

THE JOURNAL OF JAMES HALLDON

The Journal of James Halldon

Diary of the displaced

Episode 3

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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 14 continued...

Catching rainwater is not an easy thing to do.

I spent the remainder of day 14 hunting down bits of plastic and sheets of anything that I might be able to use to catch the water in. Eventually I dug some holes in the sparse layer of soil that is like a crumbly coating on the rock floor, and straightened out what little bits of plastic sheeting I could find in the nearby rubbish into small reservoirs, and waited for the water to collect.

An hour later and I managed to fill one bottle of water up, which I drank down in about three seconds.

It was fantastic, but there wasn't enough of it.

After some more hunting around and more digging I eventually managed to cover a good area with little potholes for the water to collect in. I'd have to come back when I'd slept, and hope that it had worked.

Day 15

I had another strange dream last night.

I was still on the bus, sitting watching the traffic and the throng of people on the streets of London,

but this time I was the only one on the bus. I didn't look downstairs at the driver's booth, mainly because I had an itching feeling that it would be empty.

The journey seemed to last ages, but then I guess it would if you were just sitting there with no destination. I just didn't have an idea where I was going, or where I was supposed to be getting off, so I just sat there. Then I fell asleep, within the dream, which was odd.

In the dream within the dream I was watching the old tramp again, but this time he wasn't in London, not even on the bus, he was here, walking amongst my mushroom patch, past all of the (now full!) little water pits I had built.

He didn't seem aware of them though, he appeared preoccupied with something else, something that I wasn't privy to, and wandering slowly through the mushrooms. I think, though it sounds wierd, that he was singing to them. He held his arms outwards and his palms flat, a mumbling sound a little like a hum of a bad tune coming from his throat.

He walked on, and I was trapped in my camera view of his journey through the mushroom field, which ended after about half mile, after passing some particularly huge mushrooms that must have been ten feet tall.

Along the way I noticed wooden shafts jutting out of the ground, pieces of bright cloth tied to the top, and it was these that the tramp appeared to be

using to guide himself through the mushrooms.

After the mushrooms ended, the ground was hard rock; no crumbly soil coated the flat plane of ground that he walked over.

I couldn't take my eyes off of him. My gaze was fixed on his back, as I tried to look around me my head wouldn't turn. I was only allowed to look in the direction that he was facing.

The expanse of flat rock went on for the best part of a mile before the ground once again turned to soil, I suspect it was much further, but that was the distance that my registered.

Now the land sloped downwards, and for the first time my vision was released. I realised then that I hadn't been seeing by the light of a torch, I wasn't even there to be carrying one, just floating, disembodied behind the tramp, and he wasn't carrying any form of light source. Instead the area was lit by the glow that now came from the scene in front of me.

Where the flat rock plane ended, a valley spread out below us. Wild slopes covered in strange glowing grass and plants spread across the ground.

It was hard to judge the distance to the far side, where the rocks were sharp, jutting upwards into what appeared to be a rock face, a natural wall, rising for hundreds of feet from the valley floor, and lit up by massive stalactites that were formed from a strange translucent, glowing, glass-like material, blue in colour.

There, cascading down into the valley, white

foam splashing off of the rocks as it fell from the darkness above to end in a roaring swirl in the middle of a crystal clear lake, was a waterfall.

My gaze went back to the old man, as he made his way down to the water's edge, to where I noticed for the first time that a body lay, barely five feet from the clear water's edge.

I followed him down the slope, to his side, and glanced down at the body. It was him, or what was left of him. Something terrible had happened to him here. Apart from his face, which had enough features remaining to make him recognisable, the rest of his body had been torn apart, spread out across the area in a frantic and random pattern. Something had literally ripped him apart.

I turned to the other old man, the same, but living one, to find him looking back at me, his eyes brimming with tears. Then he spoke, and it was the last part of the dream that I remember before I awoke.

“Wake up”

I had to find out. I just had to go there. It was probably quite a journey, I don't really remember the exact passage of time from the dream, but it didn't matter, I had to find the valley. I didn't remember looking at it during the dream, but when I went over it in my head I am sure I remember seeing a building, a shack of some kind, up on the rocks on the opposite side of the water, a wagon, log pile, other features. Someone lived there. I'm not

sure if it was the old man, but if the place existed I was going to find out.

But not without being prepared.

I spent the whole of the day getting my supplies together, packing whatever I thought that I would need into my cart. I hauled out the sack of bottles and made some alterations to it so that it would hang comfortably off of the front of the cart. I collected more wood, made more torches until I ran out of the curtain material. By the time I was finished there was a pile of torches enough to last me a few days if the lanterns ran out.

A trip out to the mushroom patch later in the day rewarded me with a dozen full bottles of water. I drank two of them down straight away, relishing the feel of real water running down my throat. No more cheap cola for me.

After chopping up another mushroom to take back with me I turned to head back, but couldn't help but stop and look out over the expanse. Somewhere through those mushrooms I would hopefully find some that were ten feet tall, and if I did, I would know that there was a chance that everything else I had seen in the dream was true.

As I go to sleep tonight, I am full of the first hope that I have had. There is place out there, I'm sure of it, that has light, and water, and grass, there was grass!

Of course in the back of my mind I remember

the body on the shore, torn to pieces, but it somehow didn't worry me. I was under constant threat wherever I was in this place.

Day 16

Didn't sleep as well as I would have liked to, but then I wasn't expecting too. I lay awake for a long time last night, wondering whether I should just set off right then. But eventually tiredness took me into slumber, and yet another dream.

This time I was sitting on the bank of the lake, and the old tramp was sitting next to me.

"I told you that you would be fine here, didn't I?" he said, his voice harsh and cracked. His gaze cast out over the lake, to something that I couldn't see. "You will be fine here."

"Where is here?" I asked. It was all that I could think of amongst the multitude of questions that I really wanted to ask.

"I wish I knew, exactly. I have been here a long time, as long as I can remember; my life back in the old world seems to be a vague memory that fades a little more each day. Home, is all I can say. This place is my home, was my home."

"What happened to you? Was that you on the lakeside?"

"Yes, and again, I wish I knew."

"But you are still here?"

"Yes, so it would seem that even in death I am

still trapped here. Though that is a comforting thing, really. After so long here, I would not choose to leave. It is a dangerous place, but if you can adapt, as you have done, it is also a wonderful place.”

“Dangerous? Like the Zombies and the dogs”

“Yes, and far worse, the Zombies, as you call them, are only dangerous if you approach them, they are tormented enough with their own inner pains that they do not wish to be reminded of how whole you still are. The dogs, as you call them, the Maw, are no danger to you, indeed they are a gift. Do not fear them.”

I felt myself drifting away from the scene, my body no longer a barrier to hold me, my mind racing back to the bus, where I lay sleeping, a million questions still unanswered.

Before I awoke I heard his voice one more time.

“You must find your way here, James. Find your path to the lake, and you must leave soon, for after the rain will come the storm. Leave as soon as you can, and I will be waiting for you.”

The first on my list of things to do was head back to the old camp, to the wreck, to siphon off as much of the petrol as I could in the couple of hours that I had spared myself. I figured that I might not have the opportunity to come back here, at least not without a long trip, and the petrol was something that I didn’t want to run out of soon. Torches were all very good, but there was nothing like the light of

the lanterns.

The trip was surprisingly quick, with not a single sign of a Zombie anywhere. It was disconcerting to be wandering the place, on edge, to find nothing, no movement, not even Dogthing, whom I am starting to miss.

Ten bottles of petrol filled later, and the tank now empty, I had made such good time that I wandered back via the book pile, had a bit of a rummage through it. Most of it was damp from the rain and mouldy from sitting outside. But I found a few readable books and magazines, nothing that I had ever seen before, a lot of it very old.

Then back to the bus, to empty as much as I could carry on the cart. Tools, the lanterns, my stock of mushrooms, the hose, everything that I thought would be useful that would fit on it. By the time I had stacked everything up the cart was quite heavy. I only hoped the wheels would hold out for the journey.

With some reluctance I finally set off, saying goodbye to the bus as it disappeared from view. With my temporary home left behind me, I turned the cart toward the mushroom patch, and towards the journey that awaited me, only to push it barely fifty yards when I saw movement in the gloom ahead.

I prepared myself, mace in one hand, and a knife in the other, watched and waited. The shape moved slowly out into the light, becoming

Dogthing. He padded towards me slowly, and then sat down about twenty feet in front, glancing backwards every few moments in the direction that my journey would lead me.

“So you are called a Maw then,” I stated. I don’t know what I expected back from him, but he replied in his own manner. He shuffled, stood up, and gave me what was almost a nod, and then made a quiet, whining noise, before sitting back on his haunches.

I hauled the cart into movement again, it was heavy to get started, but once you had momentum it moved quite easily over the dirt ground.

As I got closer to Dogthing, he stood up, skirted round, keeping his distance, and then began to trot alongside.

“You coming with me then?” I asked.

A snort was my answer.

It seemed he was.

He was still a very odd thing to have around you, but remembering the old tramp’s words, and the times that he had helped me - saved my life even - gave me a boost of confidence that I had been missing since he disappeared a few days ago. Any companion was good in this place, especially one with the killing ability of a demon mutt.

We set off around the junkyard, heading slowly past the massive piles of refuse that I wished I had had time to sort through a bit more, I was sure there was endless useful stuff in there.

Eventually the mushroom patch was in sight, and it felt a little strange to be pushing the cart

through them, towards my water reservoirs, with the thought that I might not be coming back this way again.

The first sign that the dream was living up to it's promises was the pools of water that had gathered in my pothole reservoirs, all of them full, and it took me a while to fill all the bottles that I had stored in the sack, making the cart even heavier to push. By the time I had filled them up and begun my journey again, I was starting to feel the tiredness come over me. The later part of the day had gone by much quicker, and although I had no way to judge the time, it certainly felt like I had been awake for a full day.

I pushed on, into the mushrooms, struggling with the extra weight of water that I was now carrying, and hadn't travelled more than fifty yards when I spotted the first marker, the same wooden poles that I remembered the tramp following, bright cloth tied neatly at the top.

As I sit here writing this journal, shaded from the rain by a massive mushroom, one that is ten feet tall, just as I had seen in the dream, an hour later from finding the first marker, and maybe ten markers passed, eating some of what I had already cooked yesterday. I am hopeful for the future.

Dogthing is sitting barely ten feet away from me, also eating, though his is raw, and bitten straight from the mushroom. His presence is a constant reminder of how strange this place really is,

but also how not everything is against me.

I think of the lake, and the shack up on the rocks, and I know there is somewhere to go at last, a place where, although it is no longer inhabited by the living, it is a place that could be lived in, for now. A place where an old tramp who I once met on a bus when I was a child once lived, one that talks to me in my dreams.