

THE JOURNAL OF JAMES HALLDON

The Journal of
James Halldon

Diary of the displaced

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 3

I have no idea where I am and not a clue what day it is. I know roughly how much time has passed since I arrived here, but other than that I'm fumbling.

It was January, I think, the 8th sounds right to me, but I'm not sure. I've always been one of those people that are too busy with the here and now to worry about what the date was. I'll write this thing in days. It's the best I can do for now.

I'll go back and get down everything that has happened so far, otherwise this thing isn't going to make any sense to anyone but myself. Not that I'm expecting anyone else to read this, but, well, you never know.

Couldn't make my mind up whether to fill in the previous days with notes, or put it all in today's, but settled on the latter, thought it would seem disjointed if I did otherwise.

2 days pre Journal (Day 1)

I remember coming round. It was dark, very dark; I could vaguely make out some shapes on the floor around me, but not much else. I was lying on something uncomfortable, or several things, it all seemed to shift under my weight. My head hurt and I knew that I had bruises all over me. How I got them, I have no idea.

It took a while to get over the initial panic, scrambling around blindly, trying to find something solid, other than this mass of crap that I was crawling over. I cracked my knee on something hard, metal. It was large, I think about the size of a microwave, or a television, but it was difficult to tell what it was.

I couldn't find my cigarette lighter. The only damn source of light available to me and it had gone. I checked all my pockets and found that I still had the cigarettes, wallet, car keys, a packet of mints, but no lighter and no mobile phone. Tried to search the ground around me, fumbling over whatever all this stuff is, but that turned up nothing.

My hands were cold. The place didn't feel that cold, though there was air coming from somewhere, a breeze that smelt musty, mouldy, rank, something like that.

Negotiating my way through the debris was slow going, but after what I thought was about an hour I reached some kind of solid barrier. I think it's a wall but It's hard to tell in nearly complete darkness. I think I crawled about a hundred yards in that time.

My head felt heavy and I was so exhausted, but it was a relief to find something solid as a reference. After that hour of stumbling, I fell asleep leaning against the wall. How I managed I don't know; I guess my body just switched off, total shut down.

1 day pre Journal (Day 2)

On waking, I found out that what I thought were a few bruises were more extensive than I imagined. My whole body was screaming out with aches and pains and it was difficult to stand up.

There was good news, though. My eyes had adjusted to the level of light a little. Not much, but it was enough to make things out nearby, to see shapes and shadows. Details weren't clear.

It was a wall, made of solid stone blocks and it was old, very old. The blocks were a good three feet long and about a foot tall, the material like slate and the rough edges felt sharp. There wasn't any cement between them, just a very thin groove.

I looked along the wall in both directions and could see that it just went on and on. Upwards, I couldn't see the top of the wall, or a ceiling of any kind.

I called out a few times, but there wasn't much of an echo, just a dull hollow sound. I was convinced the place had to be a building of some kind.

Only a packet of mints to eat, so I was getting hungry.

Felt like crap, so slept a lot of the day again, but the tiredness still didn't go away.

Woke up and finally felt a bit more alive, managed to retrace my crawl through the rubbish, approximately, until I found what I thought was a

microwave again.

Found my lighter! It was about a foot away from the microwave, fallen underneath a pile of cardboard boxes, it took a while of searching for it and I had nearly given up, but then I put my hand straight on it.

It didn't work, must have run out of fuel, though it was wet, so that may have stopped the flint. I don't know. I never considered how they work.

Back to Day 3

So this is where I am so far, after two days of mostly sleeping in the dark and feeling ill, lethargic and hungry. I'm nearly ready to just keel over. The mints didn't last very long, and left me feeling even hungrier. I know I slept a lot, so there is a possibility that I'm actually on day four. All of this doesn't seem to matter, though.

Lack of food is going to become a problem very soon.

I gathered up the pile of cardboard this morning. I know, I've no idea what time it really is, but I'm referring to the early part of my waking hours as morning, just to keep me sane.

With the cardboard under one arm I headed back over to the wall, taking it slowly and only using the lighter – which was working after it dried out - for occasional flicks of light to get my bearings.

Even with the light from the clipper, the top of the wall isn't visible and neither are the ends of the wall in either direction.

There was a decent-sized area cleared now, where I had slept for the last two nights, the ground in here is mud and stones, so this place hasn't been used in a while.

The cardboard on the top of the pile was reasonably dry and caught fire pretty quickly and when it did I was given a glimpse of something that I wasn't expecting. I stood there for about five minutes just trying to take it all in.

To start with, I wasn't inside a building, this place was much bigger than that, stretching out for the whole of the two hundred feet or so that my makeshift fire cast light. There was endless junk strewn across the mud floor. The wall wasn't a part of a building of any kind; it was just a free-standing thing about a hundred feet long and easily forty feet high, crumbling into ruin in different places, finally collapsing into rubble at both ends. The light from the cardboard seems to reach a lot further than I expected. This is good. It gives me space. I'm pretty sure the light travels further than it should.

I had only just begun to get a grasp of where I was when the fire started to die out. The cardboard had burned through pretty quickly and as it started to fade I scrambled around trying to find some more fuel to keep it going, but found only more cardboard. At least it gave me enough light to clamber around the junkyard whilst I searched for

better fuel.

An hour later and about ten more piles of cardboard, I found it. A pile of logs, big ones with the branches still on. Someone must have cut up and dumped the majority of an entire tree there. I cleared a bigger space around my bonfire, stacking up the logs at the edge of the clearing.

It took another hour to move the logs to my makeshift camp, between keeping the fire going and lugging the heavy bits of trunk. Some of it was far too heavy for me to drag.

I called out into the darkness again, but I still got no answer. I've tried this a few times now, but nothing comes back, not even my own cries. I'm starting to think that I am a long way from other people. Where could this place be? Underground? Surely this isn't under the city. You can't hide a place like this, can you?

Found this journal. It was stuffed in a box not far from the cardboard pile. I was so close to throwing it on the fire along with anything else I've found that is flammable, but hesitated, which I'm glad of. I decided that I would write in it instead. I used to keep a diary at home and I wrote in that every day, well, nearly every day, so it's nice to be able to record stuff again. My pen still works.

There appear to be pages torn out of the front of the diary, so it starts in February. But since I don't know the exact date for sure, that doesn't seem to matter.

Feeling very hungry. This is a big concern now.

Day 4

Woke up ravenously hungry. Fourth day without food or water. I'm losing weight rapidly now; thank God for that extra Christmas holiday weight.

The campfire had gone out, but there was still a big pile of logs.

Lit the fire again and then made a torch to carry with me. I needed to find food, so headed out into the junkyard, torch in hand.

The microwave isn't a microwave at all; it's just this strange, seemingly solid block of metal. Well, it appears to be metal.

Have spent most of the day clearing the area where I am camping and trying to find something edible, with no luck.

Day 5

Found something to drink! There was a stack of fizzy drink cans underneath the wreckage of an old wardrobe, about sixty cans of it. It's nasty, cheap cola, but at least it's wet and gives me some energy. I think the cans are very out of date. Even though the taste is a bit odd, it still feels good. Stopped myself on the third can. I need to make them last.

The wardrobe drawer proved useful to carry them back in.

There is so much junk here. It makes me wonder where the hell it all came from.

Now that I've got some energy, I have started to make a kind of temporary shelter. I need to have a base to work out of; this place is pitch black and if I end up stuck in the middle of nowhere, in the dark with no way to find my way back to my supplies, I'm dead.

Made a rough sack out of some old curtains I found.

Still haven't found my phone.

The fizzy drink is four years out of date, I just read the "consume by" date.

Day 6

Lots to write today. But where to start? The day began with a stint collecting more wood and breaking bits of furniture that I have found and carrying it back. I'm taking it slowly, well aware that cans of fizzy drink are not bad for energy but without any food I'm not running on full batteries.

I found a stack of chairs, dozens of them. Bizarre what you find in this place. I used them with the curtain material to make a load of lightweight torches that I can easily carry with me. Kept one of the chairs to sit on.

The first sounds came whilst I was hauling a broken sofa back to the camp, at task that is not easy whilst holding a torch.

It scared the shit out of me. A howl, a good

distance away, though it is hard to tell in this place where nothing echoes properly. It didn't sound like any dog I have come across and I've never heard anything else howl. The sound was too deep, throatier than a dog's. It was answered by another, much further away. I can't be sure of the direction the noise is coming from.

With the sofa back at the camp I leaned it against the wall until I could clear an area. My torch was nearly dead at this point, its last flickers nearly dying as I stuffed some cardboard onto the fire.

The howling had stopped.

Panicking, not wanting to lose the fire, I scrambled around with the torch and managed to just get the fire going again. There was a lot of smoke at first, but finally the fire took up in one big whoosh.

There it was, just five yards away, teeth bared at me, growling. I know by its reaction that I was saved only by the campfire. The minute the area was flooded with light again the creature screeched, a high, piercing sound like a siren, like it had been hurt. It belted away, yelping, through the junkyard, to disappear into the darkness. It only took a couple of seconds; the creature moved at a speed I could only imagine. It must have been going forty miles an hour through the piles of junk. I hate to think what it could move like on the flat, without any obstruction.

Okay, I'll describe it as best I can, but it's not like anything I have ever seen and I only got a brief look at it, whilst having what felt like a coronary. I

panicked and nearly fell on my arse into the fire whilst trying to back away from it.

Take a large dog, such as a rottweiler, and mix it about half and half with a tiger or a panther. Give that a mouth of teeth twice as big as it should be, cover it with grey-brown spiky hair and lots of scars and you have approximately what just bared its teeth at me. I would swear that there were bits of flesh hanging off of it, or its fur is all ripped or something.

The eyes, they were big, they didn't look natural. At least to me they didn't. Maybe the thing is accustomed to being in the dark? I presume this from the way it reacted to the light.

How something like that has developed is unfathomable; there is nothing that I am aware of that is like it. It must be indigenous to this place, wherever this is. That reinforces my belief that I'm somewhere a long way from any place I know. Shit, I don't even know if I'm even on earth anymore. You read stories about people vanishing and folk tales of travel to other places, but they are just stories, aren't they?

I'm going to keep the fire burning continuously now, if I can.

I think I'm going to need a weapon.

Day 7

A car wreck has appeared about twenty feet from my camp, smashed up against the side of the wall. It's a complete write-off and there is blood all over the torn, twisted upholstery. There are also, well, bits.

Jammed into the driver's foot well, which is completely crushed, is a leg. To make it worse, the bone sticking out of the leg is perfectly flat at the end, like saw marks, like it was cut off.

Yeah, no shit, this thing arrived without making a sound, just pop and it was there when I woke up. I can't even tell what make or model the vehicle is, it's in such a mess.

Looking at the damage at the front of the vehicle, I would say it didn't crash into the wall here. It's not the right shape. How the hell a wrecked car got here, I don't know.

I noticed a smell of petrol wafting in the air, which would be good news if I could get my hands on it somehow. That is if the tank is still intact. Petrol would be very handy right now.

Managed to force the boot of the car open; it took about four hours, but was worth it. Inside was a large suitcase, very heavy and ticketed to go to Namibia, Africa, Mr. Adam Samuels.

Hauled the suitcase back to the camp, struggled but couldn't open it.

I wonder if that is Mr Samuel's leg in the foot well.

Genius.

Went back to the car and very carefully pulled off some of the damaged metal panelling. Lots of split sharp bits that break off easily to make cutting implements. A large piece of the frame came away, twisted and jagged at one end.

It didn't take much effort to wrap more pieces of the door panelling around the thing and some of the curtain material around the handle, tied together with cloth strips cut from the sofa.

Now I've got myself a nasty weapon if Dogthing comes back.

It only occurred to me afterwards that I could have cut myself badly whilst pulling at all that sharp metal. There aren't exactly an abundance of ambulances around here.

As well as the mace – I think that's what they are called – I've managed to put together two half-decent knives with the help of one of the braces between a chair leg and a large piece of glass from the wreck.

Last thing before going to sleep, I used a big piece of furniture wood to pry open the side of the car so I can access the petrol tank. I've nothing to put it in at the moment, but maybe I can work the tank itself out. Really I just wanted to make sure it wasn't leaking out anywhere. It's not. The petrol

smell must be from the engine.

Very last thing, it occurred to me that Dogthing was probably hungry and a raw leg from the knee down sitting in this vehicle might bring it here again. I think I heard movement in the distance once or twice, but whilst I've got the torches and the campfire burning, they - I'm presuming there is more than one from the answered howls that I heard - seem to be leaving me alone.

Decided I couldn't risk it and took half an hour to pry open the foot well with the big bit of wood, wrapped another piece of curtain around my hand and pulled out the leg.

Damn thing, it squeaked as it came free. I nearly threw up and probably would have done if I had anything but fizzy drink in my belly. Chucked it over the wall, just. I was so glad I didn't need a second try at it. There's not a lot I can do about the blood, without wasting fizzy drink. Most of it seems to have dried anyway.

As a last thought before I sleep again, I must venture out, soon, but I need to make sure I can survive it first.

Day 8

The suitcase, when cut open, contained some men's clothing. It's all a bit too big for me but at least I've got some clean pants on now. The trousers don't fit too well but they are ok. There are towels. All I need

now is some water! Sun tan lotion and sunglasses, you're having a laugh. A roll-on deodorant, so now I don't smell too bad. Can Dogthing smell it though? I never thought of that before I used it. More pens, Namibia travel guide, mouthwash.

Stomach is burning with indigestion from only cola cans to live on. I need to find something solid soon, otherwise I'm going to have some really bad stomach problems. I think I must have already lost two stone. Oh well, doctor said I needed to loose weight.

Preparation for travel (Inventory).

Shoulder sack - slightly better fashioned with bits of leather now that I have something to cut with.

2 knives.

Wicked, nasty, Dogthing-killing mace.

15 torches.

Bundle of curtain material to make more torches.

10 cans of fizzy drink.

Cigarette lighter – still half full.

Journal and pens.

~~Small chunk of sofa foam for pillow.~~

~~Small towel and deodorant.~~

~~Mouthwash.~~ Too much to carry.

Okay, the torches last about half an hour,

roughly, the longer ones three-quarters if I am lucky. So I reckon I have maybe seven hours travel time, three and half hours each way. I'll have to judge it by the torches.

My stomach is giving me real problems now, so although I should probably leave after I've slept, I'm going to head out today.

Day 9

A breakthrough! I've discovered what might constitute food. I know that sounds odd, but I've never seen a three-foot tall mushroom before. I stood there, wasting torch time, for about ten minutes, wondering whether it was edible or not. Eventually I decided that the risk was worth it. It's a very pale white colour, which made me think of the mushrooms that you buy in the supermarket. I hope I'm right. I chopped it up and stashed it into the sack, it's not heavy stuff and there is quite a lot of it.

I'm getting too far ahead, so here we go.

Right, I've slept again, so it's pseudo-morning once more. I need to catch up on yesterday's excursion. Again, quite a bit to write. But first thing, is I'm back at the camp.

The Day 8 Expedition

Hour 1

For the first hour I walked about a quarter of a mile through the debris, marking my journey by re-arranging junk, mainly by pulling away a pile of wood or rubble and laying out a marker pointing back to the previous one, it was slow going but if I get lost in here I'll be in serious trouble, even with my supplies.

There's so much mashed-up stuff here it could be the rubbish dump for a whole town. A lot of it is either scrap yard junk or piles of broken furniture. That's good though; at least I'm not going to run out of firewood. There's no rotting filth that I can see, so this isn't landfill refuse.

Found what I can only believe is Dogthing's droppings dotted about all over the place, but no signs of Dogthing, yet.

As I travelled further away from the wall the rubbish started to thin out a bit. But there were still quite big piles of it all over the place. I spotted a damaged shopping trolley that I noted to take back with me; the wheels didn't quite work but I thought they could be fixed with a bit of force.

Hour 2

At about half a mile out, I was on the edge of the rubbish. It thinned out into only infrequent larger piles and odd scattered bits. I think I saw at least five washing machines.

It was at this point that I found the mushrooms. They were dotted around a good distance from where the ground was covered by scrap. So they seemed to favour open areas. The biggest one that I found was about three feet tall and probably the same diameter across the hat. I spent a while examining it before deciding to cook it back at the camp.

Hour 3

As I was wandering along trying to figure out what the hell all this stuff was doing here and hoping that I would see some glimmer of inhabitancy in the distance, I came across the most bizarre thing yet.

It was just sitting there, in a clearing, rubbish and junk of all kinds stacked up around it.

The first glimmer I got of it was the shape and the eyes. Or what I thought were eyes. They reflected off of the torchlight and I nearly turned to run, but it didn't move.

It was about six yards high, four wide and as long as a truck. After meeting Dogthing I was sure

that this was some gargantuan mutant rhino, or something similar. I thought that I was about to die. But then I noticed something up on top of its head and it looked like writing. I took one step closer. Stupid, I know, but I nearly fell over laughing at myself in amazement at what was sat there.

Number 12, "Not in service."

A London bus.

I was about to walk over to it and investigate when I heard the scream. Crazy. I have been on edge ever since I arrived in this place and the one moment I relaxed, something caught me ill-prepared.

I've never heard anything that made my spine tingle as much as that scream. It was stomach wrenching, long, and turned into a gargling wail seconds later. For the second time in as many minutes I nearly fled the area. But my instinct something –call it instinct if you will- compelled me to try and help. That scream was coming from something or someone in extreme distress and I knew what I was going to do, even though every part of me said it was stupid.

I ran. Not quite blindly, but barely able to see ten yards in the darkness. My torch - newly lit only a few minutes before - in one hand and my mace in the other.

The scene unfolded far too quickly for me - the fight was going on much closer than I thought. I had

barely run twenty yards and they were there. Dogthing was cowering backwards, blood streaming from a wound in its side. Looming over it - clubs in their hands - were two people.

I had hoped it would be possible and for a few brief seconds I felt relief. There were other people here. I wasn't completely alone. But that relief was short-lived as I ran towards the scene to help them.

The stench hit my senses as I got within about ten feet and then one of them span round at me. What I saw looking out of that hooded cloak was disgusting.

It may have once been human, but what was left was unrecognisable enough to not know whether it was male or female. Most of what was visible of the creature was either rotting or falling off. It began lumbering forward. Its face was half-missing and I could see its jawbone shining in the torchlight, hanging on by one or two putrid strips of muscle. The cloak opened a little as it reached back with its club and underneath I could see maggots falling out of holes in its flesh and scattering on the ground.

I've seen a lot of living dead films and I know a zombie when I see one, or at least what a zombie really looks like. Lets face it, you watch the films, but it never occurs to you that you might meet one, let alone two.

I was surprised enough that the slow, shuffling thing nearly got to me before I reacted. It tried to hit me with the broken stick that it was carrying, an improvised club, but I took a couple of steps back,

waited for it to get in range, bit back the fear and tried my new mace, ironically made to defend against the creature I now fought a common enemy with.

I lunged at it, missed and stumbled forward, nearly dropping the torch and the mace. This stuff always looks easier in the films.

Fortunately I wasn't the only one with little control over my faculties. The zombie was having a hard job turning around, so I had time to wind up and aim the second attempt.

Impact. Its head erupted into pieces, splattering the ground behind it. My arm jarred and pain shot up to my shoulder. I stumbled backwards. The creature still staggered in my direction for a moment, but then collapsed sideways, tumbling to the ground with a wet thud.

Behind me the, furious growling from Dogthing had stopped and silence came once more. I span round to look, swinging my torch in front of me, realising that I still had Dogthing and another zombie to deal with, but Dogthing was just watching me warily and nudging the remains of the other cadaver that it had torn to pieces. That was both zombies down and just a demon dog to deal with. We both stood there, just ten feet between us, breathing heavily and watching each other.

I backed away slowly, leaving it to poke around the bodies. I needed to be away from the scene. I staggered back to where the bus was and leaned against the side.

It took me a while to stop throwing my guts up and get my breath back. I remember nearly calling out in frustration, into the darkness, I'm a salesman for fuck sake! But only a half-dog thing and two smashed-up zombies were there to listen to me.

Realising that I was over my expedition outward time, I rushed some of the way back and decided to leave investigating the bus for another time.

Dogthing followed me back to camp.

Today (Day 9) I spent the most of the day shifting some of the junk around in an attempt to build some kind of wall defence around my camp.

It occurred to me as I sat back at the camp that I was wrong about Dogthing being hurt by the light. I suspect it just frightened him.

Yes, I decided to presume that Dogthing is a male. He sat just on the edge of the light of the campfire for most of the evening, licking his wound - which looked a bit nasty - and watching me warily.

Facts I've learned about Dogthing

1. Dogthing likes roasted mushroom. So do I.
2. Dogthing isn't a living dead thing. The bits hanging off of him are just very dirty bits of crusty fur. I am beginning to wonder if I have found an ally in him. I hope so; I certainly don't want him as an enemy and sleeping might be

easier with him around. Knowing there are zombies and things wandering around in here doesn't set you up for a good night.

3. He doesn't smell anywhere near as bad as I thought he would.
4. He doesn't like the campfire light.

Back to the mushrooms. They don't taste that much different to supermarket mushrooms and they come in bigger bits. I guess I will find out soon if they are edible or not, but for now it just feels good to have something solid in my stomach.

I can't believe I have been here over a week.

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 nights 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 thought was humanly possible. To me, he looked exactly like I imagined a goblin would appear, except grimmer.

"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 took 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 lying, 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.

Day 15

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.

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 too, 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 its 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.

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

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.

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 Everywhere 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?