



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

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Schlock! is an exciting new 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 schlock

fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!

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Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, reviews and art. Feel free to submit fiction, articles, art or links to your own site to [toeditor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:toeditor@schlock.co.uk).

We will also review published and self-published novels, in both print and digital editions. Please contact the editor at the above email address for further details.

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## This Edition

Featured in this edition is a collection of stories, new and old.

This week's cover illustration is "Skogtroll" by Theodor Kittelson. Cover design by C Priest Brumley.

Editorial by Gavin Chappell - Before the High Court Injunction

The Dungeon of Falsehood by Millicent 'Mad Dog' McGuire - Dougal the Wanderer meets his toughest challenge yet... COMIC FANTASY

On The Subject Of Funerals Part 4 by C. Priest Brumley - Thomas returns to the graveyard... HORROR

State of Emergency - Part Nine by David Christopher - Will and his friends cross a dangerous city... SCIENCE FICTION

Super Duper - Part Twenty One by James Rhodes - In which things come to a head... SCIENCE FICTION

Babbage Must Die - Part Twenty One by Gavin Chappell – Brian experiences problems with cashflow... SCIENCE FICTION

Schlock! Classic Serial: Varney the Vampire: Part Twenty-Six ascribed to Thomas Preskett Prest. Before Twilight... before Nosferatu ... before Dracula... there was Varney... GOTHIC HORROR

Schlock! Classic Serial: Brigands of the Moon (Part 21) by Ray Cummings - *Her voice hissed at me with all the venom of a reptile enraged. "So that was your game, Gregg Haljan! And I was so graceless as to admit love for you!" Snap murmured in my ear, "Don't move, Gregg! She's reckless."* SPACE OPERA

At The Centre of the Earth - Part Three by Gavin Chappell - Kohl meets the Guardian of the Grail in the penultimate chapter... Last in the Going Underground series. URBAN FANTASY

## EDITORIAL: BEFORE THE HIGH COURT INJUNCTION

Hope y'all enjoy the latest offering of Schlock!

We've got a few treats in store for all you Schlock! fans. The return of Millicent 'Mad Dog' McGuire and her highland warrior Dougal the Wanderer. C Priest Brumley's story On The Subject of Funerals reaches a gory conclusion. An excellent episode of Super Duper in which matters come very much to a head. And meanwhile, in David Christopher's dystopian political thriller State of Emergency, art continues to stay one step ahead of nature.

Consternation was evident in the secret underground base of Schlock! Webzine this week after someone glanced through the papers. As all you State of Emergency fans may remember, a couple of weeks ago the government was introducing curfews in the central London area to stem the recent tide of rioting and anti-social behaviour. This week in politics (the real world we try so desperately to avoid down here in the Schlock! bunker) UK home secretary Theresa May was suggesting exactly that – the reintroduction of curfews during times of civil disturbance.

We called Mr Christopher into the bunker for an emergency meeting. Under a modicum of duress, he stated:

'I am unaware of possessing precognitive powers.

'Furthermore, I wrote much of my novel several years ago, before the current regime rose to power. I want it on record that my fictitious character Susan Verlaine, home secretary in SoE has absolutely no connection with any real home secretaries living, dead, or assassinated, particularly not Theresa May. In fact, Verlaine owes rather more to the Blake's 7 villainess Supreme Commander Servalan. With just a smidgen of Davros...'

So there we have it. Before Theresa May serves Schlock! Webzine with a high court injunction, STATE OF EMERGENCY is a work of fiction. Its topicality, relevance to the current political situation and any similarities between its plot and current affairs in the UK or elsewhere are purely coincidental.

Honest.

Hope that'll get us off the hook. Don't want to spend another night in the cells.

Cheers

Gavin Chappell  
Editor.

## THE DUNGEON OF FALSEHOOD by Millicent 'Mad Dog' McGuire

The tunnel was dark, dank, and gloomy.

As the two desperate figures fled down the echoing passage, the putrid air stirred up by their flight caught at the wall-torches and caused dark shadows to flicker and gutter around them. They ran on, the glances they cast over their shoulders making it clear that whatever pursued them had put them in fear for their lives. But finally, it seemed that the shorter figure could take no more. He stopped dead in the centre of the passage, gasping for breath, and the light of a nearby torch glimmered briefly on his scowling, bearded face.

'Wait up there, Dougal!' the little warrior croaked, as his taller companion slowed down. 'I'm knackered. I can't go on.'

His comrade stepped lithely back into the torchlight. The dwarf looked up at a tall, kilted barbarian with a mane of greasy hair, a stubby nose, and teeth filed to points. Dougal the Wanderer was not even out of breath.

'What's the matter with ya noo, Shawtarz, ya whinging little dwarf?' demanded the barbarian, mangling the Common Tongue with his almost incomprehensible accent.

'What's the matter?' Shawtarz wheezed. 'What's the matter? Oh - nothing much. We've only lost everyone else to the Manhu; we're only no closer to getting our hands on the Faerie Queen's Diadem. Look, Dougal, this is it. This time we don't go home!'

Dougal faced the dwarf impassively.

'You say this every adventure we go on,' he rumbled. 'It all works out fine in the end.'

Shawtarz glowered. 'Fine? If we don't get the Faerie Queen's Diadem back, we're never going to save the Langohari clans from enslavement by the predatory Heep lancers of the eastern Gogland marches! And it looks like our luck's finally run out. Rumblebum the Wizard was torn apart by the Manhu Psi-Bots - now Gonad the Barbarian's been flattened by the animated idol of Herpes. Face it, Dougal, we - and the Langohari - are doomed.'

The Highlander scowled abstractedly.

'Och, who cares about Rumblebum and Gonad anyway?'

Shawtarz glared at him.

'We've known Rumblebum for years, Dougal,' he said, a look of shock on his wizened features. He shrugged. 'Hey - I almost liked him! Okay, Gonad was a bit of a new boy, and he wouldn't have come with us if he hadn't got a grudge against the Heep... But he was a good fighter.'

'Ah, fuck 'em!' Dougal snarled. 'Like ya say, we gotta get the Faerie Queen's Diadem back or else the Langohari clans are doomed. And if the Langohari fall...'

'We're all doomed,' the two disconsolate adventurers chorused.

Dougal pursed his lips.

'Look, at least we've got away from the Manhu now. There's no sign of pursuit anymore. They must be content with Gonad's flattened corpse, or else got lost somewhere. You got ya breath back? Well, come on. We gotta find that Diadem.'

Shawtarz sighed philosophically. Hefting his axe, he followed Dougal as the Highland warrior led him further into the dark depths of the Domain of the Manhu.

The two adventurers' footsteps echoed as they paced along the gloomy, shadow-hung corridors, but otherwise the dungeon was silent. As Shawtarz trailed Dougal down the passages, he glanced worriedly about him, eyeing the obscene carvings that writhed blasphemously along the walls and shuddering. No sane mind could have contrived such abominations, he told himself, not even his. The dwarf's skin crawled at the realisation that he was in the heart of the chief dwelling-place of the lunatic cult that had produced them,

many miles down from the clear-headed sanity of the overground world, with no clear path to the surface.

And the ominous, ever-present silence was starting to get to him. It hadn't been this quiet since the last time they were attacked...

Suddenly he bumped into the back of Dougal's legs. For some reason, the Highlander had paused. Shawtarz peered fearfully round, and gazed at the darkness ahead. A phosphorescent glow was slowly emanating from it.

The glow began to light up the surrounding darkness, and soon Shawtarz could make out the beginnings of a vast chamber that extended before them. He realised that the glow was coming from two massive figures who stood silently at the centre of the hall; ascetically beautiful, asexual giants. Behind them, two gloomy archways led further into the dungeon.

Shawtarz glanced up at his companion. Dougal had drawn his sword and was glaring expectantly at the glowing giants.

'I don't think that's gonna be much use,' the dwarf muttered.

One of the giants stepped forward.

'Stop!' it called in a ringing voice that echoed and re-echoed from the walls around them. 'Go no further!'

'Why?' Dougal the Wanderer demanded truculently.

'Know, O bold adventurers,' the shining being replied, 'from this room only two paths will take you onwards. One leads to the Treasury of the Manhu; the other to inescapable death. Only we, the Glowing Gods of Gon' Orea, share with the Manhu the secret of which is which.

'But before you ask us - and we will answer one question you put to us, and one question only - know further, that a direful weird is placed upon us. One of us speaks only the truth, the other eternally utters falsehood. Now, you may make your inquiry.'

Dougal stood thoughtfully for a while. He scratched his chin, and wrinkled his brow. He moved as if to speak, but then paused. Again, he was about to ask his question, when another thought seemed to strike him, and he subsided into contemplation once more.

Shawtarz watched him with trepidation. What was going on in that crafty, guileful skull? The dwarf had known Dougal for many years; had watched as he stormed across the civilised world, developing from a violent, bewildered barbarian into a man of deep cunning. He had seen him in many a scrape, many a situation from which only his wits or his sturdy claymore had saved him. These Glowing Gods held the key to the fulfilment of all their hopes - their hopes, and the hopes of the Langohari clans. Would the rugged highland barbarian ever unriddle this enigmatic situation?

The dwarf frowned in incomprehension. The problem was certainly beyond his own wits to understand: if they asked one god which way led to the Treasury, it might be the God of Truth, who would show them the right path, but it might just as well be the God of Lies, trying to trick them into death. How could they be certain? It was insoluble.

But then Dougal smiled. He pointed at the first Glowing God, the one who had spoken.

'If I asked your mate there what arch leads to inescapable death, which one would he point at?'

The Glowing God indicated the right-hand archway.

Dougal nodded. 'So, if you're the liar, and he's the truth-teller, then you're lying. But if he's the liar and you're the truth-teller, then he'd be lying. So it must be the other arch.'

Shawtarz's eyes lit up. The old warrior had cracked it! Logic never failed to work for the cunning barbarian. Chortling gleefully, he followed Dougal towards the right-hand arch, shooting disdainful glances at the Glowing Gods as they stepped back to let the two adventurers pass.

The dwarf and the Highlander hurried through the arch, eager to continue with their quest. But as soon as they had ducked into the passage beyond, an iron grille slammed down behind them with a crash, barring their way back into the chamber. Dougal and Shawtarz span round. They looked at each other. Then they glanced back down the passage, to be confronted by a dead end.

With a grinding noise, the walls on either side of them began to close in; slowly, inexorably crunching towards them. Shawtarz swallowed nervously, and turned to Dougal.

‘Ah, d’you think you might have maybe got the answer wrong?’

Dougal shook his head. ‘No way! It was logical, coherent thought; same as ol’ Rumblebum used ta go on about. No way, Shawtarz...’

His words trailed off and they both turned as a glow from behind them sent shadows dancing down the passageway. On the other side of the grille stood the two Glowing Gods.

The one who had spoken smiled pleasantly.

‘You remember I told you that one of us tells the truth and the other lies?’

Dougal nodded dumbly.

‘I lied,’ the Glowing God said quietly. He turned away.

For one last time, Dougal and Shawtarz stared desperately at each other in the rapidly narrowing space.

## ON THE SUBJECT OF FUNERALS by C Priest Brumley

### Part 4: End Game.

I mentally braced myself through the drive back to the graveyard for whatever lay ahead. I didn’t care what I faced, I didn’t care if Mrs. Carol had moved onto another location, and I didn’t even care if I survived this mess... I just needed to know that the others got out alright. After that, well.... We’ll see what the night holds, I told myself grimly.

The ride seemed like it was taking no time at all, even though when I looked at the tiny clock on Jim’s outdated radio a full half of an hour had gone by. A glint of light reflected off of the gun next to me caught my attention for a moment. I reached out and fondly stroked the revolver sitting on the seat next to me as I drove, feeling the cold steel and simple strength course through it to my hand. It almost seemed like it was imbuing me with power... The power to move on, the power to end Mrs. Carol. The power to end it all.

I looked up from the gun just in time to slam on the brakes.

The old lady had wandered into the middle of the highway, seemingly lost and unperturbed by the near accident. I waited for her to pass by in front of me, impatiently drumming my hand on the steering wheel as she slowly shambled by. After waiting for a full minute, I started to get an uneasy feeling in my gut, and my reptilian brain shouted at me (in no uncertain terms) to run her the fuck over and keep moving.

When she got closer to the driver’s side of the truck, I got a closer look. Her hair seemed to be sticking out in multiple directions, her shawl was disheveled and trailing from her like a cape, and perhaps most alarming of all, she seemed to have no indication whatsoever of her surroundings. The uneasiness in my gut rising, I honked my horn at her, hoping to alert her to the fact that she was in the middle of the highway, with... wait, where

are the other cars? The highway was too quiet, and now that I thought of it, no cars had passed me by or even been on the other side of the road that I can recall.

“This can’t be good,” I said out loud to no one in particular. The stress of everything, of losing Lilly and Jim, and now my growing unease with this unfortunate looking woman was making my stomach tie itself in knots at this point. Thinking it might help ease my tension a bit, I pulled a cigarette from my pack on the dashboard and lit it. The nicotine took hold once more, easing the headache I previously didn’t realize I had and gladly restoring the numbness to my hands.

I only got three drags off of the cigarette before I noticed the seemingly drunken old lady had disappeared. I looked left and right, hoping to catch a glimpse of her on one side of the street or the other, to no avail. She was simply... gone. I added another knot to the collection my stomach was trying to accrue and took another drag. I was afraid of driving forward; what if she had fallen? Only one way to find out, I told myself calmly.

The truck reversed slowly, afraid as I was to hit or possibly injure the lady. I scanned the area around the front of the truck as I went, hoping to catch a glimpse of her dressing gown or shawl or anything relevant, but saw nothing. After backing up twenty or thirty feet (I never was good at distances), I took one last look around and, still seeing nothing, put the truck in drive and sped forward.

BANG.

The sound came from the bed of the truck as before. And this time, I didn’t question it. Pitching the cigarette, I reached for the gun sitting next to me. Bravado, that dumb sunuvabitch that’s led too many people to their graves, dictated my actions from this point. I pointed the gun over my shoulder, slammed on the brakes yet again, and double-tapped the trigger.

BLAM! BLAM!

The sound was deafening, and for a moment, I thought I had permanently lost my hearing. I dropped the gun immediately, clapped my left hand to my hurt ear and howled in pain as the truck sat idling in the middle of the deserted highway. The pain lasted what seemed to be a near infinite amount of time, the thought of the old lady completely lost at the moment.

After a minute or two, I managed to pull my hand free of my ear, and I was startled to find my palm covered in bright red blood. Great, I thought. I’ve gone and blown out my fucking eardrum. Then a rattling sound from the trunk pulled me from my thoughts and brought me entirely back to reality. I hastily wiped my bloodied hand on the back of the seat next to me and undid my seatbelt, grabbed my (Jim’s, I thought briefly) gun, and jumped out of the truck.

It was the old lady, like I thought, sprawled out in the bed of the truck and writhing in agony. Her entire head was matted with a dark, viscous fluid that I guessed passed for blood. Perhaps it congealed, I wondered to myself while looking her over for any other damage. Then I saw it: Two large bullet holes, one on top of the other, going directly through her left eyebrow. And she was still fucking moving.

I backed off from the truck slowly, all thoughts of bravado and action movie heroism gone from my head. I turned to puke again, but accomplished nothing but dry heaves. It was then that I realized somewhere in the back of my mind that I hadn't eaten since breakfast that morning, and what little there was in my stomach had been left artfully plastered on the lawn in the cemetery. My stomach and nerves didn't know or even seem to care, though. They kept doing what they wanted, consequences be damned.

The dry heaves lasted longer than expected, not being helped at all by the miserable moaning recently added to the writhing sounds coming from the truck bed. After a few more minutes I (finally) stopped, gasping for breath and slowly pulling myself to my feet. The gun was still on the ground where I left it when I fell to my knees; I decided to leave it there for the time being and concentrate on one thing at a time. Then the noise died away all at once.

I peeked back over the side of the truck bed and had to do a doubletake.

She was gone. In her place was a dress and a shawl, filled with a roughly-old-lady-sized pile of ash-like granules. The granules intrigued and repulsed me, and almost instinctively, I reached out my right hand and stroked the top of the nearest pile. It felt almost like engorged sand with an airier quality, and had the delightful aroma of ten week old meat left in the Louisiana sun. If I hadn't just been sick, this would've been the kicker.

Another thing caught my attention, too, when I looked over the pile again: Bits of flesh were left. It was not much, and certainly nothing large enough to even be considered "parts", but they were there. Perhaps they were contributing to the aroma too? I pushed the thought out of my head before it took hold and forced another set of dry heaves on me. Too much today, come back tomorrow when the holding tank's full again, I thought satirically.

After looking over the piles again, I found myself with a limitless amount of unanswered questions going around my head until it seemed fit to burst. I decided to put them off and simply go forward, and hopefully the questions will answer themselves with time. I was almost always the one with the patience. The questions can wait.

To busy myself from the thoughts in my head I laboriously lowered the tailgate. I didn't have a broom on hand, but hopefully jetting forward with an open tailgate on an open highway would do a decent enough job in lieu. As I turned around to head back to the cab, my foot brushed the revolver on the ground, reminding me to pick it up. I set it delicately back on the seat next to me as I climbed into the driver's seat. One crank of the engine later and I was back on my way.

The rest of the trip went by relatively fast compared to the first half. My head was still occupied by questions, and with no one else on the road, I was free to put my driving on autopilot and do some much needed contemplation on the matter at hand. I started with making a mental checklist of questions surrounding the situation:

A, Is Mrs. Carol dead or alive? And if dead, why is she moving and killing people?

B, Who was that old lady, why did she suddenly go "Buffy" on me when I shot her, and was she already dead too?



And most importantly, C: Where the holy fuck is everyone else? I don't even see police cars out and about, which is fairly scary on its own.

And as I thought of those questions, I realized with a fatally re-emerging sense of dread that I had been sitting in the cemetery's parking lot for a few minutes now, with my headlights on and the engine running. So much for the element of surprise.

Damned autopilot.

I steadied myself against the steering wheel as I turned off the engine, taking deep breaths and trying like all hell to stop the shakes before their inevitable return. The wheel provided no comfort, and in near desperation I found myself reliving Jim's words to me hours ago: Just calm down, baby. That seemed to work, and though I still felt two seconds away from a full-blown panic attack again, I felt my hands ease up from their white-knuckled grip on the molded foam. I slowly clenched and unclenched my hands in front of me, easing the tension and using the time to build myself up for what lies ahead.

After what seemed like another century, I ran my hand to the revolver next to me and found the grip, picking it up and feeling the reassuring weight once again. Strength and Power, I told myself over and over, mingling in with Jim's words of comfort in my mind. I pushed the gun slowly into my pants pocket, careful not to catch the trigger in the process, and swung open the truck's door to enter the humid night. A rattling in the bottom of the door brought a stroke of revelation, and I hurriedly grabbed the Mag-Lite from his small holding area down there, not knowing if I'd need it but knowing it wouldn't hurt.

Now I'm ready, I told myself. Now I'm ready for the end game.

I strode forward, relying on my memory to guide me to the semi-secluded spot where Mrs. Carol was supposed to lay forever, checking the ground as I went for any signs of blood or a struggle or something. Instead, I found absolutely nothing. No bent grass, no blood pools, not even a dismembered finger to guide my path or provide hints of what happened in my absence. Nothing whatsoever. Which, naturally, only seemed to deepen the ever-growing sense of dread taking over my entire being.

I eventually reached Mrs. Carol's grave site, still set up for her graveside service, with the chairs for the immediate family still arranged in a neat row and the Minister's well-worn Bible sitting on top of the seat closest to where the struggle had taken place. I didn't see the minister anywhere, though, and in my mind's eye, I saw him set the Bible down as he walked to the group of people surrounding Jim and I when I first saw Mrs. Carol's return. He probably ran for it when he saw the mayhem, I rationalized to myself. I shrugged internally, decided it made sense, then moved on.

I hadn't taken more than two steps when I saw, just beyond the horridly bright green felt laid down on the ground, what I had been looking for. Mrs. Carol. Or, rather, her purple dress and the few assorted "parts" that hadn't managed to disintegrate yet.

They seemed a jumble of ash-like granules and slime-ridden bits that wouldn't make sense to anyone but those who knew of their true origins, all strewn on the ground before me

with small condolence to any rhyme or reason, unlike the old lady earlier. I pulled the gun out of my pocket and bent down to inspect the remains, prodding piles of ash with my foot and pushing bits with the gun, until I found the biggest part of her I think I was going to find at that point: her eye.

Prodding from the gun separated it from the pile of ash rather quickly.

Once separated, I looked down at it, and rather quickly noticed the back of the eye slowly starting to crumble into more of the ashy granules. I crouched down and watched it dissolve, from the back at first, then crab-walked around and looked at it from the front. I looked deep, not expecting anything but secretly hoping in the last seconds I had left to find something. Answers, mostly. An answer to the madness, an answer to the litany of questions resurfacing in my head, an answer for everything that has happened to me in the last twenty-four hours.

I found it.

I wasn't ready for it.

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I felt tears begin to well up suddenly at the magnitude of what I saw. Before I knew what I was doing, I felt my hand grip the gun tighter and work the muzzle up slowly to the soft underside of my jaw. The barrel felt warm on my sk

-Fin

## STATE OF EMERGENCY by Gavin Chappell

### Chapter Nine: Parting of the Ways

Rex drove cautiously. It was eight in the morning, the end of the curfew, and the morning sun shone down on a deserted street. From the main road ahead, the sound of early morning traffic was audible, the rumble of engines and beeping of horns.

'They're up early,' Will remarked from the backseat, where he was squashed up between Higgy and Wiggy. Higgy reeked of sweat. Wiggy wasn't much better.

'Eager to get to work,' Rex said bitterly. 'Doesn't matter what the state does to its citizens, people still work.'

'That's either admirable or very stupid,' Daisy said from the passenger seat.

'Stupid,' Higgy rumbled dogmatically. 'Who wants to work?'

Rex was near the junction now, and Will could see a steady stream of vehicles. They all seemed to be going left, towards Hendon and the M1. Small family groups, weighed down with their belongings, were hurrying down the pavement in the same direction. Will felt a chill. This wasn't the usual early morning rush hour traffic and it wasn't the school run.

These people were on the move. They were getting out of the city.

'I can't say I blame them,' he told the others. 'Who'd want to stay?' He hated London now. The only reason he'd ever had for staying here was long gone. He couldn't care less if it burned.

As Rex turned into the road, heading in the opposite direction from the rest of the traffic, Will saw several shop fronts with broken windows. Others had apparently been firebombed. The pavements and even the road itself were scattered with a litter of clothes and shoes and electrical goods. Outside a jewellers', a few rings and gold chains lay amidst broken glass.

They passed the slow moving cars, and Will saw drivers gesturing to them to go back. One man stuck his head out of the window, and Will heard him say:

'Don't go that way! Soldiers...!' before his urgent voice was whipped away when Rex put his foot down.

They drove on in silence.

Daisy broke it. 'Do you really think we're doing the right thing? Everyone else is getting out.'

Rex grunted. 'Everyone else is stuck in a traffic jam. Okay, we're going deeper into the city, but we'll be out of here before any of these poor saps.'

'But what if there's danger?' Daisy asked. 'These people seem to think we'll run into trouble if we go this way. This is what they're getting away from.'

'Don't worry your head about it, Daisy,' Wiggy said condescendingly. 'We'll deal with any bad men we meet.'

Daisy turned in her seat and gave him a withering look. 'What if they have guns?'

Will found himself wishing he hadn't flung his sniper rifle away so hastily after shooting Verlaine. It looked like they were heading for a warzone. They would need some kind of protection. But if they could get to the heliport, they would be up, up and away, not stuck in the traffic like everyone else.

They passed on through the London streets. Soon they had left far behind them the almost stationary cars and the pavements full of fleeing families. The city streets were wide and empty. More shops lay open and ransacked. Not a car was to be seen.

Rex stopped at a red light.

Wiggy shifted irritably next to Will. 'Come on, man,' he said. 'Don't waste time. There's no traffic.'

Rex shrugged. 'The police are out in force, Wiggy. We don't want to be arrested, do we?'

In the back, Will sighed. This was no time for Rex to become a good citizen, he thought. Then he saw movement out of the corner of his eye, and looking round Wiggy's massive chest, he saw several uniformed figures appearing from a side street. They ran up. Will saw that they were indeed police officers.

'Get out of the vehicle,' the lead police officer shouted.

Daisy wound down her window.

'What's the matter?' she asked. 'It's not curfew, and we're waiting at a red light. We're not doing anything illegal...'

'Fuckin' pigs,' Will heard Wiggy mutter contemptuously.

There was hysteria in the police officer's voice. 'Get out of the car!' he shrieked. 'Get out the fucking car!'

Wiggy pushed open his door and faced the police officers.

'What's going on here?' he said belligerently. 'We're law-abiding UK citizens on legitimate business. You'll be hearing from my lawyer.'

Suddenly the police officer produced a gun. Will's mouth went dry and his stomach lurched.

'Out!' the man shouted.

'Put the gun away, officer,' Wiggy said.

The police officer shot him. Wiggy's skull exploded across the windscreen in a welter of gore.

Suddenly soldiers were running down the street. Rex scrambled out of the car. Will and the others followed him hurriedly. The police leapt in and screeched off down the street. The soldiers opened fire on the disappearing vehicle.

'In here,' Rex urged, shouting to be heard over the gunfire, indicating a department store whose windows had been shattered. 'We'd better lie low until all this dies down.' The soldiers raced past them, not giving the civilians a second glance.

Rex's voice was incredibly calm. Will couldn't help but admire the guy's courage as he led them into the shop. He cast a look at Wiggy's mutilated corpse, lying in the gutter in a widening pool of blood, and followed them into the shop.

The department store was deserted, silent except for the ragged staccato of gunfire from the street outside. This soon died away, and an awful hush fell upon them as they sat down in the empty restaurant on the first floor. Higgy hopped over the counter and came back with sandwiches and bottles of beer and wine and pop.

Rex's face was drawn. Daisy looked as if she was about to be sick. Will felt pretty nauseous himself.

'Fucking bastards,' said Higgy. He plonked the food and drink down on a plastic tray and brought it over. Hands shaking, Will opened a small wine bottle and necked the contents.

Daisy laughed nervously. 'They blew his head off,' she said. 'Just blew his head off!'

Higgy guffawed. 'That shut him up, didn't it,' he said, swigging from a bottle of Budweiser. Will started eating a cheese and onion sandwich. It tasted of nothing.

'Stop laughing,' Rex said.

'I'm sorry,' Daisy giggled. 'I don't know why I'm laughing. It's not funny.'

Higgy laughed uncontrollably.

'Shut up,' Rex snapped. 'Get a grip. We need to work out our next move.'

'We're going to have to walk,' Will realised.

'Unless we can steal a car,' Higgy remarked, suddenly serious. 'Walking's going to be hard going, with those fuckheads about.'

'How far do we have to go?' Daisy asked. She had calmed herself with a swig or two of wine.

Rex cursed. 'I left the street map in the car. Maybe we can find one for sale here.'

Higgy said, 'Leave it to me. I know London Town.'

'So where do we go, then?' Will asked. 'Where are we now, anyway?'

London still looked all the same to him. Whenever he'd wanted to go somewhere, he'd just taken the Tube. Walking the streets was a waste of time: they were crowded, and they were dangerous. Well, at least one of those problems had been solved; although the other had been magnified.

'We're in Covent Garden,' Higgy told him. 'We've got to get through Westminster, cross the river, then past the power station to Battersea. The heliport's up a backstreet by the river.'

'How far's that?' Will asked.

Higgy shrugged. 'Four, five miles, mate.'

'I don't suppose the Tube is running,' Daisy murmured.

Rex rose. 'There's only one way to find out,' he said.

‘Hang on,’ Will said. ‘Why don’t we stock up on food before we go?’

‘It’s only a few miles,’ Rex said dismissively. ‘Anyway, we don’t want to get shot for looting.’

‘I think Will’s right,’ said Daisy, and his heart warmed at her words. ‘We could help ourselves to a few other things.’

‘Look,’ said Rex firmly, ‘this isn’t Day of the Triffids. Society hasn’t collapsed into the screaming void. There’s just been a few disturbances in Central London. We’re not destined to become road warriors of the freeway.’

‘Pity,’ said Higgy. He grabbed some more sandwiches and bottles, and stuffed them into a holdall Daisy found. He went to the window that looked out onto the street. It was deserted out there. ‘Let’s get going, shall we?’

Rex sighed.

They left the store and Will cast suspicious looks up and down the street. He could hear a buzzing of flies from the corner, and realised that Wiggy’s corpse must be attracting them. He took a nervy, morbid glance in that direction, saw a cloud of bluebottles buzzing around the sticky pool of blood in the gutter... the pathetic broken corpse... and turned hastily away.

‘The tube station’s down this way,’ Higgy said. They followed him along the street.

The emptiness, the silence, the desolation was all unnerving. Ever since he had moved to London, Will had been wanting it to be quieter. Now he had his wish, he wasn’t so sure. He would appreciate a bit of noise other than the dismal crunch of their footsteps as they picked their way across the glass-littered pavements. They saw another corpse in the gutter on the far side of the street. An elderly woman. No one investigated in any detail, but it looked to Will like she’d been trampled to death.

They reached Covent Garden tube station to find that it was closed.

‘Doesn’t look like the trains are running today,’ Higgy commented wryly.

‘What now?’ Daisy asked.

‘We keep walking,’ said Rex.

They kept walking.

They were somewhere on the outskirts of Westminster when the silence was broken. Will heard gunfire break out ahead, deafening after the eerie hush, underscored by the crump of explosions. The ground shook beneath them. But that wasn’t why Will was shaking.

‘Get into cover!’ Rex shouted. He rushed them into an alleyway. They crouched down behind some wheelie bins while Rex peered round the corner.

‘What’s happening out there?’ Daisy asked, wide-eyed. The gunfire broke off before starting up again further away.

‘Soldiers,’ Rex said laconically. ‘Shooting.’

‘Who at?’ Daisy asked.

‘Each other,’ Rex replied.

Will wriggled forward and put his head out above Rex’s.

It was true. Further up the street, soldiers were lying or crouching in cover, firing away at advancing troops. Several lay motionless in the middle of the street. A couple of buildings were ablaze. Some of the advancing soldiers had rocket launchers.

Leaving Rex to watch, he told the others what he had seen.

‘They’re between us and the river...’ Daisy murmured.

‘I wish I had a gun,’ Will said.

‘What good would that be?’ Daisy asked. ‘It would just get you shot.’

‘At least I’d be able to defend us,’ Will protested. He fell quiet. It was his ability to use a gun that had landed them in this mess, landed the country in it. Those soldiers shooting at each other down the street, that was his fault as well. It had all been blown up out of all

proportion by his botched assassination attempt.

‘We’re going to have to make our way round them,’ Rex said, returning to the others.

‘We need to get across the river if we’re going to make it to Battersea,’ Higgy said. ‘We might as well head directly there. Go over Waterloo Bridge then through Lambeth.’

The gunfire broke off abruptly, and Will heard the pounding of booted feet. Rex flung himself down the alley. Uniformed figures ran past. Then Will saw the unbelievable, dreamlike sight of a rocket soaring past on the end of a smoke trail.

It hit the building above them with a boom that knocked Will off his feet. Rubble and brick dust cascaded down into the alley.

‘Run for it!’ Rex bellowed over a new burst of gunfire. He forced his way through the tangle of fallen wheelie bins and led them down the alleyway at a run. The rattle of gunfire continued behind them.

Will was panting. He found it hard to catch his breath. His lungs burned. He had almost been flattened by falling masonry! This was getting dangerous. The whole city had gone insane. He looked back to see black smoke belching up into the bleak London skies.

About half an hour later, they reached Waterloo Bridge. Since they’d left the gunfight behind the streets had been quiet, but occasional distant sounds of fighting came from all around.

‘Which way’s Shepherds Bush?’ Will asked suddenly.

Higgy looked at him incredulously.

‘You wanna go to Shepherds Bush now?’

‘We’re going to the heliport,’ Rex said grimly. Daisy frowned at Will.

Will had been thinking as they made their way through the empty streets. Running away would achieve nothing. Professor Quigley had asked him to see that the Manifesto was published. As far as he knew, it was still concealed in the hotel room in Shepherds Bush where the Professor had been staying. That was what he should be doing, getting the Professor’s Manifesto.

‘Shepherds Bush is that way,’ Higgy said, pointing to the west. ‘Where the worst of the fighting seems to be going on. Rex is right. We go to the heliport.’

Will relented. As they hurried past the brutalist concrete monstrosity of the National Theatre, he realised he didn’t rate his chances alone very highly. Quigley’s manifesto might be the solution to all their problems, but he couldn’t very well get it to the publishers if he was shot trying.

They made their way through the streets of Lambeth, and cut across Battersea Park to get to the heliport. People were still about on this side of the river. They encountered one man patiently waiting outside the entrance to an office block.

‘You’re the first people I’ve seen all morning,’ he told them. He was young, impeccably suited, carrying a briefcase in one hand. ‘I was wondering if it was a new bank holiday. There doesn’t seem to be anyone answering the door.’

‘Didn’t you see the news last night?’ Daisy asked, incredulously. ‘Or for the last few nights?’

‘I was watching a DVD,’ the young man told them. ‘Why, what’s happening? Has the government declared a new holiday?’

‘You could say that, mate,’ said Higgy.

‘I’d go home if I were you,’ Daisy told him. ‘Hear that?’ There was a distant chatter of gunfire from north of the river. ‘Go home. No one else will be coming into work today. Or for the next few days.’

‘It’s the end of the world as we know it,’ Higgy added. ‘Who knows? Maybe no one will ever work again.’

Will suddenly realised he hadn't so much as rung his boss in a week. He'd probably lost his job.

Leaving the bewildered man still standing outside his office, they hurried on through the streets of Battersea. But when they reached the open tarmac expanse of the heliport, they found it was deserted.

'Fuck!' Rex shouted. 'Fuck!'

'That won't help anything,' Daisy told him severely.

'Where are they?' Rex demanded. 'They were supposed to be here the moment the curfew ended.'

'Maybe they didn't fancy hanging around,' said Will. Occasional gunfire was still audible in the distance.

'Or some wanker with a rocket launcher shot down their chopper,' Higgy suggested.

'That's all we need,' Daisy snapped.

Rex was stamping up and down the tarmac, muttering to himself.

'Can't you call them up on your phone?' Will asked.

Rex stopped, glowered at Will as if everything was his fault (which, he supposed, it sort of was) and whipped out his phone. He dialled a number. Moments later, he was standing on a jetty that jutted out into the Thames, deep in animated conversation while the others looked on.

He returned to them, beaming. Will noticed that he never let them listen to him when he was on the phone to his mysterious 'associate.' The man whose name and face even Rex did not know...

'They're coming. Turns out they saw what was going on down on the ground and they landed at Ascot to monitor the situation. But they're airborne now and on their way.'

'Ascot?' Will asked.

Rex shrugged. 'There's a heliport there.'

'How long will they be?' Daisy asked.

'A few minutes,' Rex replied.

'Time for lunch, then,' said Higgy, struggling out of his backpack. 'What's everyone want? We've got cheese and onion, chicken and bacon, sausage and egg, or chicken tikka. And we've still got a few bottles of Bud.'

'Any wine left?' Daisy said.

Rex was still pacing up and down. 'Oh, for god's sake!' he said savagely. 'Is this any time for a cosy picnic?'

Will had realised how hungry he was, but now his stomach was growling. 'I can't think of a better time,' he said, taking a packet of chicken and bacon sandwiches and a bottle of beer.

He sat down in one of the waiting rooms in Heliport House and tucked in, gazing out across the river. Higgy and Daisy joined him. After a moment's fretting, Rex entered and stood staring at them.

'Looks like we're getting out,' Higgy commented.

Rex nodded. 'I'll be glad to see the back of this city,' he said. He looked up suddenly as the sound of rotor blades became audible. It came from across the river.

'Here they come,' Will said as a chopper appeared over the roofs of Parson's Green, the area across the river. It circled round, spiralling down towards the heliport. Will heard Rex's mobile ringtone.

Rex whipped out his mobile and rushed outside. Will and the others followed. 'Yes?' he was saying as they joined him. 'What?' His voice shook. 'Where are they coming from? Well, land as soon as you can! Get us out of here!'

‘What’s up?’ Daisy demanded shrilly.

Rex’s face was bleak. ‘Soldiers heading up Lombard Road. In this direction.’

Will swallowed, glancing around him. Would the chopper get there in time? It looked like there was no other way out. No chance of going after the Professor’s Manifesto now.

The chopper began to descend. They crouched down as the rotor blades kicked up a dust storm. It landed on the jetty. A hatch opened and a woman appeared.

‘Hurry!’ she shouted. As they rushed towards the chopper, uniformed figures appeared round the corner of a nearby hotel.

The leader of the soldiers shouted at them. A man leapt down from the chopper and flung something in their direction.

An explosion ripped out across the helipad. Will found himself knocked off his feet for the second time that day. He looked back to see no sign of the soldiers, only a heap of rubble where the wall of the hotel had collapsed. It must have been a grenade, he realised. Either the soldiers had been killed or they’d retreated.

The others were clambering into the helicopter. He didn’t move. Daisy turned towards him. ‘Hurry up, Will,’ she said impatiently.

He shook his head. ‘I can’t leave London yet. I’ll meet you in Oxford.’

Daisy looked incredulous. The rotor blades were speeding up. The woman shouted something at her, and she nodded. She turned back to Will.

‘Don’t be an idiot, Will!’ she yelled. ‘You’ll die if you stay in London.’

‘I created this mess,’ Will shouted back. ‘It’s up to me to do something about it. I’m going to Shepherds Bush.’

Then the hatch closed, the chopper began to ascend. Will caught a single glimpse of Daisy’s despairing face as the ascending helicopter pulled her up and away. Then she was gone. The helicopter became a small dot high above, and turned and flew north-eastwards.

Will turned, and surveyed the rubble.

SUPER DUPER by James Rhodes

## Chapter Twenty One

There was so little noise that if it a pin had dropped it would have been to afraid to land on the floor. It would have dissolved itself to the elements and regenerated in the manner of Pythagoras' Metempsychosis. Luckily, no pin did drop, so there was very little metaphysical concern for any of the stationery in the police station. Biggy's arm shook ever so slightly as he continued to point it at The Don's face with all of his attention turned to the little girl who had just spoken.

“It's OK,” said Biggy, “I won't kill him.”

“Unless we don't tell him where you are,” butted in Corrine.

“No, I don't need to kill him yet. Are you OK love?”

The girl didn't look up.

“Why isn't she talking? What have you done to her?”

“What have we done?” Corrine stood up aggressively.

“Can you put your gun down now please?” asked The Don.

“You shut up.”

Biggy turned his attention back to Corrine. As he did so, The Don stepped delicately to one side so that the gun was no longer pointing at him. Biggy caught the movement in his periphery.



“Where the fuck do you think you're going?”

“Just...”

There wasn't time for an answer. The sound of the gun was deafening but the sound that stayed with everyone in the room was the drips splatter that followed it. The Don collapsed. Nobody ran to him, they were frozen in disbelief.

Biggy turned to Corrine and Smith. He blew the barrel of his pistol as if he were a gunslinger in a Western.

“Why won't my daughter talk to me?”

He pointed the gun straight at Corrine. Ellie was still clinging to her shirt, Corrine's hand covered her eyes.

“One,” counted Biggy.

Corrine couldn't think what to do.

“Two.”

She took her hand off the girl's face.

“Three.”

The girl rounded on her father.

“Get out!” Ellie pointed to the door. “Get out and never come back.”

“But Elaine, I'm your dad.”

“My name is Ellie and I hate you.”

Biggy hung his head.

“I was just trying to help you, love.”

“Maybe we should go Biggy.” Jon looked nervous.

“Maybe you should fuck off.”

Biggy turned his eyes back to Corrine and Ellie. They were so fixed and focussed that he didn't notice Jon quietly fucking off. Before he left, Jon knelt down over The Don and whispered something. Much to his surprise, Smith saw The Don nodding his head. Smith decided to risk moving a little, not much but enough to catch the attention of a paranoid and aggressive man.

“Don't you get any funny ideas either,” Biggy warned him.

“Yeah right,” said Smith wearily, “what am I going to do? Sonic spin you?”

“What?”

“Sonic spin, it's a move that Sonic does.”

“Who the fuck is Sonic?”

“He's a hedgehog,” Smith said with deadly sincerity. “He's a hedgehog that hates corruption, he's my second biggest hero.”

Biggy looked at Smith like he was an idiot.

“Say another word, and I'll shoot you too.”

“Oh,” said Smith, “I thought you wanted to know what we'd done to your daughter.”

“I do.”

“Well, do you want me to talk then?”

“Yes.”

“OK, so there's this inventor, I think he's from East Europe, he has a funny foreign name and he has found a novel way to turn animals into his robot slaves.”

Biggy nodded.

“So what Sonic does is he goes into the factories and rescues all of the creatures from their misery.”

Biggy pulled the trigger of his gun. There was a click but no bang.

“And that's why Sonic is my second biggest hero. Of course, my biggest hero is the bloke you shot in the chest a few moments ago.”

Biggy punched Smith hard across the bridge of his nose. Needless to say, Smith went down backwards before the blow even reached him. He thereby missed the greater impact of the blow and slouched comfortably on the floor. Biggy was about to put the boot in when he heard the dragging sound.

The Don was lurching across the floor with all the gore and grace of an early Romero zombie. He bore his teeth in pain, his body twisted to compensate for the agony of the bullet wound. It wasn't going to be a difficult fight for Biggy. He stepped forward. His fists were raised ready to settle the score.

Then his daughter intervened. She had no fear, she had no power, she simply rolled over and crashed into his legs.

“What are you doing, Elaine?”

“Super Sonic spin.”

Corrine laughed. The Don stopped still and began to sway slightly. Smith looked at The Don and began to realise that he wasn't going to have the monopoly on lying down for much longer.

## BABBAGE MUST DIE by Gavin Chappell

### Chapter Twenty One

Brian woke the next morning to the bliss of linen sheets and a featherbed.

Then the pain hit him. Fuck, it was agony. He felt worse than he had done when he'd woken on the cold sand yesterday. Maybe his self-prescribed course of wine, wine and more wine – oh, and a bit of food – was proving unwise. He lay there, staring at the ceiling and shaking feverishly, sodden with sweat. Should he send his manservant out for a doctor? But doctors in this century were butchers! They'd probably stick leeches all over him and then cut one of his legs off with a hacksaw. And no anaesthetic.

But what other option did he have? The local witch, if they had one? No, he needed a doctor. At least he had money. He didn't think they'd had the NHS back in 1812.

‘Humphrey!’ he bellowed, and his servant came scurrying in, yawning, from wherever it was that servants spent the night. ‘Get me a doctor. I won't be needing that coach today. And tell the innkeeper I might be staying a few more days.’

His ill-gotten gains would benefit the local economy, if nothing else.

Humphrey returned some time later with an apothecary from the same town that had produced the tailor, who had delivered Brian's new togs earlier that morning. To Brian's relief the man didn't insist on cutting off any limbs, and he scoffed at leeches.

‘Take laudanum three times daily for a week,’ the apothecary told him, ‘and get plenty of rest.’

Well, it looked like he wouldn't be going after Ada for a while, Brian thought. He sent Humphrey out to get the prescribed drug. Turned out that laudanum was opium dissolved in

wine. Woo-hoo! After a few swigs of the mixture, Brian's pain receded. His body tingled pleasantly. His optimism increased. What the hell was he worrying about? He'd go up to London tomorrow or the next day, find Ada without any problems, pop up to Cambridge for the shooting, and once Babbage had had his hash well and truly settled, Brian could just tap his ruby slippers together, say 'There's no place like home, there's no place like home,' and then he'd be back in the 21st century in a twinkling.

He fell asleep.

He spent the next week as the doctor had ordered, in a blissed-out laudanum haze. The innkeeper was happy to keep him here as long as he paid at the end of the week, Humphrey was equally content for much the same reasons. Brian was happy, everyone was happy. He managed to quell occasional urges to write sonnets and kept taking the laudanum. It also suppressed his guilt about not going after Ada and his worries that it might become habit-forming.

In fact, as the week drifted on, he found himself toying with the idea of staying here a bit longer. Why not? Ada could assassinate Babbage, if that was what she really wanted to do. He'd just lie here in bed doing nothing in particular, guzzling laudanum, and eating the roast beef of Old England, then strike out next year for the cellar and their return to the 21st century. It seemed like a plan. Why not? Hadn't he suffered enough? Pressganging, piracy (suffered and inflicted), and shipwreck. He owed it to himself to have a bit of a rest.

'Sir?' Humphrey asked him one day. 'Innkeeper wants to settle up for the week. Shall I take care of it?'

Brian grinned. He waved a hand airily. 'Bring me the bill. My money is in the wallet. You know where it is.'

Humphrey produced the innkeeper's reckoning. Brian scanned it dreamily. Slowly, he began to sense something was wrong. It was all in old money, pounds, shilling and pence. Made no sense to Brian, but twenty guineas seemed a pretty substantial sum for a week in an inn. He frowned at Humphrey.

'Can you make any sense of this?'

Humphrey took the bill and glanced through it.

'Roast beef etc, daily.... Twenty bottles of port.... Pies, cream... Laudanum.... Rum... Hire of apothecary, tailor, materials....' He looked up. 'Yes, sir, it's all in order. Twenty guineas.'

Despite his drug-addled haze, this seemed horribly wrong to Brian. Were they playing the old game of taking advantage of the foreigner? He wasn't a foreigner! Then again, he was foreign to this century, and the money meant nothing to him. He opened his wallet and poured out the gold.

'You know more about this English money than I do,' he said to Humphrey. 'Count out twenty guineas.'

Humphrey's eyes were wide. He'd obviously never seen so much money in his short life.

He began to count it, stacking it on a bedside table. Eventually he looked up.

'Slightly shy of twenty guineas, sir,' he said.

Shit, Brian thought. Just when he was starting to enjoy himself. He'd spent up, and was in debt. It was just like being back home. This was what he'd been trying to get away from! What was he going to do now? His mind raced.

'Is this all the money you had when you escaped the pirates, sir?' Humphrey asked worriedly.

Brian looked at him. No, he thought. Of course it wasn't! He had more.

'The rest of my money's in safekeeping,' he said. 'Tell you what, you deal with the innkeeper and I'll slip out the back and go and get it. Explain that the rest will come in a bit.'

Brian sneaked out of the inn successfully and struck out across the fields towards the sea cliff. Well, struck out sounds more dynamic than his undignified hobble. It had taken him quite a bit of psyching himself up to actually get out of bed, get into his scruffy old clothes with Humphrey's help, and totter downstairs. The week's rest, the good food, the laudanum, not to mention the fact that he had spent months aboard ship, made walking something of a chore. He didn't seem to have got his land-legs back.

He'd found a fallen branch beneath an old oak tree on the edge of the village and was using it to steady himself as he went. Luckily there was no one much around. He started worrying about his pirate loot. There'd been wreckers around. They'd been persistent. How could he be sure they hadn't found his money and run off with it? Then he'd be in shtook with the innkeeper. The man might even call the parish constable. Brian might end up in the lockup again. Maybe he should just hightail it for London now. But that wasn't really feasible. He was having enough trouble getting across the fields. He had no money if the box had been rifled, so he couldn't get a coach. And walking to London would be hard enough if he was in peak physical fitness, which he certainly wasn't now. He started sweating. Everything was going horribly wrong. He wanted to be back in bed, sipping laudanum. Laudanum! Now he was craving it. Was it addictive? Well, it did contain opium. Of course it was addictive. Now he was an opium addict, penniless, hounded by the law – if he ended up in the lockup they'd be sure to discover that he was Wells of the The Black Flag, notorious pirate, and not the Count of Monte Carlo after all...

He reached the cliff edge and stared down at the surging waters below. Bugger! The tide had come in. The waters were almost lapping against the bottom of the cliff, and the remains of the wreck were entirely surrounded. He looked in the direction of the cave where he'd stuffed the money. It looked like it was just accessible. Well, it was now. What if the tide came in further? He might be cut off by it, maybe even carried out to sea if he tried to get into the cave.

Brian plucked up his courage, dropped his oaken staff, and begin to shin down the cliff. He was sure the apothecary wouldn't recommend climbing crumbly sea cliffs above crashing surf as part of the rest cure. He was pouring with sweat now, despite the chill sea breeze.

What path there had been seemed to have gone, and Brian half scrambled, half climbed down the cliff.

He breathed a deep sigh as his feet finally touched the wet sand and shingle at the foot of the cliff. The sea was very close, sending foaming, jellyish pseudopods of water up the beach towards him, like some kind of questing, hungry octopus. Did that mean the tide was still coming in? He followed the cliff to the left, reaching the slippery rocks that surrounded the little cave where he'd hidden his gold. Peering into the gloom, he could see nothing.

The bastards! Some local wrecker had snaffled his ill-gotten gains! What was he going to do now? How was he going to survive in this god-awful century? He still had nine months or so before the wormhole reopened. Now he was stuck here, penniless, with a drug addiction to nurse, and him a wanted man with a price on his head, probably... He should have stayed at home. He should never have come on this stupid time travel expedition. Bloody Ada. Where was she anyway? Living it up in London with the parson! Who still hadn't come back from the city, according to the village gossip Humphrey had heard.

Hang on. He crawled forward, wincing at the clamminess of the wet sand. He could see something protruding from the sand in the cave. Yes, it was the corner of the box. It had got itself buried somehow. Presumably, the tide had come in and out of this cave every day of the week. Twice, if his knowledge of tides was at all accurate. He dug the box out of the sand, and heaved its lid open.

Relief swept over him. It was still full of money. Grinning like an idiot, he began to stuff his pockets with coins. When he'd got his coat and breeches full of the things, he took off first one boot then the other, and put in as many coins as he could while leaving enough room for his feet. Then he heaved them back on and tried to work out where else he could stick his money. For a moment, he was tempted... But no. Explaining to the apothecary how he'd got a gold coin stuck up there could be difficult. He took out his wallet and filled it with a few more. The box was still almost brimful with cash. Seemed a pity to leave it. He shut the lid, covered it with sand. Should he draw a map to show where it was? X marks the spot? No, that was a stupid idea. He'd take its location to his grave.

Feeling pleased with himself, he shuffled round. And cursed.

The tide had come in. It was rushing into the cave and pooling around his feet as he looked. He took a step forward and heard the heavy coins in his boot clink.

He'd have to get out fast! If he had to swim for it, the gold would drag him to the bottom. For a moment, he considered getting rid of it all. More water came pouring into the little cave. He didn't have the time!

He sloshed out of the wet gloom of the cave to see the sea washing against the cliffs on either side. The thin strip of sand and shingle that had been his path down to the cave had vanished beneath the water. Brian regarded the towering black shape of his erstwhile pirate ship. Was he, too, doomed?

Nerving himself, he waded out into the water. Strong currents tugged at his legs, and almost dragging him off his feet. Then one did, and he grabbed at the cliff itself to avoid plunging

into the water. Painfully, he dragged himself up onto an outcrop just outside the cave and looked around him. Then above him. Could he climb the cliff? It was a lot steeper here than it was where he had climbed down. And should he slip – he'd plunge back into the foaming waves. This really wasn't much fun. He clung to the outcrop and watched worriedly as the waters rose.

'Sir!'

Brian realised he had been holding his breath. He let it out slowly, and raised his head. A dark figure stood on the cliff top, silhouetted against the clouds.

'Humphrey?' he asked. 'Is that you?'

'Yes, sir,' Humphrey called. 'What are you doing down there, sir? You took so long I came looking for you.'

Even in the middle of his predicament, this didn't ring true for Brian. How had Humphrey known where to find him? Not that he wouldn't be grateful if the lad could get him to safety...

'Help me!' he shouted. 'Get help!'

'Don't worry, sir,' Humphrey replied. 'Just take a grip on this rope.' And indeed, a rope came slithering down the cliff from his position.

It all seemed a bit convenient, Brian thought. All the same, he grabbed tight hold of it without arguing and allowed Humphrey to haul him up the steeper parts. The rest he could scramble up, and he did so; Humphrey was finding him heavy.

'All that eatin' and no exercise, sir,' he said as he helped Brian over the lip of the cliff. 'Ye've been puttin' on weight.'

'Alright, alright,' Brian snapped. He got up and as he did so, he jingled. Humphrey's eyes lit up.

'Got your money, sir?' he asked. 'From... safekeeping?'

Brian didn't like the lad's tone. 'Yes, I've got it,' he said. 'Let's get going.'

Humphrey didn't move.

'I cottoned on pretty quick that you weren't a French gennelman, sir,' he said, to Brian's spine-tingling, flesh-chilling horror. 'You stopped talking with a French accent as soon as you had a bit of laudanum down you.' Brian realised he'd stopped putting it on days ago. 'I was wondering who you really were. Now I know.'

'You're a pirate, ain't you, sir?'

Brian gulped. He wished he still had his cutlass. But it had disappeared after the tailor called,

and been replaced with a weedy Touché Turtle rapier – what all the dandies in London were wearing right now, apparently. And even that he'd left back at the inn.

But Humphrey would have to die. He knew too much.

'What makes you think I'm a pirate?' Brian asked with a breezy laugh, turning to face the lad. He jingled again.

'That wrecked ship was a pirate ship, wasn't she, sir? Reckon your money's all pirate loot. That's why you had to go back and get it from the beach. Reckon you've buried your treasure there.'

Humphrey's guesses were a bit too close to the truth. Brian was in no position to run away; equally, he was in no position for a fight; he'd have to have it out with the lad, here and now.

'What do you want, lad?' he said. 'Are you going to report me to the parish constable? Alright, I'm not the Count of Monte Carlo, I'm not even French. I'm as English as you, Humphrey. I was wrecked on the coast. And yes, it was a pirate ship. But...'

To Brian's surprise, Humphrey laughed. 'The constable? Why should I want to trouble him?'

Brian gaped. 'Well, surely you don't want to serve a pirate!'

Humphrey shrugged. 'It pays well, sir. And a pirate's an even better master than an exiled French aristo! So, that story about your sister... Is it true?'

'Well, she's not my sister...' Brian began.

Humphrey's eyes widened. 'Is she your sweetheart, then, sir?'

Brian took off his hat and scratched his head. He thought long and hard.

'I don't know...' he said eventually. 'I suppose we're just good friends. I'm glad you reminded me about her. I'd better get after her. When's the next coach to London?'

VARNEY THE VAMPIRE ascribed to Thomas Preskett Prest

#### CHAPTER XLVII.

#### THE REMOVAL FROM THE HALL.—THE NIGHT WATCH, AND THE ALARM.

Mrs. Bannerworth's consent having been already given to the removal, she said at once, when appealed to, that she was quite ready to go at any time her children thought expedient.

Upon this, Henry sought the admiral, and told him as much, at the same time adding,—

"My sister feared that we should have considerable trouble in the removal, but I have convinced her that such will not be the case, as we are by no means overburdened with cumbrous property."

"Cumbersome property," said the admiral, "why, what do you mean? I beg leave to say, that when I took the house, I took the table and chairs with it. D—n it, what good do you suppose an empty house is to me?"

"The tables and chairs!"

"Yes. I took the house just as it stands. Don't try and bamboozle me out of it. I tell you, you've nothing to move but yourselves and immediate personal effects."

"I was not aware, admiral, that that was your plan."

"Well, then, now you are, listen to me. I've circumvented the enemy too often not to know how to get up a plot. Jack and I have managed it all. To-morrow evening, after dark, and before the moon's got high enough to throw any light, you and your brother, and Miss Flora and your mother, will come out of the house, and Jack and I will lead you where you're to go to. There's plenty of furniture where you're a-going, and so you will get off free, without anybody knowing anything about it."

"Well, admiral, I've said it before, and it is the unanimous opinion of us all, that everything should be left to you. You have proved yourself too good a friend to us for us to hesitate at all in obeying your commands. Arrange everything, I pray you, according to your wishes and feelings, and you will find there shall be no cavilling on our parts."

"That's right; there's nothing like giving a command to some one person. There's no good done without. Now I'll manage it all. Mind you, seven o'clock to-morrow evening everything is to be ready, and you will all be prepared to leave the Hall."

"It shall be so."

"Who's that giving such a thundering ring at the gate?"

"Nay, I know not. We have few visitors and no servants, so I must e'en be my own gate porter."

Henry walked to the gate, and having opened it, a servant in a handsome livery stepped a pace or two into the garden.

"Well," said Henry.

"Is Mr. Henry Bannerworth within, or Admiral Bell?"

"Both," cried the admiral. "I'm Admiral Bell, and this is Mr. Henry Bannerworth. What do you want with us, you d——d gingerbread-looking flunkey?"

"Sir, my master desires his compliments—his very best compliments—and he wants to know how you are after your flurry."

"What?"



"After your—a—a—flurry and excitement."

"Who is your master?" said Henry.

"Sir Francis Varney."

"The devil!" said the admiral; "if that don't beat all the impudence I ever came near. Our flurry! Ah! I like that fellow. Just go and tell him—"

"No, no," said Henry, interposing, "send back no message. Say to your master, fellow, that Mr. Henry Bannerworth feels that not only has he no claim to Sir Francis Varney's courtesy, but that he would rather be without it."

"Oh, ha!" said the footman, adjusting his collar; "very good. This seems a d——d, old-fashioned, outlandish place of yours. Any ale?"

"Now, shiver my hulks!" said the admiral.

"Hush! hush!" said Henry; "who knows but there may be a design in this? We have no ale."

"Oh, ah! dem!—dry as dust, by God! What does the old commodore say? Any message, my ancient Greek?"

"No, thank you," said the admiral; "bless you, nothing. What did you give for that waistcoat, d—n you? Ha! ha! you're a clever fellow."

"Ah! the old gentleman's ill. However, I'll take back his compliments, and that he's much obliged at Sir Francis's condescension. At the same time, I suppose may place in my eye what I may get out of either of you, without hindering me seeing my way back. Ha! ha! Adieu—adieu."

"Bravo!" said the admiral; "that's it—go it—now for it. D—n it, it is a do!"

The admiral's calmness during the latter part of the dialogue arose from the fact that over the flunkey's shoulder, and at some little distance off, he saw Jack Pringle taking off his jacket, and rolling up his sleeves in that deliberate sort of way that seemed to imply a determination of setting about some species of work that combined the pleasant with the useful.

Jack executed many nods to and winks at the livery-servant, and jerked his thumb likewise in the direction of a pump near at hand, in a manner that spoke as plainly as possible, that John was to be pumped upon.

And now the conference was ended, and Sir Francis's messenger turned to go; but Jack Pringle bothered him completely, for he danced round him in such a singular manner, that, turn which way he would, there stood Jack Pringle, in some grotesque attitude, intercepting him; and so he edged him on, till he got him to the pump.

"Jack," said the admiral.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Don't pump on that fellow now."

"Ay, ay, sir; give us a hand."

Jack laid hold of him by the two ears, and holding him under the pump, kicked his shins until he completely gathered himself beneath the spout. It was in vain that he shouted "Murder! help! fire! thieves!" Jack was inexorable, and the admiral pumped.

Jack turned the fellow's head about in a very scientific manner, so as to give him a fair dose of hydropathic treatment, and in a few minutes, never was human being more thoroughly saturated with moisture than was Sir Francis Varney's servant. He had left off hallooing for aid, for he found that whenever he did so, Jack held his mouth under the spout, which was decidedly unpleasant; so, with a patience that looked like heroic fortitude, he was compelled to wait until the admiral was tired of pumping.

"Very good," at length he said. "Now, Jack, for fear this fellow catcher cold, be so good as to get a horsewhip, and see him off the premises with it."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack. "And I say, old fellow, you can take back all our blessed compliments now, and say you've been flurried a little yourself; and if so be as you came here as dry as dust, d——e, you go back as wet as a mop. Won't it do to kick him out, sir?"

"Very well—as you please, Jack."

"Then here goes;" and Jack proceeded to kick the shivering animal from the garden with a vehemence that soon convinced him of the necessity of getting out of it as quickly as possible.

How it was that Sir Francis Varney, after the fearful race he had had, got home again across the fields, free from all danger, and back to his own house, from whence he sent so cool and insolent a message, they could not conceive.

But such must certainly be the fact; somehow or another, he had escaped all danger, and, with a calm insolence peculiar to the man, he had no doubt adopted the present mode of signifying as much to the Bannerworths.

The insolence of his servant was, no doubt, a matter of pre-arrangement with that individual, however he might have set about it *con amore*. As for the termination of the adventure, that, of course, had not been at all calculated upon; but, like most tools of other people's insolence or ambition, the insolence of the underling had received both his own punishment and his master's.

We know quite enough of Sir Francis Varney to feel assured that he would rather consider it as a good jest than otherwise of his footman, so that with the suffering he endured

at the Bannerworths', and the want of sympathy he was likely to find at home, that individual had certainly nothing to congratulate himself upon but the melancholy reminiscence of his own cleverness.

But were the mob satisfied with what had occurred in the churchyard? They were not, and that night was to witness the perpetration of a melancholy outrage, such as the history of the time presents no parallel to.

The finding of a brick in the coffin of the butcher, instead of the body of that individual, soon spread as a piece of startling intelligence all over the place; and the obvious deduction that was drawn from the circumstance, seemed to be that the deceased butcher was unquestionably a vampyre, and out upon some expedition at the time when his coffin was searched.

How he had originally got out of that receptacle for the dead was certainly a mystery; but the story was none the worse for that. Indeed, an ingenious individual found a solution for that part of the business, for, as he said, nothing was more natural, when anybody died who was capable of becoming a vampyre, than for other vampyres who knew it to dig him up, and lay him out in the cold beams of the moonlight, until he acquired the same sort of vitality they themselves possessed, and joined their horrible fraternity.

In lieu of a better explanation—and, after all, it was no bad one—this theory was generally received, and, with a shuddering horror, people asked themselves, if the whole of the churchyard were excavated, how many coffins would be found tenantless by the dead which had been supposed, by simple-minded people, to inhabit them.

The presence, however, of a body of dragoons, towards evening, effectually prevented any renewed attack upon the sacred precincts of the churchyard, and it was a strange and startling thing to see that country town under military surveillance, and sentinels posted at its principal buildings.

This measure smothered the vengeance of the crowd, and insured, for a time, the safety of Sir Francis Varney; for no considerable body of persons could assemble for the purpose of attacking his house again, without being followed; so such a step was not attempted.

It had so happened, however, that on that very day, the funeral of a young man was to have taken place, who had put up for a time at that same inn where Admiral Bell was first introduced to the reader. He had become seriously ill, and, after a few days of indisposition, which had puzzled the country practitioners, breathed his last.

He was to have been buried in the village churchyard on the very day of the riot and confusion incidental to the exhumation of the coffin of the butcher, and probably from that circumstance we may deduce the presence of the clergyman in canonicals at the period of the riot.

When it was found that so disorderly a mob possessed the churchyard, the idea of burying the stranger on that day was abandoned; but still all would have gone on quietly as regarded him, had it not been for the folly of one of the chamber-maids at the tavern.

This woman, with all the love of gossip incidental to her class, had, from the first, entered so fully into all the particulars concerning vampyres, that she fairly might be considered to be a little deranged on that head. Her imagination had been so worked upon, that she was in an unfit state to think of anything else, and if ever upon anybody a stern and revolting superstition was calculated to produce direful effects, it was upon this woman.

The town was tolerably quiet; the presence of the soldiery had frightened some and amused others, and no doubt the night would have passed off serenely, had she not suddenly rushed into the street, and, with bewildered accents and frantic gestures shouted,—

"A vampyre—a vampyre—a vampyre!"

These words soon collected a crowd around her, and then, with screaming accents, which would have been quite enough to convince any reflecting person that she had actually gone distracted upon that point, she cried,—

"Come into the house—come into the house! Look upon the dead body, that should have been in its grave; it's fresher now than it was the day on which it died, and there's a colour in its cheeks! A vampyre—a vampyre—a vampyre! Heaven save us from a vampyre!"

The strange, infuriated, maniacal manner in which these words were uttered, produced an astonishingly exciting effect among the mob. Several women screamed, and some few fainted. The torch was laid again to the altar of popular feeling, and the fierce flame of superstition burnt brightly and fiercely.

Some twenty or thirty persons, with shouts and exclamations, rushed into the inn, while the woman who had created the disturbance still continued to rave, tearing her hair, and shrieking at intervals, until she fell exhausted upon the pavement.

Soon, from a hundred throats, rose the dreadful cry of "A vampyre—a vampyre!" The alarm was given throughout the whole town; the bugles of the military sounded; there was a clash of arms—the shrieks of women; altogether, the premonitory symptoms of such a riot as was not likely to be quelled without bloodshed and considerable disaster.

It is truly astonishing the effect which one weak or vicious-minded person can produce upon a multitude.

Here was a woman whose opinion would have been accounted valueless upon the most common-place subject, and whose word would not have passed for twopence, setting a whole town by the ears by force of nothing but her sheer brutal ignorance.

It is a notorious physiological fact, that after four or five days, or even a week, the bodies of many persons assume an appearance of freshness, such as might have been looked for in vain immediately after death.

It is one of the most insidious processes of that decay which appears to regret with its

"————— offensive fingers, To mar the lines where beauty lingers."

But what did the chamber-maid know of physiology? Probably, she would have asked if it was anything good to eat; and so, of course, having her head full of vampyres, she must needs produce so lamentable a scene of confusion, the results of which we almost sicken at detailing.

## BRIGANDS OF THE MOON by Ray Cummings

### XXI

On the Planetara, in the radio room, Snap and I stood with Moa's weapon upon us. Miko held Anita. Triumphant, possessive. Then as she struggled, a gentleness came to this strange Martian giant. Perhaps he really loved her. Looking back on it, I sometimes think so.

"Anita, do not fear me." He held her away from him. "I would not harm you. I want your love." Irony came to him. "And I thought I had killed you. But it was only your brother."

He partly turned. I was aware of how alert was his attention. He grinned. "Hold them, Moa. Don't let them do anything foolish.... So, little Anita, you were masquerading to spy on me? That was wrong of you."

Anita had not spoken. She held herself tensely away from Miko. She had flashed me a look, just one. What horrible mischance to have brought on this catastrophe!

The completion of Grantline's message had come unnoticed by us all. We remained tense.

"Look! Grantline again!" Snap said abruptly.

But the mirrors were steady. We had no recording mechanism; the rest of the message was lost.

No further message came. There was an interval while Miko waited. He held Anita in the hollow of his great arm.

"Quiet, little bird. Do not fear me. I have work to do, Anita, this is our great adventure. We will be rich, you and I. All the luxuries these worlds can offer—all for us when this is over. Careful, Moa! This Haljan has no wit."

Well could he say it. I, who had been so witless as to let this come upon us! Moa's weapon prodded me. Her voice hissed at me with all the venom of a reptile enraged. "So that was your game, Gregg Haljan! And I was so graceless as to admit love for you!"

Snap murmured in my ear, "Don't move, Gregg! She's reckless."

She heard it. She whirled on him. "We have lost George Prince, it seems. Well, we will survive without his scientific knowledge. And you, Dean—and this Haljan, mark me—I will kill you both if you cause trouble!"

Miko was gloating. "Don't kill them yet, Moa. What was it Grantline said? Near the crater of Archimedes. Ring us down, Haljan. We'll land."

He signaled the turret, gave Coniston the Grantline message, and audiphoned it below to Hahn. The news spread about the ship. The bandits were jubilant.

"We'll land now, Haljan. Come, Anita and I will go with you to the turret."

I found my voice. "To what destination?"

"Near Archimedes. The Apennine side. Keep well away from the Grantline camp. We will probably sight it as we descend."

There was no trajectory needed. We were almost over Archimedes now. I could drop us with a visible, instrumental course. My mind was whirling with a confusion of thoughts. What could we do? I met Snap's gaze.

"Ring us down, Gregg," he said quietly.

I nodded. I pushed Moa's weapon away. "You don't need that—"

We went to the turret. Moa watched me and Snap, a grim, cold Amazon. She avoided looking at Anita, whom Miko helped down the ladders with a strange mixture of courtierlike grace and amused irony. Coniston stared at Anita.

"I say, not George Prince? The girl—"

"No time for explanations," Miko commanded. "It's the girl, masquerading as her brother. Get below, Coniston. Haljan takes us down."

The astounded Englishman continued to gaze at Anita. But he said, "I mean to say, where to on the Moon? Not to encounter Grantline at once, Miko? Our equipment is not ready."

"Of course not. We will land well away—"

The reluctant Coniston left us. I took the controls. Miko, still holding Anita as though she were a child, sat beside me. "We will watch him, Anita. A skilled fellow at this sort of work."

I rang my signals for the shifting of the gravity plates. The answer should have come from below within a second or two. But it did not. Miko regarded me with his great bushy eyebrows upraised.

"Ring again, Haljan."

I duplicated. No answer. The silence was ominous.

Miko muttered, "That accursed Hahn. Ring again!"

I sent the imperative emergency demand.

No answer. A second or two. Then all of us in the turret were startled. Transfixed. From below came a sudden hiss. It sounded in the turret; it came from the shifting room call grid. The hissing of the pneumatic valves of the plate shifters in the lower control room. The valves were opening; the plates automatically shifting into neutral, and disconnecting!

An instant of startled silence. Miko may have realized the significance of what had happened. Certainly Snap and I did. The hissing ceased. I gripped the emergency plate shifter switch which hung over my head. Its disc was dead! The plates were dead in neutral: in the position they were placed only in port! And their shifting mechanisms were imperative!

I was on my feet. "We're in neutral!"

The Moon disc moved visibly as the Planetara lurched. The vault of the heavens was slowly swinging.

Miko ripped out a heavy oath. "Haljan! What is this?"

The heavens turned with a giant swoop. The Moon was over us. It swung in a dizzying arc. Overhead, then back past our stern; under us, then appearing over our bow.

The Planetara had turned over. Upending. Rotating, end over end.

For a moment I think all of us in the turret stood and clung. The Moon disc, the Earth, Sun and all the stars were swinging past our windows. So horribly dizzying. The Planetara seemed lurching and tumbling. But it was an optical effect only. I stared with grim determination at my feet. The turret seemed to steady.

Then I looked again. That horrible swoop of all the heavens! And the Moon, as it went past seemed expanded. We were falling! Out of control, with the Moon gravity pulling us down!

"That accursed Hahn—"

A moment only had passed. My fancy that the Moon disc was enlarged was merely the horror of my imagination. We had not fallen far enough for that.

But we were falling. Unless I could do something, we would crash upon the Lunar surface.

Anita, killed in this turret: the end of everything—every hope.

Action came to me. I gasped, "Miko, you stay here! The controls are dead! You stay here and hold Anita—"

I ignored Moa's weapon. Snap thrust her away.

"We're falling, you fool—let us alone!"

Miko gasped, "Can you—check us? What happened?"

"I don't know—"

I stood clinging. This dizzying whirl. From the audiphone grid Coniston's voice sounded.

"I say, Haljan, something's wrong. Hahn doesn't signal."

The lookout in the forward tower was clinging to our window. On the deck below our turret a member of the crew appeared, stood lurching for a moment, then shouted and ran, swaying, aimless. From the lower hull corridors our grids sounded with the tramping of running steps. Panic among the crew was spreading over the ship. A chaos below deck.

I pulled at the emergency switch again. Dead....

"Snap, we must get down. The signals."

Coniston's voice came like a scream from the grid. "Hahn is dead. The controls are broken!"

I shouted, "Miko, hold Anita! Come on, Snap!"

We clung to the ladders. Snap was behind me. "Careful, Gregg! Good God!"

This dizzying whirl. I tried not to look. The deck under me was now a blurred kaleidoscope of swinging patches of moonlight and shadow.

We reached the deck. It seemed that from the turret Anita's voice followed us. "Be careful!"

Once inside the ship, our senses steadied. With the rotating, reeling heavens shut out, there were only the shouts and tramping steps of the panic-stricken crew to mark that there was anything amiss. That, and a pseudo sensation of lurching caused by the pulsing of gravity—a pull when the Moon was beneath our hull to combine its forces with our magnetizers; a lightening, when it was overhead. A throbbing, pendulum lurch!

We ran down to the corridor incline. A white-faced member of the crew came running up.

"What's happened, Haljan? What's happened?"

"We're falling!" I gripped him. "Get below. Come with us."

But he jerked away from me. "Falling?"

A steward came running. "Falling? My God!"



Snap swung at them. "Get ahead of us! The manual controls—our only chance—we need all you men at the compressor pumps!"

But it was instinct to try and get on deck, as though here below we were rats caught in a trap. The men tore away from us and ran. Their shouts of panic resounded through the dim, blue lit corridors.

Coniston came lurching from the control room. "I say—falling! Haljan, my God, look!"

Hahn was sprawled at the gravity plate switchboard. Sprawled, head down. Dead. Killed? Or a suicide?

I bent over him. His hands gripped the main switch. He had ripped it loose. And his left hand had reached and broken the fragile line of tubes that intensified the current of the pneumatic plate-shifters. A suicide? With his last frenzy, determined to kill us all? Why?

Then I saw that Hahn had been killed! Not a suicide! In his hand he gripped a small segment of black fabric, a piece torn from an invisible cloak!

Snap was rigging the hand compressors. If he could get the pressure back in the tanks....

I swung on Coniston. "You armed?"

"Yes." He was white-faced and confused, but not in a panic. He showed me his heat ray cylinder. "What do you want me to do?"

"Round up the crew. Get all you can. Bring them here to man the pumps."

He dashed away. Snap called after him, "Kill them if they argue!"

Miko's voice sounded from the turret call grid: "Falling! Haljan, you can see it now! Check us!"

Desperate moments. Or was it an hour? Coniston brought the men. He stood over them with menacing weapon.

We had all the pumps going. The pressure rose a little in the tanks. Enough to shift a bow plate. I tried it. The plate slowly clicked into a new combination. A gravity repulsion just in the bow-tip.

I signaled Miko. "Have we stopped swinging?"

"No. But slower."

I could feel it, that lurch of the gravity. But not steady now. A limp. The tendency of our bow was to stay up.

"More pressure, Snap."

One of the crew rebelled, tried to bolt from the room.

Coniston shot him down.

I shifted another bow plate. Then two in the stern. The stern plates seemed to move more readily than the others.

"Run all the stern plates," Snap advised.

I tried it. The lurching stopped. Miko called, "We're bow down. Falling!"

But not falling free. The Moon gravity pull on us was more than half neutralized.

"I'll go up, Snap, and try the engines. You don't mind staying down here? Executing my signals?"

"You idiot!" He gripped my shoulders. His eyes were gleaming, his face haggard, but his pale lips twitched with a smile.

"Maybe it's good-bye, Gregg. We'll fall—fighting."

"Yes. Fighting. Coniston, you keep the pressure up."

With the broken tubes it took nearly all the pressure to maintain the few plates I had shifted. One slipped back to neutral. Then the pumps gained on it, and it shifted again.

I dashed up to the deck. Oh, the Moon was so close now! So horribly close! The deck shadows were still. Through the forward bow windows the Moon surface glared up at us.

Those last horrible minutes were a blur. And there was always Anita's face. She left Miko. Faced with death, he sat clinging. Moa too, sat apart—staring.

And Anita crept to me. "Gregg, dear one. The end...."

I tried the electronic engines from the stern, setting them in reverse. The streams of their light glowed from the stern, forward along our hull, and flared down from our bow toward the Lunar surface. But no atmosphere was here to give resistance. Perhaps the electronic streams checked our fall a little. The pumps gave us pressure just in the last minutes, to slide a few of the hull plates. But our bow stayed down. We slid, like a spent rocket falling.

I recall the horror of that expanding Lunar surface. The maw of Archimedes yawning. A blob. Widening to a great pit. Then I saw it was to one side, rushing upward.

"Gregg, dear one—good-bye."

Her gentle arms about me. The end of everything for us. I recall murmuring, "Not falling free, Anita. Some hull plates are set."

My dials showed another plate shifting, checking us a little further. Good old Snap!

I calculated the next best plate to shift. I tried it. Slid it over.

Then everything faded but the feeling of Anita's arms around me.

"Gregg, dear one—"

The end of everything for us....

There was an up-rush of gray-black rock.

### AT THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH by Gavin Chappell

3

Eloise sighed. Beside her, Nick stirred.

'How long are we going to have to wait?' she said.

Nick sighed too. 'Until something happens,' he said in a desultory manner. 'Until Hamish comes back, I suppose.'

'I wonder what...'. Then Eloise broke off. 'Listen!' she said suddenly.

Nick listened. There was a commotion from elsewhere in the building; excited voices speaking in German. Jackboots crunched down the passage outside.

'Has Hamish come back?' Eloise murmured.

'Hamish?'

Puzzled, the Scot raised his face. The first thing he saw was a furry canine face grinning eagerly at him.

'Timmy?' Hamish said muzzily. He rolled over and gasped.

Standing over him was a motley group of crusties, clad in shabby army jackets and tattered jeans. To Hamish's further surprise, he recognised them all.

'Dave?' he said, staring up at the man closest to him, a middle-aged hippie wearing John Lennon sunglasses. 'Dave? Is that you?'

So these were the subhumans the Nazis were so afraid of!

'Yeah, Hamish!' said Dave, reaching out a hand. 'Where are Nick and Eloise? I thought

you might be here when the dog reappeared. He was whining like anything. So we followed him and we found you with these Nazi guys. Can't you get up?'

'He is manacled, Dave,' said a familiar voice. Even more surprised, Hamish managed to sit up. He glanced round.

'Menyw!' he said. The druid stood near the edge of the group. Beside him were Osborne and Siân. 'But Ah thought you'd drowned!'

'We thought you were done for, too,' said Osborne, coming forward to help him to his feet. 'We've been wandering around this forest for days. Yesterday we met up with these travellers. Didn't know you knew them.'

'Aye!' said Hamish. 'These are the guys Ah was with when Ah met Eloise and Nick. But what are you doing doon here?'

'Getting away from the Pigs,' said Dave. 'They came round and smashed up our homes once too often. We were driving through Somerset and we found these caves. We went exploring them and they led into more caves and more caves, until finally we came out here. It's the Hollow Earth, man, straight outa Jules Verne!'

'Hamish,' said Menyw, in a deep, commanding voice, 'where is Eloise? And Nick?'

'Och,' said Hamish, still staring in wonder at the travellers, 'the Nazis have got them.' He spun round suddenly, still hampered by his manacles. 'And the keeches have got ma Spear! The fuckin' grupenführer took it!'

'Where?' said Menyw urgently. 'By my calculations, we must be near Agartha!'

Hamish looked at him. 'You don't know the half of it.'

The door burst open to reveal Kohl flanked by SS men. He stood in the doorway, hands on his hips.

'At last!' he exulted. 'The time approaches!' He turned to his men and barked at them in German, then returned to the two teenagers. 'You are coming with us!' he told them.

The SS men seized them and ushered them out of the cell.

'What's happening?' asked Eloise. 'Where's Hamish? Have you got the Spear, then?'

Kohl laughed.

'We have the Spear,' he replied. 'But your friend has not returned. Only one man returned from the patrol, the leader himself. The rest of his patrol - and, alas, your friend - were wiped out by subhumans.' He laughed again at the expression on Eloise's face. 'Now we may enter the chamber of the Cauldron! Now my plans are close to fruition!'

‘No!’ said Dave insistently. ‘We’re not getting caught up in a war.’

‘But look!’ Hamish grabbed a submachine gun dropped by one of the Nazis. ‘We’ve got these! There aren’t that many Nazis in the City. And if we don’t stop them, imagine what they could do to the world.’

‘You’re changing your tune, aren’t you?’ asked Osborne. Hamish scowled at him. ‘But I agree with him,’ the biker added, turning to Dave. ‘We’ve got to stop these Nazis.’

‘Yes,’ Menyw agreed. ‘That’s why we came down here.’

Dave shook his head. ‘It’s not why we came down here,’ he said, indicating the crusties. ‘Let’s get back to our camp and we can discuss things in comfort.’ He gave the supine bodies and the scattered weapons an appraising look. ‘Bring them, if you want,’ he added. ‘But if you think you can get my people to risk their lives...’

Shaking his head sadly, he started walking through the trees. Hamish exchanged a glance with Osborne. The biker shrugged and grabbed a gun. With an expression of misgiving, Siân copied him. A few of the crusties did the same.

Then they followed Dave through the trees.

The travellers’ encampment was some way inland, where the forest floor began to slope up towards the basalt cliffs. Tents and benders were scattered around the clearing. A couple of old buses were parked there, alongside a caravan and a battered VW camper van. Hamish wondered how the travellers had got them down into this underworld.

Other travellers were lounging around the campsite. A woman looked up as they entered the clearing.

‘Who’s this?’ she inquired, looking at Hamish. ‘Did you find any of the people you were looking for?’ She noticed the gun in Hamish’s hands. ‘Or is this one of those Nazis?’

Dave looked at her sadly. ‘We’ve found one of Menyw’s friends, Stella,’ he said. ‘But we seem to have found more trouble.’

Menyw stepped forward. ‘Now, I’m not asking you and your people to risk their lives,’ the druid said slowly. ‘But my friends and I came down here with a very definite idea in mind.’

Stella folded her arms. ‘You’ve told us about your mission,’ she said. ‘But what’s all this that Dave is talking about?’

‘The Nazis are in Agartha,’ Hamish said urgently. ‘We’ve got these guns,’ he added, seeing a look of revulsion on Stella’s face. ‘They’re holding two of our friends prisoner. They have ma Spear! They’ve got everything they need to bring back Hitler and his cronies to destroy the fuckin’ world! And we’ve got to stop them!’

Dave sat down by the fire and the others came to join them.

‘I was around in the Sixties,’ he said slowly. ‘You might have guessed. I dropped out long before punks or crusties. I was lead mandolin in a band, pretty famous - the Salesmen.’

Hamish had heard the story before. Dave’s band had been big for a few months in 1968, before the lead guitarist decided to form a heavy metal band called Antichrist and sing songs about the Devil...

‘We thought we could change the world, okay? We wanted to get rid of all the old warmongers and start a new life where we could live in peace. But did the government understand? No. They did everything they could to stop us. We tried to live on the road and they did their best to stop that, too. Every time we’ve tried to change things, the establishment has done its best to crush us. Coming down here was the best move we’ve made in twenty-five years, because now we can live our own lives and there’s no one to stop us. We came here to get away from all that. And now you’re trying to make us go to war? In the words of the song, baby, you can count me out.’

Hamish folded his arms.

‘Och, aye, that’s awe very well,’ he said. ‘But you cannie just hide away and pretend the world disnae exist. That’s fuckin’ cowardice. If Kohl succeeds, the whole world up there will be plunged into fuckin’ chaos! How many people will die, if we don’t stop the bawbag?’

‘He’s right,’ said Menyw sternly. ‘If Kohl can perform the Rite of the Cauldron, he will gain unthinkable powers. Millions will die. World War Three won’t be in it. And this time, the chances are that the Nazis will win.’

Dave looked down at the campfire. He indicated the travellers: poor, hungry, ill-clad men, women, children, dogs...

‘That’s as maybe,’ he said. ‘But how are we going to stop soldiers? We won’t get very far by putting flowers in these guys’ guns. Do you think we could fight them? I know something warfare, but I can tell you, you won’t find much of an army here.’

‘Like Hamish said, there’s only a few Nazis there,’ said Siân. ‘If we can get through them and stop them performing this ritual...’

Dave shook his head.

‘War is wrong,’ he replied dogmatically. ‘You want to avert war? Do you expect to do that by turning my people into fighters?’

Stella glanced at him.

‘I seem to recall this convoy was established on anarcho-syndicalist lines. Who said you were the dictator?’

Dave looked at her in surprise. ‘I thought I was voicing the opinion of us all,’ he said mildly.

‘Maybe we should let everyone have a say on that,’ said Stella. She looked around at the travellers. ‘What does everyone else think? I don’t disagree with Dave - we won’t stop war by fighting one. But it’s important we discuss this and that everyone gets a say.’

As the travellers gathered round to talk, Hamish drew away with his companions.

‘Do you think we’ll get anywhere with these guys?’ he asked. ‘Ah don’t know if they can do anything except talk.’

Menyw looked doubtful.

‘From what you’ve said, there’s little chance of us stopping the ritual on our own,’ he said slowly. ‘We need numbers if we have any chance of succeeding. But it will be hard going even then.’

Hamish cursed impatiently.

‘But what about Eloise?’ he said. ‘And Nick?’

They stood in the great hall, surrounded by SS guards. Before them, in front of the great doors, was Kohl. In his hand was the Spear of Lugus. He brandished it before the doors.

‘In the high and holy name of the Aryan Race!’ He thrust the Spear into a small hole that resembled a keyhole. The Spear slid in almost up to its full length. There was a click, then a slow and steady grinding noise. Kohl drew the Spear back out.

He took a step backwards, as the stone doors rumbled slowly open. White light spilled out into the gloom of the hall, causing the watching Nazis and their prisoners to cover their eyes. The light flared up brightly, blazing brilliantly, as the doors opened to their widest extent. Then it dimmed to a bearable intensity and they lowered their arms.

Eloise stared in amazement into the vast, pyramidal chamber that the opening of the doors had revealed.

‘I agree with pacifism, Dave,’ one of the crusties was saying insistently, ‘but look where it got us last time! If we’d fought back against the Pigs, we wouldn’t be down here! Remember the Poll-Tax Riots? If we hadn’t risen up against the Government, everyone would still be paying the fascists for the privilege of having a head!’

‘Yeah, Derek, I get you,’ Dave was replying, ‘but I didn’t favour rioting as a method even back then. If we use violence, we’ll become as corrupt as them.’

‘We should take a vote on it,’ said another traveller. There was a chorus of agreement.

‘Very well,’ said Dave slowly, ‘who’s for making a suicidal attack on the City?’ Despite his loaded words, there was a general show of hands. Dave’s face fell. He shrugged.

‘It’s your funeral, guys,’ he said quietly.

Stella stood up. ‘Very well,’ she said, ‘if it’s the majority view, let’s do it! But how?’ She turned to Hamish and his friends. ‘It was your idea. How do we attack them?’

Menyw stepped forward.

‘It’s been a long time since I advised on matters of war,’ he said, ‘but I was instrumental in Arthur’s victory at the siege of Mount Badon.’ He rubbed his hands together. ‘I think what this situation calls for is a pincer manoeuvre. If we can divide our forces and make one attack on the City walls while a second force penetrates the place from another side and takes the Hall while the main enemy force is distracted...’

The travellers gathered round him to discuss the attack while Dave stood alone, his face doleful.

Kohl swaggered down the wide, curving flight of steps that led into the chamber within the pyramid. Behind him came the soldiers, urging their two prisoners on before them. Eloise looked around the chamber in amazement.

Above them, the roof rose into darkness, beyond the mysterious gleam of light that illuminated the floor. The chamber itself stretched at least sixty feet into further gloom. Dominating the floor was a vast, circular dais surrounded by thirteen stone slabs upon which lay motionless, armoured figures.

A large metal cauldron stood at the centre of the dais, constructed out of thirteen large, embossed, black metal panels. Suspended above this, in some way Eloise could not discern, was a huge severed head, a bearded giant whose eyes were closed.

Kohl stood regarding the mysterious head. ‘And Wotan rides to speak with Mime...’ he murmured to himself.

Slowly, he circled the stone dais, pausing to inspect each of the figures that lay on the stone slabs. Once he had walked round the dais, he turned and regarded his captives. He spread his arms wide. ‘We stand in the hall of the Mountain-King,’ he declared, his voice echoing in the stone chamber. ‘Behind me is the Black Cauldron, the Holy Grail. In my hand is the Spear of Lugus; within my grasp is ultimate power!’

He swung round and brandished the Spear before the Cauldron and the severed head, then mounted a short flight of steps that took him up onto the circular dais. Then he turned again. ‘Girl!’ he said, fixing Eloise with an exultant gaze. ‘You know something of the occult arts. You shall join me in the ritual to awaken the guardian of the grail!’

‘No!’ said Eloise defiantly. ‘Why should I help you?’

Kohl smiled. ‘Because if you do not, my men will kill your friend,’ he said simply. He barked an order at the leader of the SS soldiers and the man drew a dagger and set it to Nick’s neck.



Eloise stared in horror. Nick looked back at her, his face white. Unwillingly, Eloise went to join Kohl on the dais. 'Excellent,' said the Neo-Nazi. 'Now, stand here...' He indicated the far side of the cauldron. Eloise moved to obey him. Kohl raised the Spear.

The chamber shook with an earthquake shock and the eyes of the giant head opened to glare down at the mortal who had disturbed his rest.

'Who dares enter the sanctuary of the Cauldron?' The voice seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere. 'Know that the Cauldron brews not the food of cowards or those foresworn!'

Kohl stood in abject bewilderment before the Cauldron.

Hamish strode through the cycads, cradling a Sten gun in his arms, at the head of a group of travellers fifteen strong. To his right, similarly armed, came Derek, the young crustie who had first spoken in favour of attacking the City; to his left was Siân, who held another submachine gun. The travellers were armed with a mixture of clubs, knives and slings.

They were heading for the basalt cliffs by a circuitous route that would take them to a system of natural caves about five miles from the pass, towards which the other force was advancing, led by Osborne and Menyw.

'And these caves lead into the City?' Hamish was asking.

Derek shrugged. 'Like I said, we haven't explored them fully. It was through them that we got here. But they were volcanic vents and from what I've seen while exploring the area, the whole valley is the remains of a volcanic crater. The City itself seems to be built over one vent.'

'Isn't it a bit of a gamble?' asked Siân. 'We don't know if these caves will lead to the City. We don't know how long it will take for us to get there even if they do. How long do you think Osborne and the others can successfully distract the Nazis?'

'What's more important,' said Hamish, 'is whether we get into the City before Kohl completes the rite.'

'Who... who are you?'

Kohl's voice shook as he stared round the chamber. His eyes settled on the giant head. 'Is it the head that speaks?' he asked. 'Are you... are you Mime?'

He was answered by a steady grinding sound from the far side of the chamber. Hearing this, Eloise looked over her shoulder. In the wall behind her, at the same level to the entrance they had come through, a door was slowly opening. In the resulting gap appeared a tall figure, silhouetted against a background of light. Slowly, with graceful, stately steps, it walked down a flight of steps into the chamber.

Eloise saw a tall man with long, flowing white hair and beard, but the soft pink flesh of a baby. He wore long robes and held a staff in one hand. As he mounted the steps to the dais, he gave her a calm, quiet smile. Then he turned to face Kohl.

As he did so, there was a cry from the SS commander. He pointed at the old man and shouted:

‘Kummer! Der Abtrünniger!’

‘Kummer?’ said Kohl. ‘Siegfried Kummer? The rune-magician?’

The old man looked down at him. ‘Once I bore that name,’ he said in quiet, measured tones. ‘I was one of the greatest rune-magicians of the Armanen Order. But when the National Socialists seized power, I was forced to flee Germany. My esoteric views were not in accord with those of Himmler; the Nazis hated me.’

Eloise had heard something of the man’s story. The Armanen Order was a Pan-Germanic occult lodge established in Vienna by Guido Von List. Dedicated to the revival of the runic magic of the ancient Germans, it had soon come under the shadow of the National Socialists. One Armanist, Weisthor, had become Himmler’s most trusted adviser. He had denounced those rune-magicians whose views did not agree with the ideologies of the Third Reich. The horrors of the concentration camp had faced any occultist who did not kow-tow to Nazi beliefs. Many fled Germany, or were incarcerated in concentration camps.

Kohl knew something of the same story. ‘But you vanished!’ he said. ‘Rumours suggested you had fled to South America. But the only German I met out there was Mengeles.’

A look of distaste crossed the old man’s face. ‘I escaped into Switzerland. There I met Jung, who urged me to journey on to Tibet. It was there that I found the ancient underground city of Schampulah and the tunnels that led into the bowels of the earth - and to my true destiny.

‘For now I am Guardian of the Grail.’

Osborne led his men across the causeway.

‘This is the only way we can make a frontal assault on the place?’ he asked Stella. She had accompanied them as, in her words, “an observer.”

‘There is no way round the lake,’ she replied. ‘Unscalable cliffs on either side ensure that.’

‘It means we will be at a great disadvantage when we reach the gates,’ Menyw said, peering ahead through the sulphurous mists.

‘We’re already at a disadvantage,’ Osborne snapped. ‘We only have four guns between us.’ He patted the stock of his Sten gun. ‘But remember, if our plans work, it’s Hamish and

his men who matter most. We're just creating a diversion.'

Stella looked at him silently, then regarded her fellow travellers. 'This had better be worth it.'

The massive walls of the City swam up out of the mist and before anyone could react, there was a burst of gunfire from the battlements.

Hamish and his followers strode down the cavernous passageway. Flickering shadows cast by their cycad-wood torches crept across the walls of the tunnel.

'This is the passage that led you into the Hollow Earth?' Hamish asked. They had reached the cave entrance a few minutes before. Even at its yawning mouth, Hamish had been able to see how the tunnel had easily accommodated the travellers' vehicles.

'It's not all as wide as this,' Derek admitted. 'There were places further down where we could hardly get our buses through. And in other areas, we had to raft them across underground rivers.'

Hamish glanced at him, marvelling at their epic trek. Derek halted. 'Up here,' he said. To their left, a narrow passage led off from the main tunnel, disappearing swiftly into darkness.

'This will lead us to the City?' asked Hamish.

'I think so,' Derek replied. 'Like I said, we never really explored it. But do we have any other choice?'

Hamish grunted. 'Come on,' he said.

The travellers entered the new passage.

'I want the Waters of the Cauldron!' said Kohl. 'Give them to me, Kummer.'

Kummer looked steadily at the man. 'You must prove yourself worthy,' he said. 'The Cauldron's Brew is not for all.'

'No!' Kohl sneered, 'but I am one of the elite. I am a true Aryan. I am an Armanen. I am a Superman! It is my destiny to shape the future of the world. Nothing can stop me!'

A soldier came running into the chamber. He skidded to attention in front of the SS colonel and made a breathless, impassioned report. Eloise saw the colonel's face change. He turned to Kohl and spoke to him.

Kohl cursed.

'What is it?' asked Eloise, her voice quavering. Kohl ignored her and barked out a

string of orders to the soldiers. All but two, those guarding Nick, turned and marched from the chamber. Once they had gone, Kohl glanced at her.

‘Nothing we can’t deal with,’ he said. ‘The subhumans from the forest attack. I don’t know who has stirred them up.’ He turned back to Kummer.

Eloise’s heart pounded. Subhumans? Could Hamish have allied himself with apemen? Or was that too much to hope for...? She looked down at Nick, standing disconsolate between the two soldiers. Could they make a run for it? But then how could they stop Kohl?

She looked at the man, deep in animated conversation with Kummer and wondered if they had any chance of stopping Kohl at all.

Osborne blazed away at the Nazis.

His mind was afire with adrenalin. It was like going over a hundred miles an hour on his bike, the same feeling of infinite power as the machine throbbed in his hands, the same teetering between vast exhilaration and mind-numbing terror, halfway between godhood and the grave.

They had battled their way through the gates, lost a few in the fight to secure the archway, but they had forced the enemy back from the walls and now the Nazis had got themselves in cover around the plaza beyond. The walls of the ancient buildings were pitted with bullets.

Osborne dodged back into cover beside the archway and found Menyw and Stella crouched there.

‘Are we winning?’ asked the crustie.

‘Hard to say,’ Osborne panted. ‘The Nazis have stopped firing. It could be a trick. But we’ve picked off a few.’

Stella looked towards the archway, where huddled figures lay in the awkward postures of death.

‘Not without losses of our own,’ she said flatly.

‘Those deaths will be as nothing if Kohl succeeds in his plans,’ said Menyw. He looked over at Osborne. ‘Maybe it would be an idea to press the attack.’

Osborne shrugged. ‘Maybe,’ he said cautiously. ‘But do you want us to lose more?’

Menyw shook his head.

‘But remember, our work here is to keep the soldiers occupied,’ he said. ‘If they fall back to the temple, Hamish and his force will have to cope with them.’

Osborne sighed wearily. He went to gather together his forces for the last push.

The tunnel was narrow and stuffy and stank of rotten eggs. Hamish and Derek led the way.

‘It’s the smell that makes me think we’ll come out in the City,’ Derek was saying. ‘This is obviously a volcanic vent. We must be under the cone even now.’

Hamish grunted in reply. Then they rounded a corner and he groaned. Their blazing torches revealed a parting of the ways. The tunnel split to left and right.

‘Which way?’ Siân asked.

Derek looked at them uncertainly.

‘This is further than I’ve explored,’ he said. ‘I don’t know which way!’

Hamish glowered. ‘Well, hasn’t anyone got any idea?’

A crustie stepped forward.

‘This tunnel smells the most,’ he said, nodding towards the left hand path, which indeed reeked of sulphur. ‘I reckon we should go the other way.’

There was a rumble of assent from the crusties. Derek rounded on them.

‘No, you idiots!’ he said. ‘We’re heading for the middle of the volcano! We should go the way that smells worst! More sulphur that way,’ he explained. ‘Come on!’

He led them down the passage to the left.

It twisted and wound for some way, until they turned a corner and halted, seeing a rockfall blocking the passage ahead.

‘A dead end!’ said Hamish.

Derek cursed and ran up to it. He started clawing at the rocks. Hamish and the others moved to help him.

‘We’ll never get through that in time!’ said Siân. Hamish glowered up at her, as he helped Derek lift a large boulder.

‘Shut up and help us!’ he said. ‘We haven’t time to fuck about.’

Siân stepped forward. As she did so, Derek tugged at a rock near the roof. It came free like a loose tooth, bringing with it a strong waft of sulphur.

‘We must be near the main vent,’ Derek said, coughing. He dragged another rock away. There was a creak from the tunnel roof.

Siân looked worried.

‘What was that?’ she whispered.

‘Nuhin!’ Hamish snapped. ‘Get up there and help!’

Derek was wrapping his arms around another rock. The roof creaked again. Then, without warning, it split straight across. Sulphurous-stinking acid burst through the crack, flooding the passageway.

‘We must be right under the acid lake!’ Siân screamed over the roar of cascading acid and falling rock. ‘Run, Hamish! Run!’