

The Journal of
James Halldon

Diary of the displaced

Episode 4

Glynn James

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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 17

"So who was he then?"

"He was a professor, taught art literature I think, but he was quite mad when I met him down here, about six months before I died. He was a nice fellow, harmless enough, but he used to gibber on in some strange language, and talked to himself a lot."

"And he just disappeared?"

"Yes, well, no, not literally, one day he was talking about needing to go and get food, I said that we had enough mushrooms and pods to last us for months, but he didn't want pods or mushrooms."

"Pods?"

"They grow by the lake, you will see when you get here, they taste like potatoes, but with a sharper taste maybe, and are much bigger. They are very slow growing though."

"I see. Anyway, about Professor Adler?"

"Yes...oh, yes, well he packed up some provisions, got on his bicycle and headed out across the swamps, I begged him not to go, but he didn't listen. He never came back."

"Swamp?"

"It's a few miles past the valley, in towards the ruins. There are some ruins by the way, a city, once, I think, and a very dangerous place. I'll tell you all about it when you get here."

"What's your name anyway?"

"Rudy."

It was strange waking up outside again. The rain hasn't stopped; it still floats down in a barely perceptible sheet, the kind of rain that soaks everything completely whilst giving you the impression that it's just a light shower. I'm glad of this huge mushroom that I'm sitting under, the ground around the base is almost dry. A few feet away, it's just sludge.

Dogthing has found himself a similar nook to hide away in, tucking himself under a smaller mushroom about twenty feet away. He is so well camouflaged in this strange field that I almost didn't spot him.

It's pointless waiting until the rain eases, it hasn't done since it first started drizzling. I spent a few minutes gathering my things and pushed off out into the wet, trying to spot the next marker.

It was a slow trek through the rest of the mushrooms and up onto the rock plateau. I didn't remember the slope out of the field being quite so steep in the dream, and it took me about two hours to haul my cart up the few hundred feet of rock.

When I finally got up there, it was the weirdest sight. Talk about flat. The plateau could have been carved by a machine from the bare rock. There was almost a polished sheen glimmering in the lantern light, stretching out for the few hundred yards of visibility.

Dogthing seemed reluctant to follow me out onto the flat for the start. He perched on a small

outcropping of rock just at the top of the slope and watched me, eventually leaving the safety of his camouflage to catch me up. I'm glad he did. Seeing him sitting there, watching me go gave me an eerie lack of confidence in my choice. If he wasn't willing to walk there, what was I doing?

The markers were less frequent across the rock, and each time they were sticking out of a plastic bag filled with small stones and bits of junk. The hard surface of the ground looked like marble, but less smooth. Of course I only ever saw marble on the floor of banks and museums, where it was highly polished, this must have been marble in its raw state. I could have been walking over a natural resource worth a fortune. One thing I did notice was the long streaks of reddish-gold, I thought that they look like metal of some kind, but I could have been wrong, what the hell did I know about rocks?

Dogthing stayed a lot closer to me than usual, snuffling along the ground a few feet behind me, and hugging the shadows that the lantern cast, he seemed ok, maybe just a little uncomfortable.

I would estimate that it took eight hours to reach the crevasse, and I was about four hours into the journey when the rain just stopped. No warning, no light rain or gradually lapse, it just switched off like someone had turned the tap off. Twenty minutes later and I was walking on dry ground.

The crevasse appeared in the gloom, stretching across the path that the markers had led me on. I

had a terrible feeling as I approached that it was going to be impassable, it appeared to be about thirty feet wide, and dark, but when I finally had the chance to look down into it I sighed with relief, it was only deep as a man's height. Of course there was no easy way to cross it, and no gradual slope, just a drop.

Well it's another hour or so later now, as I sit writing this. I've got a nice little campfire going down in the crevasse, just a small one to cook up some mushrooms. It took me most of that time hauling my stuff out of the cart and down into the bottom.

I did leave the cart and walk a little way along the edge, hoping that it would end soon, that I might be able to navigate around it, but it there wasn't any sign of an easier crossing, so I gave up, I could have spent hours walking along it.

My stomach is still feeling crap after two weeks or so of drinking just cheap fizzy pop, I'm hoping that drinking water will make a difference, you know, clean my system out a bit. Having solid food seems to be helping a lot.

Day 18

"How far is it?"

"Just a couple of days from the crack in the plateau. You're making good time."

"Okay."

"The rains have stopped haven't they?"

"Yes,"

"The Maw is still with you?"

"Dogthing?"

"You named him?" (Laughter) "Yes, him."

"Yes he is still with me."

"Good, pay attention to his senses, the Gargants don't usually walk up on the plateau, so you should be ok."

"Gargants? What the hell are they?"

"Big things, vicious, they come from the swamps after the rain. If the ground starts shaking, you run in the opposite direction and hide, fast. But don't worry; you'll be ok on the plateau."

"No Zombies?"

"No, no Zombies, they seem to frequent the junkyards, and the ruins, cutting a path straight through the swamp to make their way to the great wall that you found up there. Though they take the long way round the plateau for some reason. I've never seen one up near waterfall."

"Are they Zombies, those things?"

"No."

Dogthing was even more on edge for most of the day. I'm pressing on for as many hours as I can, leaving little time to write this. Honestly, it's all just flat rock, so not much to report anyway.

Endless, flat rock.

Day 19

"It was nervous?"

"Yes, he stuck close to me, by the cart for a few hours, and he kept watching the darkness, stooping low, he wasn't a happy dog."

"No ground tremors?"

"No."

"Good. Keep going, you'll reach the valley soon."

"I'll be glad to get there."

(laughter)

"I bet. Be careful when you get here though. On very rare occasions a Gargant wanders up from the lakes and drinks from the waterfall pool."

"Lakes?"

(Laughter again)

"Yes, lakes."

He was right about arriving soon. Later that day, after about four hours of pushing the cart, the edge of the plateau just dropped off out of sight. Dogthing reacted before I even saw the terrain change, he bolted towards the darkness, and almost disappeared before the flat rock gave way to a grass slope.

I had seen the points of blue light for a while in the distance, but until we got closer I couldn't make out what they were. I suspected correctly, it was the crystal stalactites from my dreams, and as I

approached the edge of the valley my eyes adjusted to the distant light.

The sound of the waterfall cascading down the rocks was quiet and muffled, sound doesn't seem to travel so well as light does in this place, though its also odd how the light seems to just deaden off at a distance. Only the blue light of the crystals travels very far. The darkness is almost like a fog.

I found Rudy's body down by the water's edge, just where it had been in the dream, but it wasn't the same.

Where before there had been skin, and bits body all over the place, and blood, now there was just dry, old bones, most of which had submerged itself into the mud.

He hadn't died recently.

The old shack was there, up on the rocks not far from the waterfall. It was quite a trek up the path, which I think must have been worn away by the water at some point. The steps didn't appear to be cut. The rock as too smooth.

He was waiting at the entrance to the building; near where the door was flung open and hanging half off of its hinges. A strange, warm wind was gusting across the rock as I hauled the cart up the slope.

After everything I had seen in this dark world, even with the zombies (apparently not zombies) and Dogthing, and the mushrooms. Seeing a floating, glowing ghost of a dead man was still quite

disturbing. I was wary as I approached, but he was smiling and beckoning me forward.

“You made it then, good, come on, get inside, before the Gargant smells you.” He was pointing behind me, beyond the waterfall.

I span round, looking down the valley, and saw the creature he spoke of. The Gargant - and the name was quite apt - was close by. I'm not sure what it was I was expecting to see, but I know that a giant slug-thing wasn't it. From my best judgement, given the distance, it was easily as big as the bus, maybe bigger. It shuffled around on a multitude of tiny legs that lined the bottom of its body, and hundreds of tentacles writhing across the ground in front of it, as it scoured the river bed and the grass around the lake's edge for, well, whatever it was looking for.

“Fuck,”

“Yes, exactly, very nasty things. Fortunately they can't get up here, the rocks don't give them enough purchase to climb, but they can get part of the way up, and have wrecked the lower end of the valley before, killing all the pods that grow there. Come inside, let's not give it any reason to come any further upstream.”

As I entered the shack, following my ghostly friend and leaving the cart on the flat rocky area just in front of the building, I noticed that Dogthing had disappeared again. Rudy must have sensed my thoughts.

“Don’t worry, it will be back. The Maw seem to love Gargant spawn, and they are far to quick for the Gargants to catch.”

My stomach churned.

“Gargant spawn?”

“Eggs. They leave huge piles of them in the mud, easy for Maws to dig up. Best not to think about it.”

The shack looked long abandoned, but the rough stone fireplace, the only part of the building not made of wood, was stocked up and ready to light.

“I made the fire before I went down to the lake that last time, It’s been sitting there, ready, for years.”

It took a while to get the fire going; some of it was damp and mouldy. But after removing the worst of it the fire took well, and soon the shack was lit up and warm.

Rudy showed me around, commenting on many of the things in his house. There were only three rooms, the main living room, a small bedroom, and a storage at the back that stank of rotten food. It would take some cleaning up, but with a little work the place could be liveable again.

In the main living room there was an old sofa, a small desk pushed in one corner, and a bookshelf crammed full of old books and papers.

“The Professors diary is in there, on the top, I read it a while after he left. I felt guilty, but well, I just wanted to know what he was thinking. You may

want to read it, it's...strange...but it explains a little about why he was mad I think. The bits from when he was in London weren't very interesting, but the few entries he made when he moved to the country are interesting."

I nodded, moving on to look at the large grandfather clock stood in one corner, motionless, the time stuck a half past four. Dust caked the top and the glass, and the wood was dry and cracked, but even so, it was still a beautiful thing.

"It stopped working a while after I died," said Rudy, "Needs winding up every week or so. The chimes don't work, but the tick of the clock is nice."

"It is nice." I agreed.

"Yes, could do with cleaning up a little, I never got round to restoring it properly, didn't have anything to clean it with. Would you mind winding it up? It's the turnkey at the back."

I did as he asked, and started the pendulum swinging. Soon the quiet tick, tick of the clock broke the silence.

"I used to sit in here a lot," continued Rudy, "reading. Adler liked to walk a lot, but I loved just staying in here. The sound of that clock was quite relaxing."

"The professor didn't stay here much?"

"Yes, he did, most evenings anyway. He spent most of the day wandering around, and he slept outside, just up the slope a little is an overhanging in the rock, he had a camp there. There's not much

there now though, I brought most of it back down here after he left."

"I see. I'll have a look up there later, after I've got my stuff in here."

Looking though the bookshelf, I could see it was mostly classic old tales, and several copies of the same thesis book by the professor, duplicates of the books I found in the bus.

"There is a huge pile mountain of books of all kinds, mostly rotten, over in the junkyard, you've probably seen it. I used to pick up some whenever I went back there hunting for stuff." He pointed at the bookshelf, "That's where most of this came from."

Later that day I did read the professors diary, at least the last few entries that he had written before he arrived in this place. I decided to put the pages inside my journal, just in case they become useful at some point.

Professor Adler's Diary

Below are the last entries in the diary of Professor John Adler of Temperance, Northamptonshire, before his arrival in this other place.

March 20th 1922

It is the first day of spring and it is a time of year I always love. The snow - which back when I was boy would still be melting even now - is long gone. I think the weather must be changing over the years.

As I walk the lanes of the country - how I love to do in the afternoons now the weather is turning finer - I see all the first signs of the year to some. Flowers are beginning to bloom, small animals are flitting about, collecting food or materials to build their little nests with, and there's that crisp, pungent smell in the air.

It is nice at least, that the weather has turned so that I may take a break from writing my memoirs. They are a joy that I would not set aside for long, but it is - as I heard some of the younger, modern thinking artists say at my last seminar - 'nice to get out'.

It occurred to me today, whilst I was passing one of the paths that jut off of the lane that I walk - that which winds around the lake - that I had never ventured aside from my regular route. There are numerous small pathways that twist and turn away from that thin road, leading to wherever they may go. I was gripped with an urge - one which I must say I resisted for the moment - to start this year's walking with something daring. I was infused with the thought of venturing somewhere new. I must consider this during my evening musings.

March 21st 1922

There are swans on the lake today, glorious and majestic creatures they are. I was gifted with the most wondrous treat when I bore witness to two of the mightier specimens furiously debating the right to the attentions of one of the females. They were indeed noisy and abrupt, it was most impressive.

During my walk I fulfilled a little of my intent to venture forth and experience a new journey, when I found a likely and interesting path. I took it upon myself to walk but three hundred full strides along it, before inhaling the view and then returning whence I came, with a promise to venture further the next morning. It

was spontaneous really, even though the intent was premeditated, I know that sounds strange. I wasn't expecting to find a good candidate. This particular lane was one that I couldn't recall seeing before.

The lane was long and winding into the distant fields, very enticing, and I was suddenly elated – joyous even - what an excellent idea this was. I'm sure it would make a nice walk if I started out early enough. I will do this tomorrow.

March 22nd 1922

I started out ten full minutes early this morning for my walk, following my usual route around the lake, and not stopping for any distraction that might place itself upon me.

When I arrived at the path, I estimated that I would have at least an hour to venture this day. My diary entry will be short to give me extra time.

March 23rd 1922

On my third visit to the path, I have found a wonderful spring running down the slope of a small hill. Because my flask in which I carry my tea was empty, I decided to sample the water from the stream, it is quite an unusual find, and the water is exceptional clear. I tried it in my tea in the evening and it has a wonderful mineral tang to it, quite unlike anything I have tasted before. I must return with another sample tomorrow.

March 24th 1922

I have made an interesting discovery along the lane this day. About a quarter of a mile along - which is indeed a good long walk – there is the most exquisite

chapel. It resides on the side of hill, a short walk along one of the paths that leads off of this new road that I am walking each day. Behind the chapel – which seemed quite deserted and unused – is a small graveyard with some very old gravestones. I only managed to investigate a few of them, and there are at least three dozen other. The dates that I saw were 1722 and 1728, so extremely old, and very intriguing.

I have decided this evening that I will, just for the day, postpone my memoirs and make a whole day of it. I have made sandwiches and selected two good apples, and found my old walking satchel to take with me. I think it will be an interesting day.

Once more this morning I filled a flask with water from the spring for my tea this evening. It adds a wonderfully sharp taste to the tea that is both subtle and lasting. I am not surprised that you can buy this stuff in bottles in the city these days.

Mineral water; to think that I had always shied away from it, thinking it a bizarre, modern, and temporary fad. Who would have thought it?

March 25th 1922

I had the most interesting experience this day, whilst sitting in on the bench in the graveyard. One moment the day was very clear, with barely a cloud in the sky, then the next moment the sky changed. It seemed like it happened in an instant. Above me were dark thunderheads, and a wind blew chill across the hills. I'm not sure if it was something that I am coming down with, but my vision felt blurred for a moment, and shadows around the chapel and the stones shifted slightly, giving me a slight dizzying feeling. I rubbed my eyes, and looked back up, and everything was as it should be once more, the sky was clear and the sun

was smiling down upon the hills again. I thought that it was strange for the weather to change so quickly.

I am unable to explain what caused this strange vision, if that is what it was, I am sure it was just a moment of sickness on my part.

I have taken to using the water from the spring in my lemon drink before I retire to my bed, as well as my lunch and evening tea. I have found that I feel much more invigorated in the morning when I awaken because of this. Mineral water surely is a wonderful discovery. I just wish I had tried it before now.

March 26th 1922

The oddest thing happened during the night. I had what I can honestly say was a lucid dream, it must be the purifying effects of the water, I am sure of it. In the dream I was up at the graveyard on the hill, and talking to a fellow that I couldn't see very clearly. I am not sure of all the conversation, my memory of it is fading even as write this diary entry.

I do remember the fellow trying to convince me that there was a better way to lead my life, a purer way; it was almost as if he was like one of those door to door peddlers I used to tire of when I lived in the city, thank heavens I moved to the country.

I remember one other thing about the man in the graveyard, he had a terrible smell about him, and I think maybe he hadn't washed for a long time.

I woke with terrible headache so am going to give my walk a miss today. It looks terribly dreary and dark outside. The weather has taken a turn for the worse I guess.

March 27th 1922

DIARY OF THE DISPLACED

Some very odd things are happening. The weather changes from a bright sunny day to a misty, stormy half light. It does this now, regularly, and far too quickly. I worry about what may be causing this terrible change. Sometimes I worry about what we may have done to our world.

Last night as I lay in my bed I swore I heard noises outside, someone in great pain, but when I shone my lantern out of the window there was no one there, not even a sign of any passage.

The blurred vision has returned once more, but this time with a vengeance. The strangest thing is that I believe that it may be weather dependant. When it is sunny outside my vision is as normal, but then when one of the sudden weather changes occurs many things seem blurred. As before this is accompanied by headaches and dizziness for a moment before it passes.

March 28th 1922

I had another dream last night. In this one the very same fellow I spoke to in the graveyard came to my home, and was sitting in the study talking to me. I remember asking him to leave and he said the strangest thing, he insisted that he lived here.

Of course I scoffed at this and I told him he was being ridiculous, but he insisted that I was the intruder. The dream took a very strange turn before I awoke, I finally got to see who I was talking to, and it was me, except this version of me was not well, not well at all. It must be a manifestation of my worries about the strange symptoms I am suffering, because this version of me was disfigured, and had what is best described as, bits missing. It was quite disgusting. I do hope that

this is not some spiritual warning of a fate that may come.

Outside, everything is gloomy and cloudy for most of the day. I did take a walk up to the spring to replenish my supply. I think if it were not for the mineral water I would feel much worse.

March 29th 1922

I am determined that I will make an appointment with the doctor. My vision is playing up terribly. This afternoon whilst the weather was furious outside, I began hearing the most terrible noises, it must be a deficiency of some kind, for the dizziness came, and my vision went blurry, then I heard the screaming. It was a terrible, terrible haunted scream, one of pure torture, and obviously it was completely in my imagination. I ate cheese this morning with my toast, so maybe that has affected me.

I wanted to write it in my diary immediately, but I couldn't for the life of me find the damn thing. And then the oddest thing happened. The sun came out once more, and there it was, my diary and pen, just where they always were. I must have missed them completely during the feverous moment that had now passed.

March 30th 1922

The storm last night was ferocious. The episode with my diary occurred yet again today, I am beginning to question my sanity. It was missing for most of the day whilst the bad weather and those terrible voices assaulted my senses.

I shall walk down to the village in the morning and see Doctor Elsdon. This can be tolerated no more.

DIARY OF THE DISPLACED

March 31st 1922

Terrible storms. Diary is only there for moments. Dizziness gone somehow. Can't sleep but very tired. Strange smell, can't rid of.

May 8th 1922

Not sure of date, is still April? Legs ache, finger has fallen off, can't understand. Must find food. Cannot leave, terrible hungry, what is date? Chanting heard Nua'lath, Nua'lath. What is this mean?

August 10th 1922

Blood Lots it Everwhere blood Carnt seep the screamun too many screamun

Mas 145 1728812

Nua'lath muo'lah vor : Blud far Nua'lath : Kiy e
Nua'lath : Blud far Nua'lath : dun dring der warta

I'm not sure if it answers any of my questions or not. Did I end up here in a similar way? I wish I could remember what happened after I went toilet in the service station.

One thing that worries me is the date. 1922. How long was Adler here?