

Excerpts from:

The Infinitude of the Sentient Singularity:

Screamin' Skull

by JACK GRANT

Warning: Contains adult themes and explicit material.

This extensive literary work contains any and all 'triggers' seems the tome is one relating to horror in all its forms. Anyone in fear of triggering a phobia or a traumatic memory definitely should not be reading horror content.

This novel also contains some lighter moments, including humour, good cheer, friendship and laughter; in light of this, the book should be avoided by any and all 'miserable gits' everywhere.

N.B.

These excerpts taken from the novel:

Screamin' Skull;

are part of a larger work:

'The Infinitude Of The Sentient Singularity - Screamin' Skull Trilogy'

In the carefully chosen excerpts there are a few select omissions
to avoid 'spoilers'.

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Preface

A number of stories and themes described in this book are based upon true otherworldly encounters as experienced by the author. However, names and locations have been altered. Remember, that to some degree, we are all psychic, for this ability is inborn and far more common than the mainstream would ever dare to admit.

There is nothing supernatural nor paranormal; in fact, expanded awareness is both quite natural *and* normal. Suspend your disbelief and delete the 'super-' along with the 'para-'. If I had a penny for every time I saw or spoke to a spirit entity (ghost) then I believe I'm very likely to be nudging nearer towards a tenner!

Beyond the fleshy confines of mortality
In unrestricted realities that abound
The war to realise realm reduction rages on

Within time and space which cannot exist
An infinity bristling bright with expression does persist
To perceive the true power and glory of the 'one'

The magnificence which is ...
the Sentient Singularity

Screamin' Skull [Excerpts]

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Screamin' Skull

Excerpt from Chapter Eight

Cody raced around the circuit of the pitch, leaving the fielders to chase the ball which he had just struck with all his might. He went for it, speedily running from base to base with all the power he could muster. The muscles in Cody's body frantically absorbed the oxygen from his blood circulated by the athletic young man's fiercely pumping heart. His ears rang with the raucous cries erupting from the onlooking crowd. A fielder sent the ball spinning through the air. Mere seconds separated him from victory or total defeat.

Cody ran for all he was worth, feverishly snatching short shallow breaths, inhaling through his nose, exhaling through his mouth the way he had been taught. His energy surged and urged him on. With every fibre of his being he leapt towards the last base to complete a clear home run.

His left heel cut into the track churning up dirt and dust, striking base milliseconds before the ball powered into the catcher's mitt. Cody had made it, so he and his run proved safe.

The crowd erupted with cheers of sheer adulation. The damp baseball strip, that his body had lathered in sweat, displayed the colour and design of his favourite team, 'The New York Yankees'. Seriously out of breath, through gritted teeth, Cody grinned his victory to the spectators. Packed with adoring fans, the stadium buzzed with excitement.

'*Man*, 'he thought to himself, '*what a game, what a season!*' Feeling on top of the world, with his team now top of the league, Cody fist pumped the air.

During the celebration while the crowd cheered, the other players congratulated him by slapping him on the back, with a few victory hugs thrown in for good measure. They hoisted him upon their shoulders to carry him aloft in triumph towards the awaiting podium. He now found himself the reigning champion as the eleventh hour hero, the saviour of their hopes and dreams.

A harrowing, amplified scream rang out from the rostrum.

The crowd suddenly became silent. They all turned their attention to a figure wearing a dark suit. From the figure's cold cadaveric face, the eyes stared out with a deathly gaze, devoid of anything natural or normal. The eyes seemed to absorb all light without reflecting a hint of a glint. They were black pits of tar and darkness, ensuring with insistence that this 'otherworldly' individual possessed a penetrating, sinister glare which cast a curse upon the living.

The 'thing' masquerading in the form of a man in dark apparel spoke with a remote coldness; the inhuman, alien tone to the voice impressed upon Cody that this sound alone could chill the blood to the extreme in all the unfortunates that were unlucky enough to hear it.

“*Cody*,” the announcer in the dark suit said whilst effecting an unnerving upturned curvature of the lips that could hardly, in the remotest sense, be described as a smile, “*Come, step up here to claim your prize.*”

From all around this huge stadium, the hitherto, once eager fans broke their silence to deliver three very definite, ominous claps. The sound, universally defined as ‘dead’, delivered no echo.

The gaunt pallor to the dark announcer’s face lacked any semblance to a normal complexion, in that no colour other than the hue of death graced the grim visage; mournfully macabre, clammy and dour-looking. So deathly white in fact, that in partially affected patches, the thin stretched skin had a cadaverous blue tinge. The face reflected a doomed spirit hopelessly imprisoned within the grasping embrace of a static decay.

A number of dust sheet covered figures were seated on a long bench situated on the podium. The entity in the dark suit took position behind the first ghostly white shrouded person it came to. This nightmarish bodily presence roughly ripped away the covering.

Cody gasped when he witnessed the reveal. Shockingly, the seated figure turned out to be none other than Ronnie, in his pizza guy garb.

Once again the blue lips of death formed an insubstantial curve which only hinted at a sly smirk when the sinister ‘suit’ leaned forward to offer Ronnie a handgun.

“Wow, thanks!” beamed the pizza delivery guy before checking out the weapon, “Cool, dude!” Ronnie seemed to be childishly excited to the point of giddiness. He waved the gun in the air while emitting extremely intense bursts of maniacal laughter.

‘The suit’ leaned closer to Ronnie’s ear while it motioned from side to side with one bony index finger to demonstrate a warning, like an adult might enact to scold a naughty child. Keeping the index finger in front of the excited young guy’s face, the dread figure verbally chastised him.

“*It’s very naughty to smoke weed,*” the ghoul in a suit cautioned.

The part time pizza delivery guy and full time space cadet erupted with an unintelligible, incoherent babble interspersed with laughter. “I ... like ... yeh, yeh ... tokey-toke-toke ... what I can, I can ... oh yes, lolly lapalooza, yay ... it’s goody good ... yeh!” Ronnie rocked from side to side on the bench never breaking from his impulsive gibbering cluster of chuckles. Through his decidedly crazed undisciplined mirth Ronnie cheerfully called out, “Yeh, well, it gets me out o’ my head.” Ronnie fell into an uncontrollable, thigh-slapping fit of the giggles.

“*So,*” declared the dark suited announcer, “*Let the punishment fit the crime.*”

Ronnie never calmed in his uproarious hysterics when he simply said “Oh, sure ...” He put the gun to the side of his own head and pulled the trigger.

A fraction of a second before the gunshot exploded Cody cried out, “Stop! Ronnie don’t!” but his exclamation came way too late. Ronnie lifelessly slumped to the side with his blood gushing over the white podium floor.

Excerpt from Chapter Nine

The narrow winding country roads on this particular English summer morning were free of heavy traffic with it being only 6 a.m. Hector and Connie, along with their meagre possessions stacked in the back of the vehicle, were travelling at a very moderate speed. As he manoeuvred his ramshackle charabanc whilst displaying a very definite proficiency, the tufts of hair on Hector's head blew freely in the breeze. This unavoidable air current also affected Connie, what with there being no windshield. Hector smiled at all the scenic greenery he observed from behind his protective driving goggles and occasionally he cheerfully squeezed the black rubber bulb attached to the charabanc hooter.

"Hector stop, you're scaring the cows, it's so childish and irresponsible," Connie scolded while carelessly flicking a smouldering cigarette butt out and beyond.

Graced by a rather jovial mood, Hector heartily responded. "Just keeping them on their veritable tippy-hooves, Connie, besides I deserve some fun, after all, you have persuaded me to stay in that godawful ghoulish old manor."

Connie didn't have to think about his reply. "We could return to Nasty Curly, dear."

"Yes, er yes, well," Hector hesitantly answered, "You've got me by the short and curlies on that topic haven't you."

"Mmm, a hair-raising proposal," came the brief comeback. Connie twisted the cap from a bottle of vodka.

"This old thing is running marvellously, don't you think?" Hector triumphantly declared.

"The charabanc, yes dear, but remember, do keep in mind –"

"Yes, yes," Hector anticipated Connie's concern. He tried to give his friend a grain of solace. "There's no tax and no insurance, I know, but it's six in the morning Connie and we only have three miles to go."

Connie had a swig from the bottle before he berated his old chum.

"Then stop drawing attention to us with that bloody hooter!"

Hector's fingers were already poised around the rubber bulb. He hesitated.

"Who is going to arrest us? The metropolitan sheep police, the cows of Scotland Yard or maybe a rank and file pheasant staffed snatch squad?!"

Connie shot him a piercing glance. "Yes well, you're a pheasant plucker at the best of times. Good job there aren't any pigs! Besides, this antiquated old banger will in itself attract unwanted attention, it must be more than a hundred years old."

Hector nodded in agreement. He removed his hand from the hooter before going on to say, "Yes, the bodywork is original, the engine was replaced in the mid fifties, I remember my old man telling me so."

Connie took another swig from his vodka bottle whilst feeling rather relieved that he hadn't received the full lecture. His relief did not endure.

"Of course the wheels and the tyres, they were replaced ..."

Connie grimaced while he listened, given that he suffered as the captive audience to Hector's own brand of continual informative torture.

“... but of course the starting mechanism is vintage. Now the exhaust pipe I believe that must have been replaced, some mornings it blows a bugger, it does; concerning the steering wheel’s leather bindings, well that is –”

“Hector, enough!” His friend cut him short. “I do not need the history of the charabanc nor a motor mechanics lesson thank you very much. I’m already annoyed and irritable, this old thing’s a real boneshaker, I can’t feel my own arse it’s gone so numb.”

“Ah well,” Hector said before clearing his throat in readiness to recommence, “I can’t speak for the suspension, the coiled springs tend to rust and lose integrity. The seats are a little hard for the old posterior I’ll admit –”

“AAAH!” Connie cried out. “For the love of sanity go fuck your monkey some place else, Hector, you’re driving me nuts!”

Displaying a scowl to express his indignation, Hector adamantly stated, “Suit yourself, be an ignoramus, you horrible manky old actor.” After Connie’s sharp intake of breath, followed by his high pitched squeal in protest, Hector continued, “And I mean manky in the French sense of the word.”

Connie’s initial look of confusion was quickly replaced by one of sudden realisation when he firmly retorted, “The word is pronounced ‘mong-kay’. How dare you suggest that I am an actor *manqué*. I am already a well renowned Thespian of the highest degree and if it wasn’t for the vodka, I would definitely take the wheel because you’re such a crap driver!”

Connie reached out to the seat behind him in the sure knowledge that there lay the battery powered portable boom box.

“I need some music on now, if nothing else the sound will drown out you and your bloody lectures. I shan’t speak to you for the rest of the journey.”

He turned the volume up to the max and pressed play. The workings of an old-fashioned music cassette started to turn. The music blasted out of the speakers loud and proud with the infectious chorus being driven on by a pounding beat.

*The monkey’s in the driver’s seat
The monkey’s in the driver’s seat
The monkey’s in the driver’s seat
And it’s heading for the cliff’*

Connie nearly choked on his vodka, then holding his sides, he rocked with laughter.

Hector didn’t look too pleased at first though he eventually saw the funny side and succumbed to a series of hearty chuckles.

Down the winding road they travelled, hemmed in either side by hedgerows. Fresh fields of green lay beyond, upon every few metres of which, cud chewing cows contentedly grazed. After his little outburst and when the song had finished Connie turned off the boom box. He seemed content with surveying the vista, warmed and comforted by constant snifters from his vodka bottle; which incidentally, he cradled in his arms like an overprotective parent.

Connie realised he may have been a little selfish and being of a generous nature he proffered the bottle to Hector who in no uncertain terms flatly refused the offer.

“Oh better not old thing, drinking and driving, that’s a big no-no in my book.”

Connie withdrew the bottle and therefore the temptation whilst saying, “You’re only this sensible because you’re a tad more sober than usual. After all you did only polish off just the one bottle of Scotch last night; which doesn’t exactly qualify you to join the sobriety and abstinence brigade, I know ... but still I thought wonders will never cease; however, your disciplined moderation didn’t prevent you from performing your usual ritual in the kitchen.”

Hector had a sly smile on his lips. “That’s because you didn’t notice me polish off the first bottle. I threw the empty out of the window while you were packing.”

Displaying an impassive expression of pure resignation, Connie simply said, “I knew it was too good to be true.”

The mild weather combined with bright sunshine turned out to be in direct contrast to the wet stormy weekend which they had just endured. The two friends were elated to at last be free of the equestrian hell hole that they had lived in for the past six months. They rounded a corner in the road and ill fate obliged them with an ill predicament. Parked in a lay-by a few metres ahead a police car lay in wait. Standing beside the vehicle, a portly copper had taken it upon himself to indulge his craving by enthusiastically puffing away on a cigarette.

“Oh crap!” exclaimed Hector, “A rozzer and he’s waving us over.”



Excerpt from Chapter Fifteen

Zack woke up sore. In addition to a thoroughly aching body and a throbbing head, his dazed senses also quickly became aware of just how extremely parched he truly was. With the flat of one hand he stroked his brow. “Whoa, what did I take last night?” he asked himself aloud. The shadowy surroundings remained dimly lit. Just two thin slits of daylight managed to permeate the gloom above him.

In stiff agony he slid his body from the hard, lumpy, uneven surface he had landed on. He felt himself drop, though luckily only by a short distance, until he found purchase on terra firma. Zack felt his way the best he could around what seemed to be racking or shelving. Blindly through the gloom, the impeded young man persevered until he felt the flatness of a wall.

Using his hands, he slowly guided himself in the darkness, along the length of the brickwork until, at long last, he found that for which he searched; a light switch that he immediately clicked on.

The luminous tubing fixed to the ceiling above flickered and flashed, lighting up the interior. When his eyes adjusted to the sudden shock of brightness he saw numerous sacks stacked on racking. Zack could easily make out the contents through the net bagging and he discovered that they were a varied assortment of vegetables. The way he was feeling, the onion sacks ought to have been gnarly sandbags in the trenches alongside the Somme. He scanned the room thinking, *‘How do I escape from this tomb of broccoli and frickin’ onions?’*

He retraced his steps nearer to the light switch. About a metre further forward he saw a small door next to a large metal concertina screen covering the main entrance. He knew this retractable door would be locked from the outside, rammed into a ground lock. The smaller door to the side of it was double bolted from the inside.

Zack slid the bolts back and he shoved on the panelling of the door which easily creaked open onto daylight. He flicked the light switch off and walked out into the open air. This revealed him to be in another small courtyard at the back of some buildings, most likely situated to the rear of some shops. Spying a short alleyway leading out onto the main road, Zack closed the small door and made his escape.

Flabbergasted at so easily finding his bearings out on the street he quickly ascertained, much to his own amazement, that the veggie storeroom was bang next to his digs and not more than fifty yards from the main entrance of the hotel. A stark realisation dawned in his mind. He went back into the alleyway and checked his pocket. He brought out the polythene bag that contained the reefers. From his other pocket he pulled out a cheap plastic lighter. With the lit reefer held firmly between his lips, Zack had his first toke of the day. He thought to himself, *‘Just one more spliff to calm myself down before I have to face the wrath of Gregory DiAngelo.’*

Excerpt from Chapter Twenty

He ran swiftly through the dark forest taking in rapidly drawn breaths, which were deep and heavy, forcing his heart rate ever higher. The forest floor crunched in crispness, thoroughly laden, rich in leaf from the labour of autumn's fall.

The scent of decaying flora mixed richly with the aroma arising from the low lying late fruits and berries. Nature's nourishing morsels were abundantly strewn across a never-ending spread, witheringly profuse with darkening posies and yellowing grasses. The overripe fermenting fullness of the season swept into his nostrils like the spirit of a harvest long lost to the world.

The drizzle rained down, fine wet and soggy upon his form; the prelude to an oncoming storm. Far in the distance above the tall mighty trees which stood like an army of sentinels with their branches swaying in the breeze, a dark and ominous rumbling sounded like the low roar derived from a carnivorous beast.

Something pursued him – a phantom unseen.

In an effort to increase speed by utilising every fibre of his being, moist rotting undergrowth did ascend into the air, kicked up in his wake. Roosting birds in this twilight world, now disturbed by his noisy passing, screeched from the boughs above.

At last he entered the woodland clearing. The thrones of the all-knowing a rocky circle did make. He leapt into the arena triumphant in pride, his body now worn, with muscles in spasm, for vigorously his form did shake. A warning he carried deep in his heart for his mistress, the queen of the lightning spark, which he now gave.

“Upon a slimy belly something evil slithers this way, creeping ever nearer with insidious persistence through mulch and decay.”

A sweet voice descended to kiss his ears; “Have you decided? ... Have you resolved upon which way you will go?”

“Not yet!” he shouted in answer, anxious to impart the portent of an ill omen. “All in due course, but I bid you a warning the beast doth come forth.”

The voice of his mistress whispered only two words:

“I know.”

Excerpt from Chapter Twenty-Seven

A young cavalry officer marched alongside his captain in their task to lead the horses up a steep rocky trail. A small troop of men accompanied them. A short distance ahead a soldier waved his arms frantically in the air shouting, "Apaches gone into a cave! Apaches gone into a cave!"

While they led their horses side by side, the captain looked to his young lieutenant, "You heard the man Tomkins, give the order to secure the perimeter. Surround the cave. If it has another exit, post a guard. I believe we may have got them trapped. At last *Goyahkla* has run out of luck. Go ... and quick to it!"

The young officer mounted his horse. He barked an order to the two cavalry men following directly behind him. "You two with me!" They both climbed into their saddles and the three horsemen galloped up the trail. The officer began shouting to the contingent ahead, "Surround the cave, surround the cave."

Now that the captain walked alone with the troop following behind, no one could see his face. The darkness within the captain seeped into his eyes. At first it appeared as a muddy disturbance that clouds a clear pool, until the interior of both eyes were darker than the shade cast on a moonless night.

A rough looking cur of a soldier hurried towards the young lieutenant. He spat dark chewing tobacco stained saliva after every other sentence he spoke.

"Checked all around that hidey-hole," he spat, "Ain't no way no how them Injuns gettin' out o' there." He spat again. "Only one way in an' that's the only way back out."

He spat for the very last time in his life. An Apache arrow cut clean through the air. The projectile entered the back of the man's neck and the tip protruded through his throat. The unkempt and unshaven soldier fell to his knees dying.

The young officer turned a shade paler. He leapt from the saddle and used the flank of the horse for cover. The man at the lieutenant's feet slowly drowned in a rich mixture of his own blood and the dark bitter spittle of his own saliva. He grabbed at the officer's boots pawing at them.

Another trooper, concerned for his fallen fellow soldier quickly approached. "Beggin' pardon Officer Tomkins, I reckon he wants mercy. You have to finish him sir. It's a kindness, he could choke for hours gasping for air."

Tomkins yanked his leg away from the dying soldier's grip. "You do it," he ordered the recruit and swiftly led his horse away. The mare whinnied and reared at the sound of the shot dispatched into the choking man's head.

The warrior brave, 'Coyote's Shadow', watched the horse that now reared in panic. He saw the frightened animal drop its dung near a bush next to where his successful target had met his end.

The recruit that had given the man release lamented with a frown and a prayer of sorts. "Bless you Farnworth, off to meet yer maker. Hope it ain't too hot down there, old friend." Lifting his gaze, he looked to the mouth of the cave a distance up ahead and uttered familiar words all too often used by the rank and file.

“Damn Apache Scum,” he scowled.

The captain reached the rest of his regiment at the appointed rendezvous point. He met his second in command at the bottom of a short rocky slope below the trail to the cave.

“Your orders, sir?” Tomkins asked his captain.

Two soldiers dragged away the lifeless corpse of Farnworth. The captain looked down upon the blood covered cadaver while they hauled it away. Tomkins detected a slight trace of satisfaction in the sly smirk on his superior’s face.

“Sir, your orders,” he restated.

In answer the captain delivered his commands.

“Keep the mouth of the cave covered at all times. Take a few men to gather brushwood for kindling and tie it into bundles. I suppose we’re gonna have us some roast ‘A-pach’ today Tomkins. Meanwhile I’ll go and negotiate with the enemy.” The captain began to walk up the craggy slope towards the cave, carrying within his form a dark possessing entity.

“Sir, what are you doin’? That’s suicide! Sir come back!” Tomkins yelled in anxious exasperation. He began to worry that his captain had gone totally insane. He beseeched him to return to the safety of his troop. “Sir, have you snapped and gone loco? Only a crazy bastard would just walk on up to a bunch of Apaches!”

His captain never looked back while calmly saying, “Tactics Tomkins, tactics. I know what I’m doing.”

The rest of the troop witnessed their commander walking towards certain death.

Confusion swept through the ranks of the military detail.

“What the hell’s he doin’?” one soldier exclaimed.

Another of the onlooking cavalry men shook his head in disbelief. Wide-eyed, he watched the captain striding to his doom, getting ever nearer the cave entrance where he would surely face the full fury of the Apaches. “That stupid son of a bitch must ’ave a goddamn death wish!” the cavalry man shouted.

Tomkins approached the man.

“Enough of that soldier or you’re gonna be on report.”

The trooper stopped shaking his head and sneered at the lieutenant’s words. “I just carried Farnworth away, we gonna be draggin’ that damn fool’s dead hide away too.”

Tomkins said nothing in return. After meeting the man’s gaze, he briefly glanced at the ground before quickly marching away.

Excerpt from Chapter Forty-Four

A pair of unconscious, shirtless young men in knee-length camouflage combat shorts were laid out, side by side, on two separate tables. Clearly visible, the contusions caused by bite marks were randomly displayed in distinct markings all over their arms and torsos. One of them lay there with a bandaged arm, though the blood had seeped through the covering. The other had a lint and sticking plaster patch on his right shoulder which also leaked blood to stain the dressing red.

Sprawled spark-out in a white plastic garden chair, a young woman in a halter top and floral shorts had just fainted away. She had been nursing her arm which caused her a severe amount of pain. The stubborn damsel-in-distress refused to accept any differing opinions other than her own; that she had only sustained a simple sprain. However, the more mature and experienced people suspected she had a broken arm. No one, not even the victim herself had noticed the bite wound gouged in the flesh of her left calf.

They all carried the marks of this evil day, both physical and mental.

Helen, the kind lady who had guarded the face-painted toddler, worried greatly about the three unconscious young adults in the same way that she showed concern for just about everyone. Concentrating her efforts on the young lady with the injured arm, using the flat of three fingers, she gently tapped her on the cheek. "Pammy, can you hear me love, come on Pammy, wake up sweetheart." Her attempt at revival failed. The youngster remained unresponsive.

Helen turned to speak to someone in the huddled crowd.

"You did call the emergency services didn't you, Dom?"

Dominic, the fearless father who had valiantly fended off the gulls to protect his three year old boy, answered her with a certain degree of frustration. "Yes I did, I got through, but the connection was bad. So just in case, I tried again an' what d'ya know? There's absolutely no signal."

Murmurings swept through the marquee. "Me too." "And me." "I've no signal," the various festival attendees confirmed.

A mature looking guy with long grey hair tied in a pony tail, sporting a well-groomed, tidy grey beard spoke up. "Must be 'cos o' the storm that's on the way. It's going to be a big one I can tell yer. I have a different problem with my device. The battery's flat and I only charged it up a short while ago an' now my powerbank is totally drained." Now there were many affirmative nods from a large number of people who had that exact same problem.

Becoming impatient, Dom wanted to encourage a more practical approach. He shared his well reasoned idea. "There must be something on that rig or the back of stage that we can use for a charger."

A chubby lady, fully sloshed on cider, held up her half empty glass. "Good luck with that mate if you can get over there in one piece. You go first and the best of British but Tracey Brown 'ere," she thumbed at her own ample bosom, "isn't straying an inch from this damn spot!" While seated in her chair, the buxom lady

raised her legs and with a *thud*, she unceremoniously rested her heels on the table. This did nothing other than show off her gold varnished toenails displayed from her cerise coloured flip-flops.

A young man announced to everyone within earshot, “Hi! I’m Robin Newland, a DJ for ‘ND radio’ and if I can posit a notion, well, we can’t stay here forever, and a tarpaulin cover may keep the gulls away but it’s not much protection from the monsters, or whatever those things are roaming around the field. Out of sight may be out of mind but I don’t believe those grinning dancing killers think all that much, if they even think at all. I mean to say, we’re all in here protected by nothing more than a flimsy tarp cover, it’s like pulling a thin cotton sheet over your head hoping it will protect you from the axe murderer standing beside your bed.”

Sloshed Tracey Brown hollered out at Robin, “Poet ... don’t know it!” She gave out a belt of laughter before refocusing on her half depleted cider drink and the consumption thereof.

The conversation within the marquee had become intense and some pretty wide ranging options were discussed, with not even one suggestion sounding like a perfect solution.

While everyone tried to concentrate, focusing all their thoughts on finding a conclusive answer, the anguished cries beyond the thin canvas covering had merely become a theme to the nightmare that each person appeared to be sharing. Now the excruciating cries and woeful pleas begging for mercy flooded into the awareness of the occupants in the tent. With unabated persistence the wailing melded into one unified constant, blending with the unending shrieks cast by the maniacs. To fearful and very suggestible people the harrowing sounds struck terror into their hearts.

Seated at a table with four other strangers, a lady with short silver grey hair placed her glass down in readiness to speak. The quality of her voice had a strictly disciplined tone. She spoke with authority. “I think there is only one line of action to take. No matter what we have to face out there, we must all make for our cars or the village. It is true we are surrounded by flesh eating lunatics hell bent on our destruction, also we may have to endure the stabbing pecks of wild deranged birds marauding above our heads ... but despite this, we must drive home our advantage. We must break out of the field and raise the alarm!” Whilst delivering her statement, she came across as unflinching and impassive which hinted at a stoic attitude.

Tracey, the chubby boisterous lady held up her glass which now only contained the last few dregs. “I’ll drink to that,” she exclaimed whilst at the same time accepting a top up from a kind young gent who poured cider into her glass from his bottle.

Compelled by his own curiosity, Dominic asked the silver haired lady, “What advantage? Just what advantage can we drive home exactly?”

The silver haired lady cleared her throat to speak. “That we are all totally pissed off our tits on cider,” she told a rather stunned captive audience.

“That’s your plan?” For a moment or two, Dominic became temporarily dumbfounded. After gathering his thoughts he continued. “God knows how many crazies are out there not just biting people but devouring them for good measure. Cannibals with dysentery, foaming at the mouth, not to mention wild birds with rabies that also have a taste for human flesh, an’ your plan is to get steamin’ on cider and fuck the consequences?” Dominic snatched a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and lit one up to calm his nerves.

The silver haired lady had a gulp from her glass before resolutely stating, “Yes ... and please could you kindly refrain from doing that. This is a non smoking enclosure and you know that full well young man, I don’t think the people here will take too kindly to you polluting their lungs.”

Dominic, already beside himself with worry, now found his stress levels nudging him nearer to complete aggravation. He plucked the cigarette from his lips. Affected by his trembling hand, a small column of ash crumbled to fall away. This revealed the glowing cigarette tip which burned much brighter upon his next strongly taken draw. After exhaling the smoke he impulsively executed a series of rapid, sharp, shallow breaths which bordered on a panic attack. He held the slowly burning cigarette out in front of him for all to see. Dominic addressed the complaint but his comments were for all those gathered. Whilst speaking, he directly glared at the silver haired lady.

“I’ve got a better idea madam, you get hammered on scrumpy while I go outside handing around cigarettes to the maniacs. Maybe they’ll all drop dead from cancer in about thirty fucking years time ... ya daft old bint!”

The lady recoiled with a pained expression to shuffle uncomfortably in her seat.

“Well I’ve never heard the like,” she exclaimed.

Tracey Brown, the buxom sozzled lady raised her glass and her voice whilst loudly stating, “Daft old biddy, daft old cow, daft old coffin dodger, daft old fucker of a duffer! Have you heard enough now?” Tracy, the lairy lady, revealed a smile, though her eyes were glazed over with an apple cider sheen.

A little light relief swept through the marquee with some seeing the funny side and the hilarious absurdity of their current situation. Tracey seemed more interested in the marquee roof canopy than in any of the individuals sheltered within the tarpaulin confines. She didn’t even notice the silver haired lady’s strongly projected scowl.

Just when it seemed that the people’s spirits were about to be lifted, a sudden nerve-shattering scream sounded. Helen attempted to pull her arm free from the grip of the recently infected Pammy. The teenage girl had clamped her jaws on Helen’s forearm, attempting to bite through it while savaging the flesh like a starving wolf ripping into a side of raw beef. The blood profusely sprayed everywhere.

While most people’s efforts and attention turned to helping Helen only Robin the DJ noticed the twitching spasms of the two bodies laid out on the tables. The two young men in combat shorts lifted themselves to sit bolt upright. They were frothing at the mouth. Simultaneously their eyes opened to reveal nothing but a

deep void of darkness. Robin's vocal exclamation blended with his own scream when he yelled out,

"The lads! Watch out! The pair o' lads!"

The two reanimated 'lads' both dropped from the tables to charge into the nervous gathering of cider tent refugees. They lunged to bite, rip, tear and gouge. They grinned from ear to ear during the brutal undertaking of their vicious, savage attack. The crowd in the tent began to disperse, fighting to distance themselves from the three savage aggressors who had now erupted into screams of such magnitude that all covered their ears.

The screams acted like a siren call to their vile cannibal clan, who now had a shrieking signal with which to home in on. The shrill cries enticed the maniacs to dance towards the small canvas-covered marquee. They tore through the tarp like the material had all the resistance of tissue paper. The maniacs ripped the covering from the frame which allowed their winged allies to fly in.

The safe haven was breached and torn asunder. The cannibal creatures began to gorge.



Excerpt from Chapter Fifty-Two

While Cody drained his bladder in the bathroom he detected a voice emanating from across the hallway landing. He assumed the voice belonged to Connie with his bedroom only being a few feet down the hall from the 'John'. He didn't fancy his chances but he hoped, fingers crossed, that he could persuade Connie to have another darts tournament. He just wanted another chance to trounce Zack again. Victory felt so good.

With her colour drained, ashen faced, Rita gave the cellphone back to her daughter. "Keep Connie talking on your phone," she instructed. Immediately, her mother redialled from the landline.

Cody washed his hands in the bathroom basin and dried them with a towel hanging on the rack. While he did so he heard a phone ringing. The sound came from Connie's room.

Rita listened.

"Hello dear, did we get cut off? Tell me more of what the medium said."

Rita stood in her hallway with Marlene, while Suzi chatted to Connie on her cell.

"Who is this?" Rita spoke loudly into her phone.

"Why, it's Connie, dear," the voice responded.

"Who is it really?" she demanded.

"Oh have I been rumbled?" The voice in a flat tone calmly told her, "I am a servant."

Rita's anger had overcome her initial fear.

"A servant to who?" she shouted.

Cody rushed into Connie's room. Initially he was all smiles but then his face dropped by a mile. At the same time that Rita heard the voice on her phone, Cody saw the thing that continued in conversation with her.

"I am a servant of the beast."

Rita brought the phone away from her ear and slammed it into the holder.

The featureless doppelganger turned its hairless head to face in Cody's direction. To Cody the unexpressive form resembled nothing more than a man-sized white, wet clay figure which impressed upon him that this 'thing' expressed a macabre duality in being both dead and eerily yet unborn. Without gender nor characteristics, this naked entity waited to become an actuality ... or a creature lying in wait to alter and reshape itself into an undefinable 'something'. A slit had ripped into the blank canvas of its face to pass for a mouth.

In Cody's transfixed state, the most specific aspect that 'freaked him the hell out' proved to be the sound of the entity's voice. The doppelganger exactly replicated the tonal quality of Connie's speech.

"Did you overhear that, Cody? I am indeed a servant of the beast. Are you ready to play, Cody? I rather think it's time for you to run."

The doppelganger sharply marched towards him, discarding the cellphone from its excuse for a hand. Cody came to his senses and raced from the room. Making a mad dash he ran full pelt down the hallway much too overcome by shock to cry out. He burst into the control room.

"A d-, a d-, a doppler," he frantically spluttered. "A doppler's after me."



Excerpt from Chapter Sixty-Six

Zack grinned, batting at one low hanging mask to send the green ‘grey’ twirling from the attached string. The moulded false face crashed into the others resulting in a Halloween jig of costume horrors spinning in an entanglement of string cords. Zack noticed Cody’s anxious, distressed state, prompting brotherly love to win through in the end.

“What’s the matter?” he asked whilst placing a caring arm around his younger brother’s shoulders and bringing him in closer for a light squeeze. “They’re just a bunch o’ dumb masks. C’mon let’s get out o’ here. I need fries,” Zack said with a smile. He led his brother out of the store. Cody didn’t say anything because he figured the incident to be a combination of nerves and fatigue.

They made their way to the nearest burger joint. Cody slid his backside onto a bench set at a table stall while Zack put in their order at the counter. He noticed two older looking dudes, who seemed to be roughly the age of Brandon and Tyler. They were sitting at a corner table and Cody’s stall faced in their direction. They both had shaven heads and sported black ‘muscle vests’, though what caught Cody’s attention the most were their tattoos. They both displayed a vivid coiling snake tattoo on their respective right arms. The viper’s head, baring fangs, finished at the side of their necks.

Cody kept averting his eyes; he didn’t want them to notice him staring and yet he couldn’t help himself, the ‘tats’ were just so cool. He needn’t have worried because the two ‘snake guys’ were staring intently at his brother. They got to their feet and leaving their table, they headed for the rest room. Cody’s cautious discretion seemed to have worked given that the two guys didn’t even notice him. When they passed his table Cody heard one of them say, “Da, da, American dude,” followed by a short sentence spoken in a foreign language. After this, the guy nodded in Zack’s direction.

Cody immediately became alarmed. How were they aware of Zack’s nationality unless they had both been stalking them. He went straight over to his brother, grabbed him by the arm and proceeded to march Zack away.

“Hey ... what about the fries?” his brother complained.

“Stuff the fries,” Cody told him while staring directly ahead, “Two guys with snakes inked into their arms and viper tattoos on their necks recognised you from somewhere. They knew you were American.”

Somewhere in the back of Zack’s mind he vaguely recollected something. The memory wasn’t clear but Zack inwardly concurred with Cody’s initial instinct to get the hell out of there.

“What’s the time?” Cody asked when they exited the burger bar.

“Ten after nine ... why?” Zack enquired while they picked up their pace to hurry down the street.

“Because the train’s every twenty minutes, right?” Cody informed him.

“I dunno, I think I left the timetable on my seat when we left Uncle Greg.” Zack did not retain such details in his memory banks, relying instead on printed fact or instant digital info. However, Cody just about memorized everything. He quickly shared his recall with Zack.

“Tube trains every twenty minutes, I think there may be one at nine twenty. C’mon quick.”

Cody hurried Zack along. They heard the distinct clomping of heavily planted stomps marching towards them from the rear. The sound of the footsteps were speedily following in their tracks. The brothers turned to see the ‘snake guys’ in hot pursuit. They were lean and muscular, exhibiting an extremely intimidating presence. The pair of them made very threatening figures.

“Hey, American!” one of them shouted, “You owe me twenty grand! Where is my ‘Hi-Q’ ... uh, *Hi-Q?*”

The face of a Rastafarian flashed into Zack’s mind, similar in resemblance to ‘High Jack’.

Zack suddenly remembered.

“Run!” Zack barked out the order. “RUN!”