

# Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

**PUBLISHER**  
LEE HARRIS

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
ALASDAIR STUART

**COMMISSIONING EDITOR**  
ELLEN J ALLEN

**MECHANIC**  
PHIL LUNT

**ISSUE 112 • 17<sup>TH</sup> FEB 2010**

## CONTENTS:

---

**FICTION:**     *Subterranean Man Blues* by James Targett

**FEATURE:**    *Interview: Guy Adams*



*Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Abaddon Books*

## EDITORIAL:

---

by **alasdair stuart**

### Thunderstruck

Who knew AC/DC's back catalogue would work as musical calls to adventure? Apparently the writers and producers of *Supernatural*, that continue to use tracks like *Thunderstruck*, *Back in Black* and *Highway to Hell* to spectacular effect. It's a tremendous show, mixing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead style humour with monsters, action and a pair of leads who are amongst the best leading men working in modern TV.

Thing is, looked at a different way, it's just the *Dukes of Hazzard* with demons.

I'm enjoying *Survivors* a fair bit at the moment too, especially as they seem to be building the second season into a dissection of exactly how these people cope with being some of the last humans left alive. It's an unremittingly bleak show too, so much so I'm honestly surprised that it's been commissioned.

Thing is, looked at a different way, it's a plot-hole riddled *28 Days Later* without the good bits.

I'm re-watching *Battlestar Galactica* at the moment too. What fascinates me about it is, much like *Survivors*, it's a show about normal people pushed way past the thin red line, having to conform to outdated sets of ethics or forge new ones even as the universe continues to grind them further and further down. It's a relentlessly dark show but the flashes of humanity it finds in the darkness are remarkable.

Thing is, looked at a different way it's a self-indulgent, pretentious reboot of a series that doesn't so much jump the shark as explain that the shark is actually part of an elaborate plan that directly

contravenes a lot of the previously established plot strands, and then disappears into a puff of logic.

This is the dark little secret that makes every critic wake up in a cold sweat; good is subjective, bad is subjective, your opinion is just that; an opinion. I prefer *Homicide: Life on the Street* to *The Wire*, I think *Armageddon*'s a hymn to the Apollo 13 spirit as well as being crashingly, epically stupid and I always feel sorry for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when the cycle comes around again and they die without learning anything more than the last time.

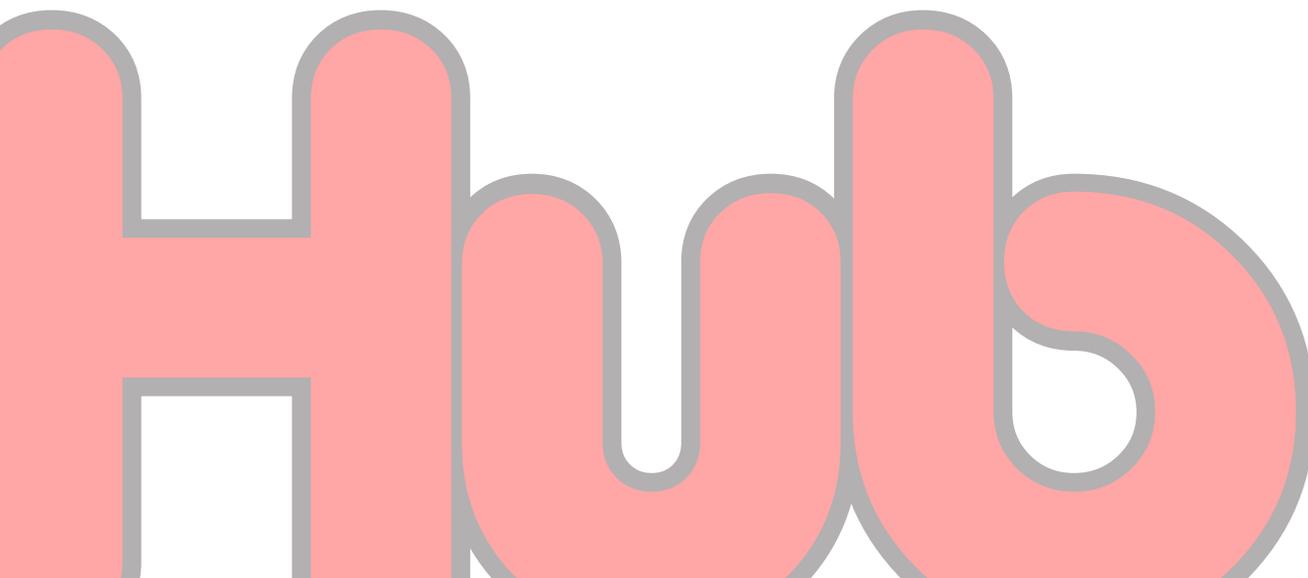
I'm right.

I'm wrong.

I'm both.

Try something new, try something you don't like or don't think you'll like. The worst thing that'll happen is you'll prove yourself right and how many of us get that luxury? Or you could find something new, could open a door into a whole new way of looking at things. Either way, give it a shot. It makes life much more interesting.

Alasdair,  
Hub Magazine





Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Abaddon Books

# FICTION

## Subterranean Man Blues

by james targett

With one hand clamped around the body's knees, its stomach sagging against his shoulder, and its head bumping against the damp folds of his coat, Cullen climbed the metal ladder that led to his home. Water dripped from the body as Cullen ascended, splashes echoing faintly below.

He was thankful that the body was surprisingly light. The man hadn't seemed either lanky or effete when he had dragged him from the water; but now, carrying him, Cullen was reminded of birds and hollow bones. A lesson half-recalled from his scattershot education. Still Cullen found himself breathing heavily as he finished the climb. Sweat seeped into the mossy fibres of his clothing.

His home was an artificial hollow near the ceiling of a derelict pumping station. High enough above the tidemark of the spring storms to be safe in all weathers. It was small, but Cullen didn't have much in the way of furniture: a dirty mattress, a wooden crate that serviced as a chair, and a small stove.

He spilled the body onto the brick floor and exhaled from the depths of his creaking lungs.

What now? he asked himself. Oh yes: this was something special. He needed to see what he had got.

Cullen's fingers found the steel lighter he kept carefully hoarded in the highest niche. He lifted down a candle and shut his eyes as he sparked a flame. There was a red glow, a feeling of warmth.

He almost dropped the lighter as the flame licked the skin of his fingers.

Cullen winced, opened one eye, and squinted as he re-ignited the flame. This time more carefully, he touched it to the wick of the candle and waited apprehensively for the candle to light. He tucked the lighter away, and brought the candle around to illuminate the face of the person he had rescued.

It wasn't much of a face. The skin was pale, studded with red welts and blotches; the nose nothing special; the lips blubbery; the eyelids squeezed shut, revealing nothing. Strands of thin black hair flopped across the man's forehead. He wore a brown jacket, a shirt that had been white before it had been soaked in underground run-off, dark trousers of an indeterminate, wet, colour.

The man moaned.

Hastily Cullen fumbled through the man's pockets. No pocketwatch or wristwatch, no rings, no wallet, no knife. Nothing in the inside pocket of the man's jacket. Cullen reached behind the man's neck, to see if he was wearing a necklace. His fingers brushed the man's skull, sensing cubes and ovoids and cables buried beneath the skin, melding with bone.

His hand jerked back, and he darted away, suddenly afraid.

Not human. One of *them*. A saint.

It would have been better to have drowned the body and let it drift down the Styx until it found the daylight waters of the Thames.

Cullen's frightened movement awakened it.

It opened its eyes: clear eyes, violet, with no signs of blood in the white parts; eyes that looked to Cullen as if they would have no trouble seeing in the night or in the day. It blinked heavily, twisted its neck from side to side.

"Fuck me," it said. "I'm blind."

Cullen belatedly stubbed out the candle, plunging them both into darkness. For a moment, he was worried he had been cursed with blindness too. Reason reasserted itself as Cullen paid attention to his other senses. He had not seen daylight for twelve years; if the saint was blind, then it was to Cullen's advantage.

"My glasses," it said. "Do you have my glasses?"

It slapped its hand against the brick floor, against the walls. It made noises like the sounds of a fish dying

out of water.

Cullen tried to breathe quietly. He would move, soon, when he knew he could be soundless. He would slip away, over the edge and back to his boat. Hopefully when he came back, the saint would be gone. It would have stumbled around until it found the edge and fell over the side.

Why hadn't it just been a human being? Why couldn't have doing a good deed just been enough.

"Are you there, is somebody there?"

Saints: they entered your life for as much as reason as the weather gave. Whether they bought gifts or curses was immaterial: they always fucked things up so that it was never the same as before. Trying to understand their motives was like trying to argue with fire.

"Please," it said.

A saint would only mean trouble. His mother and his pa had told him that. It had been the one thing they had both agreed upon.

"I fell ... I was pushed ..."

If it had survived one fall, it would survive another: there was no point in pushing it out of his bolthole. But maybe he *could* push it over the side. Drown it when he climbed down and reached the bottom.

"Please"

His heart flickered, like a candle in the subterranean darkness, and Cullen swallowed involuntarily.

"Is there anyone there?"

He wasn't a corpse dredger yet; though there would be enough profit in finishing off the junkies and drunks that stumbled down his dark canals or fell into the waters. That's why, when he had first felt the throbbing pulse, just beneath the hollow of the jaw, Cullen had done the right thing and hauled the body into his punt.

"I'm here," he said, added: "What do you want?"

"My glasses. I need my glasses."

"What glasses?"

"My spectacles. They connect me."

"Wasn't any glasses where I found you. Just water and shit."

The man groaned, like an exhausted animal in pain.

"You're not blind. It's just pitch black down here. Darkness, water, and shit. It's all you got. And me. Cullen."

Cullen spat, offered a handshake gloved with greasy leather. But the saint didn't see it. There was a whisper of air as the saint's hand passed near Cullen's face, flailing in the dark.

"It's not the absence of light," it said. "It's the rest of the world that's missing. The heavens: I can't access them."

"The what?"

Cullen crouched down his haunches, part fascinated, part wondering if he could reverse his decision and go back to considering throwing the saint over the edge.

"You wouldn't understand: you're human."

"Damn right. But I'm all you've got – and you'd better remember that when it comes to reward time."

The saint stopped moving its hand about. It sighed.

"The heavens are a higher level of reality," it said. "It's where we truly live. Where we truly communicate, and love, and war, and die."

"Uh-huh."

"You wouldn't understand."

"I get that."

"Please. I need them. I'm only half-alive without them. Underground and undead."

A trickle of laughter escaped its lips, and all Cullen heard was the rattle of the saint's broken linkages.

Cullen climbed back down his ladder, stepping off the bottom rung onto the floating pontoon of plastic barrels and rotten wood that was his personal quay. He wasn't sure why he was helping the saint, not when he didn't really know the saint's name – didn't want to know the saint's name for that matter, better that

way, ignorance was bliss and all that – but he guessed it was something to do with the moment he had hauled the sodden body out of the water. Once you did that, the job wasn't done until the body, saint or human, was returned to the surface; otherwise he might as well have left the body to slowly drown.

He untied his punt from a ring of rough iron set into the brick wall, and picked up the wooden pole. With slow strokes, Cullen set off. He headed towards the narrower channels and secret passageways. He guided himself via feel and touch, counting his strokes as he rhythmically pushed himself along the subterranean water courses. This polished brick told him to turn left in three heartbeats; that echo was the air moving through the vaults of a flooded Tube station, this trickle of water was where the tunnel passed close to the movement of the Fleet or one of its tributaries.

Eventually the waterways opened up into a hall of darkness and air, Cullen poled his shallow draft boat across the vast lake. If there had been enough light to see him by, he would have appeared suitable enough to play the part of the Great Charon; but, underground, there was no audience and no passengers, toll-paying or otherwise.

Cullen eased his punt across the scabrous waters, feeling for the great concrete pillars which supported the roof of this part of the world; for treacherous sandbanks; for submerged trees pulled down into the darkness; for brickwork pilings, rotten foundations and cancerous masonry and other navigational hazards.

He muttered softly under his breath, trying to count backwards through a twisted rhyme of numbers and mnemonics as he worked back to the tangle of flotsam and rags where he had found the saint.

No real chance of finding the glasses but he had to try. Besides, Cullen needed to think about what he was going to do with the saint when he got back. He could take the saint to the surface, but how would Cullen know it wasn't daylight when he got there? There would be people, spaces, open sky, noise. The saint would slip away and abandon him to the world. It, *the world*, would swallow him up.

He could get a mudlark to take the saint home, but if the saint did pay the mudlark a reward, then Cullen knew he would never see it. The mudlark would pocket the money and spend it on filthy brewings. It was, Cullen decided, a conundrum.

There, he had nearly reached the spot.

Water splashed.

Cullen stilled the movement of his boat. His breath matched the pattern of the slow drift of air across the lake.

"You see him?"

"Nope."

"It stinks down here!"

Three separate voices. One feminine.

"He couldn't have got far."

Even worse! The saint had bought interlopers. Other scavengers. This was Cullen's domain, the domain of him and his fellow mudlarks and toshers. Outsiders weren't welcome.

He caught a glimmer of something white, polished like bone, spectral in the subterranean space. He wanted a closer look. Cullen could move almost soundless when he wanted to. Especially when these ... poachers ... made so much noise.

A sudden glow of light, deadly white, Cullen squeezed his eyes shut and fell down, lying along his boat, the folds of his coat blurring his outline. In the brilliant shadows, he appeared as another piece of rubbish, thrown away or swept underground by wind and rain.

"How big is this place? I can't see the walls."

"We're underneath the arcology. Of course you can't see the walls."

"This would make a great crypt."

"Too damp."

"How many tunnels are there leading out of this place? He could be anywhere."

"We should give up and go home."

"You want to feed don't you? You feel the hunger."

A rumbling agreement. A noise like a growl.

Cullen opened his eyes a fraction. There were three figures. Pale, like porcelain shards. Dressed in ragged black. An impression of knee high boots, tight jeans, dirty black lace and ragged leather. Wild hair. Wrists and ankles, necks, decorated with tarnished silver. Young.

"He's our prey. We can't let him get away."

A hiss.

With mouths full of sharp teeth.

"Who are they?" Cullen asked.

"My glasses?"

Cullen shook his head, realised in the darkness that the saint couldn't see him. Damn: he was used to the darkness; he wasn't used to talking to people.

"No chance. Not with them there."

"Describe them."

So Cullen did.

"Dark children," replied the saint. "An idea that won't die."

"I don't get it," said Cullen.

"I'm what you call a - "

"A saint. Yes."

Cullen crouched down, the folds of his coat falling over the brick floor. The coat creaked slightly as he adjusted his position.

"My mother used to say that you were avatars. My pa, he said that you were icons. I never understood what he meant."

"All the terms are appropriate," said the saint, his voice started to roll as he spoke, as if he could keep speaking forever, lecturing for eternity. "We have become the embodiment of an idea. We exist more in heaven than we do in the flesh. What was once termed, crudely, the meat has been stripped away, and with it the base desires of the meat. There is only thought left."

Cullen grunted. It was the point in the conversation where he normally grunted. The mudlarks and few other fellows he spoke to expected it. When was his last conversation, fives tides ago? The saint carried on regardless.

"This happened to many of us, and, as is all cases when there are many beings in a finite space with finite resources, there was competition."

"To survive, we were forced to distil ourselves down to our core beliefs, our ideologies. Some embraced political causes, or religious belief; others adopted philosophies, or, even more boldly, positions of absolutism: absolute love, absolute hate."

"Uh-huh," said Cullen, not understanding half of what he was hearing.

"My order, embraced a higher cause. We know that Knowledge is Power. That Information wants to be Free. That Freedom comes from Education. We became Libertarian Librarians."

The saint giggled, then stopped when it realised Cullen wasn't laughing.

"What about them? The Dark Kiddies?" Cullen asked. To his mind, the saint talked a lot of nonsense.

"They're obsessed with all things dark and eerie. Vampires," it said. "Nothing wrong with being gothic – Byron was gothic, Shelley was gothic – but it's got to be wed to something. As an ideology on its own, as something to be an aspect of, it's all style and no substance. It turns inwards, becomes perverse."

Cullen ran his fingers across the floor, feeling the bricks powder slightly underneath his touch, the way they always did. His world was still here, still real. He could touch it, smell it; taste it anytime he wanted. The saint's world was a construction of wire and rags, dressed up to look like a man.

"Why they after you?" he asked, trying to piece it together in his mind, like piecing together a ruined doll.

"I was caught out alone. It's what they are. They can't help it, anymore than I could stop saving books from your Second Dark Age. So much literature – "

"Do they hunt humans?"

"No. Only my kind."

Cullen nodded, scratched his beard, one finger working at a knot of hair while he thought.

"You need to go," he said.

"But I'm blind," it said. "I'm not going anywhere without my glasses. It's unthinkable."

Cloth rustled as it folded its arms.

"Shit on me," said Cullen. "We've both got a problem then."

He stood just behind the terminator, considering: maybe the Dark Children wouldn't find the saint, they would drift away like smoke. He could lead the saint here, by the hand, push it out, back into the dazzling light and terrible cacophony. But that could take days, days where he wouldn't have anywhere to sleep, not without the wittering and the pleading and the madness.

Cullen sighed, pulled the goggles down over his eyes, and shuffled out of the shadows. His heart was thumping, and his skin felt hot and itchy underneath his layers of rotten clothing.

He hated the world. He was afraid of it. He didn't know how other people bore the weight of that great big sky, pushing down on their heads; so much light and noise, so many surprises and sudden shocks.

When his mother had died, all he had wanted to do was stay in the house. There had been food, and rats when the food ran out. Stray cats too – he could catch the skinny ones. He'd summon up courage to get water at night, as long as the moon wasn't too bright, darting out to the communal hand pump.

Those that saw him shouted at him, so he'd run back inside. Men came, big men with heavy boots – like the ones he wore now – and his pa. There'd been more shouting; his pa had told him that he had to leave. Words about bailiffs, and the rent, and the landlord. Words that he hadn't understood at the time. They'd dragged him out screaming, with the sun beating down, and everyone from the courtyard looking on. He'd felt like one of these men hauled to their execution at the foot of the Cenotaph.

He'd bit and scratched his way free. They kicked him; clawed air as they grabbed at him. He'd fled, knowing his life depended on it. The other kids followed him, shrieking and laughing and calling him names.

Recalling it made him want to puke, or cry: to crawl up into a small ball. That wasn't allowed though, His pa had found him, kicked him, made his ribs hurt again, taught Cullen what it was to be a man, good and proper. Nevermind that boy-Cullen's hiding place had been a good one, in the ruined arches where the drowned houses and floodwater met the fat Thames.

Last thing his pa did was to throw Cullen a loaf of bread and tell him that he was a disappointment.

After that, Cullen had found refuge in the ruined houses and in the tunnels. He'd watched the mudlarks make a living, scavenging the Thames's wide flanks, scouring the mudflats for anything of worth that could be cleaned up and sold back to the rest of the populace. It'd been easy for Cullen to join them, skulking around the edges, working the dark places and the shadows where nobody else wanted to tread.

The sewers and the tunnels sucked him in, until he wasn't a mudlark anymore but a tosher: scavenging a living from the filth that everyone else washed away. It was cool in the dark, underground. There wasn't any bright lights or name calling. The tunnels carried the sounds; Cullen knew what was coming. Nobody could ambush him there.

He hovered on the edge of the line, his fingertips brushing daylight.

Cullen made a whimpering sound, pulled his fingers back into a fist. Behind him the tunnel exhaled, a deep movement that whispered invitingly, calling Cullen back.

Should've just killed the fucking saint, he thought.

He retreated and waited, sitting on a plinth of broken stone. Eventually, just as it had when he was a child, the sun hid her face. He slipped from his perch, boots splashing in a rivulet. He walked out, keeping to the edge of the tunnel even as it became a cutting and two metal rails emerged from the water, running straight up to a farm. The metal rails disappeared into earth, concrete bases dividing up each field of crops; four fields in total.

Cullen approached warily, afraid that there might be dogs or men on guard. He wasn't interested in thieving. He'd only stolen food in the worst months, when there was no fish to eat and nothing in his nets that he could sell. Then he'd taken without leave because the only other choice had been the gnawing hunger in his guts.

He took the platform closest to the edge. Stairs there led away from the farm and out into the streets.

He hoped the streets hadn't moved; that the tunnels still brought him up near the places that matched the saint's names. The night sky weighed on him. He glanced up every few seconds to make sure that he hadn't strayed.

The streets, thankfully, were mostly as he remembered them. There had been small changes, but the pubs were still on the street corners and the ancient buildings with the spires remained. Some of the ruined towers had been turned into hanging gardens or pillaged for stone.

Cullen followed the saint's directions, watching his feet and glancing at the walls. He whispered to himself in his personal rhyming cant as he walked, numbers strewn amongst half-words and a babble of phonics.

He didn't see the figure of bone and black velvet, shaped like a woman, slide through the shadows as he neared his destination. It scented him, and, curious, followed him, As he stood before the oak door, nervously wondering whether to flee or knock, the dark child folded night and hid itself from prying eyes.

Cullen tapped on the door.

The Head Librarian eyed him warily. After two hours of answering the same questions, asked in the same patronising manner, by beings who cared more about his odour than about what he said, Cullen was tired and frustrated.

"You say that ur-Tempis sent you?"

Cullen nodded, hoping that he had remembered the saint's name correctly.

"For a pair of spectacles?"

"Yes sir. Without them he is ... disconnected and unable to move."

"It's true sir. ur-Tempis has not been seen in heaven for the last seventy-two hours," said the lesser saint who was hovering on the edge of the room.

They stood in the hall, just inside the Library's barbican gate. It had been decided that Cullen would not be allowed any further into the Keep. Instead, saints, each one more senior in their hierarchy, had been summoned, one by one, to stand on the same cold flagstone floor and cross-examine Cullen.

Each librarian was tall and thin. They all wore spectacles, at the corners of which glyphs and sigils formed like ghosts before dissipating across the lenses. The symbols were impenetrable to Cullen. Some of the female-looking saints wore long flowing skirts and wooden bead necklaces; most of those that appeared male favoured dun-coloured jackets and receding hairlines. Of course, even Cullen knew that the saints were asexual. They could appear to be whatever they wanted to be: male or female or hermaphrodite or many-armed temple god. Appearance was the point.

The Head Librarian stroked its beardless chin.

"We don't just give out spectacles to anyone," it said. "You aren't even registered with us."

Cullen shook his head. He coughed, prepared to spit on the floor and then remembered where he was. He swallowed hastily.

"Never attended any of our classes?"

"No sir."

"I would wager that you cannot even read or write."

Again, Cullen shook his head. He would have felt better here, with the stone overhead and the shadows at the corner of the room, if the saints hadn't been there also, pushing down, just like his pa. He wondered if they would want to take him outside and kick him. He felt a deep longing in his heart for the tunnels where he was king. Where the saint was the one who needed his help.

"How do I know I can trust you? That you aren't just going to take the glasses and sell them?"

"It told me to give you this."

Cullen reached into his pocket and pulled out the bundle wrapped in oilcloth. The Head Librarian looked at the greasy cloth apprehensively. Its acolyte dashed forward, took the package from Cullen's restless hand, and unwrapped it gingerly.

There was bits of skin, some hair, and some dried blood. Ur-Tempis had pulled it from its head, only whimpering once. It was the cold, alien nature, of the action which convinced Cullen, yet again, that more than anything else that he wanted the saint out of his eyrie. Beneath the skin and the hair and the blood

there was a rat's nest of slim black cables and a black ovoid, no larger than a duck's egg, with a raised and indented rim spiralling across its surface from one end to the other.

The Head Librarian made its favourite humming noise.

It reached out, touched the egg. The cables, much to Cullen's astonishment, started to writhe of their own free will. He hoped that they wouldn't have done that if he had opened the bundle and taken a closer look at the egg.

The cables seemed to orientate themselves. They all pointed themselves at the Head Librarian's wrist, and then plunged forward. Blood dripped on the floor. The Head Librarian said nothing as the cables pierced its skin.

Glyphs flicked across the lenses of its glasses. More and more, until the saint's eyes were blotted out by a red sheen.

"Sir?" asked the aide, still holding the egg nervously. If the aide moved its hands away, the egg and the oilcloth cushion would fall to the floor. Cullen wondered which would break: the stones or the egg. Normally he would have said the egg, but in the saints' universe everything seemed different, more malleable.

"Enough!" said the Head Librarian.

Immediately the red sheen broke apart, swimming to the edges of the glasses. Little symbols continued to form there, breaking down before becoming complete, like waves lapping at the shore.

"It seems that you were telling the truth."

It hummed again.

"Give the man the glasses," it ordered.

"But how can we trust him to deliver them?" asked the acolyte.

"Oh," replied the Head Librarian, already turning away to contemplate other business. "They are useless to anyone else. Worthless. Give the glasses to him and send him on his way. Trifle me no more with this until ur-Tempis returns."

The Head Librarian departed, holding the egg against its wrist with its other hand. The acolyte reached into its jacket and handed Cullen a steel glasses case. There was a little square of black on the front.

"That's the lock," it said. "Only one of our order can open it,"

Cullen grunted. He was tired and sick, wondering why there had been all the talking and questions when the lesser saint could have just given him the case in the first place. He wouldn't have been able to open it, and even if he had forced the case he wouldn't have found anyone to purchase the glasses. It was the appearance thing, the right rituals and theatre had to be performed, the shape of it had to be right.

He coughed and spat on the floor, didn't bother to say thank you.

The lesser saint looked aghast at the globule of spit and mucus.

"You going to let me out?" said Cullen.

The lesser saint nodded.

Anything was even better than this place, thought Cullen, even the world with the crushing sky. He'd hurry back to the farm; find his tunnels, and escape. He'd give the glasses to ur-Tempis and the saint would be gone; it would be just Cullen and the darkness again. The way he liked it.

The sky was lightening as he stepped outside. A red sunrise was staining the eastern horizon. Cullen pulled his goggles down and his coat around. He shuffled away as quickly as he could, the weight of the sky threatening to shatter his aching skull like a hammer shattering an egg. The sky oppressed him.

He was exhausted. Oddly excited. All he really wanted was the safety of the sewers. His domain. Nobody and nothing could touch him there. Librarians, Dark Kiddies, sky, and other, regular, children would be powerless when he was there. Not even the ghost of his pa could find him there. The darkness and the water and the shit: that was Cullen's fief.

Cullen only realised he was being followed when the shadows surrounded him. Water splashed underfoot. He was three hundred yards into the sewer when he lifted his head and listened properly for the first time in hours. The fetid, musty, air carried the scent of something alien to him. They smelled of leather and cloves, mothballs and rotten clothing, bones and dead leaves. He heard the rustle of silk, the tinkle of

silver jewellery.

He swore at himself for dragging the saint out the water. His curses slipping into Cullen's personal cant, as he whispered riddles to himself. Cullen told himself that nobody knew the tunnels better. Hadn't the saint said that the Dark Kiddies weren't interested in ordinary men; they were only interested in the Librarian.

However, he didn't want to lead them to his eyrie. One saint had been trouble enough, never mind a whole pack of them.

Cullen turned left when he would have turned right. Took the walkways and the ladderways, leading them away from his punt. He only realised he was rushing when he felt the pang of a stitch on his right-hand side.

The Dark Children didn't slow down. He could still hear them behind him, whispering to each other. They no longer bothered with words, communicating in hisses and gnashing clatter-clicks. They were excited. Joyful. Eager.

He stepped off a ladder, watery filth flowing over the toecaps of his boots and seeping through the rotten leather to soak into his socks. For a moment Cullen was lost. Such a thing hadn't happened to him in an age; not since before the time he went above ground to make sure his pa was definitely dead and buried.

Cullen panicked. Water always flowed downhill, to the Thames. He turned left, following the downward stream. He started to run, water splashing across his trouser legs and the ends of his coat.

A Dark Child cried out, another one laughed, and the third howled like a wolf.

The tunnel opened up, more water surging down from another outlet. Suddenly Cullen found himself waist deep in slimy water. He stumbled, went under, his coat pooling out around him. Spluttering and coughing, he hauled himself to the surface. The tunnels of waters met an artificial weir ahead of him, falling over subterranean rapids punctuated by piles of rubble and brickwork.

Cullen wiped the moisture from his beard and his eyes. He blinked, suddenly knowing his location.

He headed up one of the adjoining tunnels, wading against the current until he found a brick ledge and pulled himself out of the water. He lay for a moment on the ledge, then rolled over and vomited up a stream of sewage and fear.

That done, he set off again. He tried to move silently then, but he didn't really believe silence would delay the wolves for long. Let ur-Tempis deal with them, Cullen thought. Heaven and hell could fight it out amongst themselves; this poor human just wants to be left alone.

He patted his pockets down, feeling his rusty knife and the spectacles case. He had everything he needed.

Cullen nearly made it.

He was hauling himself up his ladder, nearly at the top, when the first of the Dark Children howled its hunting cry from beneath him. He looked down, and saw a bone-white face peering up at him from the darkness.

The Dark Child leapt, catching hold of the lower rungs of the ladder and then hauling itself up with astonishing speed.

"Who goes there?" asked ur-Tempis. "Please, I cannot see you."

Cullen continued to climb. His heart and lungs burnt with the effort. Dirty water seeped from him. The wet clothing hampered his movement. His feet were cold. His boots were sodden and heavy. His legs and arms ached. He was a litany of tiredness.

He looked down. The Dark Child was moving terribly fast. It smiled and all Cullen saw was a hole filled with needles.

Cullen locked his left arm around the ladder.

"It's me. Cullen," he cried.

"Cullen?"

"They told me to give you this."

With his free hand, he dug out the case, flicked it to ur-Tempis. It was only a few feet, but in the darkness the saint had no hope of seeing the spectacles' box. Cullen heard the saint reach out; heard, from

beneath him, an intake of breath followed by an explosion of motion.

The Dark Child leapt. As it jumped him, Cullen pushed off the ladder, swinging wildly with his right arm. Bone struck bone. His elbow connected with the Dark Kiddie. The smell of stagnant water and dead flowers and rot, surrounded him.

Cullen jerked his fist back, body swinging away from the ladder, held only in place with his left arm and his left foot. The Dark Child howled. It clawed at Cullen, scratched his skull, drawing blood as it carved a line of pain across his temple. The skin above his forehead ripped away. Blood flooded his vision.

The Kiddie was falling now. All upward momentum lost. It dragged at Cullen. Claws scabbled for purchase. They dug into his back, pulled at his coat.

He screamed as it bit into his shoulder. Teeth penetrated ancient leather. The cut across his forehead was as nothing to this new agony. Cullen felt needles grate on bone, cold poison seeping into his blood. Muscle was torn away. Nerves were stretched to screaming breaking point.

His left foot slipped, and Cullen thought he was going to fall and die. A sudden wrenching sensation, his left arm nearly torn from the socket, a ripping noise, and his coat was torn in two. The extra weight of the Dark Kiddie was suddenly gone. Cullen found himself hanging in mid-air, amazed that his grip had held.

The Dark Child screamed, and struck the water below. Its outrage became a gurgle as the water swallowed it.

Cullen's feet found the ladder. He pulled himself back onto it, wanting to be sick. He whimpered. His right arm was fucked; his left arm was a lesser agony of torn muscle. But he had to hold onto the ladder with it, if he let go he would join the Dark Kiddie in the water underneath his quay.

He bowed his head and wiped away the blood against the sleeve of his left arm. His ears were filled with a terrible roaring sound. By the sick saints above and the broken gods, by the spirits of air and darkness, by the turds and the sewer-gators, he wanted this to be over.

Instead he heard a hiss from below. It was partnered by a growl.

Cullen dragged himself up the final rungs one-handed, crying and cursing all the way. It was only five rungs, but he thought the climb would kill him. He collapsed into his eyrie.

"Well?" he finally coughed.

There was a click as ur-Tempis opened the case.

"What took you so long."

Faint violet light illuminated the eyrie. ur-Tempis slipped the glasses on. Sigils and glyphs flowed before his eyes. He stood up, head brushing the brick arch of the ceiling.

Cullen coughed. Tears burned in the corners of his eye.

"Thank you."

"Here," replied Cullen with a sniff. He cradled his right arm against his body. "You might need this."

He offered ur-Tempis his knife with his left hand.

It giggled, and Cullen was afraid for the Dark Children. The glasses gave the saint a psychopathic tint. If Cullen had known about books, he would have wondered what kind of grimoires needed a cutthroat to care for them.

The saint swung himself round, disappeared over the edge as he started climbing down.

Cullen blacked out, but not before he heard the screaming start.

He stood on the edge of darkness and daylight. His infected head wound throbbed to the drumbeat of his heart. He didn't want to look at or touch the putrid flesh, which fouled the puncture marks around his shoulder and across his back. He was bruised and battered, exhausted to the point of wanting to curl up and die in a forgotten corner, like a diseased dog. He had with him his meagre pile of possessions loaded into a salvaged pram.

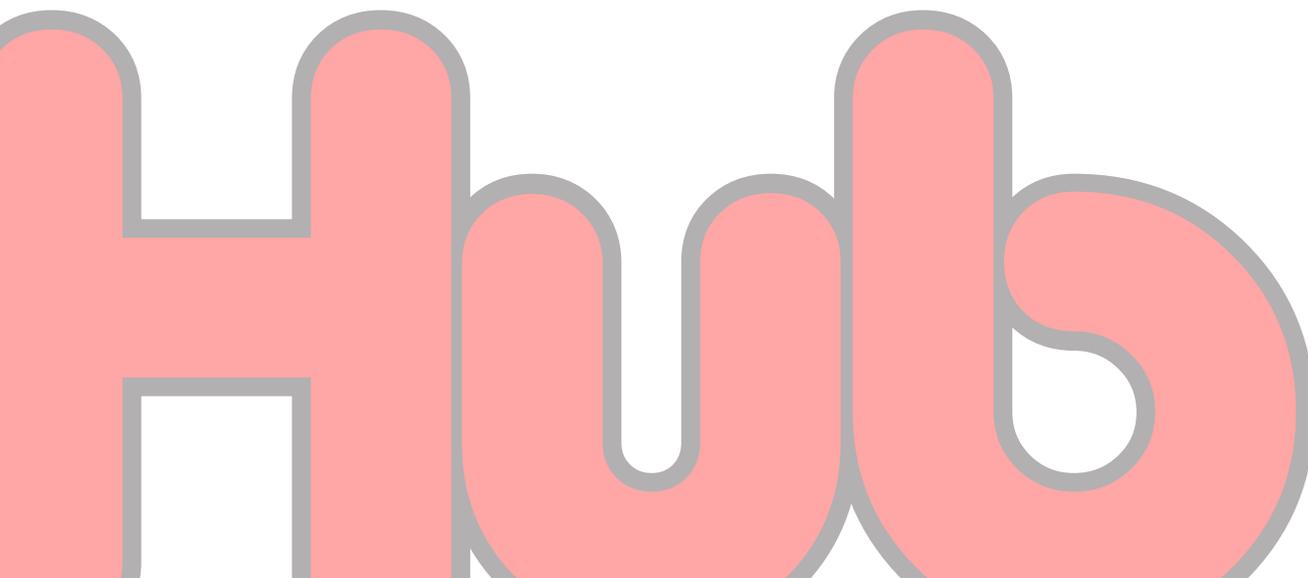
Beyond the exit was a sky the colour of dying fires. He was still afraid of the sky: the size of it was too big for him. But his eyrie was no longer home. Ten days since the Librarian had skinned the Dark Children, ripped out whatever it was that connected them to heaven, the stonework and masonry still reverberated with their screams.

Cullen needed a new home. He needed many new things: a new coat and a new knife, a body that

would heal in the darkness and damp.

He looked out on the sky. Then he shrugged, spat into a rivulet of sewage, and, with head bowed, Cullen disappeared deeper into the darkness.

fin



# FEATURES

## Interview: Guy Adams

*with alasdair stuart*

### Opening the Doors of the World House

Guy Adams is one of the best kept secrets of English horror. With the Deadbeat series, DCI Gene Hunt's guides to modern policing and the excellent Torchwood novel *The House That Jack Built*, Guy has built a reputation for jet black humour, big ideas and very personal horror. With his first novel for Angry Robot, *The World House*, now out, we talked to him about the difference between American and English horror, his plans for the future and why he writes soup.

**Hub Magazine: So, the obligatory opening question. Tell us about yourself, how did you get started as a writer?**

Guy Adams: I started writing when I was a kid. Typical cliched only child, that was me... I used to piss off my friends by insisting on applying a narrative to playground games. They'd just want to be running around pretending to shoot one another, I had to start crowbarring plot and character into everything. I remember drawing everything to a halt one day as I'd just come up with a cool climax that we could act out... great way to spoil a play fight. I cringe just thinking about it.

That obsession with make-believe turned into what I laughingly refer to as a 'career' in acting for a few years.

I ended up turning to writing full-time after having sent a cheeky email to the TV company, Kudos who produced *Life On Mars*, *Hustle* and *Spooks*. I wanted to write a book about *Hustle* for them. The email included a section of me singing the theme tune... poor bastards didn't know what had hit them. They called me and my very good friend Lee Thompson (designer genius) in for a meeting. Partly to vet me before pursuing legal action I imagine. We left the meeting with a contract to pitch books about *Life On Mars* (they weren't interested in *Hustle* at the time). Those books ended up being bought by Simon & Schuster and, in order to meet the deadline (and buggo off to Manchester to attend filming) I had to go full time in order to deliver them. At that point my partner, Debs and I had decided to emigrate to Spain with her two sons so she was stuck with all the arrangements while I was waffling on about Gene Hunt.

Once I got to Spain I swiftly found there was no other work available so if I wanted to help pay the mortgage and feed the family I would have to keep writing books. It was the only source of income open to me! This explains why I'm ever so poor...

**HM: What attracts you to horror?**

GA: First of all, in the spirit of full disclosure, I'm not sure I could class myself as a horror writer really. Not that I wouldn't be happy to -- none of that genre snobbery here, horror is a wonderful and rich genre that I love dearly -- but the fiction I write tends to be a mixture of things, *The World House* is part thriller, part fantasy, part comedy... with horror thrown in, true enough but not exclusively. I only mention it as I think that exceptional horror writing often comes from that perfection of focus... Ramsey Campbell's *Grin of the Dark* leaps to mind... though he can be extremely funny too... but books that have that inescapable build towards unease. Books that close themselves around you until you're close to suffocation. I've never tried that and I'm not sure I would have the discipline to pull it off if I did. I write soups not perfectly fried fillet steaks.

That aside I love horror for its ability to push just that little bit further. You can take a reader right up to the

point of reality and then -- giggling -- shove them right through. There's a real pleasure in that freedom.

Also fear is a rich emotion, and writers want to affect readers -- even if that reader is just themselves. Horror and comedy are the two genres where that can be at its most vital, scare them silly or give them the giggles.

Horror has a sense of awe that's important too, a sense of brushing against something immense and unknowable, like swimming in the Atlantic on a cloudy night and then touching a sperm whale with your foot.

### **HM: What do you think makes English horror different to American horror?**

GA: I'm not sure there is a real difference. I could say that English horror leans towards the cold and grim while the Americans offered sentiment and spectacle but that's such an absurd generalization that I wince... I could say that the English relish language in their storytelling, taking pleasure in style whereas the Americans just want to reel you a yarn... but AGAIN there's just as much work out there that would contradict me.

I think the above generalizations work with extremes of the genre but they're not ever so helpful in the long run. Yes, I could bolster the arguments by holding a Dean Koontz book up in one hand and Joel Lane in the other but... how about if I picked up Ligotti and Guy N. Smith?

Perhaps there's a touch more hope in American literature... I do like that... They're not afraid to offer us genuinely nice people who might have a genuinely nice happy ending. We English are crap at that... perhaps it's the rain.

### **HM: Which authors have influenced you?**

GA: Stephen King tells a great story, always. Even when he takes 300,000 words to do it. I know he has his detractors but I love him. That wonderful, deceptive style... pretending to be simple but hammering characters home so you come to love them as if they were family. Very good writer.

Michael Marshall Smith taught me -- not directly you understand, he doesn't hold classes in writing... just whisky and tobacco appreciation -- to never fear the joke. I like jokes in my work. People are funny and they say funny things. They joke all the time... when they're scared, dying, angry, crying, having sex... Especially if they're doing them all at the same time. *Ba-dum tish*. See? We can't help it. Humour is fine, whatever you're writing never be afraid of the funny line. Look at *Not One of Us*... it starts with the main character being chased by his overenthusiastic and malfunctioning alarm clock. It ends telling us something profound about God. Perfect.

Clive Barker said it was okay to place the fantasy here on Earth -- something we take for granted in children's fiction, epic landscapes are always just around the corner from our suburban terraces in the books we read when we're young. Fantasy too often -- for my taste at least -- places the fantastical in its own distinct bubble somewhere far, far away... That doesn't interest me... I want my monsters right here, only a whisper away.

Barker's a superb imaginer too, his head has infinite scope... no surprise he paints too.

Hmm... this question could get out of control, you do know that don't you?

Lots of authors influence you really, everything you ever read teaches you something (even if it's how not to

do it).

**HM: What frightens you and how does that inform your work?**

GA: I'm not frightened by much really, I relish the nasty stuff too much! There's a couple of times I've written nightmares into my work though. The first was actually in the Torchwood novel I wrote. A character has a delusion where the skin on his face becomes cold and wet, like the dead skin around a veruca. He stands in front of the mirror picking it off, trying to get to something living underneath, something that's not numb. Eventually his whole face is in chunks -- like boiled chicken -- in the sink.

Nice huh?

The other one was a dream where I slid on my front down a pothole that kept narrowing. Eventually I'm wedged, arms by my side, gravity forcing me down. That one ended up in *The World House*, albeit changed so the people were upright... it was far less scary in the book, I let them off lightly.

**HM: Is there anything you'd like to have put in the book but left out?**

GA: Nope. It's all in there. Bearing in mind there's a second book due out later in the year -- a continuation of the first but a very different book as well -- so there's more for the characters to experience yet. There's a bigger scope at work in *Restoration*, though it's also a little more focused on character interaction. So... yeah, I let rip and tone down simultaneously. Life's never boring.

**HM: What's next?**

GA: I have a very varied desk... would you believe I'm writing the biography of Leonard Rossiter? Well, you should, because I am. I'm also doing a quick book about bar bets (those little games you play in the pub to win a drink off people) which is tied in to the *Real Hustle* on TV. I'm finishing a kid's book about an underwater town in Spain filled with monsters my agent has been very patient waiting for that one.

I really want to finish a novel that's been kicking around in my head for a while. A man has the same dream every night, choking a complete stranger to death with a bicycle chain and then dumping the body. Every night. Then he meets the man he dreams about. It's a comedy obviously...

*The World House is out now from Angry Robot and will be reviewed next issue.*



*Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Abaddon Books*