

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

# Schlock!

WEBZINE

[www.schlock.co.uk](http://www.schlock.co.uk)

THIS WEEK'S FEATURED STORY:

## SITTING ROOM CITINGS

by C. Priest Brumley

Also Featuring:

## DIANE

by James Rhodes

## STATE OF EMERGENCY, pt. 12

by David Christopher

Vol. 1, Iss. 30  
6 November 2011



FANTASMAGORIANA  
CONTINUES...

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

Vol 1, Issue 30

6<sup>th</sup> November 2011

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!

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

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 [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@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.

The stories, articles and illustrations contained on this website are copyright © to the respective authors and illustrators, unless in the public domain.

### This Edition

*This week's cover illustration is "I'll Catch Me Death Out 'Ere" by Gavin Roach.  
Cover design by C Priest Brumley.*

Editorial by Gavin Chappell

Fantasmagoriana - Part Two by Lord Byron - *Darvell feels like he's been here before...* GOTHIC

Schlock! Classic Serial The Horror in the Museum: Part Three by HP Lovecraft and Hazel Heald - *Guttural cries sometimes punctuated the hideous tussle in the dark...* HORROR

**Diane by James Rhodes... *What do you do when your lover's face is everywhere?* ... SCIENCE FICTION**

**Sitting Room Citings by C. Priest Brumley - *Masach's back*... HORROR**

**Into the Void by Klaus McLusky - *Vengeance from beyond the grave - and then some*... SWORD AND SORCERY / SPACE OPERA**

**State of Emergency - Part Twelve by David Christopher - *Will and Mercer begin their journey*... SCIENCE FICTION**

**Super Duper - Part Twenty Four by James Rhodes - *Biggy grieves for his fallen comrade*... SCIENCE FICTION**

**Babbage Must Die - Part Twenty Four by Gavin Chappell - *Ada's story*... SCIENCE FICTION**

EDITORIAL by Gavin Chappell

Halloween's over for another day, and all the ghosts and ghouls return to the crypt – to read the latest issue of Schlock!

This week sees the return of Klaus Mclusky, with another episode in his story of four juvenile delinquents magically transported to a fantasy world. James Rhodes provides the story of Diane. Another cover by the talented fantasy artist Gavin Roach. And another story from C. Priest Brumley featuring the return of the demon Masach.

Meanwhile, the Romantic Gothic anthology *Fantasmagoriana* continues with a fragmentary story by Lord Byron. Plus the continuation of Super Duper, State of Emergency, and Babbage Must Die and all your favourite classic serials.

*Gavin Chappell*

FANTASMAGORIANA,  
OR, TALES OF THE DEAD FROM THE VILLA DIODATI

## PART TWO

### The Burial: A Fragment

By George Gordon (Lord Byron)

*Our next writer, Byron, was very much the James Dean of the Romantic poets; indeed, 'mad, bad and dangerous to know,' as he was called by his lover Lady Caroline Lamb, although a sensitive soul was concealed beneath an arrogant, rakish exterior. As mentioned in the introduction, by this time he was a self-imposed exile from the London high society in which he had previously thrived, after the breakup of his marriage.*

*He had already travelled widely in the East, and the following fragment is lent local colour by his own experiences of the Ottoman Empire and his readings of history. Sadly, fragmentary writings are a feature of the Romantic poets; Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* and Keats' unfinished *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* are other examples of where the Romantic imagination seems to wither on the vine.*

*A striking tale that hints at unnaturally long life, or perhaps reincarnation, *The Burial* leaves the reader with many unanswered questions. Who is Darvell? What does he mean when he says he has been in that place before? What is the significance of the bird and the snake (a potent symbol that recurs throughout world mythology)? The answers will never be known, and perhaps Byron himself did not know; perhaps that is why he never finished the story.*

*It falls to the reader to decide.*

June 17, 1816.

“In the year 17—, having for some time determined on a journey through countries not hitherto much frequented by travellers, I set out, accompanied by a friend, whom I shall designate by the name of Augustus Darvell. He was a few years my elder, and a man of considerable fortune and ancient family, advantages which an extensive capacity prevented him alike from undervaluing and overrating. Some peculiar circumstances in his private history had rendered him to me an object of attention, of interest, and even of regard, which neither the reserve of his manners, nor occasional indication of an inquietude at times approaching to alienation of mind, could extinguish.

“I was yet young in life, which I had begun early; but my intimacy with him was of a recent date: we had been educated at the same schools and university; but his progress through these had preceded mine, and he had been deeply initiated into what is called the world, while I was yet in my novitiate. While thus engaged, I heard much both of his past and present life; and, although in these accounts there were many and irreconcilable contradictions, I could still gather from the whole that he was a being of no common order, and one who, whatever pains he might take to avoid remark, would still be remarkable. I had cultivated his acquaintance subsequently, and endeavoured to obtain his friendship, but this last appeared to be unattainable: whatever affections he might have possessed seemed now, some to have been extinguished, and others to be concentrated: that his feelings were acute, I had sufficient opportunities of observing; for, although he could control, he could not altogether disguise them; still he had a power of giving to one passion the appearance of another, in such a manner that it was difficult to define the nature of what was working within him; and the expressions of his features would vary so rapidly, though slightly, that it was useless to trace them to their sources. It was evident that he was a prey to some cureless disquiet; but whether it arose from ambition, love, remorse, grief, from one or all of these, or merely from a morbid temperament akin to disease, I could not discover: there were circumstances alleged which might have justified the application to each of these causes; but, as I have before said, these were so contradictory and contradicted, that none could be fixed upon with accuracy. Where there is mystery, it is generally supposed that there must also be evil: I know not how this may be, but in him there certainly was the one, though I could not ascertain the extent of the other — and felt loth, as far as regarded himself, to believe in its existence. My advances were received with sufficient coldness: but I was young, and not easily discouraged, and at length succeeded in obtaining, to a certain degree, that common-place intercourse and moderate confidence of common and every-day concerns, created and cemented by similarity of pursuit and frequency of meeting, which is called intimacy, or friendship, according to the ideas of him who uses those words to express them.

“Darvell had already travelled extensively; and to him I had applied for information with regard to the conduct of my intended journey. It was my secret wish that he might be prevailed on to accompany me; it was also a probable hope, founded upon the shadowy restlessness which I observed in him, and to which the animation which he appeared to feel on such subjects, and his apparent indifference to all by which he was more immediately surrounded, gave fresh strength. This wish I first hinted, and then expressed: his answer, though I had partly expected it, gave me all the pleasure of surprise — he consented; and, after the requisite arrangement, we commenced our voyages. After journeying through various countries of the south of Europe, our attention was turned towards the East, according to our original destination; and it was in my progress through these regions that the incident occurred upon which will turn what I may have to relate.

“The constitution of Darvell, which must from his appearance have been in early life more than usually robust, had been for some time gradually giving away, without the intervention of any apparent disease: he had neither cough nor hectic, yet he became daily more enfeebled; his habits were temperate, and he neither declined nor complained of fatigue; yet he was evidently wasting away: he became more and more silent and sleepless, and at length so seriously altered, that my alarm grew proportionate to what I conceived to be his danger.

“We had determined, on our arrival at Smyrna, on an excursion to the ruins of Ephesus and Sardis, from which I endeavoured to dissuade him in his present state of indisposition — but in vain: there appeared to be an oppression on his mind, and a solemnity in his manner, which ill corresponded with his eagerness to proceed on what I regarded as a mere party of pleasure little suited to a valetudinarian; but I opposed him no longer — and in a few days we set off together, accompanied only by a serrugee and a single janizary.

“We had passed halfway towards the remains of Ephesus, leaving behind us the more fertile environs of Smyrna, and were entering upon that wild and tenantless tract through the marshes and defiles which lead to the few huts yet lingering over the broken columns of Diana — the roofless walls of expelled Christianity, and the still more recent but complete desolation of abandoned mosques — when the sudden and rapid illness of my companion obliged us to halt at a Turkish cemetery, the turbaned tombstones of which were the sole indication that human life had ever been a sojourner in this wilderness. The only caravansera we had seen was left some hours behind us, not a vestige of a town or even cottage was within sight or hope, and this ‘city of the dead’ appeared to be the sole refuge of my unfortunate friend, who seemed on the verge of becoming the last of its inhabitants.

“In this situation, I looked round for a place where he might most conveniently repose: contrary to the usual aspect of Mahometan burial-grounds, the cypresses were in this few in number, and these thinly scattered over its extent; the tombstones were mostly fallen, and worn with age: upon one of the most considerable of these, and beneath one of the most spreading trees, Darvell supported himself, in a half-reclining posture, with great difficulty. He asked for water. I had some doubts of our being able to find any, and prepared to go in search of it with hesitating despondency: but he desired me to remain; and turning to Suleiman, our janizary, who stood by us smoking with great tranquillity, he said, ‘Suleiman, verbana su,’ (i.e. ‘bring some water,’) and went on describing the spot where it was to be found with great minuteness, at a small well for camels, a few hundred yards to the right: the janizary obeyed. I said to Darvell, ‘How did you know this?’ He replied, ‘From our situation; you must perceive that this place was once inhabited, and could not have been so without springs: I have also been here before.’

““You have been here before! How came you never to mention this to me? and what could you be doing in a place where no one would remain a moment longer than they could help it?”

“To this question I received no answer. In the mean time Suleiman returned with the water, leaving the serrugee and the horses at the fountain. The quenching of his thirst had the appearance of reviving him for a moment; and I conceived hopes of his being able to proceed, or at least to return, and I urged the attempt. He was silent — and appeared to be collecting his spirits for an effort to speak. He began —

“This is the end of my journey, and of my life; I came here to die; but I have a request to make, a command — for such my last words must be. — You will observe it?”

“Most certainly; but I have better hopes.”

“I have no hopes, nor wishes, but this — conceal my death from every human being.”

“I hope there will be no occasion; that you will recover, and —”

“Peace! it must be so: promise this.”

“I do.”

“Swear it, by all that —” He here dictated an oath of great solemnity.

“There is no occasion for this. I will observe your request; and to doubt me is —”

“It cannot be helped, you must swear.”

“I took the oath, it appeared to relieve him. He removed a seal ring from his finger, on which were some Arabic characters, and presented it to me. He proceeded —

“ ‘On the ninth day of the month, at noon precisely (what month you please, but this must be the day), you must fling this ring into the salt springs which run into the Bay of Eleusis; the day after, at the same hour, you must repair to the ruins of the temple of Ceres, and wait one hour.’

“Why?”

“You will see.”

“The ninth day of the month, you say?”

“The ninth.”

“As I observed that the present was the ninth day of the month, his countenance changed, and he paused. As he sat, evidently becoming more feeble, a stork, with a snake in her beak, perched upon a tombstone near us; and, without devouring her prey, appeared to be steadfastly regarding us. I know not what impelled me to drive it away, but the attempt was useless; she made a few circles in the air, and returned exactly to the same spot. Darvell pointed to it, and smiled — he spoke — I know not whether to himself or to me — but the words were only, ‘Tis well!’

“‘What is well? What do you mean?’

“‘No matter; you must bury me here this evening, and exactly where that bird is now perched. You know the rest of my injunctions.’

“He then proceeded to give me several directions as to the manner in which his death might be best concealed. After these were finished, he exclaimed, ‘You perceive that bird?’

“‘Certainly.’

“‘And the serpent writhing in her beak?’

“‘Doubtless: there is nothing uncommon in it; it is her natural prey. But it is odd that she does not devour it.’

“He smiled in a ghastly manner, and said faintly, ‘It is not yet time!’ As he spoke, the stork flew away. My eyes followed it for a moment — it could hardly be longer than ten might be counted. I felt Darvell’s weight, as it were, increase upon my shoulder, and, turning to look upon his face, perceived that he was dead!

“I was shocked with the sudden certainty which could not be mistaken — his countenance in a few minutes became nearly black. I should have attributed so rapid a change to poison, had I not been aware that he had no opportunity of receiving it unperceived. The day was declining, the body was rapidly altering, and nothing remained but to fulfil his request. With the aid of Suleiman’s ataghan and my own sabre, we scooped a shallow grave upon the spot which Darvell had indicated: the earth easily gave way, having already received some Mahometan tenant. We dug as deeply as the time permitted us, and throwing the dry earth upon all that remained of the singular being so lately departed, we cut a few sods of greener turf from the less withered soil around us, and laid them upon his sepulchre.



“Between astonishment and grief, I was tearless.”

## THE HORROR IN THE MUSEUM by H. P. Lovecraft and Hazel Heald

### Part 3

Guttural cries sometimes punctured the hideous tussle in the dark. Blood spurted, clothing ripped, and Jones at last felt the actual throat of the maniac, shorn of its spectral mask. He spoke not a word, but put every ounce of energy into the defence of his life. Rogers kicked, gouged, butted, bit, clawed, and spat—yet found strength to yelp out actual sentences at times. Most of his speech was in a ritualistic jargon full of references to “It” or “Rhan-Tegoth,” and to Jones’s overwrought nerves it seemed as if the cries echoed from an infinite distance of daemonic snortings and bayings. Toward the last they were rolling on the floor, overturning benches or striking against the walls and the brick foundations of the central melting-furnace. Up to the very end Jones could not be certain of saving himself, but chance finally intervened in his favour. A jab of his knee against Rogers’ chest produced a general relaxation, and a moment later he knew he had won.

Though hardly able to hold himself up, Jones rose and stumbled about the walls seeking the light-switch—for his flashlight was gone, together with most of his clothing. As he lurched along he dragged his limp opponent with him, fearing a sudden attack when the madman came to. Finding the switch-box, he fumbled till he had the right handle. Then, as the wildly disordered workroom burst into sudden radiance, he set about binding Rogers with such cords and belts as he could easily find. The fellow’s disguise—or what was left of it—seemed to be made of a puzzlingly queer sort of leather. For some reason it made Jones’s flesh crawl to touch it, and there seemed to be an alien, rusty odour about it. In the normal clothes beneath it was Rogers’ key-ring, and this the exhausted victor seized as his final passport to freedom. The shades at the small, slit-like windows were all securely drawn, and he let them remain so.

Washing off the blood of battle at a convenient sink, Jones donned the most ordinary-looking and least ill-fitting clothes he could find on the costume hooks. Testing the door to the courtyard, he found it fastened with a spring-lock which did not require a key from the inside. He kept the key-ring, however, to admit him on his return with aid—for plainly, the thing to do was to call in an alienist. There was no telephone in the museum, but it would not take long to find an all-night restaurant or chemist’s shop where one could be had. He had almost opened the door to go when a torrent of hideous abuse from across the room told him that Rogers—whose visible injuries were confined to a long, deep scratch down the left cheek—had regained consciousness.

“Fool! Spawn of Noth-Yidik and effluvium of K’thun! Son of the dogs that howl in the maelstrom of Azathoth! You would have been sacred and immortal, and now you are betraying It and Its priest! Beware—for It is hungry! It would have been Orabona—that damned treacherous dog ready to turn against me and It—but I give you the first honour instead. Now you must both beware, for It is not gentle without Its priest.

“Iä! Iä! Vengeance is at hand! Do you know you would have been immortal? Look at the furnace! There is a fire ready to light, and there is wax in the kettle. I would have done with you as I have done with other once-living forms. Hei! You, who have vowed all my effigies are waxen, would have become a waxen effigy yourself! The furnace was all ready! When It had had Its fill, and you were like that dog I shewed you, I would have made your flattened,

punctured fragments immortal! Wax would have done it. Haven't you said I'm a great artist? Wax in every pore—wax over every square inch of you—Iä! Iä! And ever after the world would have looked at your mangled carcass and wondered how I ever imagined and made such a thing! Hei! And Orabona would have come next, and others after him—and thus would my waxen family have grown!

“Dog—do you still think I made all my effigies? Why not say preserved? You know by this time the strange places I've been to, and the strange things I've brought back. Coward—you could never face the dimensional shambler whose hide I put on to scare you—the mere sight of it alive, or even the full-fledged thought of it, would kill you instantly with fright! Iä! Iä! It waits hungry for the blood that is the life!”

Rogers, propped against the wall, swayed to and fro in his bonds.

“See here, Jones—if I let you go will you let me go? It must be taken care of by Its high-priest. Orabona will be enough to keep It alive—and when he is finished I will make his fragments immortal in wax for the world to see. It could have been you, but you have rejected the honour. I won't bother you again. Let me go, and I will share with you the power that It will bring me. Iä! Iä! Great is Rhan-Tegoth! Let me go! Let me go! It is starving down there beyond that door, and if It dies the Old Ones can never come back. Hei! Hei! Let me go!”

Jones merely shook his head, though the hideousness of the showman's imaginings revolted him. Rogers, now staring wildly at the padlocked plank door, thumped his head again and again against the brick wall and kicked with his tightly bound ankles. Jones was afraid he would injure himself, and advanced to bind him more firmly to some stationary object. Writhing, Rogers edged away from him and set up a series of frenetic ululations whose utter, monstrous unhumanness was appalling, and whose sheer volume was almost incredible. It seemed impossible that any human throat could produce noises so loud and piercing, and Jones felt that if this continued there would be no need to telephone for aid. It could not be long before a constable would investigate, even granting that there were no listening neighbours in this deserted warehouse district.

“Wza-y'ei! Wza-y'ei!” howled the madman. “Y'kaa haa bho—ii, Rhan-Tegoth—Cthulhu fhtagn—Ei! Ei! Ei! Ei!—Rhan-Tegoth, Rhan-Tegoth, Rhan-Tegoth!”

The tautly trussed creature, who had started squirming his way across the littered floor, now reached the padlocked plank door and commenced knocking his head thunderously against it. Jones dreaded the task of binding him further, and wished he were not so exhausted from the previous struggle. This violent aftermath was getting hideously on his nerves, and he began to feel a return of the nameless qualms he had felt in the dark. Everything about Rogers and his museum was so hellishly morbid and suggestive of black vistas beyond life! It was loathsome to think of the waxen masterpiece of abnormal genius which must at this very moment be lurking close at hand in the blackness beyond the heavy, padlocked door.

And now something happened which sent an additional chill down Jones's spine, and caused every hair—even the tiny growth on the backs of his hands—to bristle with a vague fright beyond classification. Rogers had suddenly stopped screaming and beating his head against the stout plank door, and was straining up to a sitting posture, head cocked on one side as if listening intently for something. All at once a smile of devilish triumph overspread his face, and he began speaking intelligibly again—this time in a hoarse whisper contrasting oddly with his former stentorian howling.

“Listen, fool! Listen hard! It has heard me, and is coming. Can't you hear It splashing out of Its tank down there at the end of the runway? I dug it deep, because there was nothing too good for It. It is amphibious, you know—you saw the gills in the picture. It came to the earth from lead-grey Yuggoth, where the cities are under the warm deep sea. It can't stand up in there—too tall—has to sit or crouch. Let me get my keys—we must let It out and kneel down before It. Then we will go out and find a dog or cat—or perhaps a drunken man—to give It

the nourishment It needs.”

It was not what the madman said, but the way he said it, that disorganised Jones so badly. The utter, insane confidence and sincerity in that crazed whisper were damnably contagious. Imagination, with such a stimulus, could find an active menace in the devilish wax figure that lurked unseen just beyond the heavy planking. Eyeing the door in unholy fascination, Jones noticed that it bore several distinct cracks, though no marks of violent treatment were visible on this side. He wondered how large a room or closet lay behind it, and how the waxen figure was arranged. The maniac’s idea of a tank and runway was as clever as all his other imaginings.

Then, in one terrible instant, Jones completely lost the power to draw a breath. The leather belt he had seized for Rogers’ further strapping fell from his limp hands, and a spasm of shivering convulsed him from head to foot. He might have known the place would drive him mad as it had driven Rogers—and now he was mad. He was mad, for he now harboured hallucinations more weird than any which had assailed him earlier that night. The madman was bidding him hear the splashing of a mythical monster in a tank beyond the door—and now, God help him, he did hear it!

Rogers saw the spasm of horror reach Jones’s face and transform it to a staring mask of fear. He cackled.

“At last, fool, you believe! At last you know! You hear It and It comes! Get me my keys, fool—we must do homage and serve It!”

But Jones was past paying attention to any human words, mad or sane. Phobic paralysis held him immobile and half-conscious, with wild images racing phantasmagorically through his helpless imagination. There was a splashing. There was a padding or shuffling, as of great wet paws on a solid surface. Something was approaching. Into his nostrils, from the cracks in that nightmare plank door, poured a noisome animal stench like and yet unlike that of the mammal cages at the zoölogical gardens in Regent’s Park.

He did not know now whether Rogers was talking or not. Everything real had faded away, and he was a statue obsessed with dreams and hallucinations so unnatural that they became almost objective and remote from him. He thought he heard a sniffing or snorting from the unknown gulf beyond the door, and when a sudden baying, trumpeting noise assailed his ears he could not feel sure that it came from the tightly bound maniac whose image swam uncertainly in his shaken vision. The photograph of that accursed, unseen wax thing persisted in floating through his consciousness. Such a thing had no right to exist. Had it not driven him mad?

Even as he reflected, a fresh evidence of madness beset him. Something, he thought, was fumbling with the latch of the heavy padlocked door. It was patting and pawing and pushing at the planks. There was a thudding on the stout wood, which grew louder and louder. The stench was horrible. And now the assault on that door from the inside was a malign, determined pounding like the strokes of a battering-ram. There was an ominous cracking—a splintering—a welling foetor—a falling plank—a black paw ending in a crab-like claw. . . .

“Help! Help! God help me! . . . Aaaaaaa! . . .”

With intense effort Jones is today able to recall a sudden bursting of his fear-paralysis into the liberation of frenzied automatic flight. What he evidently did must have paralleled curiously the wild, plunging flights of maddest nightmares; for he seems to have leaped across the disordered crypt at almost a single bound, yanked open the outside door, which closed and locked itself after him with a clatter, sprung up the worn stone steps three at a time, and raced frantically and aimlessly out of that dank cobblestoned court and through the squalid streets of Southwark.

Here the memory ends. Jones does not know how he got home, and there is no evidence of his having hired a cab. Probably he raced all the way by blind instinct—over Waterloo

Bridge, along the Strand and Charing Cross, and up Haymarket and Regent Street to his own neighbourhood. He still had on the queer mélange of museum costumes when he grew conscious enough to call the doctor.

A week later the nerve specialists allowed him to leave his bed and walk in the open air.

But he had not told the specialists much. Over his whole experience hung a pall of madness and nightmare, and he felt that silence was the only course. When he was up, he scanned intently all the papers which had accumulated since that hideous night, but found no reference to anything queer at the museum. How much, after all, had been reality? Where did reality end and morbid dream begin? Had his mind gone wholly to pieces in that dark exhibition chamber, and had the whole fight with Rogers been a phantasm of fever? It would help to put him on his feet if he could settle some of these maddening points. He must have seen that damnable photograph of the wax image called "It", for no brain but Rogers' could ever have conceived such a blasphemy.

It was a fortnight before he dared to enter Southwark Street again. He went in the middle of the morning, when there was the greatest amount of sane, wholesome activity around the ancient, crumbling shops and warehouses. The museum's sign was still there, and as he approached he saw that the place was open. The gateman nodded in a pleasant recognition as he summoned up the courage to enter, and in the vaulted chamber below an attendant touched his cap cheerfully. Perhaps everything had been a dream. Would he dare to knock at the door of the workroom and look for Rogers?

Then Orabona advanced to greet him. His dark, sleek face was a trifle sardonic, but Jones felt that he was not unfriendly. He spoke with a trace of accent.

"Good morning, Mr. Jones. It is some time since we have seen you here. Did you wish Mr. Rogers? I'm sorry, but he is away. He had word of business in America, and had to go. Yes, it was very sudden. I am in charge now—here, and at the house. I try to maintain Mr. Rogers' high standard—till he is back."

The foreigner smiled—perhaps from affability alone. Jones scarcely knew how to reply, but managed to mumble out a few inquiries about the day after his last visit. Orabona seemed greatly amused by the questions, and took considerable care in framing his replies.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Jones—the twenty-eighth of last month. I remember it for many reasons. In the morning—before Mr. Rogers got here, you understand—I found the workroom in quite a mess. There was a great deal of—cleaning up—to do. There had been—late work, you see. Important new specimen given its secondary baking process. I took complete charge when I came.

"It was a hard specimen to prepare—but of course Mr. Rogers has taught me a great deal. He is, as you know, a very great artist. When he came he helped me complete the specimen—helped very materially, I assure you—but he left soon without even greeting the men. As I tell you, he was called away suddenly. There were important chemical reactions involved. They made loud noises—in fact, some teamsters in the court outside fancy they heard several pistol shots—very amusing idea!

"As for the new specimen—that matter is very unfortunate. It is a great masterpiece—designed and made, you understand, by Mr. Rogers. He will see about it when he gets back."

Again Orabona smiled.

"The police, you know. We put it on display a week ago, and there were two or three faintings. One poor fellow had an epileptic fit in front of it. You see, it is a trifle—stronger—than the rest. Larger, for one thing. Of course, it was in the adult alcove. The next day a couple of men from Scotland Yard looked it over and said it was too morbid to be shewn. Said we'd have to remove it. It was a tremendous shame—such a masterpiece of art—but I didn't feel justified in appealing to the courts in Mr. Rogers' absence. He would not like so much publicity with the police now—but when he gets back—when he gets back—"

For some reason or other Jones felt a mounting tide of uneasiness and repulsion. But Orabona was continuing.

“You are a connoisseur, Mr. Jones. I am sure I violate no law in offering you a private view. It may be—subject, of course, to Mr. Rogers’ wishes—that we shall destroy the specimen some day—but that would be a crime.”

Jones had a powerful impulse to refuse the sight and flee precipitately, but Orabona was leading him forward by the arm with an artist’s enthusiasm. The adult alcove, crowded with nameless horrors, held no visitors. In the farther corner a large niche had been curtained off, and to this the smiling assistant advanced.

“You must know, Mr. Jones, that the title of this specimen is ‘The Sacrifice to Rhan-Tegoth’.”

Jones started violently, but Orabona appeared not to notice.

“The shapeless, colossal god is a feature in certain obscure legends which Mr. Rogers has studied. All nonsense, of course, as you’ve so often assured Mr. Rogers. It is supposed to have come from outer space, and to have lived in the Arctic three million years ago. It treated its sacrifices rather peculiarly and horribly, as you shall see. Mr. Rogers had made it fiendishly life-like—even to the face of the victim.”

Now trembling violently, Jones clung to the brass railing in front of the curtained niche. He almost reached out to stop Orabona when he saw the curtain beginning to swing aside, but some conflicting impulse held him back. The foreigner smiled triumphantly.

“Behold!”

Jones reeled in spite of his grip on the railing.

“God!—great God!”

Fully ten feet high despite a shambling, crouching attitude expressive of infinite cosmic malignancy, a monstrosity of unbelievable horror was shewn starting forward from a Cyclopean ivory throne covered with grotesque carvings. In the central pair of its six legs it bore a crushed, flattened, distorted, bloodless thing, riddled with a million punctures, and in places seared as with some pungent acid. Only the mangled head of the victim, lolling upside down at one side, revealed that it represented something once human.

The monster itself needed no title for one who had seen a certain hellish photograph. That damnable print had been all too faithful; yet it could not carry the full horror which lay in the gigantic actuality. The globular torso—the bubble-like suggestion of a head—the three fishy eyes—the foot-long proboscis—the bulging gills—the monstrous capillation of asp-like suckers—the six sinuous limbs with their black paws and crab-like claws—God! the familiarity of that black paw ending in a crab-like claw! . . .

Orabona’s smile was utterly damnable. Jones choked, and stared at the hideous exhibit with a mounting fascination which perplexed and disturbed him. What half-revealed horror was holding and forcing him to look longer and search out details? This had driven Rogers mad . . . Rogers, supreme artist . . . said they weren’t artificial. . . .

Then he localised the thing that held him. It was the crushed waxen victim’s lolling head, and something that it implied. This head was not entirely devoid of a face, and that face was familiar. It was like the mad face of poor Rogers. Jones peered closer, hardly knowing why he was driven to do so. Wasn’t it natural for a mad egotist to mould his own features into his masterpiece? Was there anything more that subconscious vision had seized on and suppressed in sheer terror?

The wax of the mangled face had been handled with boundless dexterity. Those punctures—how perfectly they reproduced the myriad wounds somehow inflicted on that poor dog! But there was something more. On the left cheek one could trace an irregularity which seemed outside the general scheme—as if the sculptor had sought to cover up a defect of his first modelling. The more Jones looked at it, the more mysteriously it horrified him—

and then, suddenly, he remembered a circumstance which brought his horror to a head. That night of hideousness—the tussle—the bound madman—and the long, deep scratch down the left cheek of the actual living Rogers. . . .

Jones, releasing his desperate clutch on the railing, sank in a total faint.

Orabona continued to smile.

DIANE by James Rhodes

Direct light hurt his eyes, always. He did not like talking to any of the things, they had her voice, her looks, and even some of her personality traits, but they were not her. He had tried touching them, of course, but even though you can touch light, you cannot stroke it or press it against you.

“This is my fault,” he mused.

Diane looked at him, for a second she even seemed sentient as one eyebrow raised in suspicion just like hers had. He had programmed them all to do that whenever they were unsure of human behaviour but he had not realised how effective it would be.

“Diane, take off your clothes.”

The hologram looked disappointed and reluctant; just like Diane would have. The hologram’s clothes disappeared in an instant.

“Diane, next time I tell you to do that, take them off properly, and put them on the floor. Do you understand?”

“If you say so, sir.”

“Call me Richard, no, Lord Richard.”

“Yes Lord Richard, would you like me to put my clothes back on and get undressed properly.”

He looked at Diane’s body; it was a perfect reproduction of his perfect woman. The thought depressed him so much that he lost his erection.

“Just come here and let me look at you.”

He wanted very badly to touch the thing but his hands passed through and disturbed the light field, the customer service hologram became pixellated in protest.

“You’re out there somewhere,” he told Diane: “If only you would forgive me for creating these things, we could be happy.”

“Lord Richard, can I assist with your inquiry?”

“Search all records for Diane Barnes.”

“All records on the prototype are subject to a court injunction preventing public disclosure.”

“I know, I was there at the court: search anyway.”

“There are 1400, 0293 sightings and 129,990,397 fan pages. Would you like me to display a list of the top entries?”

Diane extended her hands and a flat screen monitor appeared between them, listing every one of the millions of pages.

“I guess it’s easier to disappear into recognition than obscurity.”

“It must be nice to be famous,” said the hologram as the internal processor of its generator parsed an algorithm that allowed it to find the good in every situation. It was mindlessness, but it was the main reason that the DCS Hologram had thrived over its competitors.

“I am dying inside, Diane, do you understand? Maybe if I could touch you it would be OK.”

“If your inside is hurting then external touching is not the best solution. In addition, if you are dying inside, then that means you still have your health, which means you can recover. Would you like me to refer you to a list of health spas for your physical and emotional wellbeing?”

“Does Diane Barnes work at any of them?”

“All records on the prototype are subject to a court injunction preventing public disclosure.”

“She’s not a prototype, she’s a woman.”

“There is a Diane Customer Service Hologram at all of your local amenities; would you like me to display a list of locations where you can find a DCS Hologram?”

“How about locations where I can’t find one?”

“Zero locations have been identified, would you like me to display the search results?”

“Thank you, no.”

Richard opened his curtains, and squinted into his telescope. It was powerful enough to see the street in detail even from that height. As he peered down from his penthouse, he realised that every third person was a DCS Hologram. She was everywhere. People used her as a personal trainer, a shopping advisor, even as a nanny. The public loved the Diane he had made almost as much as he loved the original.

“I’m going to sit down for a while, Diane. Will you sit with me?”

The hologram took its place next to Richard on the leather sofa.

“Will you put your head on my lap?”

“I am not capable of physical contact.”

“I know, but can you pretend?”

The hologram put its head in the space above Richard’s knees. He pretended that he could stroke her hair, he imagined the weight of her against him and tried to dig out that

smell she had. He breathed deeply, leaning forwards his elbow passed through the image of her face and his tears rolled off the pristine leather.

## SITTING ROOM CITINGS by C. Priest Brumley

I am being watched.

I'm not quite sure how this happened (nor do I really care at this point), but all I know is somehow this... Thing.... popped up out of nowhere and decided to camp out in my sitting room. And I don't even know what the friggin' hell it is. It almost looks... What's the word? Daemonic, I'd say.

And it's staring at me. Why? Maybe I should talk to it?

"..... Hi."

"Hello, sir."

"Can I... help you with something?"

The thing's demeanor changed in the blink of an eye.

"No, sir, but maybe I can help you! I see here," and with a flash of curiously blue fire, a rather thick dossier appeared in his right hand and a pair of old-fashioned bifocals appeared in the other, "You are a former Marine Corps veteran? Served in the first Gulf War?"

"Yes..." I said tentatively.

"And," he continued, propping the bifocals on his face in a grotesque mockery of intellectualism, "You received the Purple Heart award from President Bush himself for your troubles?"

I puffed my chest out, my pride about receiving that particular award having grown over the years, and said, "Yes sir! Got to shake the man's hand and everything! Proudest day of my life!"

"Of course it was, sir! Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but," and at this he opened the dossier and rifled through its contents until he found a particular page, and proceeded to read aloud, "it says here that you, and I quote, 'sold your soul for the chance to live long enough to see your grandchildren after being mortally wounded by a hidden sniper'?" Finished, he lowered his bifocals and stared interestedly at me.

My face blanched in an instant.



A thin smile formed on the Daemon's lips.

"I understand your trepidation, sir, but please allow me to finish. Your exact request, that you 'live to see your grandchildren' has been fulfilled as of yesterday morning at Ten Twenty-One AM, has it not?" Again, the Daemon glowered at me expectantly.

I didn't think it was possible for any more blood to drain from my face. I was very, very wrong.

"But... But... I..." I stammered foolishly. I looked around, hoping to find something, anything to help me in this situation. I came up blank.

"Sir, with all due respect, nobody will be able to help you. Your wife is not due home for quite some time, having gone to visit the new child, has she not?"

I felt a cold sweat start to work its way down my graying temples.

"I thought as much. Well sir, as you may have guessed by now, I am indeed here to collect on your debt. My name is Masach, pleased to make your acquaintance!" The Daemon held out his hand, obviously hoping for a handshake. I settled on an incredulous look.

The Daemon returned my look after a moment, and I knew, in that instant, that I had indelibly sealed my own fate.

"Well, good sir, since you seem to want to skip the formalities, I would think it's time to get right to business," the Daemon said. He slowly removed the glasses and placed them on top of the dossier, then set both on the coffee table before him.

I gulped and gripped the armrests of my chair with white-knuckled intensity.

"Now we have three ways in which we can proceed. Would you like me to outline them for you, sir?"

"Is there *anything* I can do to get out of this?" I blurted out unexpectedly.

The Daemon stroked his chin thoughtfully, then looked up brilliantly.

"Actually, sir, there *is*! Would you be willing to trade someone else's soul for yours, par chance?"

"Yes, I would!" I half-screamed, almost leaving my chair in the process, "Anything! Just spare my life, please!"

“Excellent! I’ll be back for your granddaughter soon.”

Then, along with his dossier and bifocals, he vanished. And I wept.

#### INTO THE VOID by Klaus Mclusky

At Percy’s shout, Gerald whirled round, his blade glimmering in the single shaft of light that pierced the burial mound’s musty atmosphere. The barrow wight reared triumphantly above him, warhammer raised.

Gerald flung himself to one side as the weapon pounded into the grave mould at his feet. Quick as lightning, he hacked through the thing’s wrist. The skeletal claw clattered down on the gems and coins of the open treasure chest that lay between Gerald and his necrotic foe.

With a wild scream, Brian brought his axe down on the barrow wight’s skull, splitting it like a rotten egg. Percy and Norman rushed forward, hacking madly at their opponent, dismembering its black, withered body.

But just as before, the separate parts began slithering and scrabbling across the black earth towards each other. To no avail, Gerald stomped frenziedly on a tattered leg.

‘It’s trying to reform again!’ Percy shouted. Was the thing *never* going to stay dead?

‘Grab the treasure chest!’ Gerald told him. ‘Grab the chest and leg it out of here. The Ornithomancer said that if we replace the rock door, that thing won’t be able to follow us out of the tomb chamber. *Quickly!*’

Percy and Brian grabbed either side of the rusty, glyph-inscribed treasure chest, slamming it shut as they did so. The scattered members wriggled around them, still struggling to come together.

‘Now get up the shaft!’ Gerald shouted. He and Norman stood panting beside the rough-hewn stone archway as the other two adventurers staggered through, groaning under the weight of the great chest.

Gerald and Norman watched, open-mouthed, as the barrow wight rapidly reformed under their bulging eyes, lacking only its right hand. The remaining claw searched the floor for the

fallen warhammer.

‘Time to go,’ Gerald said grimly. They turned, and followed their two friends up the muddy shaft.

\*\*\*

With a reverberating crash, the great boulder rumbled down to block the gaping barrow mouth. Dusting their hands, Gerald and Norman staggered back as it settled back into place, and gazed around the clearing.

The forest was silent except for the mournful sighing of the night wind in the treetops. The moon sailed high in the star-strewn skies above. A few yards from the great barrow, Percy and Brian had halted, slamming the chest down in the earth beside them. They turned quickly at the scrambling approach of Gerald and Norman.

‘Let’s not hang around.’ Gerald panted. ‘The barrow wight can’t get out, but I don’t reckon this area is going to be too healthy right now.’

Percy dashed the sweat out of his eyes.

‘Well, you can carry that thing,’ he said wearily, indicating the chest. ‘It’s heavy!’

‘Gladly,’ Gerald replied with a grand gesture. ‘It’s heavy because it’s full of loot.’ He grabbed one end, motioning Norman to take the other. ‘When we get this back to civilisation, we’ll have it made - food, drink, women... everything we’ve ever wanted. No more sleeping out in the cold, wet woods.’

He straightened up, struggling under the weight of the chest. Percy was right - it *was* heavy. But he was right, too. They had it made. Nothing could go wrong this time.

‘Let’s get back to the camp,’ he wheezed. ‘We can bed down there for the rest of the night, then head on down to Hollowdale in the morning.’

\*\*\*

The hills above Hollowdale seemed a sinister prospect at high noon; gnarled, tree-swathed crags brooded above the vale and mists hung like steam from the cauldrons of a thousand witches, eternally brewing evil for the peaceful rustic villages below. But at blackest midnight it was a truly perilous place. The four young adventurers trod the muddy path beneath the looming oaks with considerable circumspection.

As he staggered under the weight of the chest, Gerald reflected that they had come a long way from Merganser Smew and his dingy offices off the Street of the Musicians, Hollowdale Town. Well, as soon as they got down in the vale, they could pay a farmer for the loan of a cart to transport the loot. But it wouldn't be a good idea to advertise their fortune. Bannzatch Skane, Mayor of the Palace, had yet to save Hollowdale from the marauding shield-maiden raiders of the Amazon Legion.

As the adventurers neared their camp, a green shooting star passed low overhead.

'Look!' said Percy idly, pointing up. 'Think it'll bring us luck?'

Gerald grunted. His mind was still on the heavy chest he was carrying. 'Just get back to the camp,' he said. 'Then we can talk about our good fortune.'

Soon afterwards they reached the stand of fir trees beside the winding Hollowdale road. Their tents still stood there, beside the cold ashes of their fire. Gratefully, Gerald and Norman slumped down with the rusty chest. Percy and Brian joined them, and they sat in silence for a while. Percy poked at the dead embers with a stick.

He yawned.

'I'm knackered,' he said. 'Think I'll turn in.'

'No you don't,' said Gerald nastily. '*You* didn't carry the chest all the way down here. Don't forget, these hills are still dangerous - especially now we've got the treasure. We'll have to keep watch. And I've just voted you for first watch.'

Percy shrugged, amused by Gerald's outburst. 'Fine, fine,' he replied. 'I'll wake Brian in two hours - unless something happens.'

Grumpily, Gerald scrambled into the tent, and got into his sleeping bag. Brian and Norman followed him. Exhausted, Gerald dozed off.

\*\*\*

He was woken from deep, dreamless sleep by a hand shaking his shoulder.

‘Warr-aggh!!!’ he said blearily, looking up to see Percy leaning in through the open tent-flap. ‘Eh, wassup? You’re suppose’ to be on watch!’

Percy’s eyes were wide.

‘Something’s going on,’ he hissed. ‘In the forest nearby. Weird lights and noises.’

By now, the other two were also awake.

‘Lights?’ Norman asked. ‘What kind?’

‘Weird ones,’ Percy replied shortly. ‘Come and take a look.’

Outside the tent, they could all see what he was talking about. The nearby trees glowed eerily, backlit by a ghastly green light. Odd bleeps and whirrs were audible in the distance, drifting across on the still night air.

‘What is it?’ Brian asked. ‘I reckon we should attack it!’

Gerald scowled at him, although his expression was invisible in the dark. ‘Not till we know what it is,’ he said firmly.

‘I reckon we get a bit closer,’ Percy suggested, emboldened by company.

The four youths crept forward through the tangled briars and bracken. The rank smell of rotting earth and fallen leaves hung heavy in the unmoving air. In the distance, the green lights still glowed.

They reached the top of a small rise, and gazed down into the dell below.

Gerald gasped.

In the centre of the open space was a large metal object, about twenty feet across and shaped like an upturned bowl or saucer. It stood on three metal legs, while a gleaming metal ramp ran from a circular hatch in the side of the hull down to the forest floor below. The green light they had seen was spilling from the open hatch.

The clearing surrounding the strange craft was busy with oddly shaped reptilian figures going about enigmatic, scientific-seeming tasks: investigating shrubs, taking soil samples, studying bark. Another reptilian creature stood on guard at the base of the ramp.

‘Aliens!’ Brian said.

‘But what are they doing here?’ Norman demanded, clutching his sword hilt firmly. ‘This is all *wrong!*’

Gerald shrugged. ‘What are aliens usually doing?’ he asked with a smirk. ‘Probing things. That right, Percy?’

Percy nodded. ‘Right up the chockie starfish,’ he said.

The four youths watched the bizarre scene for a few moments longer.

‘I reckon we nick their ship,’ Brian said.

Gerald glanced at him. Occasionally the lad’s crazy ideas had some merit. ‘It would save walking,’ he replied thoughtfully. He had worn out a fair few boot soles since they had been so mysteriously transported from their own world to this planet. Momentarily, his heart was stirred by the notion of journeying beyond the farthest stars, to visit strange new worlds, to seek out new civilisations and new life - and kill them.

Norman’s voice broke in on his thoughts. ‘Does anyone know how to drive a spaceship?’ he asked peevishly. ‘Anyway, it would be stealing.’

‘Right,’ said Gerald, suddenly filled with decision. ‘So let’s *do it!*’

Commando-like, the adventurers sped through the undergrowth, flitting between the trees one by one, finally dashing behind the massive bole of an oak before rolling into the cover of a hawthorn thicket. They circled round the reptilian scientists, who were still intent about their alien business, before they reached the back of the craft. The metal hull throbbed and hummed with power.

Brian peered round the side, and then dodged back into cover. 'There's still a guard on the ramp,' he hissed.

Gerald nodded silently. He signed to Norman and Percy to circle round the far side of the saucer-like craft, with a further gesture to suggest surprising the alien guard.

The instant the two adventurers had vanished round the far side of the saucer, Gerald led Brian at a crouching run.

They soon reached the shadows beside the ramp. The alien stood at attention, cradling some kind of futuristic-looking hairdryer, possibly a gun. It was surveying the scientists in the green-lit clearing. Gerald crept up toward it, followed by Brian.

He glimpsed Norman and Percy sneaking up on the far side, flattening themselves against the hull. Norman was still looking peeved.

The two groups converged. The throbbing of the spacecraft's engines drowned out a muffled grunt, which was followed by the thud of a body falling to the leaf-covered earth. Casting cautious glances at the alien scientists, the four youths leapt over the guard's supine body, scrambled up the ramp and flung themselves in through the glowing hatch.

They staggered to a halt in the eerie, green-lit corridor.

The passage opened out into a chamber, packed with mysterious machines of an alien technology. To the left and right, hatches led deeper into the ship.

But as they walked nervously towards the control console, a klaxon blared into life, and the green lights began to flash on and off. A thing resembling a disco-ball revolved on the console, while a computerised voice shrieked gibberish inside their heads. The noise of the klaxon grew louder.

‘We’ve set off an alarm!’ Brian shouted, never afraid to state the obvious.

‘Those aliens will hear!’ Percy shouted back.

Decisively, Gerald tore out his sword and sprinted back towards the main hatch.

Streaming across the clearing and up the ramp, leaping over the fallen body of the guard, were the alien scientists. All bore smaller versions of the hair-dryer the guard had held, and as he watched their advance, Gerald cursed his lack of foresight in not looting the corpse.

The aliens - nine or ten of them - surged up the ramp, firing energy bolts as they came. Gerald met them in the hatchway, his sword glowing strangely in the eerie green light.

He dodged a sizzling energy bolt from the first alien, whirled round with his axe, and sent its scaled, reptilian head spinning off into the darkness of the clearing. Gushing green ichor, the body stumbled and fell back down the ramp. Then the three other adventurers were at Gerald’s side, Brian and Percy and Norman with their weapons at the ready. The remaining aliens bore down upon them. Energy blasts sparked and ricocheted off the fuselage. Steel glittered in eerie light. Aliens scattered across the deck, spouting ichor. The air grew rank with a smell of ozone.

Norman fell back, nursing a scorched shoulder.

Suddenly the struggle was over, as quickly as it had begun. The members of the alien expedition lay in sticky pools of ichor, scattered down the ramp and across the clearing. Brian, Percy, and Gerald rooted among their corpses while Norman tended to his wound. The victorious adventurers seized the aliens’ weapons as trophies.

Percy turned to Gerald. ‘With these ray-guns we could zap any barrow wight back to the hell it came from!’ he exclaimed.

Gerald shook his head. ‘Why waste our time with this planet?’ he asked, heartily sick of donjons and dragons, taverns and trulls. ‘There’s a whole universe out there. And if these pussies are anything to go by, it’ll be a pushover!’

‘Come on, back to camp. We’ll grab the treasure and all our equipment. Then we pilot this flying saucer to the nth dimension. After that...’ He laughed. ‘We’ll see!’



\*\*\*

The four adventurers staggered back up the ramp, weighed down with tents, bedding, backpacks, the treasure chest, and a medley of swords and axes, ropes and grapnels, lanterns and iron spikes, ten-foot poles and assorted adventuring trash. Slinging this into a pile at the back of the control room, they slouched down on the weirdly shaped chairs and tried to puzzle out the controls.

Percy found the lever that opened and closed the hatch, and amused himself with it until Gerald snapped at him.

‘What’s this do?’ asked Brian, pressing a button. A visi-screen clicked on, showing a 360° view of the surrounding forest. Blast cannons mounted on the central dome rotated. Brian jabbed his thumb down on another button and a barrage of energy beams lit up the night.

‘Dakka-dakka-dakka!’ he jabbered fanatically.

‘Stop *that*,’ Gerald said, as two trees went up like Roman candles. Sulkily, Brian obeyed.

Gerald yanked a lever, and a star-map blossomed out to cover the visi-screen. A cursor glowed over the third planet of a star located near the top right of the map. Juggling a joystick, Gerald moved the cursor over onto a neighbouring planet, and pressed a button.

A computerised voice echoed in their heads: *‘This vessel is now en route for Ophidia.’*

Without warning, the engines rumbled into life. The deck shook. Smoke and exhaust fumes billowed up from beneath the craft. Gerald whooped.

‘We’re on our way!’ he bellowed.

The spaceship took off, soaring into the black skies above the mist-tapestried forest, its retro-rockets gleefully belching pollution into the hitherto unsullied environment.

\*\*\*

As the autopilot guided them through the swirling clouds of the planet’s stratosphere, the four

adventurers gathered around the glyph-inscribed chest.

‘Fuck knows where we’re going,’ Gerald muttered, fumbling with the catch, ‘but wherever we end up, they’re bound to appreciate hard cash.’ He flung open the chest, and abruptly gulped in horror.

Quivering evilly, like a venomous spider crouching in the midst of the gold and gems, was the severed hand of the barrow wight. Gerald stared down in shock. Before he could react, the hand sprang into frightful life and leapt at the youth’s throat.

Gerald flung himself backward as the talons snapped within inches of his windpipe. He fell to the metal deck with a clatter, and the withered claw thumped down on his chest. He stared cross-eyed as the thing came scuttling up towards his face.

‘*Get it off me!*’ he bellowed. The shout galvanised his companions, till now frozen in horror. They scrambled forward, blast guns at the ready.

Gerald threw himself to one side, spilling the reanimated hand onto the deck, where it lay for a moment, clenching and unclenching. With Percy and Norman’s help, Gerald staggered his feet.

He glared at the hand in horror. So its hideous life remained even when severed from its body! He remembered how the barrow wight had reformed again and again, no matter how many times they had dismembered it.

Brian aimed his blast gun at the thing. The claw sprang to one side as the beam lanced down. Brian’s energy bolt danced dangerously round the chamber, causing the youths to duck and dive out of its ricochet. The severed hand bounded forward, and flung itself at the control console.

Percy opened fire from a crouch, hitting the console dead on. Sparks showered the chamber. Undeterred, the withered claw seized a lever and yanked it. As the adventurers rushed the console, the entire ship lurched to the right; the deck tipped at a forty-degree angle, and the four youths went crashing into a bulkhead, showered by a rain of objects from their pile of equipment and plunder. Brian dropped his blast gun, and it clattered off into the shadows.

‘Get that hand!’ Gerald bawled.

The deck tipped again, to the left this time, sending them stumbling past the console. Percy aimed a wild blast at the sinister claw as they passed. The console exploded again, and Percy's energy beam ricocheted. The main lights went out, leaving the chamber illuminated only by a glimmer from the visi-screen.

The ship screamed into a dive. Stars whirled past the visi-screen. The treasure chest, which had been rumbling across the chamber floor with every lurch, came slamming into the instrument bank. It showered the youths with all their ill-gotten gains. The adventurers were flung across the console.

Gerald cried out in fear as he felt something skeletal scamper across him. It clattered down onto the deck.

'There it goes!' Percy shouted, seeing the barrow wight's hand scuttling in the glow of the instrument bank.

Brian sprang down onto the deck, his axe whirling. The blade glittered once in the green light. Above the whine of the out-of-control craft, Gerald heard a final crunch.

'That's done for *that*,' Brian gloated, gazing down at the mangled, unmoving claw.

The other adventurers climbed down from the console. Gold and jewels jingled beneath their feet as they picked their way up the sloping deck.

'All very well!' Gerald muttered tersely. He turned, and stared at the visi-screen, where the green orb of an alien planet was rapidly growing in the distance. 'But thanks to that thing, this ship is out of control.'

He looked wildly at the others.

'The fight wrecked our controls!' he said. 'There's no knowing where we'll end up.'

The others returned his gaze unspeaking.

Silence filled the control room, split only by the increasing whine of the engines as the spacecraft hurtled towards the misty surface of the mysterious planet.

## STATE OF EMERGENCY by David Christopher

### Chapter Twelve: The Road

When there was no immediate reply, he nerved himself and went to the door. In the corridor outside, he saw a man standing over another man's body. The man held an assault rifle, and another gun leant against the wall beside the body. Will stared at him and the man looked back. They stared at each other for a long time.

'We'd better get moving, then,' said Mercer eventually.

He hefted the rifle that he'd taken from the dead soldier's body and hung it over his shoulder. Will picked up his own gun from the wall and followed the man down the stairs.

Steve and Curtis both lay facedown in the vestibule. For an incredulous moment, Will wondered what they thought they were doing, lying down on the job. Then he noticed the dark stains in the red carpet that surrounded their unmoving bodies. Both had pistols in their hands. Clearly, not much cop against the soldier, with his assault rifle.

Mercer held up his hand, and nodded towards the broken down front door.

'Do you hear anything?' he asked.

Will tore his eyes away from the bodies. 'No,' he said.

'Neither do I,' said Mercer.

Will thought that was the funniest thing ever, and laughed until Mercer hit him.

'The soldiers must have moved on,' Mercer said without further comment. Will rubbed his cheek thoughtfully.

'It's getting dark outside,' he said. 'If we're safe here, we should maybe find beds for the night then move on in the morning.'

Next morning, the streets of Shepherds Bush were empty, deserted. No sign of the soldiers, apart from a huddled corpse in the main road. When Will first saw it, he couldn't work out what it was. A bundle of rags? A fallen tree trunk? His mind desperately tried to fit it into a credible frame of reference until he got closer and saw it for what it was. There was something so empty about a dead body. He could see why people believed in the soul.

He stood staring down at the corpse for some time. Mercer waited patiently.

'You don't seem bothered by all this,' Will said.

'It's an act,' Mercer replied.

They walked on.

‘London seems to be completely deserted,’ Will commented. ‘I wonder where all the people have gone. How far this spreads. Have the Home Counties become just as depopulated?’

‘Depends on how far the fighting’s spread, I suppose,’ Mercer replied.

Turning a corner, they found a bin lorry at an angle across the street, its bonnet up against a brick wall. The doors were open. Investigating, Will looked gingerly inside the cab. Empty.

‘We don’t want to walk all the way to Oxford,’ he told Mercer. ‘Why don’t we travel in style?’

‘In a bin lorry?’ Mercer laughed. Then he looked down at his scuffed, worn down boots. ‘Are the keys in the ignition?’

Will swarmed across the seats to check. He looked back.

‘No,’ he said. ‘They must have taken them with them when they went. Wherever they went. We’ll have to hotwire it, then.’

‘Okay,’ said Mercer placidly.

Will scrambled back down out of the cab and looked at him. Mercer returned his look and shrugged.

‘Aren’t you going to make a start?’ he asked.

Will shook his head. ‘I don’t know how to hotwire a bin lorry,’ he said. ‘I thought you might.’

Mercer folded his arms. ‘I’m an officer of the law,’ he said. ‘Not a criminal.’

‘Come off it,’ Will said, ‘you were sent by the agency. And what about those stories you were telling Steve and Curtis? All that London gangland stuff.’

Mercer looked down at the ground. ‘I made it up,’ he growled. ‘I got sick of their boasting.’

Will sighed.

‘Looks like we’re walking, then,’ he said.

As they entered Perivale, Will’s phone beeped. They were walking up the A40 with the intention of going to Oxford by the quickest possible route, following the general line of the M40 once they had got out of Greater London. Taking it out, he looked at it. He had voicemail. That was odd; his phone had been silent for the last few days. A thought struck him. Maybe it was Daisy!

He listened to the most recent voicemail. It was his father.

*‘Where are you, Will?’* Dad was saying. *‘We’ve been trying to get in touch ever since we saw the news. Are you still in London? I’ve rang your flat and there’s been no reply, your*

*mobile keeps going to voicemail. For God's sake, Will, call back! Your mother's worried sick.'*

'Hang on, Mercer,' he said. Mercer stood staring into a shop window.

The call had been made yesterday. Will's inbox was full of texts. There were several other voicemail messages. Will rang his father.

The phone was answered immediately. It was his mother.

'*Will? Will, is that you?*' she said, her voice tremulous with emotion.

'Yes, it's me,' he replied. 'I got Dad's message...'

Suddenly his father was on the phone.

*'Will! Will, where are you? Why haven't you been answering your phone? Your mum even emailed you, but I can't make head nor tail of those things. Why didn't you get back to her? Are you still in London?'*

'Just getting out of it, Dad,' Will replied. 'My phone hasn't been working. I haven't been back to the flat. I think there's been a blackout. The TV wasn't working either...'

*'Then you haven't seen the news?' his father asked. 'Some little idiot's shot the Home Secretary! There've been riots. The Army was called out, too late in my opinion. Some of these new regiments, not Geoff's I'm glad to say, some of these new regiments have mutinied. There's been a mass exodus of refugees into the Home Counties. And Will, someone's shot the government!'*

Will felt himself go white.

He had been about to tell his father that he knew what was going on better than anyone, having been in the thick of it. But this last revelation hit him like physical blow.

'Dad, Dad, you're not making sense,' he said. 'I know that ... someone shot Susan Verlaine. But she survived. You're confused, Dad. No one's shot the government. They're trying to sort things out.'

*'Will, are you telling me to doubt what the morning paper is telling me?'* his father said sternly. *'It says the situation's confused, but yesterday rogue members of the security forces entered an emergency meeting of Parliament and opened fire indiscriminately on government and opposition alike.'*

Will couldn't take it in. the whole government... shot.... This was no longer a bit of civil disturbance. This sounded more like revolution.

'Well, who's running the country, then?' he asked.

*'Susan Verlaine. She wasn't there, of course,'* his father replied, 'because she was in hospital, or "hospitalised" as these journalists insist on saying. She's *issued a call for calm and promises to do her utmost to restore order before a new government can be chosen...*'

Mercer was staring at Will. 'What's going on?' he mouthed.

'Someone's shot the government,' he said briefly, and Mercer gaped.

*'Who are you talking to?'* Will's father demanded. *'Are you with someone else?'* Suspicion sneaked into his tone. *'You're not back with Caroline, are you?'*

‘No, dad,’ said Will. ‘I’m with... a policeman.’

His father was silent for a moment. ‘*Well, that’s good,*’ he said. ‘*At least I know my son’s in safe hands.*’ He called, ‘*Will’s with a policeman,*’ and Will heard his mother’s emotional reply.

‘Okay, dad,’ Will said. ‘I’m getting out of London now. The city’s deserted. I should be safe.’ He eyed Mercer, who was waiting impatiently. ‘Talk soon.’

He rang off. Mercer was looking at him in concern.

‘They’ve shot the government? Must have been the secret police.’

‘What?’ Will demanded in disbelief. ‘Why would the secret police shoot the government?’ He paused. ‘We don’t even *have* a secret police.’

‘That’s what they want you to think,’ said Mercer knowingly.

Will sighed. Conspiracy theory bollocks, he thought. ‘Why have I never heard of the secret police, then?’ he said challengingly.

Mercer shrugged. ‘They’re secret, aren’t they?’

Will shook his head. There was no point arguing with this drivel. ‘It looks like the only person running the show is Verlaine,’ he said firmly.

‘And some bastard shot her,’ Mercer added. Will tried not to squirm. ‘But she’s in hospital. She can’t be in any position to regain control.’

Will was about to speak when he heard a roar of engines from the street ahead. He looked at Mercer urgently.

‘Better get off the road,’ Mercer replied. ‘If that’s more soldiers...’

‘Or police,’ Will added.

They hurried into the cover of a front garden and crouched down behind a privet hedge. The rumble of engines grew louder. Then army trucks were passing, one after another, each with grim-faced soldiers sitting in the back. Will counted twelve lorries before the cavalcade passed by. He rolled over and looked at Mercer.

‘Looks like someone’s making a move,’ he said.

Mercer nodded. ‘Those weren’t rogue soldiers,’ he said. ‘Too organised. Verlaine’s bringing in soldiers from outside to take control of the city. Decisive action. Amazing. Even from her hospital bed she manages to gain control...’

‘She hasn’t done that yet,’ Will said, resenting Mercer’s praise for Verlaine. ‘Central London must still be in chaos.’

‘We seem to be getting out of the worst of it,’ Mercer replied. ‘Who knows? Maybe the buses will be running when we get out of London. Or we could even take the train to Oxford.’

They rose and continued on their way. Will wasn’t as optimistic as Mercer. Troops were being sent into Central London, but it looked like the rogue soldiers they’d met in Shepherds Bush had been heading for the countryside. If even small groups of them were at large, that might make things difficult. The anarchy could spread.

They were passing a park near South Ruislip when Will heard a muffled cry.

He turned. It had come from behind a tall hedge beside the road. Mercer unslung his rifle when the cry came again, then broke off suddenly. Will heard voices, and the sound of a scuffle. Then the cry came again. It sounded like a woman.

‘Come on,’ said Mercer. Will nodded grimly and turned off the safety catch on his rifle.

They found a way through the hedge a few yards up the road. Peering in, they saw the open expanse of the park. In the shadow of some trees, two policemen were pinioning a struggling figure, a young woman. Another policeman was on top of her. His trousers were down and he was heaving himself up and down. Will stared in sick horror.

The girl broke free of one of the policeman holding her and struck out at the rapist. He paused, and punched her in the face. She fell back.

Mercer fired into the air.

As one, the policemen leapt up, and ran towards the trees, casting terrified looks behind them. The rapist was trying to pull up his trousers. Will shot him down.

Mercer loosed off a couple of shots at the other two policemen but they vanished into the trees with hardly a backward glance. Will hurried towards the girl, who lay sobbing on the green, her skirt torn and her knickers round her ankles.

Mercer joined him. He crouched beside the girl.

‘It’s alright, love,’ he said. ‘It’s alright.’ To Will’s surprise, he was almost crying. The girl pulled away, staring at him in horror. Her nose was broken and blood covered her mouth. She tugged futilely at her torn clothes.

Will took a cursory look at the policeman he’d shot. A neat hole in the back of the man’s skull showed where the bullet had hit him. A head shot. That was pretty good going. The man was stone dead.

He returned to Mercer, who had persuaded the girl to cooperate. She had sorted out her clothes and was sobbing on his broad shoulder. Will saw an empty supermarket bag-for-life lying on the grass nearby. He picked it up and brought it over.

Mercer looked up. ‘She thought I was one of those bastards,’ he said. ‘First chance I get, I’m going to get rid of this uniform.’

‘Where do you live, love?’ Will asked gently.

The girl lifted her head. She was in her early twenties by her appearance. Although he could see that she was naturally pretty, she wore a lot of makeup, too much to his mind, and her eye-shadow had run so she looked like a terrified panda. Her clothes were expensive and smart, despite their rips and tears.

‘Liberty Park,’ she muttered.

Will was startled. ‘What, in Leeds?’



She scowled, shook her head. 'No, in South Ruislip!' She had a lisp.

Will raised his eyebrows. Liberty Park must be a chain. Well, he never knew that. Was there one in every town?

'We'd better get you back there,' he said. 'Is it a security village?'

She nodded quickly.

'At least you'll be safe there,' said Mercer.

'What were you doing out here?' Will asked, as they followed her out of the park.

'I was going to the shops,' she said. 'My car wasn't running, so I had to walk.'

'Don't you watch the news?' Will asked. 'Things are more dangerous than ever. The government's been shot.'

She shrugged. 'I needed to buy my groceries. But the shops were shut when I got there. I was making my way home when the police stopped me. They were in a car. They said they wanted to question me. They took me into the park. Then they... then they...'

'Yes, love,' said Will, patting her. She flinched away from him and he realised she wasn't ready for personal contact.

This branch of Liberty Park was on the other side of town, in a leafy suburban area. High walls surrounded it. It looked to Will as if the place had been a small estate back in the nineteenth century. The main house had been demolished, and several Barretts Homes-style houses stood within its walls. Electric gates had replaced the original entrance. A lodge stood just within the gates.

The girl, who hadn't yet told them her name, hurried to the keypad in the wall outside and tapped in a code. The side gate sprang open and she hurried in, closing it behind her. Mercer grabbed the gate before she could shut it completely. She gasped, and sprang away.

'Hang on, love,' Will said. 'We want to see you safe home.' As they entered the security village, a thickset man in late middle age appeared from the lodge. He wore the uniform of a security guard.

'Hang on, what's happening here?' he demanded, speaking in broad Cockney. 'Miss Flowers, you know these men? What's happened to you? You're in a right state, love.'

'I was... I was assaulted!' she gulped. Then she turned and ran towards one of the houses.

The security guard turned towards Will and Mercer, his eyes widening as he took in their guns.

'I think you'd better turn round and get out of here, guys,' he said levelly.

Will was impressed by the man's courage. He obviously thought they were rogue police. They were armed; he wasn't. And yet he was willing to face them down.

'Sure, no problem,' said Will. 'We just wanted to make sure the lady got home okay. She was raped by three men. She should be taken to hospital, really.' He looked up as a door slammed, and he saw that the girl had gone into her house.

'I think I should call the police,' the security guard said heavily.

Mercer shook his head. 'I *am* the police,' he said, indicating his uniform. 'But so were the guys who raped her.'

The security guard mopped his brow. 'I don't know what's going on in this country today,' he complained. 'It's gone to the dogs. Gone to the effin' dogs. What happened then?'

Will explained. The security guard expressed his admiration.

'You shot one of them?' he asked, eyeing Will's rifle. 'You must be a crack shot. Ever been in the army? I was in it for twenty years.'

Will shook his head. 'My brother's in the army,' he commented.

'What happened to the others?' the security guard was asking when they heard a screech of brakes from outside the gates. A police car stood on the pavement, its engine running. Two policemen climbed out. Both were heavily armed. Will recognised them.

Two more police cars pulled up and more armed police poured out. Looked like the two men who'd escaped had gone to get their mates.

The policemen swaggered towards the gates.

## Part 24

Biggy stared furtively out of the window, rain swished against the wipers. It had started coming down not long after they had left the police station. Biggy had found the car in someone's driveway, had gone into their house, and retrieved the keys from its owner's corpse pocket. He swerved suddenly to avoid a cat.

"Will you keep an eye on the road, please?" The Don talked through gritted teeth; the movement had buffeted his shoulder wound.

"I'm looking for Jon."

"Is that your mate?"

Biggy thought about it.

"Sort of."

"He said he was going to the hospital."

"Is that what he told you?"

“That and that you didn’t have any bullets left.”

Biggy squeezed the steering wheel tightly, just for a second.

“That’s it,” Smith pointed to the hospital.

They pulled into the ambulance bay and Smith peered around the area.

“I don’t like the look of those dogs, one of them has an arm in its mouth.”

Biggy immediately recognised the colour of the uniform that hung out either side of the salivating labradoodle, which glared menacingly at them.

“Bastards.”

Biggy jumped out of the car and kicked his friend’s arm out of the dog’s mouth. Its head shook in an explosion of golden curls and human gore. It bared its teeth and then looked briefly surprised as Biggy snapped its back with his foot as if he were stepping on an ant.

“Can you do me a favour, Smith?”

“Of course, mate.”

“Whilst those dogs are distracted by that idiot, could you go into one of the ambulances and see if they have any morphine and syringes?”

Smith weighed the situation up; he looked at The Don’s pale face and heavily bandaged shoulder.

“Go on, then,” agreed Smith.

He opened his door as quietly as possible, then sneaking on his tiptoes he skulked towards the closest ambulance, which was about three metres away. He pulled on the handle and the back door opened.

Smith rummaged quickly around and carelessly opened a few boxes. On his third attempt, he found a box of morphine in tiny little vials and some sealed sterile syringes.

As Smith stepped out of the ambulance, he glanced down at Biggy. He was stood tall with what appeared to be a Staffordshire terrier hanging from his left shoulder and a Yorkshire terrier hanging from the seat of his pants. Between his hands was a large bullmastiff that was thrashing its legs as Biggy strangled it to death. It would have looked a bit like a slapstick sequence in a cartoon if it had not also looked like a large man violently fighting for his life.

Smith jumped back into the car.

“Should we help him?”

“I would, but now the adrenaline has died off, I have realised that I am in no fit state to be doing anything at all, least of all fighting a pack of dogs.”

“Adrenaline's an amazing thing. Did you know, there was this ole woman and...”

“Not to rush you, Smith, but could you inject some of that into one of my veins.”

“You want me to do it?”

“Please.”

“I'm scared of needles.”

The Don shook his head.

“Just do the tourniquet then.”

Smith took off his belt and climbed into the backseat of the car. He wrapped it around The Don's arm. The Don squeezed his fist and his veins popped up like really shit balloon animals. The Don injected himself with some morphine and it was just as well that he did because Smith wouldn't have done it properly and The Don would have gone into cardiac arrest. As it happened, he did not, so it was fine.

The front door opened and Biggy reached and pulled the handle to open the boot. There was the sound of something heavy dropping into the boot. Biggy got into the passenger side of the car.

"I found Jon," he said. "Could I please have some of your morphine?"

The Don passed the morphine forward and Biggy jacked up. He then started tending to his multiple wounds.

"I suppose I'll have to drive, then." Smith turned the ignition, put his foot down on the accelerator and waited patiently for someone to explain to him how a car works.

BABBAGE MUST DIE by Gavin Chappell

Chapter Twenty Four

Brian felt quite unwell. He found himself craving laudanum. What on earth was going on?

'You were a pirate captain last time I saw you,' the madwoman added.

'Ssh!' he said urgently, with a quick glance at Catesby. '*Ada?*' he said, feeling a touch of déjà vu. 'Is that you? But what are you doing in Bedlam?'

'Getting out,' she said succinctly. 'With the help of my friend and fellow alumnus here.' She indicated a young man with a shock of fair hair who sat in the far corner gazing into space.

It *was* Ada. Definitely Ada. Brian hadn't recognised her in her current, rather scruffy get-up, which really didn't do her justice, but the tone of voice was hers, for sure. 'How did you end up here?' he demanded. 'I saw you climb the cliffs. Why did you leave me?'

Ada shrugged. 'I couldn't find you after the wreck. I went to get help. I found your bloody cat, though.'

Brian's eyes widened. 'Puss? She survived?' He felt a flood of relief. 'Where is she? She's not in Bedlam, is she?'

Ada shook her head. 'She fell in love with a saucer of cream, and I had other things to do. So I left her at the parsonage and went away with the parson. We were going to Cambridge. I thought.'

Brian nodded resentfully. 'Oh, the parson,' he sneered. 'I've heard all about him. But how did you end up Bedlam? Best place for you, mind. You should have been committed long ago, with your crazy schemes, before you had a chance to drag me into them...'

Ada raised an eyebrow. 'What about your story? You can't come traipsing in here, weeks after they locked me up, dressed like Beau Brummell on a bad hair day, and not expect me to pass comment.' She eyed his clothes enviously. 'Nice outfit, by the way. You've moved up in the world since I last saw you, back when you were a pi...'

'That's enough of that,' Brian growled. He didn't want Catesby, who was quite shamelessly earwiggling nearby, to hear about his previous occupation. 'I,' he added with dignity, 'am the Count of Monte Carlo.' He grinned. 'You know, like in that film.' He hoped she got the reference. He thought it had been really clever.

Ada snorted. 'I take it you're referring to Dumas *père*'s novel *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*,' she began.

She hadn't lost her habitual air of superiority, Brian noted. He was itching to bring her down to size. 'No, *actually*,' he told her, 'I mean the 2002 film starring James Caviezel and Guy Pearce, clever-clogs. There's this guy in it who finds a buried treasure, right, and he uses it to pose as this Frog aristo, the Count of Monte Carlo...'

'Cristo,' Ada corrected him smugly.

Brian sulked.

'Anyway, what about you?' he asked. '*I've* been hobnobbing with the great and the good. Oh, *and* your old boyfriend Lord Byron. And what have *you* been doing? Except from getting sectioned under the medieval Mental Health Act?'

Ada began her story.

'When I saw we were going to crash, I grabbed hold of a rail and hung on for dear life. I'd lost sight of you already, with the fight going on, so I didn't know where you were. We hit the sand with an almighty crash and I was almost flung out of my little corner. But I managed to keep my grip when other people were tumbling past. Then silence fell, and I was at a loss what to do. The deck was at an acute angle, about 80 degrees, I'd say, though I didn't have my protractor with me. In my little corner, between the middeck and the quarterdeck, I was safe, so I hung on. Eventually, I fell asleep.

'I woke the next morning, and spent about half an hour negotiating my way down the deck towards the sands below. Halfway down I encountered Puss, soaked to the skin and meowing piteously. With great difficulty, I persuaded her to come with me and I carried her down to the beach. She jumped down and started sniffing round the corpses that littered the sand...'

'One of those corpses was probably me,' Brian pointed out. 'Didn't you think to investigate?'

'I thought maybe you were one of them, since I couldn't see you elsewhere, but if you were, you were a corpse,' Ada explained. 'Then villagers appeared from the cliffs and began looting the wreckage. I didn't want a confrontation, and I was running a temperature,

probably from the night out in the open in wet clothes. So I picked up the cat and went up the cliffs to see if I could get any help.

‘I came to the nearby village and knocked on the door of the parsonage. It was obvious none of the villagers were going to help; they were all too busy grabbing what they could from the ship and looting the corpses. But I thought the parson would be above that.

‘His servant led me into the parlour where he welcomed me with concern. Parson Greene is a stout, middle aged man with a fringe of beard, bald and with great round spectacles, resembling Donald Sutherland in a costume drama. He listened to my rambling with concern – by then I was feverish, and not really thinking too clearly.

‘The next thing I remember was waking in a bed in a comfortable if austere furnished master bedroom. I called out, croaked rather, and the servant came. He gave me something to drink and then Parson Greene joined us. Seeing I was more lucid, he asked me my story. What I’d said when I first got there had been pretty wild, he said.

‘I told him the truth.’

Brian raised his eyebrows and laughed hollowly.

‘You told him everything?’ he asked. ‘About coming from the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How did he react to that?’

Ada shrugged. ‘He was very warm and sympathetic. He listened to me with great sincerity and then withdrew, saying that it fell to him to find a remedy for the situation.

‘Some hours later, he returned, saying that he had arranged for a coach to London. I told him I didn’t want to go to London; I wanted to go to Cambridge, where Babbage would be. He placated me, telling me that I would have to go to London first. No coaches went straight to Cambridge from the village.



‘I believed him. Leaving Puss at the parsonage, we boarded the coach and went to London. I didn’t know where you were. I was afraid you had drowned. I thought I was all alone in this century. But here was this kindly old man who wanted to help me as best he could. We came to London, left the coach, and the parson said he would arrange lodgings for me.

‘Well, he did. You find me in the lodgings house he chose.’

Brian hooted with laughter. ‘What a bastard!’ he said. He beckoned Humphrey over. ‘You hear this, Humphrey?’ he asked. ‘Your saintly parson who taught you your letters played the biggest baddest trick on Ada and had her locked up in Bedlam!’ Humphrey looked affronted and was about to say something when Brian turned back to Ada. ‘What did you expect? Anyone in this century would have locked you up, or me for that matter, if they’d heard our whole story.’ He shook his head, wiped tears of laughter from his eyes. Ada regarded him frostily.

‘He said it was for the best,’ she told him. ‘I argued with him, I told him I wasn’t mad. He looked at me with inexpressible sorrow in his eyes, shook his head, and told me that the parish would pay for my upkeep and I would receive the best care that the kingdom could provide. I tried to escape, tried to fight, shouted that I had to kill Babbage. That just convinced them that I was mad.’

‘And what’s it been like, in Bedlam?’ Brian asked gently. He did think the story was funny but he wasn’t really callous. Ada had been here for weeks while he’d lounged about drinking himself silly, developing a laudanum habit, and impersonating an exiled French aristo. ‘Is it like in all the old horror comics?’

Ada looked over her shoulder at the other inmates, and shuddered. She returned to the barred window.

‘It’s been pretty hellish,’ she said, ‘but I’ve not been entirely friendless. I’m not the only person wrongly committed.’ She beckoned to the shock-headed young man, who seemed to wake up suddenly, grinned up at her, and shambled over.

‘This is Mr. Engelbert Addlestrop,’ Ada introduced him. Addlestrop looked vaguely at Brian and extended a limp hand for Brian to shake through the bars.

‘Charmed to meet you, sir,’ Addlestrop replied in a weak, high-pitched voice. ‘It ain’t quite the circumstances I’d hope to meet a gentleman. They took me best clothes away when Uncle had me locked up in here.’

‘Mr. Addlestrop was at Peterhouse, Cambridge,’ Ada explained, ‘my *alma mater*, as it happens. He was the first person who’d speak to me; all the others were too crazy. Like me, he’s sane.’

‘Of course you’re sane, Miss Ada,’ Addlestrop said soothingly. ‘Although you seem to have fallen prey to certain delusions. I’ve told you before; they don’t allow gels in Peterhouse ...’

‘And I’ve told you before, Mr. Addlestrop, that I’m a time traveller from the future,’ Ada snapped. Brian could see that she had developed much the same spiky relationship with Addlestrop as she had with him. He felt oddly jealous.

‘I met Mr. Addlestrop and we got talking,’ Ada went on. ‘Turns out that he was halfway through his first year at Cambridge when his father died, and he inherited quite a substantial estate. A clause in the will stated that should he prove feeble-minded or otherwise unable to manage his affairs, his inheritance would pass instead to his uncle...’

‘So schemin’ Uncle George had a physician declare me insane,’ said Addlestrop with rather more heat than he had previously shown. ‘Claimed that me studies in mathematics have turned my mind and I ain’t able to lead a normal life. I was down at the old place for half term and I told him all about Leibnizian calculus, you see...’ He went into a long rambling diatribe about the superiority of analytical calculus over Newtonian calculus, until Brian began to wonder if scheming Uncle George hadn’t been entirely right in having this poor sap committed. He exchanged a resigned glance with Ada.

She interrupted Addlestrop as soon as possible.

‘To continue. Conveniently, Mr. Addlestrop is a member of a secret society at Cambridge whose members swear an oath that they will extract any of their members who are committed to an asylum or madhouse. Less conveniently, we’ve had no way of contacting them - until recently.’

‘I had a visit from my sister, May,’ Addlestrop explained. ‘I told her how it had all come about and she was shocked and saddened. I begged her to help me. She said she knew no way that she, a mere female, could do this. Miss Ada spoke to her then, using words I never expected to hear from a lady, even one in a madhouse...’

‘I told the silly girl to write a letter to the leader of this society,’ Ada explained. ‘And she...’

Brian heard a commotion from down the passage. Catesby, who had wandered off during Ada’s story, came running back.

‘What’s happening?’ Brian demanded. Catesby’s face was white, his eyes wide.

‘Highwaymen!’ he stuttered. ‘Masked men with pistols! They’ve broken into Bedlam and they’re ransacking the place!’

Brian stared at him. In the distance, he could hear shouts and cries that cut through the general hubbub of the madhouse. Then a shot. Then another.

Ada looked urgently at Brian. ‘Can’t you do anything to get me out of here? I was hoping Addlestrop’s friends would help, but it looks like it’s too late...’

‘I suppose I could try bribing one of the warders,’ Brian said. ‘Humphrey!’ he called. ‘Find a warder and give him lots of money to let Ada go.’

Humphrey didn’t move. The sound of shouts and shots was coming closer.

‘I think your past is catching up with you, sir,’ he said. ‘No time for getting the lady out of her cell. I suggest you run.’

‘What are you jabbering about?’ Brian had to raise his voice over the hubbub. God, it really was bedlam in here now.

‘I saw the posters,’ Humphrey shouted back. ‘They must be after you – Captain Brian Wells, of the *Black Flag*.’

‘What?’ said Catesby, astounded. ‘You mean it’s true? Milord, surely not! You’re the notorious pirate captain?’

Brian looked desperately from Catesby to Humphrey. He turned to Ada and tried to say something.

‘Brian, what have you done?’ she demanded.

‘I... I... I...’ he said in explanation.

Suddenly the corridor filled up with figures, masked men who brandished flintlock pistols. Squealing, ‘It’s not me! It’s not me! He’s the pirate, not me!’ Catesby turned and ran.

One of the masked men levelled a pistol and shot him in the back. Catesby cannoned into the wall and collapsed.

The masked man blew down his barrel, then produced another pistol. He turned cold blue eyes on the others.

‘I’m looking for someone in here,’ he said. His voice, though muffled, was cultured and plummy. ‘They told me he was here. Where is he?’

He aimed the pistol at Brian.

‘Answer me!’ he cried. ‘Where is he?’

VARNEY THE VAMPIRE ascribed to Thomas Preskett Prest

## CHAPTER L.

### THE MOB'S ARRIVAL AT SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S.—THE ATTEMPT TO GAIN ADMISSION.

All eyes were directed towards that southern sky which each moment was becoming more and more illuminated by the lurid appearance bespeaking a conflagration, which if it was not extensive, at all events was raging fiercely.

There came, too upon the wind, which set from that direction, strange sounds, resembling shouts of triumph, combined occasionally with sharper cries, indicative of alarm.

With so much system and so quietly had this attack been made upon the house of Sir Francis Varney—for the consequences of it now exhibited themselves most unequivocally—that no one who had not actually accompanied the expedition was in the least aware that it had been at all undertaken, or that anything of the kind was on the tapis.

Now, however, it could be no longer kept a secret, and as the infuriated mob, who had sought this flagrant means of giving vent to their anger, saw the flames from the blazing house rising high in the heavens, they felt convinced that further secrecy was out of the question.

Accordingly, in such cries and shouts as—but for caution's sake—they would have indulged in from the very first, they now gave utterance to their feelings as regarded the man whose destruction was aimed at.

"Death to the vampyre!—death to the vampyre!" was the principal shout, and it was uttered in tones which sounded like those of rage and disappointment.

But it is necessary, now that we have disposed of the smaller number of rioters who committed so serious an outrage at the inn, that we should, with some degree of method, follow the proceedings of the larger number, who went from the town towards Sir Francis Varney's.

These persons either had information of a very positive nature, or a very strong suspicion that, notwithstanding the mysterious and most unaccountable disappearance of the vampyre in the old ruin, he would now be found, as usual, at his own residence.

Perhaps one of his own servants may have thus played the traitor to him; but however it was, there certainly was an air of confidence about some of the leaders of the tumultuous assemblage that induced a general belief that this time, at least, the vampyre would not escape popular vengeance for being what he was.

We have before noticed that these people went out of the town at different points, and did not assemble into one mass until they were at a sufficient distance off to be free from all fear of observation.

Then some of the less observant and cautious of them began to indulge in shouts of rage and defiance; but those who placed themselves foremost succeeded in procuring a halt, and one said,—

"Good friends all, if we make any noise, it can only have one effect, and that is, to warn Sir Francis Varney, and enable him to escape. If, therefore, we cannot go on quietly, I propose that we return to our homes, for we shall accomplish nothing."

This advice was sufficiently and evidently reasonable to meet with no dissension; a death-like stillness ensued, only broken by some two or three voices saying, in subdued tones,—

"That's right—that's right. Nobody speak."

"Come on, then," said he who had given such judicious counsel; and the dark mass of men moved towards Sir Francis Varney's house, as quietly as it was possible for such an assemblage to proceed.

Indeed, saving the sound of the footsteps, nothing could be heard of them at all; and that regular tramp, tramp, would have puzzled any one listening to it from any distance to know in which direction it was proceeding.

In this way they went on until Sir Francis Varney's house was reached, and then a whispered word to halt was given, and all eyes were bent upon the building.

From but one window out of the numerous ones with which the front of the mansion was studded did there shine the least light, and from that there came rather an uncommonly bright reflection, probably arising from a reading lamp placed close to the window.

A general impression, they knew not why exactly, seemed to pervade everybody, that in the room from whence streamed that bright light was Sir Francis Varney.

"The vampyre's room!" said several. "The vampyre's room! That is it!"

"Yes," said he who had a kind of moral control over his comrades; "I have no doubt but he is there."

"What's to be done?" asked several.

"Make no noise whatever, but stand aside, so as not to be seen from the door when it is opened."

"Yes, yes."

"I will knock for admittance, and, the moment it is answered, I will place this stick in such a manner within, that the door cannot be closed again. Upon my saying 'Advance,' you will make a rush forward, and we shall have possession immediately of the house."

All this was agreed to. The mob slunk close to the walls of the house, and out of immediate observation from the hall door, or from any of the windows, and then the leader advanced, and knocked loudly for admission.

The silence was now of the most complete character that could be imagined. Those who came there so bent upon vengeance were thoroughly convinced of the necessity of extreme caution, to save themselves even yet from being completely foiled.

They had abundant faith, from experience, of the resources in the way of escape of Sir Francis Varney, and not one among them was there who considered that there was any chance of capturing him, except by surprise, and when once they got hold of him, they determined he should not easily slip through their fingers.

The knock for admission produced no effect; and, after waiting three or four minutes, it was very provoking to find such a wonderful amount of caution and cunning completely thrown away.

"Try again," whispered one.

"Well, have patience; I am going to try again."

The man had the ponderous old-fashioned knocker in his hand, and was about to make another appeal to Sir Francis Varney's door, when a strange voice said,—

"Perhaps you may as well say at once what you want, instead of knocking there to no purpose."

He gave a start, for the voice seemed to come from the very door itself.

Yet it sounded decidedly human; and, upon a closer inspection, it was seen that a little wicket-gate, not larger than a man's face, had been opened from within.

This was terribly provoking. Here was an extent of caution on the part of the garrison quite unexpected. What was to be done?

"Well?" said the man who appeared at the little opening.

"Oh," said he who had knocked; "I—"

"Well?"

"I—that is to say—ahem! Is Sir Francis Varney within?"

"Well?"

"I say, is Sir Francis Varney within?"



"Well; you have said it!"

"Ah, but you have not answered it."

"No."

"Well, is he at home?"

"I decline saying; so you had better, all of you, go back to the town again, for we are well provided with all material to resist any attack you may be fools enough to make."

As he spoke, the servant shut the little square door with a bang that made his questioner jump again. Here was a dilemma!

## BRIGANDS OF THE MOON by Ray Cummings

### XXIV

The duty man at the exit locks stood at his window and watched me curiously. He saw me go up the spider stairs. He could see the figure he thought was Wilks, standing at the top. He saw me join Wilks, saw us locked together in combat.

For a brief instant the duty man stood amazed. There were two fantastic figures, fighting at the very brink of the cliff. They were small, dwarfed by distance, alternately dim and bright as they swayed in and out of the shadows. The duty man could not tell one from the other. To him it was Haljan and Wilks, fighting to the death!

The duty man sprang into action. An interior siren call was on the instrument panel near him. He rang it frantically.

The men came rushing to him, Grantline among them.

"What's this? Good God, Franck!"

They had seen the silent, deadly combat up there on the cliff.

Grantline stood stricken with amazement. "That's Wilks!"

"And Haljan," the duty man gasped. "He went out—something wrong with Wilks' actions—"

The interior of the camp was in a turmoil. The men, awakened from sleep, ran out into the corridors shouting questions.

"An attack?"

"Is it an attack?"

"The brigands?"

But it was Wilks and Haljan in a fight up there on the cliff. The men crowded at the bull's-eye windows.

And over all the confusion the alarm siren, with no one thinking to shut it off, was screaming.

Grantline, momentarily stricken, stood gazing. One of the figures broke away from the other, bounded up to the summit from the stair platform to which they had both fallen. The other followed. They locked together, swaying at the brink. For an instant it seemed that they would go over; then they surged back, momentarily out of sight.

Grantline found his wits. "Stop them! I'll go out and stop them! What fools!"

He was hastily donning one of the Erentz suits. "Cut off that siren!"

Within a minute Grantline was ready. The duty man called from the window, "Still at it, the fools. By the infernal—they'll kill themselves!"

"Franck, let me out."

"I'll go with you, Commander." But the volunteer was not equipped. Grantline would not wait.

The duty man turned to his panel. The volunteer shoved a weapon at Grantline.

Grantline jammed on his helmet, took the weapon.

He moved the few steps into the air chamber which was the first of the three pressure locks. Its interior door panel swung open for him. But the door did not close after him!

Cursing the man's slowness, he waited a few seconds. Then he turned to the corridor. The duty man came running.

Grantline took off his helmet. "What in hell—"

"Broken! Dead!"

"What!"

"Smashed from outside," gasped the duty man. "Look there—my tubes—"

The control tubes of the ports had flashed into a short circuit and burned out. The admission ports would not open!

"And the pressure controls smashed! Broken from outside!"

There was no way now of getting through the pressure locks. The doors, the entire pressure lock system, was dead. Had it been tampered with from outside?

As if to answer Grantline's question there came a chorus of shouts from the men at the corridor windows.

"Commander! By God—look!"

A figure was outside, close to the building! Clothed in suit and helmet, it stood, bloated and gigantic. It had evidently been lurking at the port entrance, had ripped out the wires there.

It moved past the windows, saw the staring faces of the men, and made off with giant bounds. Grantline reached the window in time to see it vanish around the building corner.

It was a giant figure, larger than an Earth man. A Martian?

Up on the summit of the crater the two small figures were still fighting. All this turmoil had taken no more than a minute or two.

A lurking Martian outside? The brigand, Miko? More than ever, Grantline was determined to get out. He shouted to his men to don some of the other suits, and called for some of the hand projectors.

But he could not get out through these main admission ports. He could have forced the panels open perhaps; but with the pressure changing mechanism broken, it would merely let the air out of the corridor. A rush of air, probably uncontrollable. How serious the damage was, no one could tell as yet. It would perhaps take hours to repair it.

Grantline was shouting, "Get those weapons! That's a Martian outside! The brigand leader, probably! Get into your suits, anyone who wants to go with me! We'll go by the manual emergency exit."

But the prowling Martian had found it! Within a minute Grantline was there. It was a smaller two-lock gateway of manual control, so that the person going out could operate it himself. It was in a corridor at the other end of the main building. But Grantline was too late! The lever would not open the panels!

Had someone gone out this way and broken the mechanisms after him? A traitor in the camp? Or had someone come in from outside? Or had the skulking Martian outside broken this lock as he had broken the other?

The questions surged on Grantline. His men crowded around him. The news spread. The camp was a prison! No one could get out!

And outside, the skulking Martian had disappeared. But Wilks and Haljan were still fighting. Grantline could see the two figures up on the observatory platform. They bounded apart, then together again. Crazy swaying, bouncing, striking the rail.

They went together in a great leap off the platform onto the rocks, and rolled in a bright patch of Earthlight. First one on top, then the other.

They rolled unheeding to the brink. Here, beyond the midway ledge which held the camp, it was a sheer drop of a thousand feet, on down to the crater floor.

The figures were rolling; then one shook himself loose; rose up, seized the other and, with desperate strength, shoved him—

The victorious figure drew back to safety. The other fell, hurtling down into the shadows past the camp level—down out of sight in the darkness of the crater floor.

Snap, who was in the group near Grantline at the window gasped, "God! Was that Gregg who fell?"

No one could say. No one answered. Outside, on the camp ledge, another helmeted figure now became visible. It was not far from the main building when Grantline first noticed it. It was running fast, bounding toward the spider staircase. It began mounting.

And now still another figure became visible—the giant Martian again. He appeared from around the corner of the main Grantline building. He evidently saw the winner of the combat on the cliff, who now was standing in the Earthlight, gazing down. And he saw too, no doubt, the second figure mounting the stairs. He stood quite near the window through which Grantline and his men were gazing, with his back to the building, looking up to the summit. Then he ran with tremendous leaps toward the ascending staircase.

Was it Haljan standing up there on the summit? Who was it climbing the stairs? And was the third figure Miko?

Grantline's mind framed the questions. But his attention was torn from them, and torn even from the swift silent drama outside. The corridor was ringing with shouts.

"We're imprisoned! Can't get out! Was Haljan killed? The brigands are outside!"

And then an interior audiphone blared a calling for Grantline. Someone in the instrument room of the adjoining building was talking.

"Commander, I tried the telescope to see who got killed—"

But he did not say who got killed, for he had greater news.

"Commander! The brigand ship!"

Miko's reinforcements had come.