

The Journal of
James Halldon

Diary of the displaced

Episode 2

Glynn James

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www.glynnjames.com

www.diaryofthedisplaced.co.uk

Note that this work contains scenes of violence, and graphic descriptions not appropriate for reading by children. You have been warned.

**Please pass this on to anyone you
know who may enjoy it.**

Day 10

I haven't slept for hours now. It may be day 11 for all I know, but I'm sticking to a day being between each sleep (ish). Thank god for Dogthing, and to hell with friggin zombies.

I'm just about to try and get a few hours sleep, but I doubt very much that it's going to happen. If it wasn't for Dogthing I would be dead now, there is no doubt about that.

I was fast asleep and far too comfortable. With a belly full of mushroom and nice fire going. I guess I nearly forgot about the dead things I fought.

The noise made me start and I sat bolt upright, fumbling around for a torch and my weapon. I heard that same long drawn out moan nearby and Dogthing going at something, that familiar sound of flesh ripping and the grating of Dogthing's teeth, and all much too close for my liking. He must have been sitting nearby when they arrived.

The torch flooded the area with light and I wished it hadn't really, because I could see at least four of them loping towards the camp. Worst still there were bits enough for two others strewn around the clearing that I Dogthing had been lounging around in. They don't leave a lot of blood, just bits.

I put my torch into the fire again, stoking it a little, to try and get more light in the area. It was almost out and I didn't have the time to lug any wood from the pile. I managed to get it going a bit

more and regretted it straight away.

There were dozens of them. At varying distances, all shapes and sizes, and at different stages of decay. The one nearest to me was still a good twenty feet away and most were still staggering around trying to negotiate the piles of scrap. I am so glad that they are slow; otherwise I would have been overrun.

I hesitated for a moment, would I be able to fight them all off? Not a chance. I proved on my trip out earlier that I was bloody useless with this mace. Yeah, sure, I killed it, but not after nearly landing myself on my arse.

Time to run.

My kit was still packed from the expedition, so I grabbed as much other stuff as I could and edged along the wall away from the camp, in the only direction that was reasonably clear. As I shuffled along through the rubbish I saw that there was only one of the creatures in that direction and figured that if I was quick, I might not even have to fight it.

So here I am, tucked inside the bus with the doors all jammed shut and Dogthing prowling around outside.

Dogthing followed me, after sidetracking to make a meal out of one or two of the zombies on the way. I think I now know why I've not become A Dogthing meal. He seems to only have a taste for the living dead. Sick, yeah, but I'd rather it be them than

me.

The zombies didn't follow. They seemed intent on continuing into the camp. I don't know where they are heading or what has attracted them to the area, but I'm just glad it wasn't me. Well, I think it wasn't me, they didn't follow me to the bus, so they must have had some other reason to be there.

I need to sleep now, I'm struggling to write.

Day 11

I'm still alive, still in the bus and still got me a demon Dogthing personal guard patrolling just inside the light of my torch. Can you feel love for a mutt from hell, damn right you can. He won't come into the bus, seems to be afraid of it for some reason, maybe I should take heed from that, but I'm too tired.

I'm glad I made a large supply of torches now.
Anyway, back to yesterday's escape.

My exodus wasn't entirely uneventful. That one zombie that I was hoping to avoid moved a little quicker than I was expecting. As I edged away along the wall it closed the gap. I looked back, but Dogthing was busy tearing into another of the monsters that had entered his clearing. I called out to him, well, whistled, but he didn't respond. I would have called him, but I didn't think he would

answer to “Dogthing” and I didn’t have a name for him yet. I must name him.

The wall was quite low by the time I faced off with the zombie; the reek of the creature was nasty, hitting me like a cloud of gas at about ten feet. It was a really big one, not tall or anything, but fat, very fat. And it had something sticking out of its stomach, piercing right through its body. It looked like a metal girder or something similar. Its innards were rapped around the metal and dangling down in tendrils, dragging along the floor as it stumbled around. The girder wasn’t what worried me though. For its weapon this zombie had chosen a head, yeah, a zombie head. It had hold of it by the hair, which was very long and drenched through with dried blood and other crap. As it swung it in my direction the head cursed and shouted profanities at me.

I think that that is what freaked me out more than the obese size of the creature, that swinging, screaming head that it was trying to hit me with.

I didn’t think I had much luck by ending up in this place, but luck has had a lot to do with my survival after that moment and it played a big role there as well. I was about to step forward and try to take the thing on, of which I was convinced I stood no chance. Then I noticed what it was standing on. Cardboard, another big pile of it, spread out across the floor, this time not drenched in muck and water. It took like a treat, and that giant zombie went up with it.

I’ve never been a hateful person, but the sheer

joy at watching the creature toast was immense. So much so that I wasn't expecting the damn thing to come walking off of the cardboard towards me, burning like a failed Catharine Wheel as it flailed the screaming head and its other arm around in its fury. I had no choice; I just dived over the wall and rolled away. Not a moment too soon either, because barely a second or two after I tumbled away from the wall it came crashing down in an inferno, over the rock, and then fell to pieces on the cobbled floor.

Up until then I had been avoided going over that wall, I just dreaded the thought that when I got there it would be as vast and endless as the side I was living on, plus there was something nice about sleeping with your back to solid wall. I was right to be wary.

Cobbled flooring, stretched out into the darkness, and no sign of an ending to the open space this side of the wall either. I didn't have time to have a look around and I wasn't going to go stumbling into somewhere else I didn't know. I went in the only direction I could remember, towards the bus, leaving the zombie collapsing in flames, the putrid stench of rotten burning flesh hanging in the air and tearing at my nostrils, and that head screaming even worse insults at me as I ran. The first time I hear another voice and it's not attached to a body. It couldn't even have had vocal cords.

This place is nuts.

Here's a new development. My memory isn't completely gone. I'm starting to get some bits back about the day I ended up here. I think I would have remembered more, but the dream that brought it to me ended when the zombies arrived.

I was on my way to a major client, to sort out their latest order when I hit the traffic jam. The M25 can get pretty bad during rush hour, but it wasn't normally so bad mid afternoon, so that was unusual, but nothing that says weird to me.

It took about an hour extra to get there and I phoned ahead to let them know I was going to be late. That was when I noticed my phone was low on charge, and I remember making a mental note to recharge it. I guess I never got the opportunity.

The last thing I recall was stopping off at a service station to go use their toilet. I have this thing you see, about not looking bad. Turning up to a client's place and using the toilet straight away is rude, to me at least.

So I went to the toilet in the restaurant of the service station, and that's as far as I remember. Somewhere after using that toilet I ended up here.

Here's yet another development and one even more interesting. This bus has a rough bed laid out on the upper deck and a whole bundle of belongings tucked away in corners. Someone used this place as a home at some point. I think from the dust that has settled over most of it that it wasn't recently. It's a shame, although it's nice to see any signs of life here

that might be human, the place being abandoned for so long – or so I presume – is just another reminder that I'm alone.

I Spent most of the day hiding in the bus, catching up on my sleep.

You know, I never would have thought it, but sun tan lotion works ok as soap. It's not brilliant but it freshens you up no end. It's a shame I only have one bottle of it.

Day 12

A few more zombies passed by this morning, but didn't come too close, and didn't bother investigating the bus.

Dogthing has wandered off. I didn't notice until about an hour ago that he was missing. There is something disconcerting about not knowing where he is.

I gave in to my curiosity and tried to start the bus but the engine didn't even turn over. I'm not surprised really; this thing must have been sat here for years. It's strange what you become accustomed to. After fighting zombies and eating three foot tall mushrooms, a London bus sitting in the middle of nowhere doesn't seem so odd anymore.

I found some useful stuff on the bus. A knife for starters - yes a real one - It's only one of those small

dinner knives and it is a little blunt, but it's better than the glass knives I made.

There was also a torch, minus the batteries. You never know I may come across some at some point, so will keep hold of it for now.

In the front corner on the upper floor was a pile of magazines; mostly gardening and craft ones. Some of them are over thirty years old. Behind the magazines I found a small pile of books, only a dozen or so, and six of them are the same book, multiple copies of a thesis by a Professor Adler. They look pretty old, and are all signed, presumably by Mr. Adler himself, though I can't make out the signature clearly enough to be sure.

In a pile in the middle of the floor was a thick woollen blanket, big enough at least to cover a double bed. It could do with a wash but will be a sight better than the curtain that I no longer have. Damn, I lost a lot of stuff back at the camp.

Plastic bottles, dozens of them, stuffed into a huge cloth sack. If only I could find some water. Unfortunately all of them were empty.

Hanging on small metal hooks on two of the walls was a pair of lamps. Neither of them had any fuel in them, but If I could siphon some from the car wreck I might be able to get them going. There was also a hook that was unused.

Covering most of the walls and windows on the top floor are posters from various times. Some are of bands from the eighties and others I'm pretty sure go back to pre Second World War, maybe even

further.

Saving the best find until the end, as they say (is that right?) on the bottom floor, at the back amongst all the litter (really, the bottom floor must have been the last occupant's rubbish bin) was a small metal box with a broken handle. Inside it was a rusty set of tools - various stuff - not all of it much good, but there is a screwdriver, a hammer, and a rusty but usable adjustable spanner. All fantastic finds. Shit I'm getting all happy about a damn toolset.

Lingering in the back of my mind there is an unsettling feeling that someone lived here for quite a while and then went off one day never to return. Maybe they were trapped here like me and found somewhere better, not bothering to come back, but I'm not convinced of that really, I think I would have come back even to collect a few things. Which reminds me, I still have to go back to the old camp and salvage whatever I can, avoiding any zombies on the way. I also need to find somewhere other than this bus to stay. There just seems to be zombies wandering by every few hours. I'm lucky they either don't seem to notice me, or just aren't interested at the moment.

I'm convinced that the zombies are heading somewhere, all of them. They are always walking in the same direction, and I've never seen any of them twice. Trust me I would know, they are all very different.

The strangest one I have seen so far came past late last night, whilst I was having a smoke looking

out of the window. It wandered by about thirty feet away, just on the edge of the light. I'm damn sure the creature had been put together, because there were two heads sticking out at the top, and another jutting out of its waist. It had far too many arms and legs, almost like three people had been wrapped together deliberately. The top two heads were staring at each other, like they were in shock from being attached to one another (wouldn't you be?), whilst the third, the one in its waist was looking around. I'm not even sure that the two heads facing each other were alive, well, animate, whatever they are.

There are only 3 cans of fizzy drink left. I'm surprised they have lasted this long. Either way I'm going to run out. This is a good and a bad thing, if I drink much more of the stuff I'm going to end up with serious stomach problems (not that I don't already have; fizzy pop is not good as a staple diet), but on the other hand I've got nothing else.

From the empty bottles I've come to two conclusions. Either there is water nearby, or it is so far away that whoever owned these bottles needed a lot of storage to make living here worthwhile.

I'm going back to the old camp tomorrow in an attempt to recover the last few bits of my possessions. I remember seeing a hose pipe somewhere in the junk, I think not far from the bus, so will attempt to find it.

I did venture out to see if I could find anything else to drink, but didn't go very far. I found

something very interesting though, a small heap of mangled up bicycles and prams. I'm not sure why they were piled together, and none of them were in any condition to use without some major repairs, but it does mean one thing. Wheels. I'm determined to at least fix up one of the prams to use as a cart. Will pass by the pile on the way back to the camp. A second good reason to take a different route back there.

Day 13

To say that today has been an interesting experience would be an understatement., but before I go into that I need to sort out last night's dream in my head.

I hadn't even noticed until I woke up, that I hadn't been having any dreams at all that I could remember. I used to dream so vividly before; back in the real world (is that the right thing to call it? This seems pretty real). It's strange that I don't recall dreaming at all whilst I've been here, so much so that I'd forgotten all about it, until last night that is.

It started off a bit vague, but then don't all dreams start that way? I was on the bus, this bus actually, but it wasn't here, it was driving through London, very slowly, like the world was going through one of those film clips they play in slow motion, so you don't miss the details that they cleverly placed there. It wasn't as slow as a film, but

the dial was definitely turned down slightly. Everyone outside the bus was walking at a fraction of a second delay; everyone inside the bus seemed to be in time stop. Everyone, that is, but me, and one old fellow sitting right at the front, smoking a pipe and chattering to himself.

As always on that journey, I watched the busy traffic outside and intermittently glanced down at my newspaper, which seemed to be changing every time I looked at it, even though I wasn't turning the pages. Then it occurred to me. I had been there before, on that bus, on this bus.

It was a very long time ago, when I was just a kid, but the theatre poster stuck on top panel over the stairs, slightly torn in one corner, was identical to the one I saw back then. I'm sure I was only young at the time, out on a day trip with my parents to the London Museums.

I remember the old man getting off the bus a stop before us. He peered at me as he went by, and my dad nearly leapt out of the stall behind me, but the old boy just smiled at me and pointed at the empty pop bottle that I had been sitting squeezing the air out of.

I think I remembered him so clearly because of his distinctive appearance. He was scruffy beyond scruffy, with half of his clothes in tatters, rips and holes dotted all about him. I'm pretty sure his boots were held together with masking tape or something similar. His beard was long and plaited, almost like thin dreadlocks, with multi-coloured string or

threads or some sort woven into the plaits. How he managed it I 'm not sure, but he must have been wearing at least six or seven layers of coats and jumpers of varying stages of disrepair. Finally there was the hat, a baseball cap that had faded over the years that he must have been wearing it, until it was just a light shade of muddy brown. That hadn't stopped him from attaching about half a million tiny pin badges to it. It must have weighted a pound.

He had the strangest face I think I've ever seen. His nose was huge and bulbous, his eyes deeply inset and smaller than I though was humanly possible. To me, he looked exactly like I imagined a goblin would appear, except grimier.

"You finished with that son?" He said with a wink. I just stared at him and held the bottle out. I imagine that my mouth was wide open, my jaw ready to bounce off of my lap. He to the bottle, winked at me a second time, said "You'll be fine," offered me one more toothy grin, and then shuffled off down the stairwell.

I woke soon afterwards, startled by a noise outside. But the dream was still fresh in my mind and the images overlaid reality for a few seconds. From where I was laying, huddled in the blanket (which is friggin warm by the way, if not a bit smelly) I could see amongst all the other posters on the walls, and there sat just where it had been back then, though partially covered by a few other posters, was the very same one, ripped corner and all. "Evita", starring Marti Webb. There it was, right

in front of me.

I sat there for a while, going over it in my head, and though I'm not totally sure, I'm nearly convinced that that was how I remembered it happening. I don't think that it's all in my imagination.

The noise outside repeated once more, the shuffling, scratching. It brought me round in a second. I lit up the torch, being as quiet as I could, and peered out of the window.

Dogthing was shuffling around the front of the bus, and even though he only stayed for a few minutes before heading back out into the darkness, I've never been so relieved to see a mutt from hell.

An hour later I was out the back of the bus, cooking mushroom on a small fire, I was tempted to cook inside the bus, but if the thing went up in flames I would be homeless. I figured I would hear a zombie coming in plenty of time.

I was wrong.

It was already past me and moving off into the darkness when I became aware of it, just visible on the edge of the light cast by the fire. This one was only small, and missing an arm from what I could see. It just carried on lumbering on its way into the darkness, in the direction of the old camp and the wall.

I hadn't been totally stupid, the mace was

leaning against the side of the bus just a foot away from me and I leapt around the fire to grab it. I was still standing there, shaking, nervous as hell that the thing would come back, when two more sidled into the light. This pair was leaning on each other, or maybe one was dragging the other along. The shorter of the two had a leg dragging behind it, barely attached.

They completely ignored me and followed the same path.

You know what's worse than having to fight zombies? Being ignored by the damn things. It makes you wonder if you are even there. I suspect that if I wander near them they would attack me, which I'm not going to test, but by the way they just carried on, ignorant of my existence, I'm beginning to think that they don't sense a lot, maybe they can't even see you unless you are right on them.

It's starting to really grate at me, wanting to know where the hell they are all going, and I just know that I'm going to be daft enough at some point to follow them and find out, but right now I'm down to two cans of drink.

I want to go back to the old camp, disregard the need to head off somewhere I don't know to find more supplies. Food isn't a problem, there are about a million mushrooms growing in the dark all over the place. Water is a problem though.

Ok I'm heading out now, got my satchel and a few bits and pieces, the tools for one, the mace,

lighter, a couple of empty bottles (one which looks remarkably like that bottle I gave the old man on the bus) a few torches.

I decided to go for the bike and pram pile to see if I can put together some form of trolley to move stuff in, it's right on the edge of an area I haven't been into with plenty of mushrooms, so I can explore a little and grab some food at the same time.

Oh, and it's not near the zombie route.

Day 14

Yesterday I spent the majority of the day rummaging through the pile of prams and bicycles, trying to find enough good bits to put something together. I did it in the end, after a lot of messing around. I found an old pram that only had three wheels and a single wheel the same size, well nearly the same.

Thinking of other possibilities, I also picked up a few of the bikes and various other parts that looked usable, and pushed them along in the pram, back to the bus.

After a couple of trips there I had enough bits to rig something up and spent the rest of the day inside the bus fixing up the pram with it's new wheel.

There are only two cans of drink left. I'm trying to ration them, but they don't exactly quench any thirst. If anything, they make it worse.

Today I decided to go and have a poke around back near the old camp. There was an area where all the cardboard was damp, so I figured there had to be water around there somewhere. I took a pile of empty bottles and one of the hanging lanterns, tucked into my new wobbly pram trolley in the hope of filling them up.

On the way to the wreck I spotted the hose pipe that I thought I had seen before. It had a few holes in it and was rapped around a massive stone block which looked like a collapsed part of an old building.

It took a bit of cutting with the new knife to free a section of it, about four metres long, it's a better tool than the glass knives, but it's still pretty blunt.

I cut it into two pieces, so it should be good enough for siphoning off petrol, I think. I've seen how it's done – my dad was always tinkering around with his car – but I've never tried to empty a petrol tank myself before.

The zombies had gone, and there wasn't even much left of the gargantuan one with the swinging head for a weapon, the one that I torched. There were small bits here and there, but the majority had vanished. I'm sure some of the bits were broken bone. Maybe Dogthing had dinner here.

After clearing out what remained of my camp; the pillow, sofa foam, curtains and odd bits that I had collected, including a pile of chair legs, I

wandered back over to the car wreck.

It was still there, with that musty smell of petrol lingering in the air. Where I had managed to prize open the side of the vehicle the petrol tank was in clear view, I admit that I was a little nervous holding a lighted torch over it.

After cutting the pipe into shorter lengths and propping the torch up a few feet away took off the petrol cap and forced both lengths down the hole. It took a lot of blowing to get the petrol flowing out, but soon I had a few bottles full.

The lantern, once filled, lit up an area much bigger than the torches did. At last, a source of light that shouldn't run out every half an hour. I hope.

It was strange to see the old camp area, and the place where I first arrived all brightly lit up. I could see about a hundred yards before light began to recede. It was my first view of the whole area.

After a bit off clambering around I found a decent piece of pole and tied it to the pram, pointing upwards. A couple of whacks from my mace and there was a nice hook shape on the top to tie the lantern on. A strip of the curtain sorted that out.

The damp area where I first found the cardboard – just a few feet from the spot where I first woke up – was as dry as the rest now and I couldn't find any reason for it being wet in the first place.

Something I hadn't noticed whilst I was living out of that camp was a mountain of books and newspapers about a hundred yards along the wall, in the opposite direction from where I made my quick exit a few days ago. I pushed the cart (I'm not going to keep calling it a pram) over to it, and had a poke around.

There must have been thousands - tens of thousands even - of books and magazines in that pile. I grabbed a few of the bigger ones and stacked them on the cart before moving on, promising myself that I had to come back and have a really good look around there.

It's was so much easier to spot useful things with the area lit up almost as bright as daylight, but that also meant I kept seeing stuff that would definitely come in handy, far to much of it to carry at that moment.

One interesting things that I did spot was half a dozen sacks, filled with empty drink cans, exactly the ones that I had been living off. Unfortunately there weren't any full ones.

Dogthing hasn't shown his face again since he popped back to the bus yesterday. I wish that I knew what he knew. He's probably lying around in a huge pool of water somewhere, drinking his fill and rollicking on the shore. If only he could talk. I bet there would be an endless amount of interesting things he could tell me, having lived here all his life. You know I still wonder what exactly he is and how

he got here.

As I headed out to the mushroom field I spotted the oddest thing.

Scaffolding.

I don't mean piles of it, this stuff was already erected and sitting there in the middle of a huge clearing in the junkyard. Some of it was hanging down, ready to collapse, but most of it was standing quite sturdy, ramps, ladders and all. The only thing that was missing was the building in the midst of it all. There wasn't really time to head over to it and investigate, I needed new supplies urgently, so I set off once more, pushing my cart, back towards the mushroom field.

Sometimes it just doesn't click does it?

Then later on you have an epiphany and feel damn stupid because you didn't put two things together.

Mushrooms.

Where do they grow?

In the dark. With a little light. In the damp.

I was busy cutting up my third mushroom, standing in what looked like an endless field of the things - seriously they stretched on as far as I could see, so I wasn't going out into them, I'd have gotten

myself lost – and I felt something tap me on the shoulder. I spun around, dropping both the mushroom and my knife. My heart almost leapt out of my throat. That stunned tingling feeling you get when you jar an elbow or knee on something shot round my whole body.

There was nothing there, just more mushrooms and more endless darkness. I was alone.

The mace was in my hand in about a millisecond. It was a good job I wasn't holding the lantern, otherwise I might have dropped it and wound up standing in complete darkness. A minute went by, then I felt it again, but this time it was on top of my head.

A drip.

In the utter silence of this never-ending void, I heard a sound that nearly made me jump up and down with joy. It was only very light, barely audible, but it was there.

The pattering sound of rainfall.