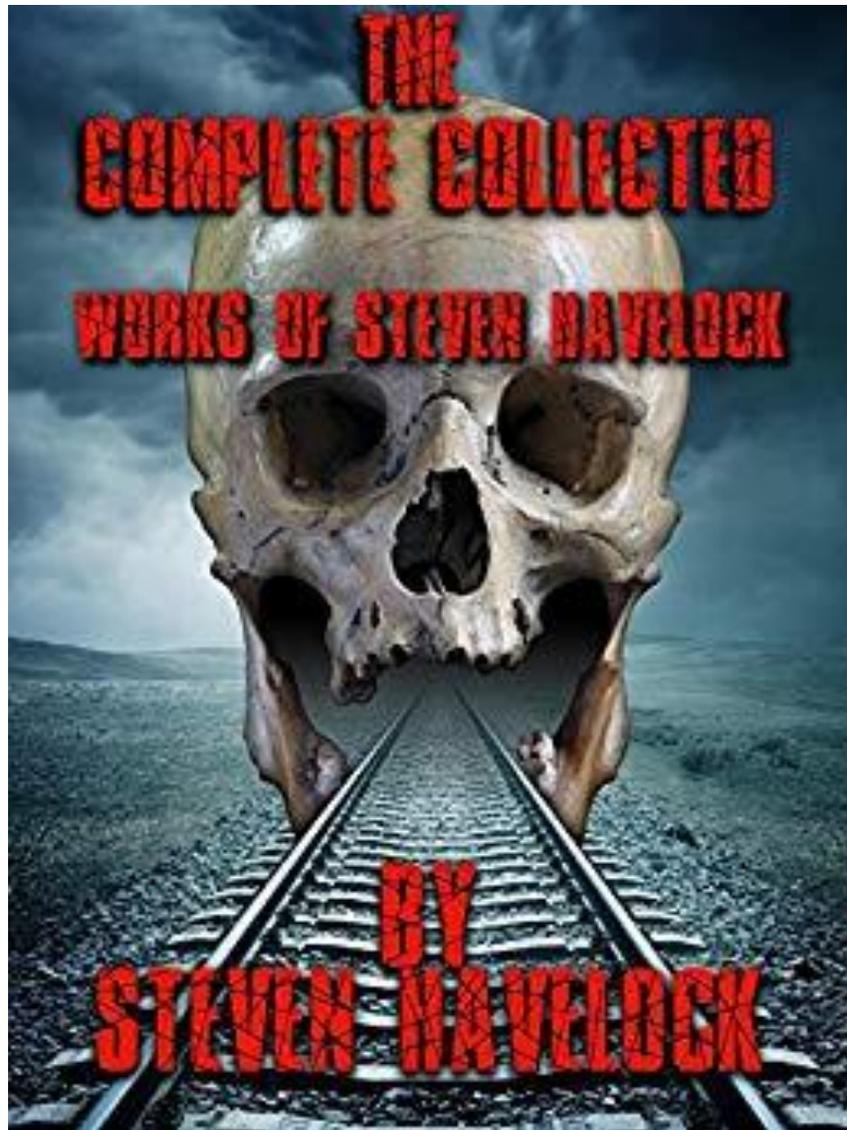
I was stuck on a roll which contained Oliver's wedding day when it happened. I had everything I needed except for Oliver. I looked through all the footage which was now carefully organized and couldn't find him. And then I knew.

I saw the street light turning green. I heard the wheels accelerating and felt the smell of burnt rubber. Then intense pain and the sensation of slipping away. I was dying all over again.

When I regained consciousness I found myself back in the black and white room, in front of the painting. I have been living inside the tree house for years and now I was back in the room where it all started as if I had never left. But something was different now.

'Well done, Oliver,' said a familiar voice and as I passed Miss Dala and reached the door, it opened and I stepped through.

THE END



[Return to Contents](#)

FECKED UP by GK Murphy

As it happened, this was Eddie Dicks' first trip to Ireland, since previous summers he spent in his native English towns on holiday, basking on the beaches of Torquay, Great Yarmouth, Brighton, and even on the sands of his home town in the North of England, the glorious underrated holiday resort of Blackpool. He was a proud northerner and took no shit off anyone out to blacken Blackpool's name or who casually insulted the good reputation or social standing of his home town. The place had a long history. Visitors from abroad nicknamed the place Little Las Vegas...even Jerry Lewis, the legendary American actor and comedian, adored quaint little Blackpool and often spend many a vacation there. Jerry loved Blackpool and Blackpool loved Jerry.

Ireland didn't seem to have any theme parks, any at all. But scenically it was spacious and beautiful, with vast rolling landscape, idyllic and quaint in so many ways. In fact, from what Eddie saw, the majority of the place was green hillside and expansive fields that oddly enough seemed to be rarely occupied by cattle or other livestock.

The EU/Britain malarkey was afoot at the moment as politicians attempted to flesh out and solve this elephant-in-the-room problem of the existence of a temporary Northern Irish backstop. Yes, it was afoot all right (much to everyone's chagrin) as it was dissected by Brussels, yet despite a massive mutual agreement between British Parliament and Irish MPs that there should never be a hard border, there would be still a long period of 'fucking about' as Tusk and Co refused to prolong negotiations (Perhaps the EU boys were a tad nervous—or scared—that if the UK exited Europe, perhaps similarly more countries in the EU may have taken notice and recognized the benefits of leaving the prehistoric EU and do the same thing, if Britain proved a success story?).

Who fucking knew and who fucking give a shit?

Eddie Dicks certainly couldn't give a shit. Right now, it was just past midnight in Dublin and good drink had flowed freely for the last few hours on his tour of the pubs and bars. He'd met the delightful Sinéad and was now walking across a field with her on their way to her home on the outskirts.

Dark-haired and brown eyed Sinéad was a good looking young woman with a set of tits and nice arse to die for and 30-year-old Eddie Dicks was sure if he stuck by her, he'd most certainly get his leg over tonight if he played his cards right. Yes, he was all for improving and cementing better Anglo/Gaelic relations and what better way to achieve this aim than by two from each isle ravaging each other throughout the wee small hours of the morning (technically night time), fucking like wild beasts?

It was treacherous trudging through this particular one field and getting more of a swamp with every step underfoot. It was here they drew to a sharp halt, and paused in horror as Eddie, disgusted, pointed out the monstrous vision before them on the damp grass. A horse's carcass lay there in the vast field minus a ribcage and stomach. It looked like the crows and gulls had been at it, maybe the odd fox or wild dog as well, as maggots and worms finished off what meagre waste

was left over. In its day, the black horse had been a handsome creature, now reduced to mere offal and carrion.

“Jesus,” Eddie spluttered, catching his breath, “That is fucking disgusting!”

Sinead said, “I know, he was such a great horse as well, such a beauty, sadly deceased now and there’s nothing anybody can do about it. He died the way many do...cardiac arrest, just collapsed where he stood.”

“Shouldn’t you have buried it or something? Showed a bit of respect for the animal?”

“We don’t do that in Ireland. I don’t think they do it in England either—or anywhere in the world. Wherever or whenever they die, what you see before you is a universal outcome for every horse, unfortunately.”

“It just seems such a damned shame.”

Eddie seemed transfixed with the gruesome artefact.

Eventually, Sinead tugged on his arm impatiently, when she said, “Come on, the grass is damp and we’re in Dublin, which means rain isn’t far off, so let’s dig our heels in and make haste. Come on, lover boy!”

“I’ve got a better idea,” he said, grinning, “Let’s make good of our surroundings. Why don’t we strip naked and start fucking each other’s brains out right here?”

There was a brief pause for silence as the two considered matters deeper.

Sinead liked the idea, he could tell.

Immediately, she reached across and pulled her jumper up over her head, releasing her broad, bra-less tits, tits which had bounce and width and appeared sumptuous and tempting. Her nipples were mammoth and round—they looked well-sucked and toyed with in their day. Eddie wanted to put his face in between them and snuggle in.

“Take your skirt and knickers off,” he demanded, “and then get down on the grass on your back and spread your legs!”

She teased, “My English heartthrob...”

“Just do it, bitch!”

Other women may have found such language rude and insulting yet Sinead found it turned her on more, the way Eddie dreamed it would.

But she was full of surprises, too.

“I want to suck on your dick. I want to suck your dick until you come over my face and in my mouth. I want to swallow and taste your come. Please, Eddie, get your cock out!”

Without any hesitation, Eddie unzipped his jeans as Sinead got out of her skirt and knickers, until suddenly both of them were completely stripped naked in the dark field. There were no lights nearby or on the lane next to the field so it was pure darkness. However, the gleaming moonlight and stars provided sufficient illumination and glow for the couple to see what they were doing.

Foreplay was in order, so as Sinead lay on her back on the wet grass, Eddie lay on top of her as they kissed passionately, and stroked and kneaded her broad tits, biting the nipples gently with his teeth as she reached and grabbed his stiffening cock.

“Kneel up,” he said finally, and stood, “Suck me off properly, bitch!”

“I love it when you call me bitch,” she said. She knelt before Eddie, teasing his dick with her hands, stroking it gently as she pulled back and forth his foreskin to reveal his big purple tip, “You’re so massive!”

She put it in her mouth and started to pump it as she sucked. Eddie winced as her teeth scraped his shaft. He felt her teeth touch his bell-end. It felt so empowering and such a beautiful thing to experience, something he hadn’t experienced for a very long time. And ‘experience’ was the key word, since Sinead had buckets of it, proven by the way she loved and worked every inch of his swollen erect cock, with every jerk and pull and every flick of the tongue, was the stuff of experts.

Suddenly, he paused and peered across at the savaged horse a few feet away, and at the maggots feasting on its dead flesh and bones, in a way hearing the maggots go to work, a kind of rustle, a kind of buzz, a singular hum that disturbed Eddie.

“I’ve got something,” Sinead said, as she reached into her skirt pocket, when she produced a couple of pills, “Take one of these...it is purest Ecstasy...it will make our fucking better. Our blowjob will feel simply more heavenly!”

He snatched the pill and put it in his mouth without hesitation.

At first, Eddie felt no effect. Sinead still knelt in front of him, working his shaft, jerking it for dear life. She slurped as she sucked, spitting her saliva on the cock to lubricate further its passage into her throat, deeper and deeper down as she swallowed it whole, gargling and sometimes seeming to choke on its length as she did so.

“Holy shit...” Eddie muttered, as things around him started to darken and shift, when abruptly the field and everything went into overdrive and began to spin, and he lost all sensation in his body. “You bitch...” he said, “you’ve fucking drugged me!”

He heard a guttural, demonic cackle resonate in the vicinity of where they were situated in the field. It was Sinead laughing at him as he collapsed to the ground in a heap. The final imagery he witnessed before passing out was Sinead pumping his dick, yet also the stink of the fetid dead animal, and visions of the maggots and worms devouring it inch by inch until it was down to the bone, where they chewed the marrow...

He seemed to lay there staring up at the stars and moon, as they spun.

It seemed a lifetime wait before anything happened.

He gurgled, "Fucking Irish whore..." but no reply issued.

After a while, the voices of two or three Irishmen filled the atmosphere, and if he didn't merely imagine it, was he being dragged naked across the damp grass, perhaps towards the big black-painted barn he'd witnessed in the distance earlier, where Sinead supposedly lived nearby.

Everything was turning into a fucking nightmare...

Again, in his mind's eye, he saw deeper into the horse's ribcage and stomach and could smell the stench of animal death, the maggots eating entrails, the stomach and spleen, ripped and shredded.

He felt vomit emerge from his throat into his mouth and coughed and spluttered as he choked on it, trying desperately to simply breathe and avoid any serious blockage. The pill wasn't Ecstasy. It was something else. It was a strong sedative, something that reduced your body to fucking jelly.

The maggots, the worms, the rotten stomach...

It was these thoughts that induced the sickness. Fuck knows where these three Irish bastards were taking him...honestly, it barely required consideration, or at least in Eddie Dicks' situation, or thoughts concerning when and where he'd waken, or if he'd end up sober or drug-free or still drugged-up on this shit, in his right frame of mind, just the bloke from Blackpool—the bloke who suddenly realized this off-the-cuff holiday to quaint old Dublin was a bad idea from the start.

"Motherfuckers..." he mumbled as he was dragged backwards by the legs across the grass, "Irish motherfuckers, all of you...let me go, Irish cunts..."

Somewhere, there was laughter.

One thing was for sure...the horse wasn't laughing anymore. The horse was dead and being eaten by the elements. The maggots and worms were devouring its rotting flesh.

"Poor horse..." Eddie muttered, inspiring more sick laughter, "poor little horse, with the maggots..."

Images of his father filled his mind, a minor distraction to the field, the darkness and the dampness on his back as he was dragged through the grass and sludge.

“Dad, I’m sorry…” he slurred.

In Blackpool two days earlier, Eddie was at his parents’ house getting packed and ready to go for his vacation in Dublin, when his father Philip Dicks took him to one side in the kitchen over a hot mug of Bovril.

He said, “As you know, son, a lot of the Dicks family stem from Ireland and it would be a nice gesture if you paid a visit to Roe Churchyard in the city—in Dublin centre—and placed a wreath and some flowers on your grandparents’ graves.”

Eddie took a bite from a slice of toast doused in peanut butter and honey. He nodded, “I plan on doing exactly that, dad. It’s only right I show my respects for the Dublin side of the family while I’m over there.”

Philip grinned, “I suppose you’ll be consuming gallons of the black stuff while you’re there? Did you know Guinness is actually red in colour?”

Eddie chuckled, “You’re joking, right? Everybody in the world knows Guinness is black.”

“Do you want me to prove it? There’s a bottle in the fridge. I’ll go get it and prove it…” Dad said assuredly, “Wait here, son, and prepare to be dazzled!” and opened the fridge door.

This was ridiculous. It seemed an awfully pointless exercise.

He uncorked it and poured half into a pint glass. Then, he gestured to Eddie to come over to the window, where Philip held the glass up to the sunlight shining in.

“Well I’ll be damned,” said Eddie, amazed, “I’m stunned. I would never have known. I mean, all my life I’ve thought Guinness was black as the Ace of Spades, pure black nectar!”

“Now you know…but you know something, I’ll have money on the table saying the majority of Ireland don’t have a clue the stuff is really red, either!”

Shaking his head, Eddie took the glass and sipped from it. “Delicious whatever colour…ha, who would have thought, eh?”

“You learn something new every day, as they say.”

“Hell yes, you certainly do, I’ll admit I have. Next, you’ll be telling me Foster’s Lager is blue!”

They laughed together.

Dad said, “Irene was on the telephone asking about you earlier. She’s a lovely girl, Irene...such a shame you finished with her when you did, your mother and I thought it was true love, or that it was leading to something bigger...you broke her heart, Edward.”

“Irene is eighteen stone in weight, dad. She loves nothing more than to eat and stuff her face. I’m not going to compete with a McDonald’s or Pizza Hut.”

Dad scorned, “She could easily lose weight, couldn’t she?”

“I don’t think so. She’s tried and failed so many times. She’s a bona fide binge eater and that is that—I’m finished with Irene, so please, I don’t carry a torch for her and neither should you and mum. You never know, I might meet someone in Dublin. Irish girls are bedazzling.”

“Poor Irene, though.”

“Oh, please...”

Here, Dad chirped up, when he said, “At least you gave up smoking, son. How long has it been since your last one?”

“Three months and twelve days, and still counting. It’s been easier than I thought, once you get the first couple of weeks out of the way. It’s all downhill after that, don’t believe different. In the mornings were toughest, to wake and not go for a smoke...and, of course, after meals, that was hard. But I’m off them now—no going back!”

Silence ensued as both men considered things.

But Dad broke the silence. He looked at his son gravely and said, “The part of Dublin you’re staying in...don’t go too far off the beaten track, you can come across some odd folk, people who perhaps...have a thing about the British...the English in particular.”

“I think everybody in the world has a deep distrust of the English, dad. The Irish are renowned for their hatred of the Brits. But we holiday there often and their more than glad to accept our money. I don’t think I’ll have anything to worry about. Besides, I have more than my share of Irish blood!”

Dad sighed, “That’s quite true, yes. But they don’t know that...unless you take your birth certificate with you.”

“Are you serious, dad?”

“Quite so, yes...that way, if you come into any bother, you simply direct them to where you keep your luggage and indicate where they can find the certificate, and they’ll let you off scot-free.”

After a pause to think, Eddie decided his dad might have had a point. “Yeah,” he said, “I’ll take the damn thing, it might prove a good insurance policy, just in case if anything does happen to go

tits-up and I land myself in bother with any of the locals—or the Irish law, for that matter, who I'm sure hate the Brits just as much as Dubliners.”

Dad gestured for Eddie to sit down at the kitchen table. Curious, Eddie sat down, wondering what was so important.

Philip sat down opposite him at the table. He took a sip from his coffee and said to his only son, “Did I ever tell you about your Uncle Stephen?”

Eddie shook his head, “No...the one who was killed?”

“He was killed in Ireland. He died in Dublin, as a matter of fact.”

“What happened to him?”

“It was nothing to do with the IRA, like some say...No, it was a family living near Dublin, perhaps with IRA sympathies, that killed your uncle...they beheaded Stephen one night and put his head on a wooden stalk. They planted it outside the local constabulary. It was a sad day for the entire Dicks family...” Dad reached across and squeezed his son's hand, adding, “I dread it may happen again, not just to you, but any Briton, anyone they take a dislike to...I'm worried for you, son, that's all. Be very careful over there, where you go and who you talk to, and if you are picking up women, just vet them first and be vigilant.”

“Don't worry, dad, I'd be foolish to pick up any old women. Women are part of my vacation, yes...I'm red-blooded, after all...but I'm no mug, I'm far from stupid.”

“Stephen was like you, just on holiday in Dublin. He left behind two sons, a daughter and a loving wife, all because of that Dublin trip.”

“I'll be fine, really, honest, I swear.”

“I know you will, son, but I'm just giving you the heads up. Ireland isn't exactly the Golden Isle it professes to be. Be watchful at all times and take nothing for granted.”

Eddie chuckled and took another bite of his toast. “Dad,” he said, “You worry too much.”

He wished his dad was with him in Ireland right now. Actually no, he never...

It was like waking in an ice-box when Eddie opened his eyes. The cell-like room had green-painted walls, slightly runny and strewn with green paint, and with patches and streaks of damp and decaying plaster, giving the impression this place had been around for many, many years.

But the cold atmosphere was shocking, almost electrifying in a sense.

More shockingly, though, was the fact Eddie Dicks was strapped to a stretcher naked and stripped of clothes, with both wrists cuffed to the metal railing on either side. He felt dazed and

rather groggy, and his eyesight was blurred, his mouth dry, plus above all this, he desperately needed a piss. His bladder was at bursting point, even achy as if the mass of piss collected within may eventually burst his stomach like an exploding bubble.

However, shortly his bladder did fail him and he pissed. Yet, this reaction was more out of horror for the vision he witnessed in the room with him, which he saw once his sight cleared and everything was diamond perfect, despite the filthy stench of his own urine which pervaded the entire room's atmosphere like skunk stink.

In the corner of the ceiling, above a grey wooden door, was a huge, fat spider, at least three feet wide, with long black, hairy legs, and amid its thick hair, Eddie identified two little pinpoints, red and neon, that were its eyes. They watched him intently, and yet further, the thing had a mouth under these two eyes, with a grotesque set of human-like teeth protruding, crooked and yellow. Its body moved as it breathed, in and out, in and out, inhale, exhale...the thing even seemed to be smiling.

The spider spoke, "You travel to the Emerald Isle, Mr Dicks, and expect an easy ride. Ah, not so if you're an Englishman. You see, Ireland has become a very tolerant place down the years, and yes it has been hard for us, but you will always have your diehards that exist and still harbour old and past values, and still despise the English, just like me I admit...and just like the others you're about to meet and greet."

There was no hint of humour in the tarantula's words.

Eddie spluttered, "Others...? Are you going to kill me?" Out of frustration, he yelled, "This is fake, I'm dreaming...you're not a real spider, this is fucking impossible!"

The spider chuckled, "You're well and truly fecked..."

An Irish-sounding, speaking spider—that was new!

"My family are from Ireland," Eddie protested, "I'm part-Irish!"

But as he spoke, dizziness and nausea swept over Eddie Dicks as everything started to fade, and in the background the sound of the spider laughing echoed throughout the green room, until this raucous, crazed laughter became a buzz in his ears, where it started to finally drain away, drift into the subconscious ether, until it faded so much it was gone all together, and a welcome darkness pervaded...

...and then light again...

He was strapped to a chair and sitting at the head of a large dinner table. He was still naked and cold.

Sinead, who sat to his right, smiled sweetly at Eddie who presently felt so nauseous he thought he may pass out and fall into darkness again.

He managed to say, “Did you bring me here, Sinead?”

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I thought you were English. I now have information through good sources that your family is actually Irish.”

“Why am I handcuffed to this chair, then?”

She shook her head, “I’m afraid you must still die. If you lived and reported this incident, my family would be truly fucked...I cannot afford to let you inform the police. We would all go to prison. It would be on the news bulletins...Ireland would get a bad name, like it did the old days, like during The Troubles...”

Hearing he was going to die, a frightened Eddie got more frightened. He wasn’t sure if he could negotiate with this mad women yet it seemed the only option available. But how can you reason with somebody who was clinically insane, or somebody ready and willing to commit murder? Again, he felt his bladder go, yet he managed to contain the pushing force well, and keep it in his stomach better than before.

She confided, “My brother and father brought you here, not me. You’ll meet them soon. And you’ll meet my grandparents...they’re all currently preparing supper for us.” Her eyes lit up with glee, when she added, “You can dine with us before you die, Eddie Dicks...and you’ll get a good Irish funeral, in the fields, in a field of clover and holly, just like every Irishman deserves, in the countryside where you will return to sweet nature.”

“I’d rather stay alive, Sinead. Irish or not, I have a family in England, a mostly-Irish family. Please, let me go...I’ll walk away from here and never return. I won’t report anything to the police.”

“Oh, I’m not so sure, Eddie.”

“Please, Sinead, you must. When I don’t return to England my family will get in touch with the authorities and there will be a manhunt in Dublin, and they’ll discover my killers. You’ll get life imprisonment for sure, both your family and you.”

Sinead looked uncertain and doubtful. Eddie’s ploy might have transmitted well.

She said, “I’ll certainly give it thought. But dine with us first. I know deep down you’re Irish just like us...that makes us proud. The Irish are a proud nation, just like the English are proud. And yet the English are such bastards...”

He pleaded, “How did this come about...this hatred? England and Ireland get along well...”

She spluttered, “Brexit...that fucking backstop between North and South...it’s going to turn everybody’s lives into shit!”

“It might never happen.”

“Yes, oh yes, the British will get their way and it will, and Ireland will suffer as a consequence!”

It was difficult but Eddie managed a weak laugh, as he said, “Sinead...” and pleaded, “That reason isn’t worth committing murder for.”

“Everybody in Ireland will be fecked.”

“Everybody in the UK will be, too...you won’t be alone. But Britain and Ireland will just brush themselves down and simply carry on as usual, and it won’t be long I bet before we’re back in shipshape condition and even better than before...Fuck Labour and the Tories, because they don’t care about us as people...those pompous rich kids/men just care about themselves and their salaries, not you, not me, not us as human beings, not our countries and jobs, or the damage their indecision and no-votes will cause, votes which don’t affect them. You see, Sinead, these fucking politicians don’t have to work or graft, not like the likes of us folk who are obligated to slog and sweat our bollocks off for a wage, unlike those in Parliament who stand and wave sheets of paper at each other and shout and jeer like spoilt brats and talk shit, they don’t care about us...they care about themselves only!”

“We’re fecked either way, thanks to those bastards.”

Eddie was weeping now. “Now please, take the cuffs off me, I’ll walk out and you’ll never see me again, promise...” Her expression was blank, and Eddie feared the situation more, “please, Sinead, I beg you, have pity, please!”

She leant forward and planted a tiny kiss on the tip of his dribbling nose. Nothing Eddie had just said seemed to have affected her or held any sway at all. The trapped man wanted to scream in sheer frustration.

“We’ll discuss these matters after supper. A receptive belly makes for a receptive mind,” she said.

For Eddie, death seemed to loom nearer. Whoever these whacko people were, the entire scenario suggested they were all indeed fucking whacko and potential insane murderers.

He needed a fucking miracle to get out of this shit.

Again, it might have been seconds, hours, days later once he opened his eyes, yet this time it was to realize he was no longer restrained by cuffs or strapped to anything, just that he was sat on a wooden chair at a long mahogany dining room table. Yet, this time it was not just him and Sinead at the table in royal stead for a supper-time meal but most of the family she had spoken about previously.

The vision shocked to the core and sickened to the stomach.

Sinead sat there smiling at him, looking rather pleased with the whole set-up as a little further along the table her two brothers sat, who were two bald, elderly inbred-looking creeps who seemed to be eating the bloody, tethered end of a dismembered forearm, whilst further along, two nightmarish folks—either her parents or grandparents (this was never figured out)—who were completely dead to the world and just plain corpses, just sitting there propped-up, just there looking into blank space like showroom dummies.

Sinead said, “Would you like an arm or leg, Eddie? Because you’re truly Irish, we decided to let you live, so feel free to feast with us tonight, or would you prefer to get your cock out and let either me or one of my brothers suck you off?”

Eddie Dicks wanted to puke. Once he understood he was no longer restrained and free to move, he made haste and stood up as he backed away from the table, shocked and petrified both at the same time. This mad shit was a lot to take in at once. Bizarrely, one of the two creepy brothers looked at Eddie and waved the severed, bloody arm he was currently in the process of devouring, and slurred the words, “What the feck is the matter with you, sonny?”

“Yes,” Sinead said, concerned, “Anybody would think you were fecking frightened or something. Sit down and eat, there’s a fine feller!”

He scarpered from the room into a long lobby with a door at the end. Unawares it was early morning, sun just coming up and light emerging from the skies above, Eddie opened it and ran outside into a field naked and screaming, intending to make as much distance between him and the tiny cottage as was feasibly possible—as fast as possible. He had to move quick since Sinead and her brothers were hot on his heels, shrilling like banshees, like crazed fucking hyenas howling with mocking laughter, and this band of diseased, twisted inbred lunatics were after his blood—his flesh, his limbs, to fucking eat!

True to his word, though, Eddie Dicks made it back to the city centre, and perhaps ridiculously anybody would think, he never reported Sinead or her family of cannibals to the authorities despite the horrors he witnessed—since somehow, he thought, if he did, they would have hunted him down again in the UK and somehow have managed to bring him to a compromise and ship him back to Ireland in a wooden box or something, and if they did, he would have gotten no second chance that time around—that time, there would have been no escape. He never visited the Emerald Isle again—and fuck knows whatever became of luscious Sinead and her weird family. To be honest, he no longer cared but they must have still lived there, killing, cannibalizing and luring poor English folk into a nightmare. One day they would become a cropper and get rumbled (it was bound to happen) just not by him, it was too much of a risk—too nightmarish, too horrifically possible they looked him up in the UK. Eddie thought, not for the first time, thank God he was part-Irish...

And he often thought on those cold winter nights in Blackpool (and would often, until the day he left this mortal coil), what the bloody feck was that shit all about?

THE END

GONZO PULP PUBLICATIONS
PRESENT

Long John Silver and the Squid-God of Lemuria



David Christopher

[Return to Contents](#)

THE SEARCH FOR ASTRA PALACE by Gregory KH Bryant

Part Fifty Nine

Dimara kept the O8-111A in a parking orbit above Astra Palace. There was little she could do outside Ward's ship, so for now she simply monitored the movements of Captain Hardy's group, while communicating with them occasionally.

Hardy, for his part, was happy to allow Mud to speak for the group. These were not Hardy's usual climes, and though Mud had proven himself an excellent instructor many times over, yet still Captain Hardy was unconfident about his newly acquired skills, as was Illara.

Mud had no difficulty slipping into Astra Palace. With all the festivities surrounding the hunt for Carter Ward within the arena, security was slack. Mud easily landed the "Charon" and docked it in a berth set aside for newcomers.

"You the guys we been talking to?" one of the landing crews asked Mud, Illara and Hardy when they stepped out of their ship.

"Good ta have y'all," said another.

"Yah, s'great t' see ever'body," Mud answered. "Two questions. Where's the booze and where's the wimmin?"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! we're swimmin' in wimmin, friend, as for the booze, this place is drownin' in it, and whack and ice and speed and crack and mud and ever' other kind of goody ya can think of..."

That short exposition provoked a hilarious round of laughter. Mud, Hardy and Illara all joined in, making their own laughter as loud, rude and raucous as that of their hosts.

Illara stepped past Mud and asked, generally, "So where does a girl go to get her bets in, huh, chums?"

"Honey, you can place your bet with me. I'll treat it sweet, real sweet."

Several other such invitations came flying at Illara, which she was able to deflect with a blunt and brutal grace.

She removed her utility knife from its place upon her belt, unlocked it and gave herself a moment to pick her teeth with it. Done picking her teeth, she examined the point of her blade, then wiped the blade on her thigh, returning the blade to its sheath.

Sucking her teeth with a grin, and then spitting delicately, she said, "Sure, boys. Who wants to be the first to try his luck?"

Then, crossing her arms, she leaned back against a white-painted pylon, and gave the ground crews a most fetching smile.

They all laughed, Mud and Hardy included.

“Babes,” came admiring catcalls, “You win!” “Got my bet!” “Dayam, chickie!”

“Thanks guys. Now, which way to the fun n’ games?” Illara asked.

“Just this way, ma’am,” one of the ground crew pointed, a youngish man who enjoyed a set of foppish ears in the form of earlobes neatly trimmed to allow an elaborate fringe on the outside edge, a trend among some of the Scroungers at the time. With a bit of crimson dye, yellow and black, many had achieved a most satisfying effect.

“Down that hallway, and you’ll start seeing signs, tellin’ ya where you’ll find ticketing and seating.”

“Thanks,” Illara answered. “C’mon, gang. Let’s go get good and drunk.”

“Right there witcha, Honey,” Mud replied, being careful not to use Illara’s name.

“I ditto that,” Hardy said.

The three of them moved on. They hadn’t gone far before evidences of the wild debauchery ahead made themselves strikingly clear. Horns played, drums beat, chants were chanted. The odours of cooking wafted throughout the passageways they travelled through.

Crowds of drunken people came stumbling raucously through the walkways. The laughter sometimes grew so loud that Hardy, Illara and Mud were unable to hear each other speaking, so they stopped trying.

They came at last to a broad entrance way where dozens of people moved constantly back and forth through it. Above the entrance there depended a large globe not at all unlike the globe that was a map to the complex arena where Ward and Lacey were at that very moment fighting for their lives.

Mud, Illara and Hardy stood at the entrance way, crowds pushing and hurrying past, staring at the holographic map for many long moments. Small movements within the map were very suggestive.

“Think that might be him?” Illara asked of Mud and Hardy. None of them were aware that Lacey was accompanying Ward.

“Dunno,” Mud answered.

The map showed dark spots, reflecting the region where Ward had knocked out the electronics with the grenades. A dozen pixels representing the hunters clambered through the shadows.

Ward and Lacey came to the edge of the shadows that Ward had created some half hour before. Just beyond the edge of the shadow, burning lamps cast brilliant light throughout the labyrinth.

Ward studied the field ahead with great care. At last he began to speak.

“Awrite, chickie, here’s the deal,” Ward said.

“Uh...,” Lacey um’d.

Ward gave her a sharp glance.

“Yeh? Got somethin’ on yer mind? Whut is it?”

“Uh, I have a name, and it’s not `chick’ or `chickie’ or `babe’ or `delicious’. My name is Lacey, and maybe you could start calling me by my name?”

Ward glared at Lacey for a long moment. “I hope she’s not going to start being a pain in my ass,” he thought to himself. But what the hell, if calling her `Lacey’ instead of `chick’ will keep the peace, then sure, why the hell not?

“Okay, babe... Lacey,” Ward said. “Gotta start minding my manners. Call the lady by the name she wants. Z’at okay?”

“Sure,” Lacey said, with a smile. Ward could not help but notice that hers was a very pretty smile.

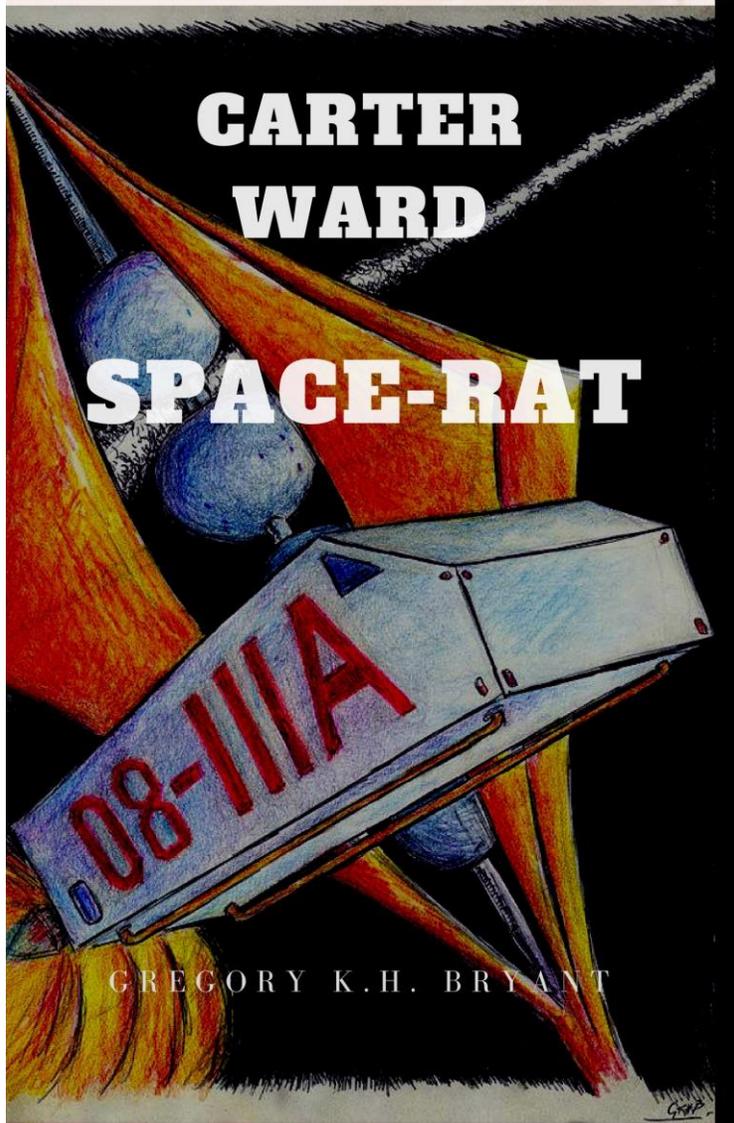
“Awrite, then,” Ward said. He gave Lacey a bright grin in return for her smile.

“Now we got that all settled, Lacey,” Ward finished, “Let’s go stir up some shit.”

“Yeah!” Lacey agreed with a laugh.

CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE

Now available from Schlock! Publications: *Carter Ward—Space Rat* by Gregory KH Bryant.



[Return to Contents](#)

ERIC BRIGHTEYES by H Rider Haggard

XIX: How Koll the Half-Witted Brought Tidings from Iceland

Presently as Eric walked he met Atli the Earl seeking him. Atli greeted him.

“I have seen strange things, Eric,” he said, “but none more strange than this coming of thine and the manner of it. Swanhild is foresighted, and that was a doom-dream of hers.”

“I think her foresighted also,” said Eric. “And now, Earl, knowest thou this: that little good can come to thee at the hands of one whom thou hast saved from the sea.”

“I set no faith in such old wives’ tales,” answered Atli. “Here thou art come, and it is my will that thou shouldest sit here. At the least, I will give thee no help to go hence.”

“Then we must bide in Straumey, it seems,” said Eric: “for of all my goods and gear this alone is left me,” and he looked at Whitefire.

“Thou hast still a gold ring or two upon thy arm,” answered the Earl, laughing. “But surely, Eric, thou wouldst not begone?”

“I know not, Earl. Listen: it is well that I should be plain with thee. Once, before thou didst wed Swanhild, she had another mind.”

“I have heard something of that, and I have guessed more, Brighteyes; but methinks Swanhild is little given to gadding now. She is as cold as ice, and no good wife for any man,” and Atli sighed, “‘Snow melts not if sun shines not,’ so runs the saw. Thou art an honest man, Eric, and no whisperer in the ears of others’ wives.”

“I am not minded indeed to do thee such harm, Earl, but this thou knowest: that woman’s guile and beauty are swords few shields can brook. Now I have spoken—and they are hard words to speak—be it as thou wilt.”

“It is my will that thou shouldest sit here this winter, Eric. Had I my way, indeed, never wouldest thou sit elsewhere. Listen: things have not gone well with me of late. Age hath a grip of me, and foes rise up against one who has no sons. That was an ill marriage, too, which I made with Swanhild yonder: for she loves me not, and I have found no luck since first I saw her face. Moreover, it is in my mind that my days are almost sped. Swanhild has already foretold my death, and, as thou knowest well, she is foresighted. So I pray thee, Eric, bide thou here while thou mayest, for I would have thee at my side.”

“It shall be as thou wilt, Earl,” said Eric.

So Eric Brighteyes and Skallagrim Lambstail sat that winter in the hall of Atli the Earl at Straumey. For many weeks all things went well and Eric forgot his fears. Swanhild was gentle to him and kindly. She loved much to talk with him, even of Gudruda her rival; but no word of love

passed her lips. Nevertheless, she did but bide her time, for when she struck she determined to strike home. Atli and Eric were ever side by side, and Eric gave the Earl much good counsel. He promised to do this also, for now, being simple-minded, his doubts had passed and he had no more fear of Swanhild. On the mainland lived a certain chief who had seized large lands of Atli's, and held them for a year or more. Now Eric gave his word that, before he sailed for Iceland in the early summer, he would go up against this man and drive him from the lands, if he could. For Brighteyes might not come to Iceland till hard upon midsummer, when his three years of outlawry were spent.

The winter wore away and the spring came. Then Atli gathered his men and went with Eric in boats to where the chief dwelt who held his lands. There they fell on him and there was a fierce fight. But in the end the man was slain by Skallagrim, and Eric did great deeds, as was his wont. Now in this fray Eric was wounded in the foot by a spear, so that he must be borne back to Straumey, and he lay there in the hall for many days. Swanhild nursed him, and most days he sat talking with her in her bower.

When Eric was nearly healed of his hurt, the Earl went with all his people to a certain island of the Orkneys to gather scat [¹] that was unpaid, and Skallagrim went with him. But Eric did not go, because of his hurt, fearing lest the wound should open if he walked overmuch. Thus it came to pass that, except for some women, he was left almost alone with Swanhild.

Now, when Atli had been gone three days, it chanced on an afternoon that Swanhild heard how a man from Iceland sought speech with her. She bade them bring him in to where she was alone in her bower, for Eric was not there, having gone down to the sea to fish.

The man came and she knew him at once for Koll the Half-witted, who had been her mother Groa's thrall. On his shoulders was the cloak that Ospakar Blacktooth had given him; it was much torn now, and he had a worn and hungry look.

"Whence comest thou, Koll?" she asked, "and what are thy tidings?"

"From Scotland last, lady, where I sat this winter; before that, from Iceland. As for my tidings, they are heavy, if thou hast not heard them. Asmund the Priest is dead, and dead is Unna his wife, poisoned by thy mother, Groa, at their marriage-feast. Dead, too, is thy mother, Groa. Björn, Asmund's son, shot her with an arrow, and she lies in Goldfoss pool."

Now Swanhild hid her face for a while in her hands. Then she lifted it and it was white to see. "Speakest thou truth, fox? If thou liest, this I swear to thee—thy tongue shall be dragged from thee by the roots!"

"I speak the truth, lady," he answered. But still he spoke not all the truth, for he said nothing of the part which he had played in the deaths of Asmund and Unna. Then he told her of the manner of their end.

¹ Tribute.

Swanhild listened silently—then said:

“What news of Gudruda, Asmund’s daughter? Is she wed?”

“Nay, lady. Folk spoke of her and Ospakar, that was all.”

“Hearken, Koll,” said Swanhild, “bearing such heavy tidings, canst thou not weight the ship a little more? Eric Brighteyes is here. Canst thou not swear to him that, when thou didst leave Iceland it was said without question that Gudruda had betrothed herself to Ospakar, and that the wedding-feast was set for this last Yule? Thou hast a hungry look, Koll, and methinks that things have not gone altogether well with thee of late. Now, if thou canst so charge thy memory, thou shalt lose little by it. But, if thou canst not, then thou goest hence from Straumey with never a luck-penny in thy purse, and never a sup to stay thy stomach with.”

Now of all things Koll least desired to be sent from Straumey; for, though Swanhild did not know it, he was sought for on the mainland as a thief.

“That I may do, lady,” he said, looking at her cunningly. “Now I remember that Gudruda the Fair charged me with a certain message for Eric Brighteyes, if I should chance to see him as I journeyed.”

Then Swanhild, Atli’s wife, and Koll the Half-witted talked long and earnestly together.

At nightfall Eric came in from his fishing. His heart was light, for the time drew near when he should sail for home, and he did not think on evil. For now he feared Swanhild no longer, and, no fresh tidings having come from Iceland about Ospakar and Gudruda, he had almost put the matter from his mind. On he walked to the hall, limping somewhat from his wound, but singing as he came, and bearing his fish slung upon a pole.

At the men’s door of the hall a woman stood waiting. She told Eric that the lady Swanhild would speak with him in her bower. Thither he went and knocked. Getting no answer he knocked again, then entered.

Swanhild sat on a couch. She was weeping, and her hair fell about her face.

“What now, Swanhild?” he said.

She looked up heavily. “Ill news for thee and me, Eric. Koll, who was my mother’s thrall, has come hither from Iceland, and these are his tidings: that Asmund is dead, and Unna, thy cousin, Thorod of Greenfell’s daughter, is dead, and my mother Groa is dead also.”

“Heavy tidings, truly!” said Eric; “and what of Gudruda, is she also dead?”

“Nay, Eric she is wed—wed to Ospakar.”

Now Eric reeled against the wall, clutching it, and for a space all things swam round him.

“Where is this Koll?” he gasped. “Send me Koll hither.”

Presently he came, and Eric questioned him coldly and calmly. But Koll could lie full well. It is said that in his day there was no one in Iceland who could lie so well as Koll the Half-witted. He told Eric how it was said that Gudruda was plighted to Ospakar, and how the match had been agreed on at the Althing in the summer that was gone (and indeed there had been some such talk), and how that the feast was to be at Middalhof on last Yule Day.

“Is that all thy tidings?” said Eric. “If so, I give no heed to them: for ever, Koll, I have known thee for a liar!”

“Nay, Eric, it is not all,” answered Koll. “As it chanced, two days before the ship in which I sailed was bound, I saw Gudruda the Fair. Then she asked me whither I was going, and I told her that I would journey to London, where men said thou wert, and asked her if she would send a message. Then she alighted from her horse, Blackmane, and spoke with me apart. ‘Koll,’ she said, ‘it well may happen that thou wilt see Eric Brighteyes in London town. Now, if thou seest him, I charge thee straightly tell him this. Tell him that my father is dead, and my brother Björn, who rules in his place, is a hard man, and has ever urged me on to wed Ospakar, till at last, having no choice, I have consented to it. And say to Eric that I grieve much and sorely, and that, though we twain should never meet more, yet I shall always hold his memory dear.’”

“It is not like Gudruda to speak thus,” said Eric: “she had ever a stout heart and these are craven words. Koll, I hold that thou liest; and, if indeed I find it so, I’ll wring the head from off thee!”

“Nay, Eric, I lie not. Wherefore should I lie? Hearken: thou hast not heard all my tale. When the lady Gudruda had made an end of speaking she drew something from her breast and gave it me, saying: ‘Give this to Eric, in witness of my words.’”

“Show me the token,” said Eric.

Now, many years ago, when they were yet boy and girl, it chanced that Eric had given to Gudruda the half of an ancient gold piece that he had found upon the shore. He had given her half, and half he had kept, wearing it next his heart. But he knew not this, for she feared to tell him, that Gudruda had lost her half. Nor indeed had she lost it, for Swanhild had taken the love-token and hidden it away. Now she brought it forth for Koll to build his lies upon.

Then Koll drew out the half-piece from a leather purse and passed it to him. Eric plunged his hand into his breast and found his half. He placed the two side by side, while Swanhild watched him. Lo! they fitted well.

Then Eric laughed aloud, a hard and bitter laugh. “There will be slaying,” he cried, “before all this tale is told. Take thy fee and begone, thou messenger of ill,” and he cast the broken piece at Koll. “For once thou hast spoken the truth.”

Koll stooped, found the gold and went, leaving Brighteyes and Swanhild face to face.

He hid his brow in his arms and groaned aloud. Softly Swanhild crept up to him—softly she drew his hands away, holding them between her own.

“Heavy tidings, Eric,” she said, “heavy tidings for thee and me! She is a murderess who gave me birth and she has slain my own father—my father and thy cousin Unna also. Gudruda is a traitress, a traitress fair and false. I did ill to be born of such a woman; thou didst ill to put thy faith in such a woman. Together let us weep, for our woe is equal.”

“Ay, let us weep together,” Eric answered. “Nay, why should we weep? Together let us be merry, for we know the worst. All words are said—all hopes are sped! Let us be merry, then, for now we have no more tidings to fear.”

“Ay,” Swanhild answered, looking on him darkly, “we will be merry and laugh our sorrows down. Ah! thou foolish Eric, under what unlucky star wast thou born that thou knewest not true from false?” and she called the serving-women, bidding them bring food and wine.

Now Eric sat alone with Swanhild in her bower and made pretence to eat. But he could eat little, though he drank deep of the southern wine. Close beside him sat Swanhild, filling his cup. She was wondrous fair that night, and it seemed to Eric that her eyes gleamed like stars. Sweetly she spoke also and wisely. She told strange tales and she sang strange songs, and ever her eyes shone more and more, and ever she crept closer to him. Eric’s brain was afire, though his heart was cold and dead. He laughed loud and mightily, he told great tales of deeds that he had done, growing boastful in his folly, and still Swanhild’s eyes shone more and more, and still she crept closer, wooing him in many ways.

Now of a sudden Eric thought of his friend, Earl Atli, and his mind grew clear.

“This may not be, Swanhild,” he said. “Yet I would that I had loved thee from the first, and not the false Gudruda: for, with all thy dark ways, at least thou art better than she.”

“Thou speakest wisely, Eric,” Swanhild answered, though she meant not that he should go. “The Norns have appointed us an evil fate, giving me as wife to an old man whom I do not love, and thee for a lover to a woman who has betrayed thee. Ah, Eric Brighteyes, thou foolish Eric! why knewest thou not the false from the true while yet there was time? Now are all words said and all things done—nor can they be undone. Go hence, Eric, ere ill come of it; but, before thou goest, drink one cup of parting, and then farewell.”

And she slipped from him and filled the cup, mixing in it a certain love-portion that she had made ready.

“Give it me that I may swear an oath on it,” said Eric.

Swanhild gave him the cup and stood before him, watching him.

“Hearken,” he said: “I swear this, that before snow falls again in Iceland I will see Ospakar dead at my feet or lie dead at the feet of Ospakar.”

“Well spoken, Eric,” Swanhild answered. “Now, before thou drinkest, grant me one little boon. It is but a woman’s fancy, and thou canst scarce deny me. The years will be long when thou art gone, for from this night it is best that we should meet no more, and I would keep something of thee to call back thy memory and the memories of our youth when thou hast passed away and I grow old.”

“What wouldst have then, Swanhild? I have nothing left to give, except Whitefire alone.”

“I do not ask Whitefire, Eric, though Whitefire shall kiss the gift. I ask nothing but one tress of that golden hair of thine.”

“Once I swore that none should touch my hair again except Gudruda’s self.”

“It will grow long, then, Eric, for now Gudruda tends black locks and thinks little on golden. Broken are all oaths.”

Eric groaned. “All oaths are broken in sooth,” he said. “Have then thy will;” and, loosing the peace-strings, he drew Whitefire from its sheath and gave her the great war-sword.

Swanhild took it by the hilt, and, lifting a tress of Eric’s yellow hair, she shore through it deftly with Whitefire’s razor-edge, smiling as she shore. With the same war-blade on which Eric and Gudruda had pledged their troth, did Swanhild cut the locks that Eric had sworn no hand should clip except Gudruda’s.

He took back the sword and sheathed it, and, knotting the long tress, Swanhild hid it in her bosom.

“Now drink the cup, Eric,” she said—”pledge me and go.”

Eric drank to the dregs and cast the cup down, and lo! all things changed to him, for his blood was afire, and seas seemed to roll within his brain. Only before him stood Swanhild like a shape of light and glory, and he thought that she sang softly over him, always drawing nearer, and that with her came a scent of flowers like the scent of the Iceland meads in May.

“All oaths are broken, Eric,” she murmured, “all oaths are broken indeed, and now must new oaths be sworn. For cut is thy golden hair, Brighteyes, and not by Gudruda’s hand!”

CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE

[Return to Contents](#)

THE LOST CONTINENT by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

3. A Rival Navy

Now, when we came up with the coasts of Atlantis, though Tob, with the aid of his modern instruments, had made his landfall with most marvellous skill and nearness, there still remained some ten days' more journey in which we had to retrace our course, till we came to that arm of the sea up which lies the great city of Atlantis, the capital.

The sight of the land, and the breath of earth and herbage which came off from it with the breezes, were, I believe, under the Gods, the means of saving the lives of all of us. For, as is necessary with long cross-ocean voyages, many of our ships' companies had died, and still more were sick with scurvy through the unnatural tossing, or (as some have it) through the salt, unnatural food inseparable from shipboard. But these last, the sight and the smells of land heartened up in extraordinary fashion, and from being helpless logs, unable to move even under blows of the scourge, they became active again, able to help in the shipwork, and lusty (when the time came) to fight for their lives and their vessels.

From the moment that I was deposed in Yucatan, despite Tatho's assurances, there had been doubts in my mind as to what nature would be my reception in Atlantis. But I had faced this event of the future without concern: it was in the hands of the Gods. The Empress Phorenice might be supreme on earth; she might cause my head to be lopped from its proper shoulders the moment I set foot ashore; but my Lord the Sun was above Phorenice, and if my head fell, it would be because He saw best that it should be so. On which account, therefore, I had not troubled myself about the matter during the voyage, but had followed out my calm study of the higher mysteries with an unloaded mind.

But when our navy had retraced sufficiently the course that had been overrun, and came up with the two vast headlands which marked the entrance to the inland waters, there, a bare two days from the Atlantis capital, we met with another navy which was, beyond doubt, waiting to give us a reception. The ships were riding at anchor in a bay which lent them shelter, but they had scouts on the high land above, who cried the alarm of our approach, and when we rounded the headland, they were standing out to dispute our passage.

Of us there were now but five ships, the rest having been lost in storms, or fallen behind because all their crews were dead from the scurvy; and of the strangers there were three fine ships, and three galleys of many oars apiece. They were clean and bright and black; our ships were storm-ragged and weather-worn, and had bottoms that were foul with trailing ocean weed. Our ships hung out the colours and signs of Tatho and Deucalion openly and without shame, so that all who looked might know their origin and errand; but the other navy came on without banner or antient, as though they were some low creatures feeling shame for their birth.

Clear it seemed also that they would not let us pass without a fight, and in this there was nothing uncommon; for no law carries out over the seas, and a brother in one ship feels quite free to harry his brother in another vessel if he meets him out of earshot of the beach—more especially if that other brother be coming home laden from foray or trading tour. So Tob, with system and

method, got our vessel into fighting trim, and the other four captains did the like with theirs, and drew close in to us to form a compact squadron. They had no wish to smell slavery, now that the voyage had come so near to its end.

Our Lord the Sun shone brilliantly, giving full speed to the machines, as though He was fully willing for the affair to proceed, and the two navies approached one another with quickness, the three galleys holding back to stay in line with their consorts. But when some bare hundred ship-lengths separated us, the other navy halted, and one of the galleys, drawing ahead, flew green branches from her masts, seeking for a parley.

The course was unusual, but we, in our sea-battered state, were no navy to invite a fight unnecessarily. So in hoarse sea-bawls word was passed, and we too halted, and Tob hoisted a withered stick (which had to do duty for greenery), to show that we were ready for talk, and would respect the person of an ambassador.

The galley drew on, swung round, and backed till its stern rasped on our shield rail, and one of her people clambered up and jumped down upon our decks. He was a dandily rigged-out fellow, young and lusty, and all healthy from the land and land victual, and he looked round him with a sneer at our sea-tatteredness, and with a fine self-confidence. Then, seeing Tob, he nodded as one meets an acquaintance. "Old pot-mate," he said, "your woman waits for you up by the quay-side in Atlantis yonder, with four youngsters at her heels. I saw her not half a month ago."

"You didn't come out here to tell me home news," said Tob; "that I'll be sworn. I've drunk enough pots with you, Dason, to know your pleasantries thoroughly."

"I wanted to point out to you that your home is still there, with your wife and children ready to welcome you."

"I am not a man that ever forgets it," said Tob grimly; "and because I've got them always at the back of my mind, I've sailed this ship over the top of more than one pirate, when, if I'd been a single man, I might have been e'en content to take the hap of slavery."

"Oh, I know you're a desperate enough fellow," said Dason, "and I'm free to confess that if it does come to blows we are like to lose a few men before we get you and your cripples here, and your crazy ships comfortably sunk. Our navy has its orders to carry out, and the cause of my embassy is this: we wish to see if you will act the sensible part and give us what we want, and so be permitted to go on your way home, with a skin that is unslit and dry?"

"You have come to the wrong bird here for a plucking," said Tob with a heavy laugh. "We took no treasure or merchandise on board in Yucatan. We stayed in harbour long enough to cure our sea victual and fill with food and water, and no longer. We sail back as we sailed out, barren ships. You will not believe me, of course; I would not have believed you had our places been changed; but you may go into the holds and search if you choose. You will find there nothing but a few poor sailormen half in pieces with the scurvy. No, you can steal nothing here but blows, Dason, and we will give you those with but little asking."

“I am glad to see that you state your cargo at such slender value,” said the envoy, “for it is the cargo I must take back with me on the galley, if you are to earn your safe conduct to home.”

Tob knit his brows. “You had better speak more plain,” he said. “I am a common sailor, and do not understand fancy talk.”

“It is clear to see,” said Dason, “that you have been set to bring Deucalion back to Atlantis as a prop for Phorenice. Well, we others find Phorenice hard enough to fight against without further reinforcements, and so we want Deucalion in our own custody to deal with after our own fashion.”

“And if I do the miser, and deny you this piece of my freight?”

The spruce envoy looked round at the splintered ship, and the battered navy beside her. “Why, then, Tob, we shall send you all to the fishes in very short time, and instead of Deucalion standing before the Gods alone, he will go down with a fine ragged company limping at his heels.”

“I doubt it,” said Tob, “but we shall see. As for letting you have my Lord Deucalion, that is out of the question. For see here, pot-mate Dason; in the first place, if I went to Atlantis without Deucalion, my other lord, Tatho, would come back one of these days, and in his hands I should die by the slowest of slow inches; in the second, I have seen my Lord Deucalion kill a great sea lizard, and he showed himself such a proper man that day that I would not give him up against his will, even to Tatho himself; and in the third place, you owe me for your share in our last wine-bout ashore, and I’ll see you with the nether Gods before I give you aught till you’ve settled that score.”

“Well, Tob, I hope you’ll drown easy. As for that wife of yours, I’ve always had a fancy for her myself, and I shall know how to find a use for the woman.”

“I’ll draw your neck for that, you son of a European,” said Tob; “and if you do not clear off this deck I’ll draw it here. Go,” he cried, “you father of monkey children! Get away, and let me fight you fairly, or by my honour I’ll stamp the inwards out of you, and make your silly crew wear them as necklaces.”

Upon which Dason went to his galley.

Promptly Tob set going the machine on our own “Bear,” and bawled his orders right and left to the other ships. The crew might be weak with scurvy, but they were quick to obey. Instantly the five vessels were all started, and because our Lord the Sun was shining brightly, got soon to the full of their pace. The whole of our small navy converged, singling out one ship of their opponents, and she, not being ready for so swift an attack, got flurried, and endeavoured to turn and run for room, instead of trying to meet us bows on. As a consequence, the whole of our five ships hit her together on the broadside, tearing her planking with their underwater beaks, and sinking her before we had backed clear from the engage.

But if we thus brought the enemy's number down to five, and so equal to our own, the advantage did not remain with us for long. The three nimble galleys formed into line: their boatswains' whips cracked as the slaves bent to their oars, and presently one of our own ships was gored and sunk, the men on her being killed in the water without hope of rescue.

And then commenced a tight-locked melee that would have warmed the heart of the greatest warrior alive. The ships and the galleys were forced together and lay savagely grinding one another upon the swells, as though they had been sentient animals. The men on board them shot their arrows, slashed with axes, thrust and hacked with swords, and hurled the throwing fire. But in every way the fight converged upon the "Bear." It was on her that the enemy spent the fiercest of their spite; it was to the "Bear," that the other crews of Tatho's navy rallied as their own vessels caught fire, or were sunk or taken.

Battle is an old acquaintance with us of the Priestly Clan, and for those of us who have had to carve out territories for the new colonies, it comes with enough frequency to cloy even the most chivalrous appetite. So I can speak here as a man of experience. Up till that time, for half a life-span, I had heard men shout "Deucalion" as a battlecry, and in my day had seen some lusty encounters. But this sea-fight surprised even me in its savage fierceness. The bleak, unstable element which surrounded us; the swaying decks on which we fought; the throwing fire, which burnt flesh and wood alike with its horrid flame; the great gluttonous man-eating birds that hovered in the sky overhead; the man-eating fish that swarmed up from the seas around, gnawing and quarrelling over those that fell into the waters, all went to make up a circumstance fit to daunt the bravest men-at-arms ever gathered for an army.

But these tarry shipmen faced it all with an indomitable courage, and never a cry of quailing. Life on the seas is so hard, and (from the beasts that haunt the great waters) so full of savage dangers, that Death has lost half his terrors to them through sheer familiarity. They were fellows who from pure lust for a fray would fight to a finish amongst themselves in the taverns ashore; and so here, in this desperate sea-battle, the passion for killing burned in them, as a fire stone from Heaven rages in a forest; and they took even their death-wounds laughing.

On our side the battle-cry was "Tob!" and the name of this obscure ship-captain seemed to carry a confidence with it for our own crews that many a well-known commander might have envied. The enemy had a dozen rallying cries, and these confused them. But as their other ship-commanders one by one were killed, and Dason remained, active with mischief, "Dason!" became the shout which was thrown back at us in response to our "Tob!"

However, I will not load my page with farther long account of this obscure sea-fight, whose only glory was its ferocity. One by one all the ships of either side were sunk or lay with all their people killed, till finally only Dason's galley and our own "Bear" were left. For the moment we were being mastered. We had a score of men remaining out of all those that manned the navy when it sailed from Yucatan, and the enemy had boarded us and made the decks of the "Bear" the field of battle. But they had been over busy with the throwing fire, and presently, as we raged at one another, the smoke and the flame from the sturdy vessel herself let us very plainly know that she was past salvation.

But Tob was nothing daunted. "They may stay here and fry if they choose," he shouted with his great boisterous laugh, "but for ourselves the galley is good enough now. Keep a guard on Deucalion, and come with me, shipmates!"

"Tob!" our fellows shouted in their ecstasy of fighting madness, and I too could not forbear sending out a "Tob!" for my battle-cry. It was a change for me not to be leader, but it was a luxury for once to fight in the wake of this Tob, despite his uncouthness of mien and plan. There was no stopping this new rush, though progress still was slow. Tob with his bloody axe cut the road in front, and we others, with the lust of battle filling us to the chin, raged like furies in his wake. Gods! but it was a fight.

Ten of us won to the galley, with the flames and the smoke from the poor "Bear" spurting at our heels. We turned and stabbed madly at all who tried to follow, and hacked through the grapples that held the vessels to their embrace. The sea-swells spurned the "Bear" away.

The slaves chained to the rowing-galley's benches had interest neither one way nor the other, and looked on the contest with dull concern, save when some stray missile found a billet amongst them. But a handful of the fighting men had scrambled desperately on board the galley after us, preferring any fate to a fiery death on the "Bear," and these had to be dealt with promptly. Three, with their fighting fury still red-hot in them, had most wastefully to be killed out of mischief's way; five, who had pitched their weapons into the sea, were chained to oar looms, in place of slaves who were dead; and there remained only Dason to have a fate apportioned.

The fight had cooled out of him, and he had thrown his arms to the sea, and stood sullenly ready for what might befall; and to him Tob went up with an exulting face.

"Ho, pot-mate Dason," cried he, "you made a lot of talk an hour ago about that woman of mine, who lives with her brats on the quay-side in Atlantis yonder. Now, I'll give you a pleasant choice; either I'll take you along home, and tell her what you said before the whole ship's company (that are for the most part dead now, poor souls!), and I'll leave her to perform on your carcase as she sees fit by way of payment; or, as the other choice, I'll deal with you here now myself."

"I thank you for the chance," said Dason, and knelt and offered his neck to the axe. So Tob cut off his head, sticking it on the galley's beak as an advertisement of what had been done. The body he threw over the side, and one of the great man-eating birds that hovered near, picked it up and flew away with it to its nest amongst the crags. And so we were free to get a meal of the fruits and the fresh meats which the galley offered, whilst the oar-slaves sent the galley rushing onwards towards the capital.

There was a wine-skin in the after-castle, and I filled a horn and poured some out at Tob's feet in salutation. "My man," I said, "you have shown me a fight."

"Thanks," said he, "and I know you are a judge. 'Twas pretty whilst it lasted; and, seeing that my lads were, for the most, scurvy-rotten, I will say they fought with credit. I have lost my Lord Tatho's navy, but I think Phorenice will see me righted there. If those that are against her took so

much trouble to kill my Lord Deucalion before he could come to her aid, I can fancy she will not be niggard in her joy when I put Deucalion safe, if somewhat dented and blood-bespattered, on the quay.”

“The Gods know,” I said, for it is never my custom to discuss policies with my inferiors, even though etiquette be for the moment loosened, as ours was then by the thrill of battle. “The Gods will decide what is best for you, Tob, even as they have decided that it is best that I should go on to Atlantis.”

The sailor held a horn filled from the wine-skin in his hand, and I think was minded to pour a libation at my feet, even as I had done at his. But he changed his mind, and emptied it down his throat instead. “It is thirsty work, this fighting,” he said, “and that drink comes very useful.”

I put my hand on his blood-smearred arm. “Tob,” I said, “whether I step into power again, or whether I go to the block to-morrow, is another matter which the Gods alone know, but hear me tell you now, that if a chance is given me of showing my gratitude, I shall not forget the way you have served me in this voyage, and the way you have fought this day.”

Tob filled another brimming horn from the wine-skin and splashed it at my feet. “That’s good enough surety for me,” he said, “that my woman and brats never want from this day onward. The Lord Deucalion for the block, indeed!”

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK

[Return to Contents](#)