



IGITUR

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- Red Hilt 2023.

BACKGROUND.

Between 17.03.2021 and 02.08.2022 contact between London and the outside world was cut. All forms of communication, both electronic and physical, were disabled, including transport via road, air and the river Thames.

Agents who attempted to enter the area were unable to do so. They walked until exhaustion without making any visible progress. Several described a feeling of being lost or "walking without reaching anywhere." Civilians who evaded the security perimeter to attempt the journey elicited similar statements upon their return.

Due to the scarcity of drone and satellite imagery on account of static interference, illustrations have been provided by Specimen #09. Specimen #09 is an individual in our custody who has provided pivotal intelligence through his drawings. He claims to depict visions of people, events and phenomena relating to the incident. So far, his intelligence has not been in doubt.



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Transcription of <Item_167>



Figure 0.1: According to Specimen #09 the Thames was severely flooded. This has been corroborated by recent expeditions into the city. When asked about the size of the moon, Specimen #09 assured us he was not exaggerating. However, he was less certain whether this was the Moon of our solar system or something other. Satellite imagery remains inconclusive.

PROLOGUE: END

This is my last hour as a human. I know it in my heart but more than that - I can see it.

I look down at my blood-soaked hands and see through the layers of tissue. The skin, the muscle, the bone, my very marrow is mutating. The nuclei of my cells are shifting, bulging and transforming. Finally, I can shed my old skin and be born anew. Something greater. There remains but one more small step...

This hellish night shall come to an end as soon as I reach the tree and the Moon. My path has been long and winding but my journey is almost over.

London is done for. Perhaps even humanity is finished. We have struggled and laboured for thousands of years in abject misery all for this night. On this night, the cycle completes.

If anyone should hear this recording and shrink in horror at what I report, know that everything I did was in the name of a higher purpose. Most of you will not understand, how could you? Your vision is narrow. Your lives are so meagre. None of you know what true rebirth feels like. Even your dreams are tiny and pathetic. If you could see but a sliver of what I have seen this night, the ecstasy would drive cattle like you mad.

Understand, this night is for me. An end to the privation which my soul was forced to endure and the dawn of a new

Prologue

life. I earned this night and Fate has pronounced this victory mine.

I recall how this night began, the Doctor and her injection, but little else before that. All the better I forget my loathsome past. Yet still, I cannot rid myself of that beguiling voice.

“There now, relax, relax. Breathe deep...close your eyes...good. Now, rest. Rest and sleep. And forget.”

I: THOSE VANISHED THINGS

You would not believe any of this unless you had seen it. At the time, even I could not believe my eyes. None of it made sense.

I remember waking on a hard bed. I gasped and let loose a scream. My mouth opened wide and I yelled on and on. My memory had shattered. My name, who I was, what I was doing, nothing would surface.

Thick straps dangled from the bedframe and a series of knotted plastic tubes draped down across my right arm from a machine above my head. A white gown covered my body. I looked around for a familiar face, for a nurse or doctor, anyone, but the room stood empty. Instruments quietly whirled and clicked. Above, the bar lighting hummed. The silence was intense, as if I had found myself in a sealed vacuum.

Unconsciously, my fingers brushed over a ridge on my belly - I suspected that something had been taken from my insides. I rose from the bed and pounded towards the door opposite. A series of confusing letters and a number were printed on the glass pane:

“8 NEMICEPS.”

On the other side, scorch marks encumbered my vision but I could make out a corridor. Similar entrances lined the way but there was no movement. Everything was still. Disturbingly,

blood and a black tar-like substance coated the walls and their chrome railings as well as what appeared to be some sort of medical equipment, which had fallen, scattering itself across the floor. The place had been the site of a desperate struggle but between what or whom I could not tell. I turned the handle and pulled.

Immediately, I was struck by the stench. The reek was unbearable, as if something had festered away for days. I pinned my nose shut and forced myself forward, there was no other choice. Dodging the mess as best I could, I made my way through the facility, swapping my gown for ill-fitting clothes and a pair of military boots which had been dumped in front of a laundry chute. In room after room, more strange machines and their tentacles lolled across empty beds.

I pushed open a set of double doors that led to a badly lit stairwell and descended until I ran out of steps. Pushing through a further set, I came into a reception area. A circular marble desk stood proudly in the centre, encircling a pair of heavy benches. They had been turned onto their sides, spilling leafy green plants and their soil onto the ground along with hundreds of envelopes, paper and stationery. Bullet holes pockmarked everything in sight. A translucent panel displaying a collection of slick corporate logos had not escaped the fray and flickered sporadically.

I took a couple steps before I froze. In a segment of the revolving door, with its back to me, a strange creature was staring out into the world outside. The thing was vaguely humanoid but wraith-like and horrifying. Tall, wiry, thin. I panicked and stepped backwards onto something which cracked beneath my feet. Blind as the thing was, it could still hear.

Stumbling and tripping over my boots, I sped from the agi-

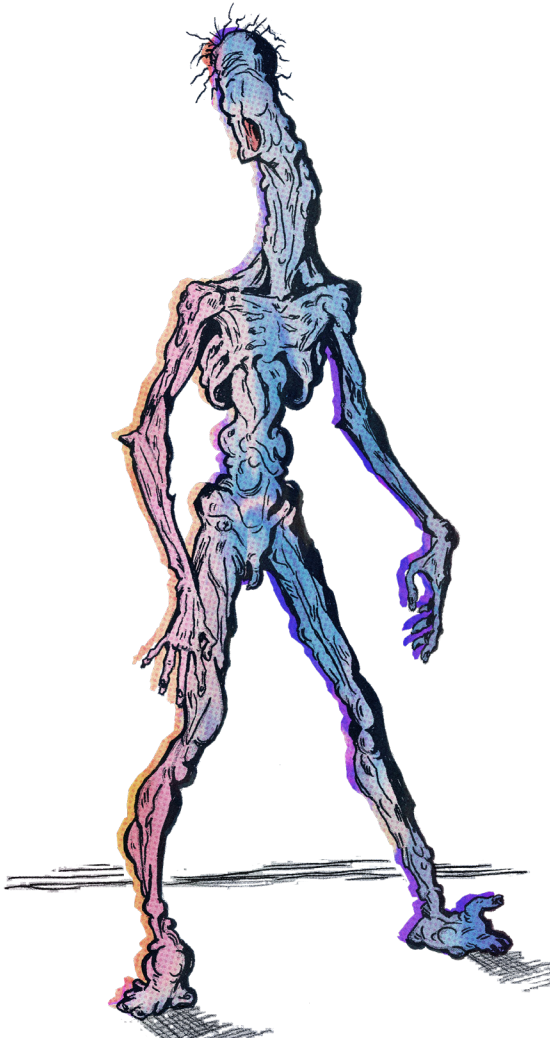


Figure 1.1: One of our squads made for the research hospital at [REDACTED] as soon as the incident concluded. Several creatures akin to this one were discovered. All were dead. Causes of death varied but each body was marked by wounds from a knife. Our forensics team have established that several creatures were in a state of panic at the time of the attack.

tated presence which wailed and shrieked as it began to chase. Back up the staircase I bolted. I sprinted and sprinted until I chanced upon a secure room. I swung the heavy metal door shut and sealed myself inside.

And there it was - encased in a square container, the part of me that had been taken.

The freak banged on the door savagely but it had lost my attention. All I cared for was the gift in the incubator. A slimy black organ, like an eel or tentacle. It trembled. I was meant to find this thing. Meant to have it. I broke open the casing with my fist, feeling no pain as I smashed through the glass and laid my hands on it.

Just touching it made my spine tingle.

I then gorged myself on the cord. How sweet and satisfying the taste! For a moment - bliss. It felt as if I had tasted the cure of all my ills. I knew I wanted more. I needed more. However, my legs had begun to sway. My skin dampened and I felt as if plunged into a sweltering jungle. The room spun faster and faster before a thunderclap pierced my eardrums. Whether this was from the wraith banging on the metal door or another source altogether I was unsure. My ears continued to ring and the general stench seemed to multiply in its rancidness. I attempted to shut my eyes but images pulsed and danced before me.

I felt panic and extreme nausea. I felt so sick. Dizzily I slid down, the once solid world now a shimmering mirage.

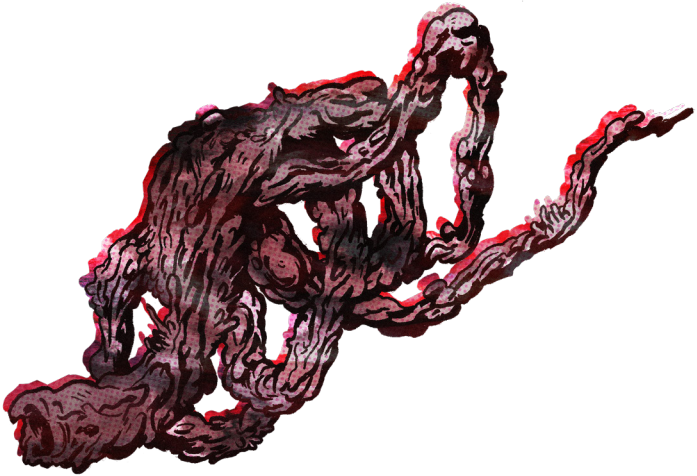


Figure 1.2: Specimen #09 was reluctant to produce this image. He seemed to believe that depicting the thing was somehow dangerous. Dr. [REDACTED] was the last member of Red Hilt who had suitable security clearance to know the nature of this organ. At present, we possess little information but have recovered the container the organ was housed in.

II: THE DAGGER OF ABRAHAM

* * *

It is as though I'm flying. Not soaring lazily like some raptor. No. This is a painful process. My body is pulled and yanked by competing forces. My limbs detach then return seconds later. I try to look at myself but the perspective is shirked and disarrayed. Angles and proportions are jumbled. I fall through a hideous vortex. Stars go bursting before my eyes. I sense entire worlds and galaxies passing me by.

My limbs return and I find myself lying in the middle of a ravine. I lift my head groggily.

In the distance, I see a temple. For I am sure this is a temple. The architecture is uniquely beautiful yet oddly familiar. Behind monolithic walls, atop a gigantic platform, a myriad of towers soars into the clouds. Around their bases, tumbling piles of bleached bones bask in the hot sun. In the centre of the complex, a great citadel, the tallest of the towers, dominates my vision.

I feel a low reverberation in the air.

“Ἐν τούτῳ νικά.”

Without thinking I begin to walk toward the citadel. I step onto a bridge. By each of my sides, richly painted statues decorate the balustrades. So lifelike are they that I reach out and

touch one. My fingers register a coarse sensation. These are not idols made from stone. No, these are bodies. Dried and mummified husks, hunched over in prayer and clutching their three pairs of hands together. One after another, they prostrate themselves towards the tower.

On and on I walk. Along the bridge, through courtyards and up innumerable stairs. The promise ringing in my ears every few steps.

“Ἐν τούτῳ νικά.”

I have been sent here for a reason. Something is waiting for me.

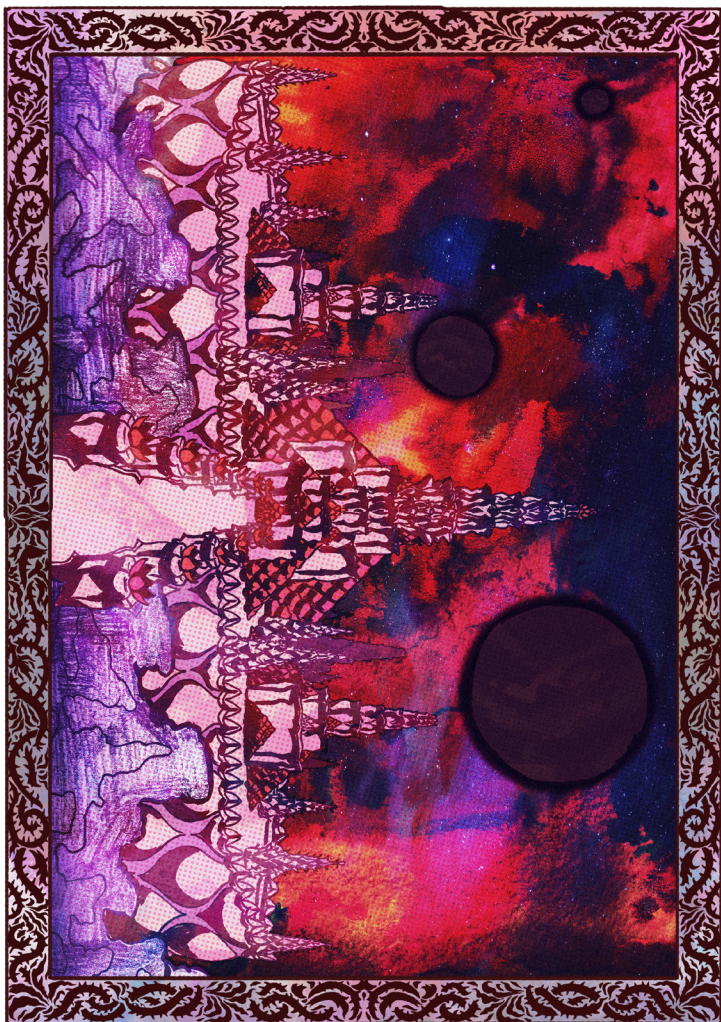
I ascend to the highest room of the citadel. A collection of stained-glass windows shower the chamber in a reddish light. Here, more mummified worshippers are bent over in deference, clad in luscious robes, crowns, bracelets, rings, collars and precious jewels.

Six pillars mount a giant tapestry in the middle of the room. I stare at its surface and reflect on the design that has been captured on its worn cloth. Perhaps it is some sort of god, a pagan idol. Despite my ignorance, I am fascinated. With a mixture of dread and desire, I marvel at the objects held in each of its many hands and arms. The vaguely human figure stands proudly atop a conquered fish-like being and I feel a distinct anguish, as though reminded of something lost and forgotten. The form and the impression are that of a malevolent passion. A cruel purity.

“Ἐν τούτῳ νικά.”

The chant breaks through my reverie and my eyes drift to one

Figure 2.1: Speaking with Specimen #09, attempts have been made to locate this site. Specimen #09 has been unable to provide satisfactory details. All he can tell us is that this location is extremely old and in a place "devoid of life; the site of mass extinction."



of the objects in the grasp of the god: a dagger. Long, twisted and cruel, of exotic design and ancient birth, like the cord, I know that this thing belongs to me. This gift has been awaiting my arrival, lying hidden in the tomb of this dead world.

“Ἐν τούτῳ νικά.”

And so, I obey and pry the dagger from the icon’s palm.

* * *



Figure 2.2: Like the cord (Figure 1.2), this illustration elicited stress from Specimen #09. He claimed it was an object of spite and hatred and identified it as the “Dagger of Abraham.” When asked if he was referring to the Biblical figure of Abraham, Specimen #09 responded in the affirmative and claimed that the dagger had been somehow modified and used in “mockery” of Isaac’s sacrifice.



Figure 2.3: Specimen #09 claimed that the temple complex was full of priests like this. They, he stated, were not alive but somehow mummified.

III: SWALLOWED BY THE NIGHT

I awoke to the sound of that freakish thing hammering its fists on the heavy doors. I lifted my cheek from the floor and in my grasp was something that did not belong to this world - the dagger.

There were no witnesses for what I did next. How I forced apart the chamber doors and how the wraith attacked but fell to my blade. I was defending myself. It had to be done. The sacrifice was just.

Wet with blood I stepped back out into the corridor. Fortunately, I was still alone. I hurried past the empty rooms, towards a small window. I lifted its squeaky latch and leaned out. A gust of cold air met my face. Night had fallen but no lights shone from below. Neither could I hear any sounds except the distant patter of gunfire.

Searching for something to latch onto in the hope of gaining my bearings, I looked up.

High in the sky, she had appeared, my Moon. How brightly She shone, the heavens all to Herself - how fair and majestic! She hovered above the face of the earth, thin silver clouds encircling Her like a halo. Apple of my eye. Light of my new life. I could smell Her soft fragrance. Like a sweet ointment, the aroma filled my lungs with heat, fire and purpose. I knew then that I had to reach Her.

I brought my head back inside and heard a small voice trickle forth.

“She is hovering above the tree and waiting for thee, adorned as thine bride and thine to take. Thou need only claim Her.”

These words came from the dagger. A voice of authority and cold charisma.

I badly wanted what was offered but I felt afraid. I felt crushed by fear, like a caged rabbit waiting for a needle, helpless and woeful. I looked at Her again through the small window. How alluring She was within the night sky. Mother of mystery and magic. Peerless Queen. She entranced me and then I heard Her speak.

“Oh, noble hero, why stand thee idle? This world withers, forfeit to death. Thou hast the dagger and my promise within thee blooms and takes root. Come, take what is thine right. Take courage and find me, for with me, thou shall dwell in prosperity. Come to me, keep me in thy heart and I will grant thee victory this dark night.”

The words rang in my ears and filled my heart with fresh strength. In spite of my mortal fear, I believed Her fully.

My pulse thrummed in anticipation.

IV: FILTH. DISORDER. INIQUITY.

As I stumbled out of the facility, I found no welcome in the city. The streets were strewn with rubbish and marked with a chaos of a place hurriedly fled. Cars, taxis and buses no longer confined themselves to the roads but had driven onto the pavements, their sides or embedded themselves in shopfronts. The drivers had disappeared and only the dead remained, either thrown through their windscreens or sprawled lifeless on the asphalt. The smell was overwhelming - putrefaction, rot and decay. If it were not for the aroma of the Moon, I would have retched.

Most noticeable of all was the silence. The hum of London traffic had vanished and an eerie quiet flooded the streets. Small dying fires crackled, their black smoke drifting up into the night sky, joining dark clouds as they rolled into one another, rumbling.

I began to navigate my way through the chaos. I must have emerged somewhere in the Portuguese district near Vauxhall, for I recognised one of the cafes. It had been badly disfigured: the front door was nowhere to be seen and the large floor-to-ceiling windows were scarred with several long cracks. Kindled by nostalgia, I walked towards the entrance, minding my way through the litter and upturned vehicles. I peered inside. The ivory light of the Moon shone over the wreckage. Broken chairs and tables had been amassed in a dishevelled heap to one side and against the right-hand wall, cakes had begun to sprout an orange mould inside a tall circular cabinet. Nothing

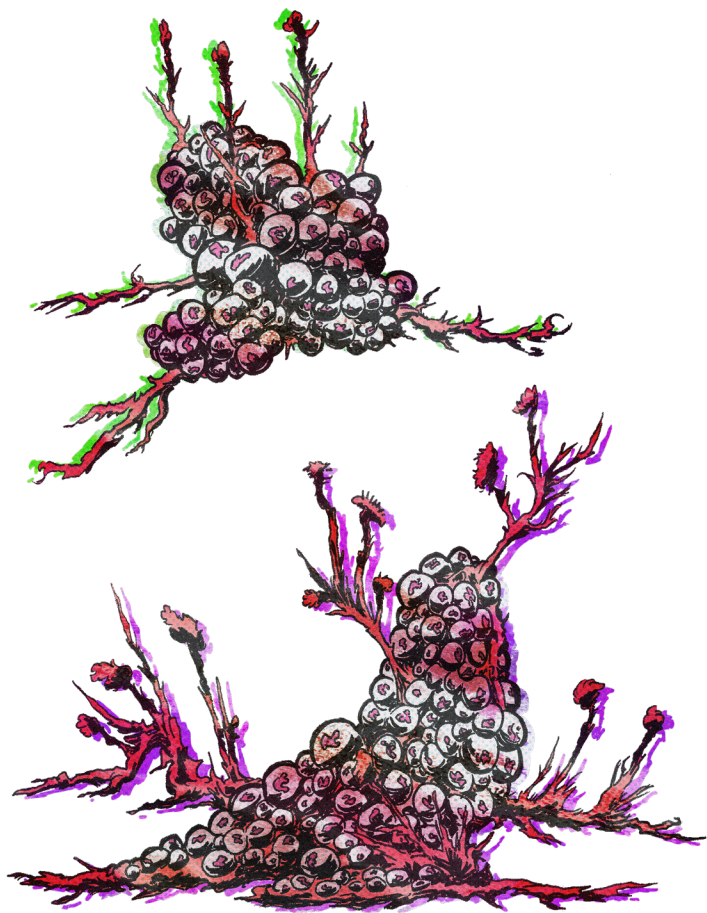


Figure 4.1: Our expeditions into the city revealed many specimens like these. The ones that we have recovered are all small, roughly the size of a football. We have concluded there is no difference in sex between these creatures and that each one has both male and female reproductive organs. This corroborates with Specimen #09's claim that some of the people of the city had been "turned into flowers."

stood in its proper place. Rocks and other debris cast angular shadows across the muddy floor tiles while on the countertop, the cash register hung open, limp and empty. A deathly stillness gripped the scene as if the air itself had contracted rigor mortis.

I needed to reach my Beloved. I calculated that she was hovering somewhere north of the river Thames. If I could reach one of the river's bridges, I knew that I would be able locate her more precisely, taking advantage of the wide, open vistas.

A steady light drizzle had begun to set in. I marched north, leaving Vauxhall in my wake. Since I had left the facility, my assumption had been that I was alone. However, as I worked my way through the maze of residential estates, I heard a pathetic moaning and a desperate sobbing. Within a concrete courtyard, I found the source of the noise – several large clusters of flying eyes with slippery tendrils were squealing as the wind picked and tossed them about. Some were large, others small. They were wet, slick and slimy, reddish pink in colour and splattering juices over anything that touched their path.

I hurried away. From then on, I stuck close to the edge of buildings in a bid to conceal myself.

I turned off from the high street and into a quiet lane where the tarmac gave way to well-worn cobbles. Victorian streetlamps formed a straight line to one side but refused to cast their light. In their shade, I spied more piles of refuse but stopped in my tracks. The mound nearest me twitched. I focused my attention on the lump and my eyes widened in horror. This was a bloated organic mass, rubbery and immense, slumbering among fetid waste. Similar creatures were scattered further behind, spilling out from pores in the ground. Like pulsating cysts threatening to burst, I swore I could see human corpses

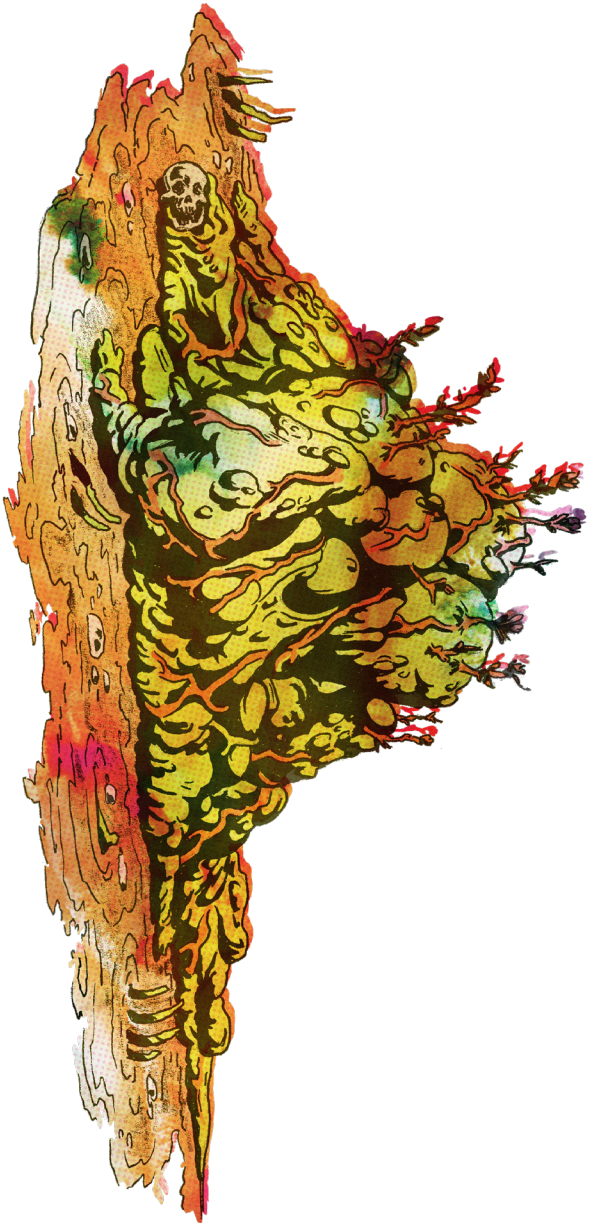


Figure 4.2: Though Specimen #09 states that many of these creatures roamed the streets during the incident, we have not discovered any complete specimens. However, we believe that their existence can be confirmed from the craters which now litter the pavements and roads. Several craters were filled with partially dissolved bones.

sinking into the centre of these beings. Fear overwhelmed my senses. I turned and ran.

For many hours, I went about the dangers of the city with as much cunning as I could. The way was hard and uncertain and my clothes became caked in dirt as I walked and walked. Always She guided me with Her scent and when running was not enough, I used the cruel dagger. Even though I was unskilled in its use, with a cut or a stab I managed to evade death. Always I did only what was necessary to defend myself, a quality few humans can boast. Thanks to that exacting blade I ventured deeper into the ruined city, towards the beckoning of the Moon.

Eventually I came across people although they were few and far between. Their faces were contorted with desperation as they ran directionless from building to building, clutching at their belongings. I also observed confirmation of my suspicions: the bloated cysts feasted on humans. They attacked their prey by dragging them into holes carved in the ground, reducing their screams to choked sobs beneath organic mires. Stranger still, I saw one woman carried aloft, as though flying, only to be crushed under the weight of an invisible monstrous force.

The rain and wind grew fiercer. It troubled me but, in the end, it did not matter. Nothing would stop me. Nothing could. While physical weakness held me back and made the journey hard, I was spurred on by my purpose. This was the promise of Fate to me. Her promise.

I finally came into the heart of London, exhausted and disorientated. I had missed Vauxhall Bridge and instead appeared further along the river, to the south of Westminster. I leant against a railing to catch my breath. Gazing at the Houses of

Parliament opposite, I reflected - what was once a bastion of wealth and authority, the seat of royalty and empire now lay in tatters, feeble and broken. In fact, a thick crimson vine had begun to work its way through the rutted architecture, clamping down on the building as if attempting to stop it from floating away. I would have considered this a sign of Mother Earth taking back her throne but this vine looked foreign to nature.

I stepped through sludge and onto Westminster Bridge. At around the halfway point, when my horizon had widened suitably, I stopped to survey the sky. There she was - my pearly queen, radiant and brighter than ever! I prepared a mental map of the heavens but vibrations in the soles of my feet interrupted my concentration. I placed my hands on the side of the bridge and bent over to study the water below. Small ripples had begun to form. Something was stirring. The bridge itself began to shake and rattle before something gigantic reared up. At first, it looked like a larger specimen of the cysts but this one was bigger. Much bigger. Overwhelming and colossal, its core was the size of a two-storey house. From its body rose three necks like veined worms, each one ending in a hideous yawning opening. Unnerving sounds came from within and the stink that gushed forth was like a festering abattoir. With these necks it reached for me. All I could do was scramble backwards. Intent on my capture, the polycephalic worm shoved buses and cars out the way as it lurched for its intended meal with a singular frenzy.

With the gaping sphincters opening to devour me, I was done for. Only a bright dart went slicing through the air. A projectile hit the beast square in the mouth of its left head. Another struck the right, then the middle. A foam began to boil and expand from within the creature, choking it, giving me the chance to flee.

A safe distance from the bridge, I turned to examine my rescuers. Clad in a black uniform and hefting assault rifles, a single panel of yellow glass hid their eyes. Defiant, they blocked my path. I was outnumbered and encircled. Frustration boiled in my veins. Did they think their guns would save them from entropy? Resistance would only delay the inevitable.

Despite my best efforts, I was taken captive and shoved into an armoured vehicle. As the doors slammed shut, a deafening hail of bullets sounded from outside. The soldiers were clearly fighting hard to stave off the entities. My eyes took several seconds to adapt to the muted blue light before I detected the presence of three others. While I did not recognise two of them, I sensed the intertwining of my fate with the Young Woman. She had a look of terror on her face but held herself with dignity. Somehow, I knew that this was not a trap I had fallen into but rather the unfolding of the promise.

Content with my Fate, I sat back against the inside of the van, grateful for a respite from the horrors outside.

A bone-rattling few hours later, including multiple long-winded stops at what must have been military checkpoints, the back doors finally swung open. I stepped out into the fresh night air and winced as the wind whipped my face. Shielding myself with tied hands, I squinted to see where we had been brought. In the distance was the City of London and its skyscrapers. Most had collapsed. Others were in the process of coming undone and bore a patchwork of strange gashes, leaving their metal innards swinging frenetically in the wind.

The armed men barked at us to walk in a line down towards the Thames. Hemmed in from either side, escape was impossible. Up ahead, a small motorboat, bobbed up and down on the river. I understood where they were planning to take us:

behind the motorboat, a great warship weighed heavily in water. Unlike the standard grey paint of military vessels, the sides of this beast had been covered in an obsidian matte black. A series of white Roman numerals had been daubed at the bow: "XII." I craned my neck back to look up at the top deck. Figures were moving purposively back and forth like foraging bees. Many were carrying mesh cages from the back of the ship into the decks below.

I glanced up to the Moon for reassurance.

Figure 4.3: Concerning the entity that rose up from the Thames, a likely candidate is the creature found beached at [REDACTED]. In size, it is similar to a fully grown Blue Whale. When shown photographs of the being, Specimen #09 concluded that it had starved to death on account of its emaciated frame. An examination of the carcass revealed that the creature was composed of multiple bodies, human and animal, which had fused together.



V: IRON DESTINED FOR RUST

As we sped through the murky waters, creatures fled underneath us, thrashing in fear like frogs trying to hide from a water snake. Tension was thick in the air. Each soldier was carrying a veritable arsenal and what they could not carry they laid against the edge of the boat - rifles, handguns, grenades and other heavier guns. These men were at war. To them, misguided as they were and stubborn, the city was a hostage that could be rescued. They hoped for this even while they sank deeper into annihilation. Pitiful.

Though I knew Her promise was unfolding before me, I remained afraid. Like the stench of the rotting city, fear clung fast to me. Dread was my crown, the belt about my waist, the shackles round my wrists.

Reassuringly, the cool speech of the dagger resounded in my mind.

“While hard to perceive, do not fear, for a path has been laid. Hold to it. Be steadfast and not afraid.”

Onto the floating fortress we embarked, where I met the author of my capture. Like the Young Woman inside the truck, I knew her as soon as I saw her. It was the Doctor.

Recognition crossed her face but her expression changed in a way I did not expect. There was a mourning in her eyes. A disappointment and a sadness. Quickly, she ordered the men

to take me below deck but stressed that I was to be kept safe.

Inside a sterile and brightly lit room, I was inspected and the dagger taken from me. A medic observed the scar on my belly before I was locked in a glass tank. I slumped against the transparent barrier holding my head in my hands. For how was I to reach my Beloved?

As if in answer to my prayers, the dagger's familiar voice floated through the air.

"Fear not. I am here with thee. A covenant has been made which shall not be broken. Look down—"

I looked and inhaled sharply. In my palm was the blade, the weapon that had been taken from me mere moments before.

"Make of thy blood an offering as thou hast done before."

I hesitated. The dagger grew warm and swelled with the promise of power.

"Listen," the knife urged. "For there is a wound in thy nature. An unfair crack making thou weak. Until this has been sealed, Her promise will remain forever out of reach."

The hairs on my neck bristled. The dagger continued.

"To become whole, thou must wound thyself a final time. For this will cement the covenant and complete the promise. Thou shalt be crowned king - a king of such eminence that thine host will be innumerable as the stars in the sky. Hurry. For She awaits, the Fairest and most Beloved. Hear my words and do not turn from this task."

In this way, the blade spoke and though my skin was covered in cold sweat and my hands shuddered, I steel myself to its words. I had come too far. I needed another taste. I would not fail. I would not falter. Slowly, I raised the point of the blade so that it angled directly in front of my left side. As I primed it for a blow, it hovered unsteadily.

I then struck.

I plunged the knife into my flank, twisting it through the gaps in my ribs. It hurt. I wheezed and choked but I refused to die. Fate had stepped in to save me. Blood splattered onto my hands and dripped onto the cell floor.

At once I felt a new energy course through my body. I looked at my side and saw that the wound had disappeared. No scar could be seen. A powerful force was at work.

Bending back the hinges of my cell door, I dispatched the men on the other side. Unimpeded no more, I dashed into the belly of the ship, sliding down narrow stairwells and slipping through the labyrinth of walkways and chambers.

Careful to attract as little attention as possible, one by one I released the prisoners of that place. As I freed the beasts, my chest swelled with pride. There were so many vicious creatures. One lumbering brute towered above me from within its prison with long, ape-like limbs. Its thick and powerful torso supported a savage face like that of a toad or shark with small beady eyes. Approaching it, I saw that the face was dominated by a massive, crooked maw which bore an expression of violent indignity. I brought the knife to the glass to slice an opening. A gurgling squeal erupted from the being's wide mouth before it charged head-long through the glass, out of the room and into the subterranean maze.

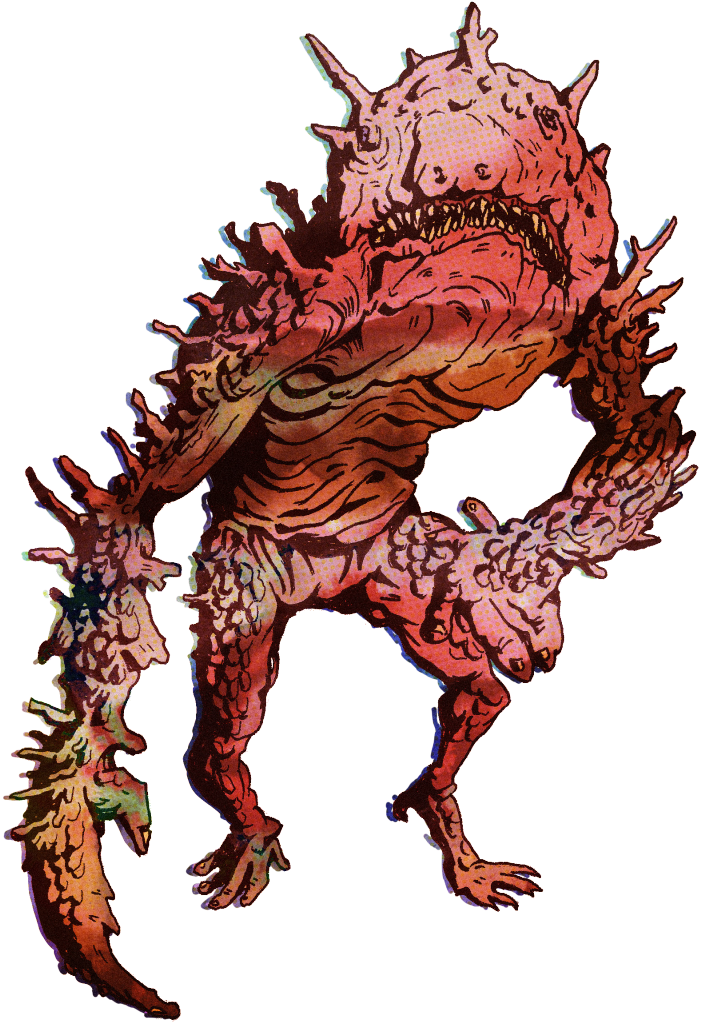


Figure 5.1: Many of these specimens had been housed on HMS [REDACTED] for study and experimentation. Due to the destruction of the ship, however, an intact specimen was not easy to find. Many had been subjected to severe burns and gunfire damage.

Carnage reigned. Try as they might with their bullets and fire-power, the sheer number of the monsters overwhelmed the crew. The hour of their defeat had arrived. But my work was not done. I skated up through the levels of the ship, up and up toward my rival.

Alarms blared and doors fell down to contain the mayhem but it was too late. The turmoil had taken its toll on the vessel and its reinforced gates slid up and down aimlessly. When I finally reached the Doctor's quarters, I paused at the threshold. Across the room, trapped under a fortified barrier, the Doctor's lower body had been crushed. She registered my appearance and laboured to rise with as much strength as she could muster. She laughed bitterly.

"You came back?" she asked. "I thought I'd done enough to make you forget your obsession."

Eyeing the blade in my right hand, she paused in thought. There were tears in her eyes, as if seeing me caused her much anguish and sorrow. She went on, telling her story as if she knew she was soon to die.

"I dreamed once. I dreamed of something more. Something better, for everyone. I dreamed, like the philosophers and alchemists, of a beautiful hope, of an end to the emptiness we all shared. Though impossible in their time, it became possible for me. You understand that I had to try given the state of our world? I needed to bring those locked secrets to the light of day."

Mindful of the roars from the decks below yet too intrigued to move, I continued to listen.

"I discovered things beyond the dreams of Einstein and Hawking. Things like the imaginations of Dante or Milton. Inaccessible things to humans. Horrible things. I dived beneath the surface and saw the truth. The truth that everything we know is drained of the real. Our reality is but a refraction. Hollow. Trite. Narrow. Please, don't make my mistake. I should have stopped a long time ago, when my dreams faded and before obsession took control. But you, you can still turn back. Forget this godforsaken dump and forget what you've seen. Leave while you can, before this place is razed to dust."

For a few moments I considered her tear-stricken plea. I understood what she meant. I knew she had seen what I had seen. I knew she was telling the truth, however misguided she had become. I knew in my heart why my journey frightened and pained her so. Yet I could not turn back. I retorted in irritation.

"Unlocking the secrets for the sake of filling humanity's emptiness is a pathetic gesture. It speaks to those who are satisfied with their position in the cosmic hierarchy. Our disgusting, miserable state. How can you think it is fair? No, I deserve more. I shall do what others won't and what you never could. I plan to see this road through to the end, to the places where you dare not tread. Think - if I had not heeded the call, someone else would have. I refuse to submit to a tedious human existence."

She stared at me, broken. Bringing her hand out from her side and steadying herself with the other, she pointed her gun and fired. She found her mark but the bullet could do little to stem my new vitality. With my right eye shot and blood pouring from my face, I stormed across her quarters, enraged.

"What good is it to struggle against fate?" I spat, clasp-

dagger tight within my palm.

I swooped down and slit her throat. It was quick and painless. Better than what she deserved. As with me, she had hidden something inside herself. I carefully pulled her body out from between the doors and made an incision in her stomach. Here, was the second cord. I proceeded to gorge myself on the black organ. Oh, how sweet it tasted!

More... more. I needed more.

VI: EMBRYON

* * *

I feel like I'm flying again. My skin tingles, electric and feverish. This time however I have better control. I have adapted to the chaos, the swirling, nausea, shaking and trembling. There is pain but, oh, how it thrills me - the mastery of my body in this vortex.

I open my eyes and hurtle through galaxies. A veil has been removed and I can see further. I am enmeshed and submerged in something vast; coiled up in the shimmering guts of a dimensionless darkness. Black holes sprout before me, tearing through the fabric of the void, shrinking and bulging throughout the limitless expanse. How sad to see them swell in size only to drift and evaporate. Nothing escapes the disease of finitude. However, my destiny lies beyond this. I know it now.

Leaning into my heightened senses, at the horizon of my vision I feel new beings enter my realm. Crawling horrors with gaping jaws, hundreds of twisted mangled limbs. A cacophony of voices wail at me bellowing and howling, millions of agonised beasts ready to engulf entire worlds in doom. Comets and asteroids speed past like arrows alight as the infinite deep fills with perverse abominations. These dens of horrors exist outside ordinary perception but I see them. I see them clearly and erupt with mad laughter.

Embryon

Vibrating in ecstasy, my senses are overwhelmed. A kaleidoscope of shapes and angles, prisms and organic chimeras glint and transmute.

* * *

VII: CLOTHED WITH THE SUN

The Young Woman from inside the armoured truck pulled me to my feet. In a flurry of words, she explained our situation, how she had found me on the banks of the river overcome with exhaustion and dragged me to safety.

Inwardly I grinned.

Leaning on her shoulder for support, I rose and submitted to her plan to flee, for I needed time to recover my strength. While she concentrated on steadying me, I found it hard to hide my elation at the changes that had taken place in the landscape. The heavens had filled with swirling spectres and behemoths sailed through the clouds. I marvelled at the pervasive growth of vines that had made a sprawling network through the guts of the city. London had been transformed from an asphalt jungle into an organic one. The very air itself and taken on a new life – hot, moist and thick with pollen.

Stepping inside an abandoned office and journeying to the top floor, the Young Woman and I rested for a while. From this vantage, we could see much of what remained of the metropolis. We studied the skyscrapers to the south of the river and discovered the cause of the deep gashes in their sides. Immense arachnids clambered between them, gibbering to one another in a tongue I could not yet understand. Beneath them, armed men were hurrying along the riverbanks. Somehow they were finding ways to attack. Enraged, the titans bellowed their response. From their singular eyes white rays sliced through the

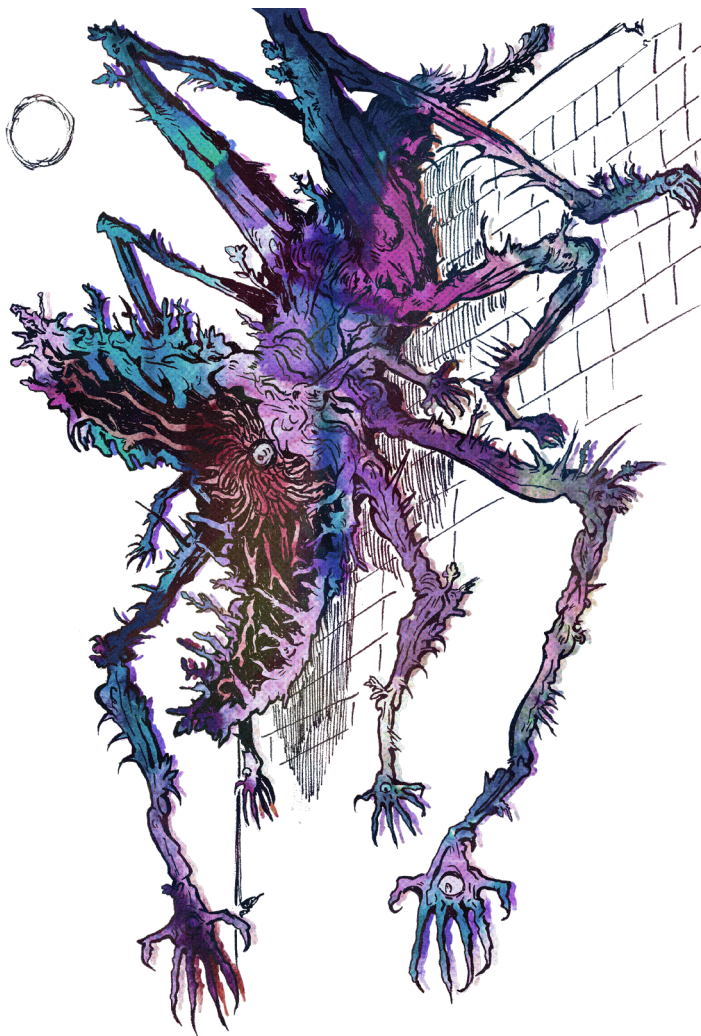


Figure 7.4: In total, eleven bodies were found that match this illustration: four in the city and seven inside of the walls of the chasm in $51^{\circ}30'45.1''\text{N}$ $0^{\circ}05'25.7''\text{W}$. It is likely that these beings are responsible for the characteristic footholds in the sides of London's skyscrapers.

air, opening molten fissures in the pavements. I saw dozens of men fall. The merciless spiders continued to swing their heads savagely, turning office blocks and roads into smoking rubble.

Shaken, the Young Woman asked that we stay hidden a while longer. I agreed and it was not long until she was fast asleep. While she dozed, I watched the glow of my Beloved bathe the world in a pleasing pearly light. Casting shadows across the matted rug of creepers, they seemed to twist and writhe as if possessed. I traced these organic lines with my eye and spied their source. A gaping pit stood under the Moon, swallowing both the tendrils and moonlight. I made a note of its location.

The Young Woman grunted and tossed in her sleep. Her dreams were troubled and I sensed a physical change. Something was growing inside her. She had conceived. A miracle of this sort was only possible thanks to the power of my Beloved. With Her by my side, I knew that all was possible.

When the Young Woman awoke, her intention to flee the city had not altered. I decided to bide my time for a suitable opportunity and so allowed her to lead us back out into the warm night. While we trekked, the Young Woman impressed upon me that the river was our last salvation. She explained how, for days, perhaps weeks, she and others had gathered what survivors they could and prepared a small boat for a final exodus. She had been a leader among them, a former nurse who knew plenty about the care of the sick and wounded. They would not leave without her she claimed and there would be space for me as well.

Masking my thoughts, I reflected that if the Young Woman found these survivors, my timeline would seal shut. Her survival would mean that the thing growing inside her would also die. The Moon too would vanish and I would likely die soon

after. I could not permit this.

Feeling my strength slowly return as we marched, I sensed fatigue begin to take hold of her as the rapid pregnancy ran its course. I seized my chance and offered her my shoulder, quietly altering our course. She was too absorbed in maintaining her footing and confused by her physical condition to notice. Moreover, the baby in her stomach had started to protest. She had to stop and sit. I helped her find a comfortable position against a withered tree. As she leant against its trunk, golden leaves floated into her lap.

Quickly and quietly, she gave birth to a boy. He was unlike any other creature I had seen that night. He did not cry nor make a sound. His eyes were bright silver and gold with pale skin like that of an albino. Staring at the contours of his body, I saw the future of this child, the beginning of a radiant species. Both a beacon of hope and tyranny. Such possibilities. Yet in all of them, my path was barred.

The Young Woman was the image of dignity and compassion as she held the celestial child. The dagger felt my hesitation and twitched inside my pocket.

“Focus the mind, my friend. Do not shrink back - spill the innocent blood of this boy and see thine voyage to its end. Thou must debase oneself, feel the peerless anguish of this murder and delve into filth before ascending.”

I had come too far. This was my night. No one could take that from me. I cut her throat and for the first and last time the boy cried. I ended him swiftly and inside his small body, I found the final piece of that black fruit. Above me, the sweet voice of my Beloved whispered encouragement.

“God humane, reach now and taste. Consume this flesh and lifeblood.”

I gluttoned myself one last time. The cost was high but I promise you, child, this was a mercy. A mercy that I refused to let you damn yourself with sin, to let you suffer a mortal life.

I felt the earth shake and for the final time, I dropped to the ground. Blissfully and with ease, like a baby falling into the arms of its mother, I slept.



Figure 7.2: When Specimen #09 presented this illustration he was in a fit of tears. He refused to elaborate when questioned. The bodies of the woman and her child were recovered under a tree at [REDACTED].

VIII: TO DREAM OF HEAVEN

* * *

I look back through time. Each second is potent and vivid. I see, hear and feel millennia of human struggle. Wars, torture, death and disease; vast multitudes in agony. Rwanda, Auschwitz, Adana, Badr Khan, Calcutta, Wounded Knee, Bengal, Persepolis, Carthage, Béziers, Bukhara, the Congo. I absorb of all of these and more.

My sight spreads further still, into a land so strange that it seems to belong to another world. In this alien landscape, vast lakes stretch from horizon to horizon. In the crystal waters, scorpion-like predators swim close to the surface while among emerald algae, small, slimy fish dart out from my shadow. Linger near the shore, I study one such creature labouring in the mud. I recognise this being. This squat thing, simple-minded and pitiful is humanity's ancestor. This is Eve, who dares venture beyond her aquatic realm. The one for whom the moon's reflections on the water are not enough.

Lowly mother and progenitor, bearer of woes and bringer of all our pain, oh Eve, would it not have been better to have stayed in the depths beneath?

If God is still watching us, then he has no pity. He mocks us with death and entropy as we hope and dream of more.

To Dream of Heaven

Oh, crawling wretched Mother, do not despair. Tonight, your dreams shall bear fruit in me and like a lily atop a mountain, I shall bloom.

* * *

IX: SON OF MAN

The Moon was as full as ever when I peeled back my eyelids. Huge and beautiful but silent. My dagger too refused to make a noise. Patting my pockets, I found that it had disappeared. I panicked. I looked up to my Darling, sole domina of the sky, but no answer came.

I was utterly alone and the silence of the night shook me as if I were a child. By my side were the pale bodies of the Young Woman and the Boy, drained of blood. I looked about in desperation. London was in its death throes. The remaining skyscrapers had sunk and been reduced to crumbling stumps. The tarmac had been torn apart and buildings teetered on the lips of wide chasms. I wavered as reticence swept through my mind.

Only a few months ago London was a bustling capital, brimming with people going about their lives. Some content, most not. Ants going here and there, fretting over minor things. And I was one of them. Was I happy then, in my ignorant and blinkered world? Perhaps.

Why was I so unsure of myself, burdened with such guilt? The Doctor was smarter than I and had already made a life of striving to help humanity. I took that brilliant mind from the world.

And then the innocent child. He was blessed and touched from birth. What if Fate could have made him a finer one

than I?

Lost in my despair, I had forgotten the glory of my visions. A part of me was evidently still human. Weak and unimaginative. I approached the pit below the Moon and it was this part of me that trembled. Slipping over the rocky edge and into the pitch black, the claws of gargantuan beasts reached out for me. Their hands passed me down from one gentle grip to another, bearing me deep into the subterranean womb. Down, down I went, swallowed further and further by the throat of the earth.

In this place was a tree. A twisted, ruddy tree. The air was still, fixed and frozen in place. I gazed at its form and was reminded of the icon in the citadel. Both had that same cruel and powerful aura. Both were beautiful and terrifying.

From a branch held towards me, hung a crimson fruit. Shaped like a dried persimmon and gleaming with an iridescent twinkle, it quivered like a beating heart. Already transformed by the three cords, I shuddered to think what this final fruit would do. Yet if I stopped now, if I let this night drift away, what then? I would be at the mercy of those soldiers. How humiliating. How shameful. She chose me. The dagger chose me.

Lycurgus, Solon, Muhammad, Napoleon. You broke laws to make empires. I shall do the same although I seek an eternal one. This is the destiny of my becoming. As in autumn, when the trees lose their shrivelled leaves, I have taken this night to shed all that is feeble in me.

I snatched the fruit into my hands, tearing it from the tree. My teeth tore into its skin and I gnashed at its flesh. I tasted the distilled power that rested within and swallowed it whole.

Above me the jaws of the pit closed tight. In the impregnable darkness, the keys to death arrived.

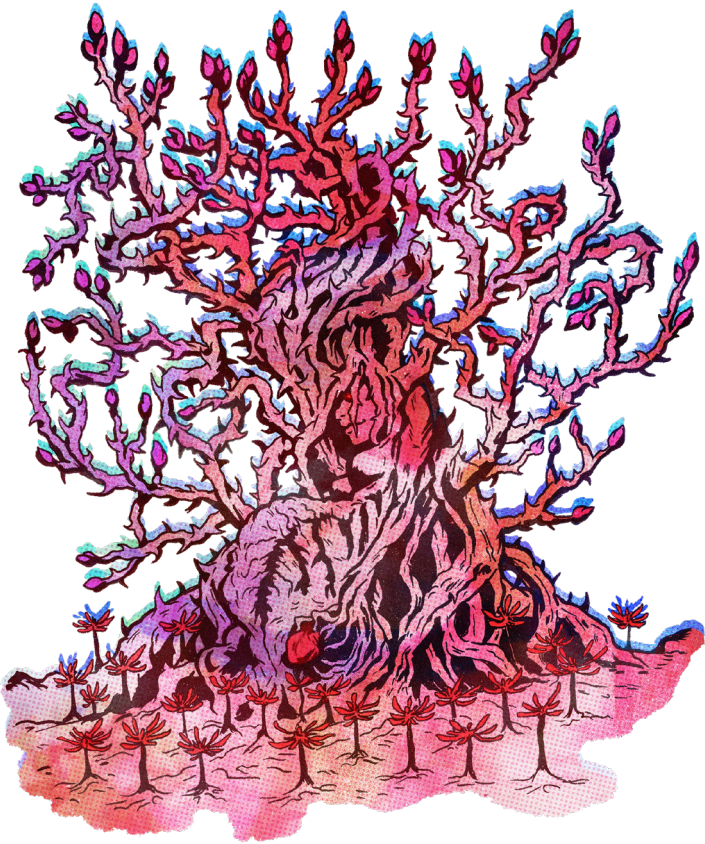


Figure 9.1: At the bottom of the chasm, a tree much like this was found. In contrast to the drawing, the red fruit was missing and the flowers had wilted. He referred to this tree as "Lilith" and claimed it was born "of the moon."

X: VEXILLA REGIS

For three days and three nights I dwell in the gullet of the earth. As the fruit dissolves inside me and the vines of the tree wrap around me, I am gestated. This is my last hour as a human. I know it in my heart but more than that - I can see it.

I look down at my blood-soaked hands through a red haze and my eyes see through the layers of tissue. The skin, the muscle, the bone, my very marrow - every single cell in my body is mutating. The nuclei are shifting and bulging, even changing colour. Finally, I can shed my old skin and be born anew. Be something greater.

I have taken the last step. This long hellish night has come to an end now that I have reached the tree and the Moon.

Humanity is done for. You have struggled and laboured for thousands of years in abject misery, all for this night. On this night, there will be an end as well as a beginning and I shall soon rise to a bloody red dawn.

I feel every mortal shell left in London quake. Every struggling human. Every freakish and pained lifeform. Every enraged freak. Every arachnid giant. All are touched by my powers within their hearts. They have not seen my image but they know I am upon them. I bring thee good tidings, oh struggling ones! The King has come, wielding the majesty of death as his arrow.

The vines open and I make my ascent. I have become triumph incarnate.

Behold, give me thine awe. I am Ozymandias, the Great Red Dragon, the Prowling Lion that tramples down over thee. In blood, I have written the legacy of my deeds, and thence, bloody, cruel and invincible, I come to view my kingdom and look out upon the stars. Power is to me a bow and death my dart.

My barb flies up into the heavens and back down to shower the earth in splinters. Each being is struck, arrows passing through metal, stone and flesh to find their target. Nothing but dried husks remain as spirits are ripped from the prison of their bodies.

The city of my birth is the first wound, the first mortal blow upon this earth. Soon, I shall make of this universe a festering corpse and thus in abject Death shall I rule.

I am the Dream of man. The Nightmare of man. The fruit of thy orchard. Extracted sparks of potential made into a glorious whole. The power to pass through the night with a yearning heart and pitiless ambition is granted to me and, thus, I have earned the bright day of My Lordship.

Like a star I fly. I am the last light of all living things.



Figure 10.1: Like the image of the cord (Figure 1.2) and dagger (Figure 2.2), Specimen #09 was reluctant to complete this piece. We believe that the drawing matches satellite imagery captured on the morning of 02.08.2022 which tracked an unidentified object rising into the atmosphere above London at approximately 03:00 GMT. Unfortunately, as per the majority of our visual recordings, static interference has rendered the material useless. By way of note, this was Specimen #09's final work before he entered into his catatonic state.

TRANSCRIPTION INFORMATION.

Author: [REDACTED].

Start date: 10:32 on 02.08.22.

End date: 11:49 on 07.08.22.

Audio source: <Item_167> retrieved from
51°30'45.1"N 0°05'25.7"W.

Detail(s): Audio analysed via multiple passes.
Narrative interpretation used where temporal sequence unclear. For unmodified transcription, please refer to "Igtr_item_167_trns_full.doc."

Visions of Specimen #09 paired with transcription where appropriate.



Property of Red Hilt.