

# **No Nazis Please, We're British.**

By Ed Zenith

The Wychacre Chronicles

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## Before We Begin

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**About the Author**

Ed Zenith is a multi-genre writer residing in the South West of England and living in his own mind.

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1. <http://edzenith.wordpress.com/>

The fate of the country lies in the hands of  
A Witch – A Zombie – A Banshee – A God  
... and a Junior Civil Servant?



## CHAPTER ONE



LONDON, 1941.

Of all the things Colin Powers expected to see on his first day as a Junior Civil Servant in Whitehall, Winston Churchill's wrinkled scrotum was not one of them.

He had expected paperwork, and lots of it. He had expected mundanity and severe boredom, interspersed with moments of existential ennui. He expected to be well and truly, thoroughly and utterly fed up. That, after all, was why he had signed up. He had asked his father to pull a few strings and manoeuvre him into a position in Whitehall in order to help the war effort in a way that categorically did not involve holding a gun or facing any sort of enemy. While the rest of Europe was being bombed to shit, Colin Powers had absolutely no intention of helping out in any practical respect. He had every intention however of sitting on his arse and fiddling with paper clips and filing cabinets until the end of the war.

He strode down the corridors of the Palace of Westminster in his brand new pressed pinstripe suit (another thing that daddy had sorted out for him – a few favours in the gentleman's club had led to an appointment at Saville Row and a fair few yards of material that had somehow bypassed the rationing system. Powers knew all too quickly why it had not been seen fit to be claimed by His Majesty's government, in that it was as uncomfortable as hell, but as the tailor had been fond of saying, 'Never mind the quality, feel the *length*...'). He held a Manila file under one arm and walked with purpose past Members of Parliament, Generals in full military regalia, fellow civil servants in identical

pin stripe suits and the occasional man in a black suit that Powers took to be Military Intelligence. He had no idea where he was going as he had only started that morning, but he had learned long ago in boarding school that one way to get the teachers and bullies to ignore you was to walk around purposefully with a piece of paper. Nine times out of ten people just got out of your way and let you get on with whatever it was you were pretending to do.

Powers ran his hand through his jet black hair as he passed a couple of secretaries walking the halls. He was a handsome devil and he knew it. His good looks (also donated by his father) had got him out of a lot of scrapes in the past. His winning smile had been known as the 'Power Grin' at his school and had made many females, including elderly librarians and house-mistresses, giggly with pleasure. On leaving school, he found he was able to schmooze his way into jobs easily, and con unsuspecting colleagues (yes, female ones) into doing the actual work for him. His luck ran out however when he was fired for convincing one of the aforementioned colleagues to join him for a fumble in the stationary cupboard. It was about the same time that a letter from the government dropped onto the doormat of his family home in Sussex, asking (read: ordering) him to join up and do his bit for King and country.

"That is *never* going to happen," he said to himself, and set about finding a loophole in the system.

His loophole was of course that if you had a well-connected father and a talent for bullshit, you could wriggle your way out of anything. Including army service in the biggest war the world had ever known.

And so Whitehall called. He slipped through the applications process and somehow circumvented the vetting (where they tested for applicants having actual *skills*) and found himself pacing the corridors of power with no real agenda or clue what he was meant to be doing.

"Colin Powers?" came a voice from behind him. He turned, his heart pounding, to see an uncommonly attractive girl in a red blouse and knee-length skirt.

“Yes!” he said. Even if he hadn’t been Colin Powers, he would have answered in the affirmative. It was his nature to agree with whatever a beautiful girl said in order to worm his way in to her affections. And by affections, he of course meant pants.

“Ah, we’ve been looking for you. First day, yes?” she said. It was plummy accent from Berkshire and she had the rosy cheeks to suggest she rode horses back on the family farm. Colin also had rosy cheeks but this was mainly from the hip flask of brandy he kept on him at all times.

“Yes! Eager to get to work. Helping the war effort. Serving King and country!” he said, waving his Manila shield.

“By walking around with an empty folder?” said the girl. Colin’s face dropped. *Rumbled.*

“I was just, um...” he started but faltered. He turned on the Power Grin. “Just looking for the *stationary cupboard*.”

The girl, Gena, stared at him with an almost pitying expression while he grinned.

*It’s not working*, he thought. *She should be blushing by now. Then smiling, biting her lip and leading me by the hand to the nearest toilet or mop cupboard for a fumble in the dark. Why isn’t it working?*

“You can knock that on the head right now, Colin,” said Gena. She turned and walked away but looked back over her shoulder. “Come!”

Colin threw the folder into a nearby waste paper bin and followed, keeping an eye on her behind at all times.

“Sorry, I just thought-” Colin began.

“Thought you could start by banging the first girl you saw?” said Gena. She smiled as she said it, confident that she was now making Colin blush. “Sorry, playtime will have to wait. We’ve got a war to fight and we need the blood in your brain, not your underwear.”

Colin had never been called out before. Perversely, it kind of turned him on.

“Sorry if I offended you. I guess you’re taken, but I don’t see a ring...” he said, struggling to keep up with her through the bustling hallways.

“Hmm? Oh no, I enjoy a good physical workout as much as the next person, but you see I live in Shoreditch at the moment and the Luftwaffe decimated my street two days ago. Five of my neighbours were killed.”

Colin stopped dead.

“Jesus...I’m sorry,” he muttered. Gena turned to face him. She showed not even an ounce of sadness, but instead a visage of steely determination.

“Me too,” she said. “But right now I don’t have time for high-jinks or for grinning pretty-boys who think they are the best thing since the Spitfire. I chose to come to work and to fight Hitler in the only way I can – by doing my job.”

Colin had no answer to that.

“So you see, Colin Powers, had I not been totally fucked by the Germans over the weekend, I may have been open to a quick feel-up in the cloakroom today. But not with you.”

Colin followed her in silence and when they came to a door, he rushed to open it for her.

“Where are we going?” he asked finally.

“10 Downing Street,” said Gina. “You’ve been summoned.”



DOWNING STREET? *THE* Downing Street?

Number Ten?

Number Ten *Downing* Street?

There must have been some mistake, thought Colin, his palms sweaty with nerves.

“No mistake,” said Gena. Apparently, when he was nervous Colin also spoke his thoughts out loud. “The PM asked for you by name. Said you’d be mooching around with your thumb up your arse.”

PM? Colin was really hoping that those initials did not stand for Prime Minister. Peach Melba, maybe? Puppet Master? Penguin Monster? Pumpkin Mash?

It was unlikely, but it was all he could hold on to. He couldn’t face the notion of having to meet the leader of his country on the first day in his job. But maybe it was just a formality? Maybe the Prime Minister greeted all civil servants on their first day, to ease them in? Colin hoped to hell he did, but simultaneously he thought that if he did, he probably should be doing something better with his time.

“By name?” he queried.

Gena led him through the corridors of Parliament and down some steps, past the armed guards who, unlike Colin, did not even attempt to look down her top. They simply nodded and let her through the door which led into a leaky underground passage. Emergency wall lights lit the way. At the end of the tunnel a brass lift was stationed, and Gena wrenched the doors open with a strength that made Colin grateful that he hadn’t tried anything with her after all.

“In,” she ordered. The lift was tiny, room only for one, but Gena delighted in making Colin uncomfortable as he slid in next to her. “Nervous?” she said.

“I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t,” he admitted. She smiled and reached past him to pull a lever. The carriage lurched causing Colin to stumble forward, falling onto Gena. From her cruel smile, it was exactly what she had intended.

“I told you Mr Powers, I’m not interested in that sort of thing...” she smirked. “Hmm, you don’t feel nervous to me...”

The lift rose and rose, then stopped with another lurch. Colin attempted to pull the metal gate across in an attempt to be gentlemanly, but he couldn’t quite manage it.

“Sorry. It’s very stiff,” he said, regretting his words immediately. Gena simply raised an eyebrow and pulled the gate open with one hand.

They stepped out onto a large tiled floor which immediately made Colin feel uncomfortable. Nothing good came from a tiled floor, in his experience; hospitals, toilets, boarding school changing rooms – each of them a cesspit for germs, death and unhappiness. Gena walked confidently forwards. As Colin’s eyes followed her he realised that he was standing in the bathroom of Number Ten Downing Street. It was easy to recognise a bathroom of course; the sink and the steamed up mirrors were a dead giveaway. The reason that he could be sure that he was in the home of the Prime Minister was because in front of him was a claw-footed, roll top bath containing Winston Bloody Churchill.

“Good morning Prime Minister,” said Gena. She walked over to him and placed a few files on the chair next to the bath. Churchill put down his copy of *The Times* and Colin saw the red face of the man he knew so well from newspapers, radio and the newsreels at the picture houses. He was puffing on a cigar and looked over his half-moon glasses to Gena.

“Good morning Gena,” he said. It was the same gruff voice Colin knew from the radio. “News?”

“I thought you were reading the paper, sir?”

“Real news, dammit!” he laughed. It descended into a cough, a hacking that ended with him spitting a lump of tobacco-brown sputum into the bathwater.

“General Montgomery has ordered more ointment for venereal disease to be sent straight away to North Africa. Apparently the whores down there are full of the stuff and he’s got a platoon full of privates with cock-rot,” said Gena. She was as casual as if she were reading the cricket scores. “Word from Berlin is that our spies have managed to secrete itching powder into Goering’s pantihose. And our man in Düsseldorf is pretty sure that Eva Braun is a man.”

The Prime Minister laughed again. It reminded Colin of a drowning bulldog.

“Two guesses how he found that out!” said Churchill. “The *hard* way. Ha! Hard, get it?”

“Yes sir, very good,” said Gena. She was leaning over the bath and Colin was sure that she shouldn’t be. Should a female member of staff be in the presence of the Prime Minister in the nuddy? He was sure there was probably a paragraph in the civil servant’s handbook about that somewhere.

“Gena, what have we spoken about?” the large, naked statesman said, looking over his glasses (and down Gena’s blouse). “If I wanted to surround myself with idiots to laugh at my jokes, I’d have gone into the music halls. Now if my jokes are unfunny, you should say so.”

Gena smirked. She had been told off, but told off in the way that a toddler is chastised for drawing on their father’s newspaper. It certainly wasn’t the explosion of temper Colin had expected to hear.

“Of course sir,” she said. “That was a piss-poor pun, sir.”

“That’s better,” Churchill saw the lingering Colin from the corner of his eye and sat up, exposing his man-boob above the waterline. “Hullo? What’s this?”

Gena turned to look also, having seemingly forgotten about Colin for the moment.

“Ah yes, this is Colin Powers, Sir. You sent for him?”

There was a fraction of a moment while the Prime Minister looked blankly at Colin and Colin looked blankly back. Then the sparks ignited in the old man’s brain and he leapt up from the bath, climbed out and strode towards Colin, dripping wet.

Another fraction of a second passed while Colin stood, gazing upon the leader of his country – naked. His eye struggled to maintain contact with the upper half of his body, eventually snaking down over his sagging nipples and drooping, obese stomach, to settle on the meat of the matter (as it were): The Prime Minister’s penis.

Not to mention the testicles as big as cricket balls...

*LOOK AWAY!* screamed Colin's brain and he quickly turned on the spot, swivelling from the shrivelled PM's knob. Although he now faced an entirely white wall, the image of the flaccid and strangely brown member seemed to be burned into his retinas, as though he had just stared at the sun for ten minutes.

"Mr Powers! Glad to finally meet you!" began the PM, extending a hand to shake. On Colin's turn away from him, he became confused. "What's up, man? If the Prime Minister offers you a hand to shake, you damn well shake it!"

Gena came to the rescue with a towel.

"You're naked again, sir," she explained. "I don't think I briefed Mr Powers about your...habits."

"Hmm? Oh, I see," mumbled Churchill. He took the towel and began to dry himself off. Gena approached Colin and whispered in his ear.

"Sorry about that. Probably should have warned you."

"You think so?" said Colin, still trying to get Churchill's cock out of his head. "Does he usually take guests when he's... you know?"

"Buck naked? Sometimes. Although rarely the VIPs. If you've seen him in his birthday suit, you know you've been cleared at the highest level of security."

"Hooray for me," said Colin with a negative amount of enthusiasm.

"Oh, it's quite an honour. I only got to see 'little Winston' after working here for two years," said Gena. She smiled at Colin's horrified look. "It's not sexual! He's just a very busy man who likes to take whatever time he can to relax. Honestly, can you blame him? Come on."

She forcibly turned Colin around and pushed him into the next room. They followed a set of wet footprints through the corridors and a typing pool, past a General trying to chat up a gaggle of secretaries, and into an office, where Churchill now sat behind his desk, thankfully clothed in a bathrobe.

“Right, Powers!” he said. He stood to shake hands, which Colin did this time, but regretted his decision when the robe flung open. Once again, he found himself staring at the wrinkled willy of the most powerful man in the country. “Oops, sorry! Gena here should have told you about my penchant for luxuriously long baths. Still, no harm done.”

*Not physically,* thought Colin. *Psychologically, however...*

Something was bothering Colin about the day so far, and having already been thrown out of charm school at the age of sixteen for urinating on the headmaster’s cat, he decided to go ahead and get it off his chest.

“Prime Minister, I’m honoured to have been seen by your good self on just my first day,” he began. “however...what the hell am I doing here?”

There was a moment of silent tension before Churchill burst into laughter.

“Ha-haaa! Very good old chap! Direct and to the point! Just like your father!” He laughed and again, it descended into a hacking cough. Colin froze.

“Sorry, sir?” he said. “You know my father?”

“Of course! Fought together in the Great War, and for a time before that. How is old Bertie?”

“Very well, thank you,” Colin said. This was news to him. He knew his father had been in the army of course, and that he moved in some high-up circles in society, but he had never mentioned knowing Churchill himself. Then again, Colin had never asked. “So, that’s why you wanted to see me? To check up on an old friend?”

Half of Colin hoped to get back to his time-wasting duties in Westminster straight away, while the other half quite liked the adventure of hanging around in Number Ten, and hoped to waste time there instead. No fraction of him however was prepared for the real reason he was there.

“Not quite, Powers. I want you,” said the PM, “to be my inside man.”



## CHAPTER TWO



Colin had never been driven so fast, including the time he accompanied his cousin to hospital in an ambulance after getting a fishing hook caught in his anus. The driver must have been specially trained, perhaps as a racing driver at Silverstone, or even as a test pilot for the RAF. He dodged cars, horses and buses and had left the confines of London within five minutes. He steered them around country lanes and through a field or two, judging by the suspension on the car. They finally screeched to a halt and Churchill's door opened. He stepped out in a haze of cigar smoke.

Colin staggered out too, desperately trying to keep his breakfast down. He had turned grey with the motion sickness and tobacco smoke but tried to stand up straight. Churchill, a man at least twice his age, seemed to be unaffected by the journey.

"Welcome to the freak hotel..." he muttered under his breath.

Colin looked up to see a country house set against a glorious blue sky and bright sunshine. The landscape around them could have been Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire or any of the home counties. A lush green copse lay to the west, a field of corn to the east. Colin could see no sign of a nearby village. They were well and truly out in the sticks.

They walked in through the main doors of the house, large oak creations with carved effigies of the Green Man. The bearded pagan symbol seemed to have a worried expression on his face as if to say 'You're not coming in *here*, are you?'. Looking about the great hall as they entered, Colin noticed the house was in a state of disarray. Plaster was falling

off the walls, oil paintings remained covered to protect them from the light, and the tiled floor, once used for dances when royals and dignitaries came to visit, was dirty and streaked with mud. Wherever the house was, Colin was certain that the servants had been let go some time ago.

"This, Mr Powers, is Wychacre House," said Churchill. "We took it over a year or so ago when the owner died, leaving a great amount of debt. It came at a good time for us. We needed a base for operations and this place suited us ideally."

"Wychacre? Never heard of it," said Colin.

"Good. Top secret bases should not be familiar to the hoi polloi. No offence..."

Colin took none. He was too busy looking up at the grand old Tudor ceiling with exposed beams and ornately carved bosses. And the naked old woman floating twenty foot up in the air.

"ANNIE!" bellowed Churchill. "Get down and get some bloody clothes on!"

"Winnie!" called the old woman. She had posh accent that Colin would have placed somewhere between Mayfair and Hyde Park. "You're a fine one to talk! I've heard stories about you and your baths..."

Colin felt the same way he had when he went foraging on his father's estate and imbibed a large amount of strange looking mushrooms. The old woman, who was seventy if she was a day and as naked as when she was born, floated down from the ceiling and landed gracefully on the ground where she executed a plié that a prima ballerina would have been envious of. Churchill grabbed a fur coat from a hatstand and held it aloft for her to slip into.

"Lady Annabelle Drummond, this is Colin Powers," said Churchill.

"Winnie, you old devil! You brought me a treat..." said Lady Annabelle. She came uncomfortably close to Colin, stroking his chin with an outstretched finger and purring like a tiger on heat. Colin held

his breath with fear as the white-haired old woman looked him up and down, her eyes resting on his crotch. "He's skinny, but handsome. He'll do nicely, thank you..."

"Calm down, Annie. This one's off limits," said Churchill. Colin was so grateful he wanted to hug him.

"Oh pooh!" said Lady Annabelle. "You're no fun!"

She flounced off out of the great hall and Churchill turned to Colin, his eyebrows raised.

"You're welcome," he said. "This way."

They walked through a door set into the wall and into an office. Colin's head tried to work out what was happening, as the office they walked into was an exact replica of the one they had just left in Downing Street. Had he hallucinated the last thirty minutes? Was he really back in London?

"I make sure I have a facsimile of my office in any major location," said Churchill, and Colin breathed a sigh of relief. It made sense – such an important, busy man would need all his home comforts and files on hand at all times. What didn't make sense however...

"She was flying..." he muttered. "That woman...Lady Drummond? She flew."

Churchill re-lit his cigar and pulled a bottle of whiskey out of his desk drawer. Colin was relieved – no, *ecstatic* - to see there were two glasses. He poured both glasses to the brim and pushed one over to Colin, who took it gratefully.

"Drink up and pay attention," said Churchill. "What I'm about to tell you is top secret and known only to the people in this house." He massaged his brow. The toll of the war was clearly getting to him. "You may have heard rumours about Hitler and the Nazi party."

"Rumours, Sir?" said Colin. "The ones about the ferrets and the orgies?"

"No! Not those! All true though, by the way..." said Churchill with a wink. "Rumours about paranormal intentions have been circulating

for a while. You know the sort of thing; black masses, worshipping unholy relics, interests in the occult.”

Colin thought. He had heard such things from his friends in the army.

“I thought that was just propaganda?”

“It was! Some of our best advertising men came up with it to try and poison the public's mind against them!” said Churchill. He necked his whiskey and poured another. “You can imagine how we felt when it turned out to be true. One of our best MI:7 men went undercover and ended up sacrificing a kidney in a satanic ceremony. Apparently Himm-ler ate it with a side of sauerkraut and a glass of Liebfraumilch.”

Colin's guts could stand it no longer and he quickly grabbed a waste paper basket to vomit into.

“Sorry sir,” he said afterwards. He accepted Churchill's offer of a monogrammed handkerchief to dab his mouth with.

“Understandable...” said the PM. “It became clear that this was the advantage that the Germans had over us all this time. Their control of the occult was winning the war for them. We had to act. When I say ‘we’, I mean, of course, me.”

Colin thought for a second.

“This place...it's a counter-occult forces centre? Or something like that?” said Colin. He was calming down now, thanks to the alcohol. He suspected, rightly, that the Prime Minister had spiked it with traces of opium...

“Got it in one! I knew you were the right man for the job! Any son of Bertie's was bound to be just as brilliant as his father.” Churchill leaned in over the desk. “In this building are the most...*unique* people in the British Empire. People with abilities that will astound and confuse you. People who have knowledge to help bring Hitler and his devil-worshipping forces to their knees. We call it the Occult Defence Division.”

Colin cradled his whiskey, strangely calm and accepting of the odd facts that were being relayed to him.

“Occult Defence Division,” he said, turning the words over in his mouth. “ODD for short. Very clever.”

“Hmm,” muttered Churchill. “Hadn’t thought of that...”

“Sir, when you said no one outside of this house knows about this, you meant it, didn’t you? The head of the army? Navy? The King?”

“All in the dark. The only civilians that know about this place are you and I.”

Colin let it sink in.

“But how do you fund it? You must have a budget?” he said. Churchill smiled with pride.

“A black budget, we call it. So black you would have thought we’d have pulled it out of the chimney. The Chancellor of the Exchequer thinks we’re funding a convalescence home for retired spies in Dorset.”

“She...Lady Drummond...was she a... *witch*?” said Colin.

Churchill leant back in his chair.

“I hesitate to use that word. Partly because it makes me feel like an idiot, and partly because she’s an old family friend and it seems vaguely disrespectful.” Churchill rummaged in a desk drawer and slammed down several Manila folders on the desk. They were stamped in red ink – TOP SECRET: EYES ONLY. Colin felt a peculiar thrill as he started to leaf through them:

**Project: Wychacre**

**Personnel Files**

**Name: Lady Annabelle Drummond**

**Born: 1st May 1862, Buckinghamshire, England.**

**Abilities: Occult Specialist Class 1 (WITCH). Expert in paganism, Druidism, hedonism and old English witchcraft. Special abilities include powers of flight, transformation and divination.**

**Notes: Highly sexualised. Demands prostitutes of any gender on a regular basis.**

**Name:** General Montgomery 'Monty' Brown

**Born:** 14th August 1863, Devon, England. (Died: 17th July 1917)

**Abilities:** Although Gen. Brown was killed in the Battle of the Somme, re-animation occurred as part of the German Army's early experiments with the occult. The zombification process has unusually not affected the brain and Gen. Brown remains a military mind to be reckoned with. His sense of smell and thirst for flesh is heightened of course, hence regular deliveries from local slaughterhouse.

**Name:** Dervla O'Brien

**Born:** 21st December 1916, County Cork, Ireland.

**Abilities:** Born into the Faerie folk of Ireland, Miss O'Brien is classed as a 'Banshee'. She has a natural magic and understanding of the world and nature, as well as the ability to predict death. Her wailing has proved useful in combat training and she is exceptionally strong. Uses her allure as a weapon.

**Notes:** Hostile towards English. Don't mention the Empire...

**Name:** Private James 'Ginger' Fox

**Born:** ???

**Abilities:** Private Fox is a 'demigod'. As far as we can tell he has always existed and always will. Cannot be killed. Has powers to influence people's mood and feelings.

**Notes:** Spectacularly stupid. Takes orders well but don't leave him to his own initiative...

Colin looked up from the files. The world had a slight fog about it now, as if he had just seen something that meant he would never feel the same about his existence again. It could have equally been the alcohol of course, or the opium. Churchill puffed peacefully on his cigar and raised an eyebrow.

"A witch...a zombie...a banshee...and a god?" said Colin slowly, tasting each word in his mouth for evidence of their truth. "Sir...is this

some sort of ...prank? Something you do to civil servants on their first day?"

The Prime Minister's face darkened.

"Most certainly not," he said in a tone that said in no uncertain terms 'Don't fuck with me' (but in a much more polite, English way).

"No...no, I thought not. Had to ask, of course," said Colin. His mind swam with what he had been told over the last ten minutes. Of all the questions drifting through his mind, one kept floating to the surface. "Sir? What in blue blazes has this got to do with *me*?"

Churchill leant forward in his seat and threw the stub of his cigar into the remainder of his whiskey. His eyes met Colin's' and Colin was suddenly very aware that the leader of his country was about to give him an order. The man who fought for Britain and who always got his way was about to dictate the course of his life. And there was nothing Colin could do about it.

"You, my dear boy," said Churchill, "are going to lead them."



COLIN WOKE FROM A LURID dream about the Prime Minister and a strange country house full of freaks. He felt mahogany under his face and relaxed; he had obviously just fallen asleep at his desk on the first day of work at Whitehall (which wasn't unusual for him). He had a thumping great headache though so maybe he had been sipping from his hip flask a wee bit too often...

"Come on buggerlugs, let's be having you!" said a gruff voice. He felt a tug on his arm and his cuffs were ripped open, exposing the skin underneath. He felt a tight sensation on his forearm and decided that it was time to open his eyes. He regretted it instantly, as the first thing he saw was a length of rubber pipe around his arm, and Winston Bloody Churchill again, bent over him with a syringe full of God-knows-what placed delicately over his arm.

*Shit*, thought Colin. *Not a dream. And now I'm being drugged by the PM.*

"Sir! What is that?" said Colin. At least, that was what he had meant to say. In fact, he said: "Sur? Whasis dat?", slurring like Scotsman on Hogmanay. His words came out like his boarding school's old custard - thick and sloppy, drooling out from the side of his mouth. He tried to move away but his body clearly wasn't awake yet and Churchill had a tight hold on him.

"This? Nothing much. Just a little pick-me-up," said the old, bald man. He slapped at Colin's arm, trying to find a vein.

"Pig-meee-ub?" questioned Colin.

"You fainted, you see. Knocked yourself out cold on the desk. Probably the shock of me asking you to do a proper job for once in your life. Although it could equally have been the half a bottle of scotch and laudanum you just imbibed," Churchill sniffed the glass on the table. "My fault. A little heavy on the opioids. Now, hold still. This stuff'll keep you going for a few days. My doctor prescribed this and it works a treat. During Dunkirk I took three of these straight and didn't need to sleep for a month."

Without any more chat, Churchill stabbed Colin in the arm and pressed down on the syringe. Colin felt like his veins had been replaced with jet fuel. His mind felt on fire, like he had just invented the moon and then pissed out the milky way as an encore. He leapt up from the desk and let out a loud, guttural cry that had not been heard by humans since caveman days.

"Holy-fucking-Jesus in a tutu!" he yelled.

"Told you," said Churchill with a cocky smile. "Now, let's get down to business, shall we?"

Colin's left arm began to shake uncontrollably and his right leg was scratching at the floor like a bull who has just spotted a fat matador.

"Business, yes, business...Of course sir, straight away sir, let's get down to it as soon as fucking possible, can I get you a cup of tea sir,

maybe more scotch and a small syringe of adrenaline, how about some toast, or a boiled swan, or a tight embrace or a gin and tonic?" Colin babbled. Churchill did not reply, but instead took out a pocket watch and counted down some seconds.

"Three...two...one. How are you feeling now?"

Colin felt the nervous energy drain out of him like he had just pulled the plug out of a bath. What he was left with was a deliciously clear mind and a consciousness the like of which he had never felt before. It was as if every extraneous thought had been cleared from his mind and he now only needed to concentrate on one thing; the man in front of him.

"Better, sir," he said finally.

"Good. It's powerful stuff, as I said, but it leaves you with a slight mania for a minute or two, then you're right as rain," Churchill said. He puffed on his cigar and sat again. "Now: business. You recall what I said before you passed out like my Aunt Bessie at the sight of a man's belly-button?"

"Um...You want me to lead the...the...people in this house?"

"Exactly. You can call them what you want, by the way. Freaks, un-naturals, 'special people', heathens, inhumans. Makes no difference."

Colin sat finally, confused.

"Sir, aren't they on *our* side?"

"Well, yes, nominally. They are certainly on the side of Britain. I can not however confirm if they are on the side of humanity."

Churchill reached into a cupboard and inexplicably brought out a meat pie on a plate, complete with a hunk of cheese and a knife. He dug in, completing the rest of his speech with a cheek full of pie crust.

"The people here are our last line of defence against the Nazi Occult Forces. You've read their files, so you know why we keep them in a separate division from the rest of the Military. The average Tommy wouldn't be able to handle seeing a floating witch or a rotting general. So this unit remains top secret. But," said Churchill, spraying pork and

jelly over Colin, "I need a civilian in here. I need to know what is going on and I need someone to take control."

Colin froze. His voice came out like a whiny little boy who had just had his toys taken away.

"Why me, Sir?" he said. "Why not just promote one of the ... *freaks* to be leader?"

"Because Mr Powers, they have no real working knowledge of the outside world. If they weren't born into magic, they have spent at least the last twenty years surrounded by it. I need a normal man. I need you."

Colin gulped and winced.

"So...why me?" he repeated, trying (and failing) not to sound weak. Churchill smiled.

"You'll see. Maybe not now, or tomorrow. But you'll see," he said. Colin had no comeback. "Come on. Let's meet the troops."



## CHAPTER THREE



Colin strode through the corridors of the old house, trying to keep up with Churchill. The house had the smell of an old removal van and Colin was tempted to pull down the covers on the windows to let in sunshine and fresh air, but he feared the light may kill the zombie if he met him (wait, was that vampires? If he was to take this job – and it looked like he had no choice but to – he would have to brush up on his knowledge of the supernatural)

The PM kicked open a door and barged into a dining room.

“Good morning everyone! Nice to have you here; and Annie, you dressed!”

Lady Annabelle was dressed in a silk robe, which still showed off far too much wrinkled, liver-spotted skin for Colin's liking.

“Mornin' Guv,” said a voice in the corner. It had an Irish lilt to it and Colin turned to see the owner of the voice step out of the shadows. “Need any bad guys killin'?”

She was pale skinned and dressed in all black. She had army regulation boots and a shock of curly red hair which seemed to obey its own laws of gravity, sticking out at unnatural angles. Recalling the personnel files, Colin deduced by elimination (she was the only other female in the house) that this was Dervla O'Brien, a banshee.

She whipped her head around to Colin and shot him a look that burrowed into him like a tapeworm. He noticed her eyes; a shade of maroon that was both beautiful and disturbing.

“Who's yer man?” she said. Colin was immediately attracted to her. He knew from the file that her 'allure' was dangerous. She acted like

a sort of temptress, a siren that would force men off the road and into the deadly bogs of her native Ireland. He saw now how effective her weapon could be. "Whoever he is, he's got a helluva stiffy on him..."

Colin looked down to see a tent pole in his trousers. Obviously Dervla's allure was instantaneous.

"So he does!" laughed Lady Annabelle with delight. "My, my! Are you sure he's off limits, Winnie?"

"Quite sure, Annie," said Churchill. "Don't worry, Powers, it happens to us all. If it helps, I've just the thing to 'calm the beast' if you know what I mean..."

Before Colin could confirm that he in fact did *not* know what the Prime Minister meant, a side door to the dining room opened and a smell entered before Colin could see who it was.

"Good morning, Winston!" came a bark of a voice. "Sorry I'm a tad late. Had to take a dose of DDT. These flies are killing me!"

Colin saw the figure of General Montgomery Brown across the room, and true to the PM's word, his erection died on the spot. The man was dressed in a green army uniform from the previous war, held an officer's swagger stick and held himself upright like a man in service should. From a distance one might not have been able to see what was wrong with the soldier immediately. Unfortunately, that distance was a good five or six miles, because you could smell what was wrong with him before you even saw his face.

General Brown was dead.

Not only dead, but decomposing, and had been for some time. His eyes had glassy retinas and were red around the sockets, while skin hung off his face. He had a hole in one cheek where Colin could see a black tongue and rotting teeth. His moustache however was curiously large and bushy, and must have been treated with some sort of wax to keep in such good condition, while Monty Brown himself decayed and fell apart.

“Monty, this is the new boy. Colin Powers,” said Churchill. Monty marched straight up to Colin and came close, looking him up and down. He was well within Colin's personal space, and the stench was overpowering.

“Bertie's boy?” said Monty. “Blow me down! How is the old bugger?”

“Y-you knew father too?” said Colin, gulping down a mouthful of bile that he had brought up.

“Of course! Winston and I served together at Gallipoli and Bertie was our right hand man. Lord, you're the spitting image of him!”

“So I hear,” said Colin, subtly backing away. “I'll send Father your regards.”

“Ah, better not. He thinks I've been dead for twenty-four years. Which I have, technically. Did you gather that?”

“Mr Powers has been briefed on all your...conditions,” interrupted Churchill. “He will be acting as a go-between. He can obviously pass in and out of Number Ten a tad easier than you, Monty. No offence.”

“Ha! None taken, old boy!” said Monty. He slapped Colin playfully on the back, and Colin heard a crunch. “Oops...”

Monty looked down to see a bone sticking out of his coat. His ulna had cracked and he forced it back into place with a sickening 'snap'. He smiled sheepishly, as though he had just noticed his flies were undone, rather than his body was falling apart.

“I want you all to treat an order from Mr Powers as though it was coming directly from myself. He is my mouthpiece in Wychacre, and on any missions of course,” said Churchill.

Dervla skipped to the grand dining table and sat on the top, swinging her legs under her like a schoolgirl.

“Winston's got a new toy!” she sang. “Can he do any tricks?”

Colin, blushing, felt the need to defend himself.

“I think you'll find I am a fair and forceful leader, Miss O'Brien,” he said. He used a tone of responsibility that he had never used before, or

had ever had any cause to. "Speaking of which, shouldn't there be one more here?"

As if on cue, the door opened and in stumbled a young, dashing man in a modern, 1940s army uniform.

"Sorry I'm late, fellas," he said. "Got lost in the grounds again. We really should have a map for this place."

"I don't think top-secret bases have maps, Ginger," said Lady Annabelle in a voice that was somewhat slower and more mumsy than her usual speaking voice. It was if she was talking to a toddler, or a slightly more intelligent poodle. "In case the enemy get hold of them, remember?"

"Ah, yes, silly me," he said. Private Fox turned to see Colin and flashed him a smile. "Hullo! New boy!" Colin's first thought was that he was beautiful; not handsome – that implies some masculinity to him. James 'Ginger' Fox was pretty like a flower girl at a wedding and had an innocence to him that made it hard to believe the claims on his files. When the paperwork had said 'demigod', Colin had expected a giant with a trident, not someone who looked like it was his first day at boarding school and would be the first to be bummed in the showers.

"Private Fox. Pleased to meet you," said Colin, shaking his curiously soft hands.

"What a coincidence! That's my name!" said the young man with a smile of delight and confusion.

"No, no, no," Colin corrected. "I'm Colin Powers."

"Then why did you say you were called Private Fox?" said Fox. His face had the same baffled look as when Colin had tried the old 'got your nose' trick on a two-year-old cousin.

"I...er...I got confused," shrugged Colin.

"Ah! I know that feeling. Anyway, *I'm* Private Fox. Call me Ginger. Everybody does. God knows why!" the boy laughed.

"Um, maybe because of your ginger hair?" chanced Colin. Ginger looked astounded, as though a lifelong mystery had just been solved.

Colin's mind flashed back to the files he had read, and the notes on Private Fox: *'Spectacularly stupid. Takes orders well but don't leave him to his own initiative...'*

Churchill shook his head sadly at the boy.

"Now we're all acquainted, I think it is time we got down to business," he grumbled. "I have a mission for you."



SEATED IN THE DINING room with all the curtains drawn, Colin felt more anxious than ever. He didn't mind the demigod and the sexy-fairy-banshee creature, but the sex-hungry witch and the decomposing zombie were frightening things to be around in the dark, for two very different reasons. Churchill clicked a button and a slide projector whirred into life. The curtains to the main window made a perfect backdrop.

"I've briefed Powers here on the fight against the occult forces of the Nazi regime and he has had ample time to process what this means for Britain and his role in it all," said Churchill. Colin's hand shot up.

"Sir, I've had an hour and a half!" he protested, but Churchill waved his comments away.

"Your mission, ladies and gentlemen," he said, pressing a button and shifting the slide to one of a Nazi rally in Nuremberg, "Is to protect our nation by whatever supernatural means necessary, be it magic, witchcraft, godly powers or...or zombie stuff."

General Brown laughed and thumped the table, breaking a finger.

"Ha! We'll show 'em Winston!" he shouted. "What's the target?"

"Ah, well, this is more of a find-and-protect mission, rather than a seek-and-destroy mission, Monty," said the PM.

"Ah, poo!" sulked General Brown. "Seek-and-destroys are my favourites!"

The slide shifted to an image of a statue of Columbia in Washington DC.

"You know what the term 'Soul of the Nation' means?" Churchill asked.

Some blank looks were traded across the table. Colin, sensing Churchill's expectant look, piped up.

"Um, you mean, a symbol, maybe? A statue or painting that illustrates the hopes and dreams of a country?" he guessed.

"Yes, and no," said Churchill. Colin smiled smugly that at least part of his description was accurate. "I mean yes, the figure embodies the country and its personality, and it provides aspiration and inspiration. But no, the thing to which I refer is much more than simply a work of art."

Lady Annabelle sat up straight suddenly. Colin was ninety-nine per cent sure she had just fallen asleep.

"So...you mean like Columbia for the Americans? Or Uncle Sam?" chanced General Brown.

"Exactly, my dear boy!"

"Oh, like Marianne in France!" said Lady Annabelle.

"Hibernia in the Old Country," said Dervla.

"Mother Russia?" said Colin. Ginger was noticeably quiet, having not understood a word.

"Now we're talking!" said Churchill. "Each nation has one, and it is your duty to protect ours."

A silence fell.

"Protect? But...it's just a symbol. Something to draw on propaganda posters...isn't it?" said Colin.

Churchill sat and lit up a cigar, the smoke filtering through the light of the slide projector.

"It's not, is it?" said Dervla.

"No. No, it is not," said Churchill. Colin looked at the old man in the half-light. For his age, he carried himself like a young man, charging here and there with bursts of energy. Suddenly though he looked every one of his sixty-seven years and then some, weighed down with

the worries of the war. He continued. "The fact is that the Soul of the Nation is real. It is a physical, living being – albeit supernatural and immortal like some of you lot. And we need *you* to protect Britain's."

Colin nodded.

"Alright. We can do that, can't we folks?" He attempted to sound powerful like a leader, but instead sounded more like an over-enthusiastic Akela at a boy scout group. "What does our fellow look like? John Bull? Britannia?"

"No idea," muttered Churchill.

"I see. And where is he? I mean, she? It?"

"Not a clue."

Colin stood and pulled open a curtain.

"Sir, if you're testing me, I'm not sure that's very fair, do you?"

Churchill looked over his glasses.

"We have information that the enemy have used occult techniques to locate Britain's Soul. They have already done it with Marianne of France and seized her. Mother Russia is under guard in Stalingrad, but Polonia was kidnapped from Warsaw six months ago. Belgium's Leo Belgicas fell just two weeks ago."

"They're sweeping Europe," said Dervla. "What about Ireland?"

"Sorry, Miss O'Brien," said Churchill. "Doesn't look like anyone is much bothered about conquering your homeland. Hibernia is safe in a pub in County Cork."

Even though this was objectively good news, Dervla looked insulted at the snub.

"Fecking Nazis," she mumbled. "Can't even invade the best countries..."

"But our... 'Soul,'" said Colin, embracing the silliness of the conversation, "is safe?"

"As far as we know, yes..." said Churchill. He smiled as though what he had said was reassuring.

"'As far as we know'?" Colin didn't like the sound of that.

“A similar threat to the Soul of the Nation came around back in the Great War, you see, and Lord Kitchener immediately sent the Soul away to be hidden and protected from the Hun...”

“Good old Herbie!” called General Brown.

“I’ll drink to that!” said Dervla, raising a hip flask. “He was born in Kerry, y’know...”

“...But the location was deemed so important, so secret, that it was never recorded.” Churchill puffed on his cigar while the rest of the eyes in the room fell on him.

“So...the British Government hid the Soul of the Nation so well...that they couldn’t find it again?” Colin said, hoping he had drastically misunderstood the situation.

“Yes. That’s about the size of it,” said Churchill. “Good thing we’ve got you lot to sort it out, hmm?”

Colin took a look around the room. Lady Annabelle was shaking her head with disbelief. Dervla was picking her teeth and smiling, finding the whole thing deeply amusing. General Brown, the most jovial of the group, sat with an embarrassed look on his rotting face. Ginger, bless him, hadn’t a chuffing clue what was going on. Colin envied him.

“Alright. What happens if we fail?” said Colin.

“If the Soul of the Nation is taken from us, it will cause complete anarchy. Think about your own soul. If someone were to take it from your body, you would be left hopeless and bereft. You would cease to care, to try, to really *live*,” said Churchill. “If Britain’s Soul was taken by the Nazis, we would stop being a country and instead become a bunch of soulless idiots who happen to live on the same island. Germany could catch the next ferry to Dover, stick a flag up our arse and claim us as their own. And we would barely do a thing to stop them.”

The silence in the room was deafening. Colin, aware that, somehow, he was the leader of this group, eventually spoke up.

“How long do we have?”

Churchill extinguished his cigar on the beautiful mahogany table.

“The intelligence is fresh. We got word from our man in Berlin that they had located the Soul last night. Given the time it would take for them to activate a special forces group to cease it, our calculations give you forty-eight hours.”

“From when?” asked Monty.

“Oh, erm...last night,” said Churchill, consulting a pocket watch. “Twelve hours ago.”

“So that's...thirty-six hours?” said Colin. “Fuck me.”

Lady Annabelle opened her mouth to reply, but Dervla placed a hand on her arm, holding her back. The old witch sat back, pouting.

“Ladies and Gentleman,” said Churchill, rising to leave, “Good luck.”



## CHAPTER FOUR



Colin saw Churchill to his car. “Sir, I’m flattered, I really am,” he started to say, “But I think there’s been a mistake.”

Churchill, marching over the gravel drive, had already started thinking about lunch and a major offensive air raid on Germany.

“Hmm? Oh, no, the intelligence is good. Our best spooks out in the field gather the data. We just have to work out how to bugger Gerry with it.”

“No, sir. I mean me as the leader of this...circus!” Colin protested. Churchill stopped, his hand on the car door. He frowned and stared deep into Colin’s eyes.

“I...do not...make...mistakes,” he said. Then with a smile and heavy smack around Colin’s shoulder he burst out laughing. “But seriously Powers, all you have to do is report back to me. I very much believe in the threat from the heathen Nazis, but this whole Occult Defences Division business? It’s a work-in-progress. I can vouch for Monty and Annie personally, but if they and the other two are wasting our time and resources, you need to let me know. Then we can disband the experiment and get on with bombing the shit out of Germany again. So keep ‘em in line, see what they can do, and give me the skinny every week when you pop back to Whitehall. I’ll send a car.”

Colin stared back at the powerful man, maybe even *the most* powerful man in the world at that point. And he hated him. He didn’t want any part of this; the special forces, the witchcraft, the babysitting of the

supernatural freaks. He just wanted to serve his country in the most dull and inactive way possible.

And yet, here he was, shaking the Prime Minister's hand, saying what a good job he'd do. Well, what choice did he have?

"Have a safe journey back, sir," he said. Winston Bloody Churchill climbed into the back seat and gave him a wink.

"Take care of my circus, Powers," he said. "You're the ringmaster now."

Wheels of the car screeched and span, kicking up gravel and sending smoke flying. Churchill closed the door and the vehicle sped off, leaving a cloud of exhaust fumes.

Colin looked about him at the grand, yet decaying, country home. The peace of the countryside was idyllic. He looked out to the surrounding land.

"FUUUUUUUUUUCK!"



"DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING?" said Ginger, looking up from playing patience with a set of raunchy picture playing cards.

"I think that was our dear leader screaming his bollocks off," said Dervla. "He's young, isn't he?"

"Whipper-snapper of a lad, agreed," said Monty. He picked a maggot from his hair and ate it. "If he's anything like his father though, he'll be a damn fine chap."

Colin stepped back into the dining room, where all eyes – dead or otherwise – landed on him. He coughed and stood at the head of the table, where Churchill had just stood so commandingly. They were expecting leadership. A firm hand. Knowledge. A speech. And by golly, he was going to give it to them.

"Right!" he started, rather too loud. "I want everything we know about this case in this room right now! We'll discuss tactics when we-"

“Can I stop you there, boss?” said Dervla. “It's pretty bloody obvious that you've just been dropped in the shit at the deep end. You don't have to go acting the big man to us.”

A ten ton weight was lifted off Colin's shoulders.

“I don't?” he said, his tone dropping to that of a panicked school-boy whose cricket ball had just smashed the headmaster's window. “Thank Christ for that! What the fuck are we going to do?”

Dervla laughed and applauded, while Lady Annabelle came and put a friendly arm around Colin.

“No need to fret, darling. It's quite a simple locator spell really. I'll need to raid my supplies and have a look at a few books, but we should have the location of this Soul thingy in no time.”

“Then we grab some transport, find the fella and move him to another secure base,” said Monty. “Standard retrieve and protect mission. I've done heaps over the years.”

Colin, who had been on the brink of hyperventilating, was now breathing easier.

“Really?” he said. He looked like a dog who had just been spared from castration at the last second. “Oh, that's great. That's brilliant!”

“For you, maybe,” said Dervla. “It's us that have to do all the fecking work...”

Lady Annabelle returned to her room to research locator spells, while the rest of the group played a deeply unfair version of poker. The unfair part was that Private Ginger Fox was so dim that half the time he played with his cards facing the wrong way. Colin decided to pace the floor instead.

“So how'd you land this job then?” said Dervla. “Is this a promotion or a punishment?”

Colin helped himself to a decanter of whiskey.

“To be honest, I'm not sure I've done anything to deserve either,” he said. “It's my first day and I'm in charge of a top-secret department. I'm not qualified in any way to do this.”

General Brown smiled and winked at Colin. It was a gesture that was both reassuring and disgusting.

“It helps that you went to Harrow School. Winnie’s an old Harrovian. That’s how the British government works nowadays, for better or worse.”

Lady Annabelle entered the room and Colin noticed that she had turned a particularly worrying shade of white. As her normal pallor was deathly white anyway, her skin now looked almost translucent.

“Annie? What the hell’s wrong?” said Ginger. He dashed over to her and caught her in his strong arms as she swooned. He carried her through to the drawing room and laid her on a chaise longue.

“Annie, are you okay?” said Colin. “Are you okay, Annie?”

She spoke breathlessly so that Colin had to get close. Her skin smelled of Lily of the Valley and Dunhill cigarettes.

“I...I saw him!” she whispered. “The spell was simple, so I cast it immediately. Time was of the essence, yes? But instead of the Soul of the Nation, I saw...I saw-”

Dervla rolled her eyes.

“Spit it out Annie!” she shouted. Colin flashed her a look. “What? She’s playing you up. Loves the attention, that one. She’s like this when we play Charades...”

Annabelle shot Dervla a dirty look, then whispered something so faint that Colin had to get close enough to touch her lips with his ear.

“What, Annie? Say it again?”

“ZIMMER!” she yelled, sending Colin staggering across the room. As he righted himself, he saw Monty, Dervla and Ginger, each looking at Annie in horror.

“Well, that’s it then,” said Monty. “We’re fucked.”



COLIN HAD SOUGHT CLARIFICATION immediately.

“Zimmer?” he said. Ginger had carried Annie up to her room, where she insisted on being fanned whilst naked to ease the shock. Whether it was her or Ginger who had to be naked wasn't clear. Monty paced the room while Dervla lay on the dining table, occasionally pouring claret into her mouth. “Who in merry hell is Zimmer?”

“Christ, you really are new! Did Churchill just pick you up from school or summat?” said Dervla.

“Well...more or less...yes,” admitted Colin. “That's not the point. Who is Zimmer?”

“Zimmer is the head of the Nazi Occult Forces. He heads up the departments dealing with the obtaining of objects of special magical value, control of paranormal personages, and the use of occult powers in the fight against the allied forces,” said Monty. He nervously bit a fingernail, but ended up pulling it out by the root.

“So...he's me?” asked Colin. “Head of the Occult Defences Division? That's my position isn't it? He's the baddie version of me.”

Dervla looked up.

“Colin, he is in no way like you.”

“Well, no, I'm not a Nazi, obviously, and-”

“Did you learn necromancy at the age of twelve?” said Monty, his voice shaking. “Did you cast a hex on an entire platoon of men at Dunkirk to make them shit themselves? Did you use re-animated corpses of your own soldiers to train new recruits?”

Colin shook his head slowly.

“Then you're nothing like him,” continued Monty. “And you have no hope of beating him, at whatever he has planned.”

“Herr Herman Zimmer is not just a baddie, Colin,” said Dervla. “He's evil incarnate.”



## CHAPTER FIVE



Colin had broken his way into Churchill's replica office and found his stash of alcohol. He poured himself a Power Blaster. It was a cocktail he had just created, named after himself. He mixed a half pint of port with a shot of scotch, topped it up with strawberry liqueur, then added a dash of crushed coffee beans and twist of lemon. It was anything he could lay his hands on and was created with the express purpose of knocking him out cold until the next morning, when he would hopefully awake in his flat in Bayswater having realised this was all a very vivid nightmare.

Just as the glass was about to touch his lips, he had an epiphany. At least he thought that was what it was. He had never had one before, so how would he know? He had certainly had ideas before – not good ones, but ideas, still – but none of them rated as ‘epiphanies’ in his book.

*I could just quit*, he thought.

It was brilliant. So simple and it solved all the major problems with one stroke. He would not be in danger, the Wychacre fellows would not have a work-shy richboy for a boss and, most importantly, he would not be in danger. He poured his drink into the waste paper basket and reached for the phone. It rang before he could touch it. After staring at it for a few seconds, he picked it up.

“Hello?”

“Hello loverboy,” said a sultry voice on the other end.

“Um, sorry, who is... *Gena*?” he said. He looked at the mouthpiece of the receiver, as if staring at a piece of black Bakelite would help him recognise who he was talking to.

“Got it in one, Mr Powers!” said Gena. “So how’s your first day so far?”

Colin’s head swam.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” he said.

“Ah well, you’re probably right. You can’t tell me anyway. Whatever it is you are doing is so secret that they had to add a paragraph to the Official Secrets Act for your situation. Even I don’t know where you are or what you’re doing. Only the PM himself is allowed to discuss it with you.”

Colin gulped.

“So where is the old fellow? The PM, I mean. If I can’t talk to you...

“He’s on a plane to...I don’t know – somewhere secret I suppose. Although he did ask me to find out what the Russian was for the phrase ‘Get off me you whore I need to piss,’” said Gena. “You can’t talk specifics with me, but I can relay messages if you make them vague enough.”

Colin smiled. He missed Gena – he had only met her once but in his mind she embodied something good and pure – normality. It was something that was in short supply at the moment.

“Alright, take this down for his eyes only – um, and yours, of course. Unless you can do short hand with your eyes closed...”

“Oh, wait a sec, Colin!” The mouthpiece was covered for a moment as she scabbled with paper. “Ah, yes, I nearly forgot. Mr Churchill asked me to relay this message:

*Tell that sniffling little shit that if he tries to quit then I’ll hoick him out to North Africa quicker then you can say ‘camel’s todger.’ I’ll strip him butt naked, paint a target on his chest, sit him on a mule and slap its arse until it runs for the enemy line.”*

Colin was silent for a moment.

“That all clear, Champ?” said Gena. Colin nodded and hung up.



COLIN HAD TURNED A peculiar shade of white. He entered the dining room, where Monty was bent over a map of the United Kingdom.

“Hello, Sarge!” said Ginger. “What’s the latest?”

“I’m not your Sergeant, Ginger,” said Colin. “And the latest news is that we are completely fucked.”

Annie sat in the corner, smoking something that smelled suspiciously like marijuana.

“That’s not news, sweetheart,” she said, inhaling. “What Foxy wanted to know is, what are we going to do?”

Colin paced for a moment. He thought about Churchill, about his father and why in blue blazes he was there. His father must have recommended him for the position, that was the only explanation. But why? His father had made it perfectly clear that he had no confidence in him whatsoever, at any aspect of life. He hadn’t trusted him to drive a car until his early twenties and had specifically forbade him from marrying until he was at least thirty-five, because he’d ‘only muck that up as well’.

But perhaps...

Perhaps his father had told Churchill to test him? To see what he could do if he put his mind to it? Or if he had a gun to his head? Maybe daddy did have an ounce of faith in him after all...

“Annie, put down that joint and come over here,” he said. Annie, confused and currently floating three inches above her chair, did as she was told. “Monty, where are we on this thing?”

Monty smiled with pride at Colin.

“Right here, sir! It’s unmarked on the map, so you’ll have to take my word for it.”

“I’ll trust you. Annie, did you get a location when you cast the locator spell?” Colin said.

“Yes. Up here,” Annie said. She took a pin and stuck it up in the north of the country, close to the city of Chester. “I saw tunnels. Darkness. Damp.”

Ginger sat up at the table, eyes wide.

“Tunnels? That’s the underground city in Cheshire. It’s a huge bunker built to house the government if Hitler flattens London.”

Everyone stared at him, eyebrows raised.

“H...how did you...?” Dervla began. Ginger gave a cute shrug.

“Bugged if I know!” he smiled. “I must have some brains up there somewhere. It’s hit and miss as to when they decide to show up.”

Colin, despite only having known the demigod for a few hours, felt enormously proud all of a sudden.

“So if we assume the Soul of the Nation was held down a bunker for the last twenty-something years, then all we have to do is fetch it and re-home it,” said Colin. “Like finding a dog that’s run away.”

“Only with evil Nazis snapping at your heels,” said Dervla. “You forgot that part.”

Colin stared at the map a while longer. If he broke the mission down into chunks, and tried to reframe everything so that it seemed as normal as everyday life, maybe he could get through this. He could do it.

“Dervla, your file says you are able to predict death,” he said. “How accurate are you?”

“Pretty accurate, why?”

“What do you see for our future?” he asked. All eyes went to the banshee, eager to see if they were as doomed as they felt.

“I...I don’t see anything!” she smiled. “No casualties, nothing.”

Colin clapped his hands. It was all he needed to hear.

“Then grab a weapon and your coat,” he said. “Cos’ we’re going to save the country, and I hear it’s chilly up North...”



## CHAPTER SIX



“Now this is more like it!” Colin grinned, rubbing his hands together. When he had asked what modes of transport were available to them, he had expected to be shown a clapped-out horse and trap, or an old Rolls Royce with only one wheel remaining. It would have been in line with the rest of Wychacre; run down, the former glory fading. But Monty had just tapped his decomposing nose and told him to follow. Colin was led down a spiral staircase which went into the old servants’ area and down further still. The stairway got smaller and smaller until they finally plopped out on the other side. To his amazement, Colin found himself in a dank-smelling railway tunnel.

“They built a train line around here a hundred years ago. The Lord of the Manor resisted and managed to get them to build it *under* his land instead of across it, so as not to spoil the view,” said Monty. He walked along the gravel at the base of the tunnel. Colin followed warily, suddenly very conscious that he was being led by a zombie into a dark hole, alone. “Then they shut off the entire line in the Great War. We kept this bit to ourselves though...”

Monty disappeared for a few moments and Colin was lost in the dark for a brief second. It was silent and he suddenly appreciated the quiet in a way he had never done before. He hoped his life might soon involve more calm periods, instead of witches, zombies and – more disturbingly – responsibility. There was a clang as Monty threw a switch, and suddenly the tunnel was lit up like Piccadilly Circus. In front of Colin stood the largest, most magnificent steam locomotive he had seen in his life. To be fair, he had never taken much notice of trains be-

fore; they were a convenient form of public transport and a place to grab a quick fumble with a horny passenger in the first-class carriage. The engine in front of him though was pretty impressive.

“Now this is more like it!” he grinned. (There. We’re up to speed)

“Meet Betsy. She’s the unofficial sixth member of our little gang of freaks,” said Monty.

“Hey, now! No one’s calling you a freak,” protested Colin.

“You think I don’t know what Winston calls us behind our backs?” the general said, eyebrows raised. “To him, we’re just a bunch of unusual and embarrassing weapons in his beloved war.”

Colin opened his mouth to protest more, but he felt it would have been an insult to Monty to lie to him.

“You’re doing your bit for your country, Monty. From beyond the grave, no less! There’s nothing embarrassing about that,” he said. Holding his breath against the smell, he patted the old man on the shoulder (gently, so as not to dislodge a decaying bone). “Let’s get this ‘Soul of the Nation’ thing over and done with, and I promise I will request a proper medal for your services. A real recognition for your work here.”

Monty looked touched. Colin couldn’t tell if that was a tear coming from his eye or some sort of embalming fluid. Monty coughed and stood straight.

“Thank you, sir! Let me show you the engine.”

Colin wasn’t interested in engines, particularly, but it was clear that Betsy was Monty’s pride and joy. The cab was spotless, polished to shining glory, and even the coal in the hopper had been sorted into different piles according to size and weight.

“I have a lot of time to kill,” explained Monty.

What Colin really wanted to see however was the carriage. Coupled to Betsy was a brown and gold marvel of rolling stock. The minute he saw it Colin knew that he wanted to live there, possibly even marry it. Climbing up to the door, he snuck inside. It was like walking into a Evelyn Waugh novel – every piece of furniture, from an eight foot long

chaise longue to a built-in bar was spotlessly clean and ready to indulge every luxurious fantasy Colin had. It was obvious Monty had paid just as much attention to the carriage as he had to the engine.

“Not bad, eh?” said a voice behind him. Dervla had stealthily climbed up behind him and had been watching Colin salivating over the décor. “Monty missed his vocation in interior design. He said he based it on Queen Victoria’s royal carriage. I tend to think old Vicky’s digs weren’t a patch on these wheels.”

She barged past Colin, carrying a large crate that was twice the size of her. It was old and dripping oil from one corner, with the stencilled message ‘DANGER: EXPLOSIVES’ on the side. Dervla looked around for a place to put it, and went to throw it onto the chaise longue.

“No!” called Colin, but it was too late. The heavy crate fell with a bang, crushing the furniture underneath it and breaking the legs of the chaise longue. As he looked on, horrified, Colin saw a dribble of oil spray from the corner of the crate onto what looked to be a genuine Persian rug.

“Oops,” said Dervla, then shrugged and departed to get some more cargo. Monty passed her on the way in and stood, gaping at the wreckage.

“I’m sure we can fix it!” said Colin quickly. “Got any glue?”

Monty stared for a few more moments and sighed.

“Philistines. Never mind, it never fitted with the décor anyway. Wrong period, you see. Gives me an excuse to go antique hunting!”

The process began of getting everyone on board. Annie insisted on taking a full trunk as if she was about to do the Grand Tour of Europe. When questioned, she revealed that it was her occult supplies box, containing herbs, plants, poisons...

“...a shrunken head from the tribes of the Amazon, a black snake pickled in vinegar, tar candles, and a spell book bound in human skin,” Annie listed.

"Honestly, I would have been fine with the explanation of 'witchy stuff'," said Colin. "Got everything you need, Dervla?"

"Just me, myself and I. Oh and a shitload of weaponry."

"Monty?"

"Just need my trusty service revolver and a map. All set, chief," said Monty, rubbing his gun like the head of a newborn baby.

"Great. And Ginger? Got everything you need?" asked Colin. Ginger looked up from a copy of the *London Illustrated Times*.

"Hmm? Oh, are we going somewhere?" he said with a vacant smile.

"Never mind him, let's crack on," said Dervla.

"Yes; if you will, Monty!"

Monty disappeared from the carriage without a word and soon the engine was huffing and puffing. There was a clank as they shifted forward. Soon they were out on the open rails, building up steam and headed North.

In the carriage, Dervla busied himself with cleaning her arsenal of guns, Annie read through some useful spells, and Ginger just stared into mid-air, his mind seemingly blank. Colin, with very little to do, explored the bar.

"Cocktail anyone?" he offered.

"I'll have a G&T Darling," said Annie without looking up from her book.

"Gin and tonic for the lady. Ginger?"

Ginger didn't answer, lost in his own thought.

"He doesn't drink," said Dervla. "Says it brings out his 'wild side'."

"Ginger beer for Ginger then. And you, Madam?" said Colin. He turned on his Power Grin.

"Whisky. Straight."

Colin sighed.

"Is that all? A classy broad like you? Come on! Test me out!" he said.

Dervla smiled and put down the rifle she was lovingly polishing.

“Alright, gimme a sidecar,” she said. “And Colin? Even if you are my boss, call me a broad again and I’ll shoot you between the eyes while you sleep.”

“Noted!” said Colin, and got to work preparing the order. “So what’s your story? How did you end up in Churchill’s Cherubs?”

Dervla came and sat at the bar.

“Not much to tell. I was minding my own business back in Ireland when a group of soldiers passed by my sid.”

“Sid?” questioned Colin. “Who’s Sid?”

“It’s another name for a mound. It’s where banshees live. Anyway, I got a vision and knew right there that they were going to die, and soon. I tried to tell ‘em, but they carried on and got themselves killed in an ambush anyway. Their General came back the next day and took me in. They thought I was some sort of informant, but I soon proved I was a supernatural being.”

“How?” asked Colin, squeezing an orange for her cocktail.

“I lifted their Commanding Officer off the ground by his balls. They’d never seen strength like that in a woman, so they guessed I had to be a faerie. Then I was locked up until Winston came along a year ago to form the ODD.” She took a sip of the cocktail. “Damn, lad! How’d you mix a sidecar so good? Posh boy like you, I’d thought you’d be trained in banking and whoring, not the art of the barkeep.”

Colin took a bow and carried Annie’s and Ginger’s drink over to them.

“A misspent youth. I never really got through university – or school for that matter. But I was a great drinker. I mean, *really* good! I could’ve made professional. I used to take over the bar at our local drinking club when the staff had passed out.” He returned to the bar and leaned in conspiratorially. “What’s the skinny on Miss Haversham over there?” he said, nodding to Annie.

Dervla leaned in too.

“Annie was a society bride since she was a bairn. She mixed in the upper classes and knew Queen Victoria. I think she may even be Churchill’s Godmother. She sat on charity boards, was the quintessential member of English high society.”

“So what happened?”

“Her husband died and she retired. This was when she was about fifty. Then, as a hobby, she took up witchcraft. They rest, as they say, is confidential.”

Colin looked over at Annie, intrigued.

“But she’s the most powerful witch in the country? That’s amazing! What else do you know about her?”

Dervla downed the rest of her sidecar and let out a small gasp.

“Oh, man, that was good. Two things you need to know about Annie. One: She cheats at cards. And two: She has ears like a bat and has been listening to everything we’ve been saying.”

Colin looked up and sure enough, Annie was sat reading, but also saluting them with her middle finger.

“Sorry Annie!” Colin called. “And what about Ginger?”

They both looked over to the young-looking private, who was staring at a pencil as though he could not work out the technology behind it.

“Him? Not a fecking clue,” Dervla shrugged. “He was supposedly born in year dot, and still looks like a bloody teenager, so he qualifies for this circus. But what he does? No idea.”

Colin continued to enquire about Monty, but Dervla shrugged once again. It seems he was an open book; a top soldier who died in service and was curiously re-animated. He had been rotting (literally) in the basement of a government compound since the end of the first war, until Winston gained power and liberated him. According to Dervla, he managed to resist the urge to bite any human he saw and lived entirely on meat from the butchers.

“And you, sir?” she said finally, a little tipsy. “Why is a dropout pretty-boy heading up the most secretive undercover operation in history? No offence?”

“None taken,” Colin said. He thought about it while he fixed himself an Alabama Fizz. “Dervla, in your own words: Not a fecking clue.”



## CHAPTER SEVEN



The journey up to Cheshire was delightful, made all the more bearable by the addition of cocktails. By the time they reached the Lake District, Annie, Dervla and Colin were well and truly plastered.

“And then the vicar said: ‘Rectum? It nearly killed ‘em!’” said Colin to a howl of laughter. And howl was the operative word: Dervla’s status as a banshee meant she was not only a death-predicting, super-strong machine, but she had the voice to fit the job description. When she laughed, she screamed. Several deer grazing in a meadow outside were deafened as the train zoomed past them.

“Ah! Stop it! I can’t breathe!” laughed Dervla. Annie excused herself to use the ladies room (“I’ve laughed so much I’ve wet my knickers!” was how she put it), and Ginger gave a small smile. It wasn’t that he didn’t think the jokes were funny. He just didn’t understand them.

“What the merry hell is going on in here?” said a voice from the door. It was Monty, appearing ghost-like.

“Monty! Come on in old chap!” said Colin. Then, with a look of panic: “Wait, if you’re here, who’s driving the train?”

Monty rolled his eyes (in his head, not around on the floor. Although that was probably possible...).

“We’ve been stopped for five minutes,” he sighed.

“We have? Then why is the carriage still rocking?”

A wobbly Colin followed Monty down the steps to the side of the tracks. They had followed the route as far as they could go, and the stone outcrop they needed was in a field half a mile to their left.

“A word, chief,” said Monty, beckoning him closer.

“For you, Montgomery, anything,” slurred Colin. “Y’know you’re the only one who calls me chief. I like it. A bit of respect for the position I hold. You now how long I’ve been doing this job?”

“About ten hours,” said Monty.

“*Is it?* Feels like longer...” Colin belched and nodded at the General. “What did you want to talk about?”

“This,” said Monty. He pulled back his rotting fist and swung it straight at Colin, who tried, but failed, to avoid both of the fists he saw coming towards him. The hand collided with Colin’s face hard, with a sickening crack and a spurt of blood spraying on the gravel below.

“Monty! What the hell was that for?” Colin screamed. He turned back to face the zombie, his lip bruised, missing a tooth (which he may or may not have swallowed – he wasn’t sure) and spitting blood. Monty shook his hand as though it hurt.

“Agh. Two broken fingers. Worth it though,” he mumbled. “I did that, dear boy, because I knew your father and I would hope that if he saw any relation of mine acting like an ass, he would do the same.”

“I am not behaving like an ass!” said Colin. He backed away slightly in case Monty wanted to follow up with an uppercut. “You can’t hit me, I’m your superior!”

“THEN BLOODY WELL ACT LIKE IT!” Monty roared. “While you’re getting pissed with the crew, you could have been planning tactics, preparing weapons, anything! Instead you head to the bottle like a coward!”

Ginger was looking through the window at them impassively, and Dervla took his hand to lead him away. Outside, Colin ground his teeth and went a certain shade of red that future moguls in the home decorating industry would go on to name ‘Shameful Blush’.

“You know why I went for a drink?” Colin spat. “Because I don’t know what the hell I’m doing! I’ve never seen service, I can’t shoot a gun straight; why did Churchill choose me for this job? Who cares if I

went to Harrow? I still can't plan a battle! And anyway, I wanted-" he paused.

"Go on,"

"I wanted them to like me." Colin shook his head at how sad he sounded. "I'm no good at this, Monty. You take over - I'll thumb it back to London."

He turned to go, but felt a hand on his shoulder. The smell of the General's rotting skin hit his nose.

"Oh no you don't," he said. "Winston'll have your balls if you run off now. You're a fine boy, but I don't now why he picked you. All I know is that you have to trust him. He's a good fellow." He reached to his mouth and pulled a tooth out. "Here. To replace yours?"

Colin shook his head, aghast.

"No, I'm fine, thanks..."

They started to walk back to the train carriage.

"You're doing fine, by the way. Considering..." said Monty. "Back at the house, you used everyone's strengths to formulate a plan. Dervla's precognitive skills, Annie's spells. Not just the work of an amateur, if you ask me."

Colin sulkily played with his bruised lip.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying trust us. Use us like you would tools in a workshop. And trust your own instinct. It'll be right most of the time."



## CHAPTER EIGHT



“All present and correct?” called Colin. As soon as he did so he realised it was a stupid question. There were only five of them after all, including himself, and from where he stood he could see four people – which, even by his own appalling maths, meant they were indeed all present. Monty stood to attention, loving being able to be out in the open air, but most of all being on a mission. Colin could see that he had missed the military awfully. Beside him stood Annie, her white hair blowing in the breeze. She ignored Colin completely, instead choosing to top up her make up while looking into a compact mirror. He watched as she applied black lipstick and powdered her face as though they were going to a ball. She caught his incredulous look.

“What? One must always look one’s best,” she said. She tucked the make up down her cleavage, which Colin noted was impressively large for a woman of her age. Worse luck, she caught him looking. “Play-time’s later, chief,” she winked.

Dervla stood next in line, tooled up with weaponry like a mercenary about to storm Berlin. Around her waist she wore a belt of grenades and over her shoulder was a Tommy gun. A hunting knife was attached to her lower leg and around her forehead she wore a bandanna to keep her hair back. A service revolver sat in an exposed holster. Colin had never really been attracted to powerful women, but looking at her, he would definitely make an exception.

“Dervla,” he said, gulping back the adolescent-style voice breaking that told her he was trying hard not to explode. “Got everything you need?”

"This'll do," she shrugged.

Finally Private Ginger Fox stood on the end of the row, dressed in his standard uniform but clutching a package wrapped in brown paper.

"Ginger, what have you got there? I asked you to get ready for the mission?" asked Colin.

"Hmm? Oh, yes, I thought I'd bring some sandwiches," Ginger smiled.

"Sandwiches?" enquired Colin.

"Yes."

"To a military mission?"

"That's right!" he said. "Enough for everyone of course."

*Bless him, thought Colin. He looks so pleased with himself.*

"Ginger, darling, did you bring any weapons?" said Annie in a soft voice.

"Ooh, no!" said the Private. "Do you think we'll need any?"

"Well, you know...just in case."

"Oh," said Ginger. He looked off into the far distance and if Colin didn't know better, he would have said the young-looking soldier was thinking. Eventually he shrugged. "Looks like I'll just have to chance it!"

"Chance it?" spat Colin. "Chance a battle with Nazi Occultists?"

Ginger shrugged.

"What sort of sandwiches?" Monty piped up from the end of the line.

"Does it matter?" sighed Colin.

"Cheese and chutney," said Ginger. "And cucumber. In case someone doesn't eat meat."

Colin rubbed his brow and decided to move the mission onwards, before trying to explain that cheese is not a meat to Ginger ended up with him ramming his head into a rock.

"Off we go then!" he chirruped and began to march.

“Hang on a tick!” called Monty. “Here, you should have this.” He handed a gun over to Colin, who took it carefully. “I call her Beryl.”

Colin looked at the piece in his hand. It was clean as a whistle. A whistle that had just been washed in vinegar and buffed up by virginal handmaids, at that. It was obviously well-loved. Colin, being a lifelong coward, had never held a gun before.

“Monty, I can’t! You must have a sentimental attachment to it?”

“Yes, I suppose I have...” said the old man wistfully.

“Ah! Is it named after your first girlfriend?” asked Dervla.

“No, after the first girl I killed. I used that very same gun, you see,” he said. He smiled and looked off into the distance, reliving past glories. “You never forget your first...”

They marched onwards towards the outcrop.

“What’ll you do for protection?” asked Colin, holding the gun at arms-length.

“I’ve been dead for twenty-four years, young man,” he answered. “The only one who would need protection is those Nazi bastards from me.”

Colin ensured the gun was not cocked and stuffed it down the front of his trousers.

“Nice,” nodded Dervla. “Looks very butch. You know, if I didn’t know you already.”

“Oops, getting closer!” said Colin. “Let’s have silence from now until the cavern, yes?”

And so the Wychacre elite team walked on in silence. They climbed over a fence (all except Annie, who floated) and then across the green field.

“Strange,” said Colin. “If this place is as top secret as they say it is, you’d think they’d have more security measu-”

CLICK.

Colin stopped dead.

"You had to say it, didn't you?" said Dervla. "Security measures? Like LANDMINES?"

"Um, Dervla, how about we save the bollocking until later and we deal with this part of the mission?" called Monty. "Like, saving one of our team from becoming meat pie filling?"

"Not helping, fellas!" shouted Colin, suddenly drenched in sweat. "The mine is under my left foot. Maybe if I leap forward, I can jump clear of the explosion? Does that work, or is that only in movies?"

The crew was silent for a moment.

"I mean, yeah, it'd work," said Dervla with a shrug.

"Great!"

"And you might only lose the *one* leg..."

"Never mind. Any other ideas?"

Monty marched up to him and bent down to his feet. He started to clear away some of the mud under Colin's boot with a bayonet. Soon he had exposed the rest of the mine.

"Ah, an old C-710!" he said, as though greeting an old friend. "Haven't seen one of these since the Great War!"

"Please tell me you know how to disarm one?" said Colin. He was now perspiring so much that he found it hard to see, as the sweat was dripping into his eyes.

"Hmm? Oh, God no! Left that to the rest of the squad. A General rarely gets his hands dirty, you see?"

It was clear that the superhuman brigade of oddities that Churchill had landed Colin with had no urgency when it came to matters of, well, urgency. Colin wiped his brow and decided he had to take charge.

"Annie! You can fly, yes?" he called. "Can you hover above me, pick me up and then zoom upwards so we fly out of the blast quick enough to avoid me becoming a hunk of sizzling steak?"

Annie mulled over the matter, rubbing her breast thoughtfully.

"No, sorry darling. I couldn't pull a strapping young boy like yourself," she said, before giggling to Dervla: "As much as I'd like to!"

“Gah! Are any of you of any use? Ginger? What do you actually *do*?”

Ginger looked up from inspecting a daisy.

“Sorry, did you mean me?” he said with his innocent lamb look on his face.

“Yes! Are you able to save me from certain death?” Colin screamed. Ginger sauntered over, in no hurry. Slowly, he looked around Colin’s feet and reached out to borrow Monty’s bayonet. He slid it under Colin’s boot and ensured the trigger was pressed down. Then he put his boot on the bayonet, slowly pushed Colin’s leg away and moved his own into place.

Colin steadily moved away, his heart racing. He turned to see Ginger, now stood on the landmine in his place.

“Ginger...that was...amazing!” he said, breathless. “But now what?”

Private Ginger Fox looked about him as if asking himself the question for the first time.

“Just stand back, I suppose?” he said. Colin’s face fell as he realised what the young man was about to do.

“No! You can’t! I won’t let you-” but Dervla ran towards Colin and straight into his stomach, barging him clear. Annie and Monty ran away too. As Dervla threw Colin down in the mud with a thump, he turned to see Ginger, saluting and smiling happily as he removed his leg from the mine and was enveloped in a twenty-foot high fireball.



## CHAPTER NINE



“GINGER!” Colin screamed, but he was drowned out by the noise of the explosion. Black smoke billowed from the spot where Colin had stood not thirty seconds earlier. He staggered up and started to run towards it, but the fire was still burning and Dervla dragged him back.

“Colin, wait!” she shouted, but he wrestled free of her grip. He ran over to the fire and the wind chose that moment to blow away the smoke. Colin stopped dead.

He stood in exactly the same spot, unharmed, unaffected, and most importantly, un-killed, was Ginger. He fixed his cuffs, brushed a bit of shrapnel from his shoulder and straightened his hat, then walked forwards to Colin.

“How...how did you...?” Colin stammered. Ginger smiled and shrugged.

“Not a clue, old chap,” he said. “I suppose it’s part of the whole ‘demigod’ thing. It’s saved my bacon a few times, I can tell you. You know, Henry the Eighth once had me burned at the stake for being a wizard. Landmines are a piece of cake compared to that.”

He strolled onwards, whistling a George Formby song while the rest of the team exchanged confused looks.

They pressed on towards the outcrop. It was only a few hundred yards away now but they moved slowly in a line, Ginger walking ahead by ten yards or so in order to absorb any more blasts from mines, should they occur. Thankfully they did not.

Just five yards from the outcrop, Ginger stopped.

“Tripwire!” he called.

“Really? That seems very basic to protect a government facility?” said Colin. He stepped closer and saw a length of piano wire stretched between two stones. “Bomb, do you think?”

Dervla inspected it also.

“One way to find out,” she said. Before Colin could stop her, she stamped on the wire. A shot rang out, and a bullet flew towards her. She stumbled slightly and then waited for the echoes of the shot to disappear. “No, not a bomb,” she said, straightening up and looking down at herself. “Rigged up to a rifle of some sort. Look, the bullet went straight through my stomach and out the other side.” She pulled up her shirt and pointed down at a small, bleeding hole, very matter-of-factly. “Thing is, where did it go after that?”

She turned to speak to Colin but he was not there. Looking down, she saw him lying on the ground, clutching his leg.

“What are you doing down there?” she asked.

Colin let out a scream that could be heard in the neighbouring counties.

“You fuckwit! You just shot me in the leg!” he yelled.

“No I didn’t!” Dervla argued. She then looked down at her stomach and at the bullet hole that was already starting to heal over. Working out the trajectory of the bullet, and allowing for the difference in hers and Colin’s height, she reluctantly admitted to herself that it *could* have been her fault. “Ah. Yeah, sorry about that. When you’re an impervious supernatural being you tend to forget that bullets can be a tad...y’know, *deadly*.”

Annie shoved everyone out of the way and brutally pulled Colin’s hand away from the wound in his upper thigh.

“Flesh wound,” she muttered. “Lucky bugger! An inch to the left and you’d have lost your meat and two veg. Couldn’t have that now, could we?” She pulled a vial from her bosom (*What the hell else has she got down there?* wondered Colin) and tore open his trousers. Colin was

glad she was taking charge and appeared to know a thing or two about medicine, but he wasn't sure it was strictly necessary that she had to tear his trousers with her teeth. "A little bit of magic and we'll have you up in a minute or two..."

Colin lay on his back, reflecting on his life while Annie worked her magic (literally) and Dervla explained why it wasn't really her fault, but instead Colin's for being susceptible to weapons. Annie's healing spell worked wonders. He felt the pain float away from him and the bullet dislodge itself from his femur. Within a minute, he was sitting up. He didn't know how she had done it, or why the spell had involved her holding his crotch for so long, but he smiled and thanked her.

"Okay, can I have your attention? Just so I'm clear, how many of you are impervious to death and have a devil-may-care attitude to weapons?"

Ginger and Dervla raised their hands.

"Not impervious exactly," said Annie. "But very resistant. Plus, a bevy of spells to heal myself and others."

"For which I'm very grateful, Annie. Monty?"

"Dead already. Does that count?" said the old zombie.

"For the purposes of this mission, yes," said Colin. He mopped up the blood around his leg. "So just me who's fully mortal then? Fantastic."

The door was a full metal job that looked like it had been borrowed from the vault at the Bank of England. It looked to be about twelve inches thick and had a wheel at the front that needed to be turned to open it, but Colin doubted that it was going to be that easy. He tried the wheel, but it was stuck fast, unopened for years.

"Anyone got a superpower that allows them to pass through solid metal doors?" enquired Colin.

"Not yet, but I am working on it," said Annie helpfully.

“Okay, so end of the line!” said Colin, turning to walk back to the train. “We tried, can’t ask more than that!” Dervla stopped him with a hand on his chest and spun him back around.

“Not so fast, pretty boy,” she said, and approached the solid door. “Just needs a little finesse...”

She stepped up and blew on her fingers like a gambler about to roll dice. She place a hand gently on the wheel, then attempted to turn it.

No joy. Stuck, as before.

She shrugged and turned back to Colin.

“See?” Colin began. “Told you. It’s-”

But Dervla span and ran back to the door at a speed that Colin couldn't comprehend. She was a blur, going from a standing start to one hundred miles an hour in less than a second. She crashed into the door with a harsh BANG, her shoulder connecting with the metal and buckling it like it was tin foil. She bounced back a little and landed on the floor with a gasp. Colin looked down at the petite banshee on the ground and then back up at the grey metal door, now bent and holding on by one hinge.

“‘*Finesse*’?” Colin questioned, holding out a hand to help her up.

“Maybe it means something different in Ireland?” she smirked, taking his offer of assistance. Ginger helped by pulling the rest of the door off its hinge. He threw it down on the ground and the resulting clang echoed in the surrounding landscape. Beyond the door frame lay a dark chasm of a tunnel.

“After you, Sarge!” he said, gesturing to the dark void inside. Colin gulped. “What’s the plan now?”

“Ginger, I’m not a sergeant,” Colin snapped.

“Oh. What do I call you then?”

“How about...Colin?”

Ginger laughed.

“Colin? I can’t call you that!”

“Well, I don’t have a rank; I’m not in the military so you can’t call me Corporal or Lieutenant or what have you.”

“No, I mean I can’t call you that because it’s a stupid name!” Ginger guffawed. “I mean, who’s called *Colin*?”

“Me!”

Colin sighed and walked into the blackness of the tunnels. Truth was, he didn’t have a plan. He didn’t have training or any skills to speak of but he had managed to get this far, for which he silently congratulated himself.

“Follow me!” he called. “And let’s get some light on the situation, shall we?”

A white glow came from behind them which illuminated the tunnels. They were mainly brick, like the London Underground, but with patchy bits of concrete here and there. “Ah, great, thanks. Glad someone had the foresight to pack a torch. Was that you, Dervla?”

“Hmm? No boss,” said the banshee from behind him.

“Ah. Monty? Is that your lantern?” Colin asked without looking back.

“No, Chief,” said Monty. Colin slowed.

“Annie?”

“No sweetie,” she responded. “I thought you did?”

“...no.”

Without needing to check if Ginger had thought to pack anything useful, Colin stopped dead in the tunnel, the rest of the group following suit. Slowly, he turned.

The apparition in front of him was a ghoul of some sort; its face was half-hanging off and it had wispy white hair. It wore a torn and tattered white gown that billowed gently, showing the white, rotting, pock-marked skin underneath. It was a female – or had been – and the gown barely covered its sagging, wrinkled breasts which drooped down to the floor. It was also huge; twice the size of a normal human, and it radiated light like some sort of decomposing Christmas angel. In the

second or two between serenity and blind panic, the ghoul reminded Colin very much of his Great Aunt Maude.

*“Who dares to sully my halls with their stench?”* said the ghoul. Its voice rasped like a cat bringing up a hairball. The fear that ran through Colin was electric; it made both his hair stand on end and a small stream of urine dribble down his leg.

“Kill it!” he yelled. Dervla, who as a representative of the land of faerie, had seen some pretty weird shit in her time, froze. “Dervla, the guns! Use the guns! All the guns!”

Eventually she shook herself from her semi-catatonic state and lifted the Gatling gun up to aim.

“No, wait, you’ll-” Annie started to say.

*Blamblamblamblamblamblamblamblamblamblam!*

The sound of the gun deafened Colin momentarily and he shielded his face from the spent bullet casings that flew out of the chamber. When Dervla had ceased fire and the smoke had cleared, Colin looked to see the ghoul floating in mid air, its massive face twisted into a snarl. It was riddled with bullet holes but still moved forwards.

“As I was about to say,” said Annie, “You’ll only make it angry.”

*“Aaaaargh!”* screamed the ghoul in a voice that could have stripped the paint off a double decker bus. *“You will pay! Trespassers will be eliminated!”*

Colin ran. He had no other way of tackling the ghoul so simply legged it into the network of tunnels without a word. Thankfully, the rest of the group followed. Unthankfully, Great Aunt Maude did also.

He ran faster than he thought possible, but screeched to a halt when he came to a space where the tunnel branched off in five different ways. Monty and Dervla arrived next.

“What the actual HELL is that?” Colin blurted.

“Boundary spirit, I’d wager,” said Monty. “Usually put in place to keep enemy out. Our warlocks must have put it there in the last war.”

“So it’s on our side?” gasped Dervla, breathless.

“Try telling her that!” Annie said, walking calmly to the rest of the group. Ginger sauntered in last. “It’s been neglected for twenty-odd years and gone a bit stir-crazy. It just wants to devour the first thing it sees.”

“Devour?” gulped Colin.

“You know, suck out the soul, feast on the flesh. That sort of thing.”

“Bullets didn’t touch it,” said Ginger. “What do we do?”

All eyes fell on Annie.

“Me? Why me?” said Annie, secretly loving the attention.

“Seems to be your department, old girl,” said Monty. “Got any special incantations tucked up your skirt?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know, soldier boy!” she giggled.

The sight of a witch flirting with a zombie was enough to make Colin wish that the ghoul would hurry up and devour them already. The moan and the glow of the ghoul grew nearer.

“Annie, can you do it?” he yelled.

“Yes, yes, yes, of course!” she said, waving them away. They backed up in the chamber. The already-freezing tunnel grew icier.

Great Aunt Maude had arrived.



## CHAPTER TEN



“Any plans Annie?” said Colin in a whisper. “If so, I think now’s the time to set them in motion.”

“Yes, don’t rush me darling,” said Annie as if he was a waiting cab driver.

“It’s not me doing the rushing, it’s him. I mean, her. THAT!”

The ghoul drifted around the corner, filling the space available to it like a fart in a phone box. It grew larger and its moaning increased to teenager standards.

“It’s a ‘her,’” said Annie. “And me and the little bitch are going to have some words. Back up.”

Annie struck a pose like a martial arts expert, legs spread and arms raised to expose her luscious locks of underarm hair.

*“Whooooo aaaarrreeeee yooooouuuuuu?”* gasped the ghoul.

“Your fucking nemesis, dearie,” said Lady Drummond. “Let’s see what you’ve got...”

The ghoul looked, not unfairly, unworried. It was a supernatural being the size of a house, capable of draining a man’s soul through his eyeballs (Colin imagined), while she was an elderly woman with a book of spells. Had there been a book running, Colin would have placed a shilling on the ghoul and if she was being honest, so would Annie.

“In the name of the Goddess, in the words of the great leader of my clan, take my powers and multiply them, give me your strength and free this wretched beast from its ties to this place.”

Colin was a tad disappointed. He had expected a full-on witch fight, but Annie seemed to have just muttered some sort of prayer and

the Ghoul had frozen in the air. Had it given up? Had Annie beaten it? Whatever had happened, he would have asked for his money back had he paid any to watch.

*"Is that all you have, sorceress?"* said the ghoul. It (she) opened its (her) mouth, which seemed to open wider than possible as though the jaw was dislocated. Its teeth were razors, its tongue forked like a serpent, and the eyes changed from dull grey to black like midnight. Colin could feel his soul starting to leave his body, although that may have been the feeling of him shitting himself with fear.

"Not by half, you non-corporeal cunt!" Annie screamed. For reasons unclear to Colin, Monty, Ginger, Dervla – and the ghoul, come to mention it – Annie ripped off her dress in a fluid movement and stood there buck naked, her pubic hair billowing in the breeze. It was then that things took a turn for the weird.

*"Numulay brasicae, withitrie castilown, Brillifie truncify, funerael dogrits."*

It was no language Colin had ever heard before but it wasn't Annie talking. The voice was coming out of her, but was not her own. It was harsh and rough, like the owner of the voice had been gargling with broken glass. It felt three hundred years old, whereas Annie's natural voice only felt a hundred and fifty.

*"What sorcery is this?"* groaned the ghoul. It was shrinking in size now. Its bony arms reached in to clasp its chest, it seemed short of breath, if that was possible for a supernatural being. *"You murder us!"*

*"Numulay brasicae, withitrie castilown, Brillifie truncify, funerael dogrits!"* Annie repeated. The ghoul screamed and shrank, screamed and shrank. It was now the size of a small child, but Annie would not stop there.

*"Numulay brasicae, withitrie castilown, Brillifie truncify, funerael dogrits!"*

It shrank to the size of a dog, then a cat, then a bird. Finally, Annie had hexed the ghoul to the size of an insect. It lay on the floor, begging

for mercy in a tinny, squeaky voice. Annie reached down to her supplies, picked out a small medicine bottle and scooped the pathetic creature up into it. It still glowed as though she had bottled a firefly, but the brightness was less. It was defeated. She screwed on the top of the bottle.

“As I was explaining before,” she continued. “One cannot kill a ghoul, but you can make it easier to handle.” She shook the bottle and the sound could be heard of a tiny moan.

Colin stepped forward and began to applaud.

“Brilliant!” he called. “Unbelievable!”

He stepped forward to hug her but then remembered that she was still entirely naked. He offered a hand to shake instead.

“Lady Drummond, you’re my kinda woman!” said Monty. At first he saluted, then leant in for a kiss on both cheeks. Annie grabbed him by the lapels and pulled him in for a full-on kiss on the lips which lasted a good twenty seconds.

“Apologies, Monty,” she said when she came up for air. “The casting of a hex makes me extremely sexually charged. I would, if at home, be heading to a brothel to ruin a few rent boys and ladies of the night, but I shall attempt to curb my desires for the remainder of the mission.”

Monty staggered backwards and Colin discovered that zombies, against all logic, could blush.

“Let’s crack on, shall we?” said Colin.



## Chapter Eleven



“I’m hungry,” said Ginger. Colin sighed. It was like taking a bunch of three-year-olds on an outing. Next thing he knew he’d have to schedule in a bathroom break and get them to wash their hands afterwards. They marched along one of the passages, chosen because Dervla, the only one with any precognitive skills, had shrugged and said ‘it feels right’.

“Did you think to bring any rations, Ginger?” he asked politely.

“Didn’t think I’d need them, old chap. Not usually partial to food, unless I’ve just undergone a potentially fatal explosion. After that, I’m ravenous.”

Begrudgingly, Colin fished around in his pocket and pulled out a piece of Kendal Mint Cake he had been saving. He passed it over and Ginger wolfed it down in two mouthfuls. Colin had been looking forward to that snack, but he supposed that Ginger did save his life. He tried to feel gracious, but he had *really* wanted that mint cake.

“So any chance of any more light? I don’t think a bottled ghoul will cut it anymore,” he said. Annie had been holding the dimly glowing ghost in a bottle ever since she had captured it.

“I’ll see what I can do!” said Annie. “I’ll just need to disrobe...”

She had just freed one breast from her dress when the tunnel around them was flooded with light. The caged lightbulbs along the length of the corridor glowed furiously. Colin looked around to see Dervla at a fusebox that was hanging on the wall.

“You’re welcome,” she winked. Annie reluctantly tucked her bosom back into the dress.

“Annie, I’ve got to ask, what’s with the nudity?” said Colin, trying to erase the image of her curiously brown nipples from his mind.

“Sorcery, dear boy, is *sex*,” she explained. “Sexual energy, re-directed and transformed. Clothes inhibit sexual energy, and therefore inhibit the power with which I can cast a spell.”

“So you have to get your kit off when you do magic?” he confirmed. Annie nodded.

“Precisely! Big spells, anyway,” he smiled. “And in any case, if you had a body like mine, you’d show it off at every opportunity.”

They pressed on.

“No sign of the nasty Nazis,” Colin commented. “This Herr Zimmer might not be all he’s cracked up to be.”

“SHHHHH!” said Monty. “He may hear you!”

Colin laughed.

“We’re deep underground surrounded by hundreds of tons of rock. You think he’s got a microphone hidden somewhere?”

“Of course not,” said Dervla. “But he has his ways. Once I heard he possessed a pigeon and got it to fly to Downing Street to sit on Churchill’s windowsill and listen in. When he found out that Churchill had closed all the windows and sound-proofed them, he blew the pigeon up. And several hundred other birds. All this while his body was sitting in a cosy armchair in Berlin.”

Colin was astonished.

“Don’t tell me you’re scared of him too, Miss O’Brien?” he joked.

“Am I fuck. In fact, if you’re listening, Zimmer, you can kiss my pasty Irish arse!”

The crew descended into giggles. They were trying to contain themselves when Dervla stopped dead.

“It’s close!”

“The Soul of the Nation?” asked Colin.

“No, the frickin’ Pope, who do you think I mean?” she snapped. “A few hundred yards.”

They kept a keen eye out.

“Do we know what we’re looking for?” asked Annie. “Winnie said he didn’t know what the Soul thing looks like.”

Colin shrugged.

“Something that symbolises our nation, I suppose,” he said. “Could be a lion. You know, like in Trafalgar Square?”

“I feckin’ hope not!” said Dervla. “I didn’t bring my lion tamer’s costume. I was hoping for something like Queen Boadicea. I like a strong woman.”

“Me too...” said Colin wistfully. He caught Annie staring and smirking. “Wait, did I say that out loud?”

“If you ask me, it’ll be John Bull; a stout, strong man with a cigar. Much like our beloved leader, come to think of it...” said Monty.

“Poppycock! The soul is woman, that’s for sure,” said Annie. “Britannia! Now *there’s* a body...”

Colin led them forwards for a minute and stopped when they came upon a locked metal trunk at the end of the corridor. It had no grand markings, just a hefty padlock on the front.

“Where is it?” said Colin.

“I think...I think it’s in the box,” said Dervla. The whole group gasped.

“They locked it in a box?” said Colin. “For twenty-odd years? Well, get it out!”

Dervla unhooked a crow bar from her belt and passed it to Colin. He nearly collapsed under the weight of it, and so passed it straight to Ginger. The demigod had the padlock off with one shot.

“Okay then. Let’s see what we’ve got!”

They opened the lid carefully and stepped back.

For a moment, nothing happened. Colin worried that they were supposed to do something to wake it, like perform a naked ceremonial dance, or sacrifice a Welshman. He certainly hoped not, as he *really* didn’t want to get naked.

“Hello?” came a voice from inside. “Who is it?”

“Um...your country,” said Colin. “We need you.”

Colin stood back and prepared for the might of John Bull, or the majesty of Queen Boadicea. He was about to kneel (it only seemed right) when he was confronted with the image...

...of a boy, about eight years in age. He was pale, scruffy and thin. He wore a set of cricket whites, with shin pads and a box to cover his pre-pubescent genitals. He stepped out, almost falling to the floor as he did so. He looked around the collection of people in front of him, who all looked rather underwhelmed. Colin noticed a dribble of snot trickle down from his nose.

“Thank goodness you’ve come!” he said in squeaky voice. “I’ve been waiting so long!”

Colin looked around the group and decided to ask the obvious:

“Who the hell are you?”

The boy smiled and stuck out a hand.

“So sorry! Where are my manners?” he said. “Pleased to meet you. I’m Bunty.”



## Chapter Twelve



Bunty stood with his hand outstretched and an innocent smile on his face for what seemed like hours. In fact it was only thirty-six seconds, but in Colin's mind it was such a deeply excruciating and confusing thirty-six seconds that he aged a full half a day in little over half a minute.

"So...you?" he said. Bunty nodded. Colin looked to Dervla for clarification, but she could only offer a shrug. "*You?*" Colin repeated. Bunty smiled and nodded again, so it seemed to be the right question to ask, even if it didn't seem to be clarifying anything about the situation or moving the discussion forwards. "*You're the Soul of the Nation?*"

"That's right," said Bunty. He pulled his hand back finally and ran it through his greasy hair, forcing it into a left parting. "Were you expecting someone else? John Bull, maybe?"

"Hmm? No, no, no! Good God, no!" said Monty, a tad too loudly. "We came to see you, dear boy. Just you! Good old... *Bunty*, was it?"

Bunty smiled.

"It's fine," he said. "I know I've been portrayed as many things throughout the years. My appearance changes to reflect the strength of the nation, you see."

Dervla looked him up and down.

"And this is the best you could come up with for now?" she said. Bunty, far from being offended, smiled.

"Good gracious, she's a Mick!" he announced happily. Dervla bristled at the term and Colin caught her fist as she rose it to strike. "What's

a native of the Emerald Isle doing this side of the Irish Sea? I say, you don't happen to know old Hibernia, do you?"

Dervla didn't know where to begin, so she didn't. Thankfully Colin spoke up first.

"Group huddle!" he said, throwing his arms up in the air. He placed them around the shoulders of Annie and Monty, who simply stared agog at him. "Huddle. You know. Like a scrum, but friendlier."

"Why?" said Annie. Colin sighed.

"Because I want to have a private conversation without *him* over hearing," he said, nodding towards Bunty, who was absently practising a reverse sweep. "No offence meant, Bunty."

"Hmm? Oh, none taken," he smiled. He seemed to be a bit lacking in the old grey cells. Colin finally ushered Dervla closer and huddled down.

"What do you want to say in priv- wait, where's Ginger?" said Dervla. She broke the huddle for a moment and looked up to see Ginger practising bowling to Bunty, who would smash away the imaginary cricket ball with the imaginary cricket bat. "Aw, look! He's found a friend. It's like they're on the same level..."

Colin coughed to get her back in the huddle.

"What do we do?" he asked. "He's a child! He can't know what the Nazis have done to the rest of the Souls, or what they are going to do to him."

"He's a supernatural representation of our country. He's been around for thousands of years," said Annie. "I don't think there is any need to mollycoddle him."

They broke the huddle and stood. Colin looked at Bunty and realised that he was about to tell (at least on the surface) an eight year old boy that he would very probably be murdered by the Nazis in the next few hours.

"Bunty?" he said.

"I know why you're here," said the boy. Colin's heart leapt. "The war's over, isn't it?"

"Well, yes..." Colin began. "But we kind of got into another one..."

"Oh. And are we winning this one? Because the last one was a complete shit-show when they decided to hole me up in here."

Monty folded his arms defensively.

"I'd tear a strip off you for talk like that, m'boy!" he blustered. "If it didn't happen to be true..."

"Sweetie, we need to get you out of here. You're in danger," said Annie. Suddenly Colin saw a different side to her. She had shifted from being a geriatric sex-pest to something more motherly. Or grandmotherly. He could see a great tenderness in her eyes (or that could have been glaucoma...)

"Righto!" cheered Bunty. "Lead the way, Captain Scott! Hurrah!"

"HURRAH!" sang Ginger. And the two of them mounted imaginary stallions and galloped off into the tunnels, leaving the grown-ups to look at each other, bemused and lost.

"Do you know, in all the excitement, I forgot to ask the Prime Minister whether I was getting paid enough for this shit," said Colin, before walking off after two infantile immortals.



AN HOUR LATER, THEY were still wandering the inner corridors of the bunker. The trouble seemed to be, Colin realised, that if you've seen one concrete slab wall, you've seen them all, and one tended to look like another. He stopped and leaned against the wall.

"At ease, chaps," he said, before quickly adding: "And chapesses. Take five. Or whatever the right military term is for having a breather. Us mortals need a drink."

Monty stepped up to him and offered the use of a hip flask.

"Tipple?" he offered. Colin took it gratefully and sipped, but raised an eyebrow to Monty.

“I thought drinking on the job ‘wasn’t professional,’” he said, handing back the flask.

“There’s a difference between steaming drunk and Dutch courage, you know,” said Monty. He took a sip himself, and moments later a dribble of whisky leaked out of his shoes. “Never mind that. My whole liver and digestive system rotted away years ago so it all goes straight through me. The taste buds still work though, so I keep a dram or two about me for old time’s sake. We’re lost, aren’t we?”

“What? No, don’t be silly. I-” Colin couldn’t keep up the pretence. “Yeah. Completely. Do you think the rest of them know?”

“Probably, but we’d speak up if we knew the right way,” said Monty. He turned and walked over to Annie, who was absently massaging her nipples. “Annie my love, you may have noticed we are a tad directionally challenged. Got anything you can whip up?”

“I’m not the pastry chef at the Savoy, Monty,” she snapped. To be honest, Colin was just pleased she hadn’t take the opportunity to make a double entendre based on the word ‘whips’. “However, I may be able to conjure up a locator spell. Give me a second.”

Annie set about mixing one vial with another from her bag of goodies, and was muttering in a strange deep voice that did not seem to be her own, when the vial in her hand exploded and let out a greenish gas.

“Excellent!” cheered Monty. “Now what?”

“Follow the cloud!” said Annie, suddenly drained of energy with a rosy glow to her cheeks. She lit a cigarette. “It’ll lead us to sunlight.”

The gas meandered through the air for a moment and drifted through the tunnel at a snails pace. It then picked up speed and the highly untrained unit of magical freaks followed, Bunty lagging behind. They followed the gas around a corner and ran after it.

“Keep up!” called Colin. “We can’t let it out of our-”

Colin stopped talking as soon as the steel door met his nose, making a sickening crack as it echoed around the room. He fell to the

ground and clasped his nose, attempting – badly – to stem the blood now gushing from his face. He looked up and saw the cloud of gas disappear as it squeezed through a tiny gap in the door frame.

“Go after it! Quick!” said Dervla. She reached out to the place where a handle should be, but there was none. Looking to the other side of the door, she found an empty space also.

“What the screaming blue FUCK is that door doing closed?” shouted Colin. “We came through it not five minutes ago!”

The group looked around each other. Slowly, Ginger raised his hand like a schoolboy confessing to a particularly nasty fart.

“It was making a draft, so I closed it,” he said. Colin stood and stepped up to Ginger, looking him in the eye.

“There’s no handle on this side.” he said quietly. “It’s a one-way door.”

Ginger looked down, licking his lips guiltily.

“Yes. Yes, I realise that now,” he muttered.

“So how, in the name of SATAN, are we going to get out?” screamed Colin. He stepped away from Ginger. It was no good shouting at him, he realised. It was like yelling at a kitten for the state of the tin-mining industry. He didn’t understand and couldn’t do anything about it anyway. He turned to Dervla. “Can you break it down? You know, use your ‘finesse’?”

Dervla shrugged apologetically.

“I suppose I could, but the rate that cloud was travelling, it’ll be long gone now.”

“I concur,” said Annie, still out of breath. “And I’m out of ingredients for another locator spell.”

Colin crouched down on the ground. His nose hurt like hell. He was tired, starting to get a hangover, and he wanted more than anything at that moment to be sat at a desk in Whitehall moving papers from one side of the desk to another, dying of boredom.

“So let me get this straight. A bunch of Nazis are tracking down Little Lord Fauntleroy here, and I’m trapped under a hundred tons of rock and in charge of an inept bunch of supernatural FUCKWITS?”

“I say, steady on old chap,” said Monty.

“Come and say that to my face,” challenged Dervla. “I’ll punch yer shiny English teeth through your throat!”

“This isn’t helping!” said Annie.

And soon the group had descended into an argument the likes of which Colin had not seen since the Christmas his mother had confessed to having an affair with both the Head Butler *and* the Scullery Maid.

The rumpus was silenced by a high pitched scream which caused all of them to plug up their ears with their fingers. It was the screech of feedback coming from the tannoy system, the speakers situated on each corner of the tunnels.

“Jesus! Turn them off!” called Colin.

Dervla jumped up and grabbed the wires that fed into the back of the speaker and ripped them out. There was a spray of sparks from the wires and Dervla dropped back to the floor. The feedback continued.

“They *are* off!” she yelled.

Slowly the feedback subsided and a creepy, accented voice started to appear over the static hum.

“Testing... Ein, zwei. Zwei? Testing. Is that on? Hellooo?” sang the voice. “Can you hear me?”

Colin looked amongst his peers, and decided to answer.

“Um, yes? Hello?”

“Ah! Gut! Thank you.” The German voice chimed in over the tannoy. “It’s so hard to tell, you know? I’m not a great fan of technology at the best of times....”

The Wychacre oddities exchanged some confused looks. Colin pointed to the speaker and shrugged, mouthing ‘who the hell is that?’ to Monty. The voice continued to witter on. Monty shrugged back, al-

though when he relaxed his shoulders they made a sickening crack and his left arm refused to budge without a little help from Ginger's fist. The young demigod hammered down on the zombie's frame until he didn't look so much like a hunchback.

"Excuse me for interrupting," said Dervla suddenly. She made Colin jump. He turned quickly to her and pressed his finger to his lips. When it became clear that she had no intention of shutting up, he pressed his finger to *her* lips instead. She gave him a look that could freeze over the River Thames in July, and bit down firmly on his hand. Colin winced and withdrew his hand. "But who in the name of feck are *you*?"

"Ah ha!" laughed the voice campily. "You must be Miss O'Brien! So pleased to make your acquaintance. I've never met a real banshee before, you know? My mentor used to keep one pickled in a barrel of schnapps, but he had killed it long before..."

"Is that who I think it is?" said Colin under his breath.

"Undoubtedly, Mr Powers," said the voice again. It had dropped an octave now and had a harsh rasp on it, like a bulldog with bronchitis. "Allow me to introduce myself. You can call me... Herr Zimmer!"



## Chapter Thirteen



“How the hell did he find us?” boomed Monty. Colin’s urges for them to keep quiet went falling on deaf ears, or in Monty’s case, rotting ears.

“Remote viewing, most likely,” said Annie. She held a vial of crystals up to the speaker and it briefly glowed blue. “Yes, and a venting spell to cast his voice to the tannoy system. Don’t worry, he’s nowhere near us. In fact, I’ll bet my bra he’s safely tucked away in Berlin.”

“Ja! Quite correct!” said Herr Zimmer. His voice regained its higher pitched, playful tone. “I am most impressed, Lady Drummond. Although I think we all know that you’re not even wearing a bra...”

“Ooh! Cheeky!” laughed Annie. She caught herself blushing and shook her head, wafting herself to regain composure. “What do you want, you fucking Kraut?” she snapped.

“Now, now!” said Zimmer. “Before we get down to business, let me say just how impressed I am at Mr Churchill’s little experimental regiment. I have long admired your work, Lady Drummond. Your hexes are legendary.”

Annie tried not to smile.

“Thank you,” she muttered.

“And General Brown, your record is exemplary, both pre- and posthumous.”

Monty simply grunted.

“Private Fox, you are ... well, unique!” continued the German. “As a demigod, you are quite brilliant. Also I’ve never seen a more strapping example of a young man.”

"*Queer*," muttered Ginger.

"And Mr Powers..." Here Herr Zimmer paused, seemingly lost for words. "I must admit I was confused when my sources told me that my rival in the world of paranormal defences was to be a spoilt little rich boy. I had expected someone with more...experience?"

*You and me both, pal*, thought Colin.

"So let me just say for now that under different circumstances I would dearly love to dine with you all – even you, Mr Powers – and exchange notes on the worlds of sorcery and the paranormal."

There was a silence that seemed to go on for an age.

"But...?" said Dervla.

"You *had* to ask, didn't you?" said Colin under his breath.

"But, as you say in English, the show must go on," said Zimmer. His voice dropped to the deep growl it had before. Although he could not be seen, Colin got the distinct impression that if he were there in the room with them, there would have been a lighting change, a thunder-clap and his eyes would have glowed red. Or maybe he'd been watching too many cheap horror movies at the flicks.

"What do you want?" Colin spoke up.

"You know damn well," said the chilling voice. "I want the boy."

The group turned to look at Bunty, who stood in a corner. A patch of yellow liquid quickly spread over the front of his cricketing trousers.

"Hand him over," said Zimmer's croaking voice.

"No," said Dervla simply. She put her arm around Bunty's shoulders. "He belongs here."

"Yeah!" said Colin. He was attempting to put on an air of bravery, but it was tricky with his heart almost beating out of his chest. "He's under our protection."

A low, menacing laugh emanated from the speakers.

"Oi! Have some respect!" Monty chimed in.

"Oh, as I mentioned, I have nothing but the highest respect for you all...well, most of you," said Zimmer. Colin flicked a V sign at the tan-

noy. It didn't need explaining that he was the baddie's least favourite. "Which is why it pains me so much that I will have to destroy you all."

Colin was aware that all eyes were on him, waiting for him to do something leader-y. *Okay*, he thought. *Time to prove the creepy Kraut wrong.*

"Dervla, use your finesse on that door," he said. Dervla stepped back, ready to take a run up. "Annie, Ginger, you're on protection of Bunty. If Zimmer tries to hit him with anything, give him what you've got. Monty, lead us out of here."

"Me? How?" spluttered Monty.

"I left half a bacon sandwich on the train. Can your zombie senses track it?"

Monty lifted his nose up and sniffed deeply.

"Do you know, old boy, I think I can!" he grinned.

"Very well, Mr Powers, have it your way," said the husk of a voice. "I will send my special forces to defeat you. Don't say I didn't give you a chance to hand over the Soul."

Dervla took a run up at the door and punched a hole straight through it. Ginger helped bend back the metal until they could all fit through. Monty sniffed again and led them through the hole in the door. Annie, Bunty, Ginger and Dervla followed.

"May the best man win, Mr Powers," said Herr Zimmer. The tannoy crackled, the connection getting weaker.

Colin looked up at the speaker, imagining the figure of his enemy in a dank German bunker, surrounded by maps and spells pinned to noticeboards. He wanted to accept the challenge, to be gentlemanly yet tough. Whatever he said next would have to be succinct, gracious and memorable. Shakespeare, perhaps? Something from Henry V? A bit of William Blake?

"Hey Zimmer?" said Colin.

"Yes, Mr Powers?"

"Go fuck yourself!"



## Chapter Fourteen



They jogged through the tunnels, Monty leading them like an un-dead bloodhound. The sense of urgency was astonishing; Colin had never much cared for deadlines or appointments and so was unused to working to another person's timescale. He found however that the pressure of a ticking clock, and not least a threat on his mortality, gave him quite the adrenaline rush.

"Good work, General!" he called, but it was too soon. Monty paused at a crossroads. "What? What is it?"

"The scent...it's coming from all directions," said Monty. "I can't tell which is the right way."

A dry cackle came over the speakers in the tunnels.

"Ah ha! A little olfactory hex to spice things up while my special forces arrive," said Herr Zimmer. "If you sit tight, they'll be with you in two or three minutes. Good luck!"

There was a hiss of static and a whistle of feedback, then the tunnels went silent.

"Do you know, I don't think I like that man?" said Monty.

"Ah, give him time," said Dervla.

Colin circled around, surveying the tunnels and their striking similarity.

"Alright. Let's split up," he suggested. Dervla began a slow, sarcastic hand clap (to which Ginger joined in, although he had no idea why...)

"Because all great plans start with the phrase 'Let's split up!'" she said, shaking her head. "Haven't you seen enough horror flicks to know it never ends well?"

Colin, affronted, stood up tall and attempted to hold his ground. He was supposed to be in charge, and didn't want to lose face.

"Why do you say that, Miss O'Brien?" he said, trying to match her level of sarcasm and failing.

"In all the old monster movies, the kids always say 'Let's spilt up' and it gives the monster the chance to pick them off one by one."

Colin had to admit she was right. Before he could concede however...

"Quite right," piped up Monty. "But in this monster movie, we have the advantage of being the monsters!"

Dervla stared at her friends for a moment, then shrugged in defeat.

"Good, that's sorted then," said Colin. "Bunty, you're with Dervla. If you find the exit, let out one of your super-shrill banshee screams. We can follow that."

"It's called a *wail*," Dervla corrected.

"Whatever. I'll go with Ginger. If we find the exit we'll...I don't know? Ginger?"

Ginger pulled a grenade from his pocket and pulled the pin.

"I could throw this and everyone could follow the noise?" he asked, calmly holding the handle in. Colin rushed to retrieve the pin and re-insert it.

"Excellent. Might I take that, Ginger? Marvellous..." he said, relieving the Private of the grenade. "Monty and Annie, you take the right hand passage. If you reach the exit first...I don't know, send a flare out of your vagina or something."

"Hmm, worth a try..." said Annie. Monty lifted his elbow so Lady Annabelle could link arms. They sauntered away together like they were off on an evening stroll.

Colin took the left passage, jogging to keep up with Ginger's long, military strides, and Dervla and the Soul of the Nation went straight on.

"So Private Fox? How am I doing?" Colin huffed.

"Doing, old chap? How do you mean?"

"In charge," said Colin. "You've served under some regiments. I imagine you've seen some conflict in your time?"

Ginger laughed.

"Oh, yes. Seen a few battles. Survived all of them, obviously," he said, his voice tinged with nostalgia. "Just the main ones. The Somme. Agincourt. Troy."

Colin did a double take.

"You fought in the Battle of Troy? Did you see Helen?"

"Yes, just the once. Between you and me, she wasn't all that..."

"Oh. Shame," Colin muttered. "So how am I doing as a leader?"

"Anyone dead yet?" asked Ginger (Colin got the feeling it was not a rhetorical question and that Ginger hadn't been paying attention).

"Erm...no?"

"Then you're doing pretty damn well."



MONTY AND ANNIE PROMENADED down the dank passage together, arm in arm. Monty had found it best to link arms with Annie, not because it kept her safe and close, but because it stopped her hand from fondling his buttocks.

"This is a rum job and no mistake, eh?" said Monty.

"Yes, but no one dead yet, so there's a plus," Annie said. "Isn't Colin doing well? I feel quite proud of him."

The tunnel suddenly went dark and they heard an ominous thud from in front and behind them. Then came the unmistakable sound of two rifles being cocked and loaded.

"I'd hold on to that thought if I were you, my dear," muttered Monty. "Don't supposed you have that flare-thing that Colin mentioned to hand, have you?"

"Oh, I can do a lot better than that..."

With a flourish, Annie clapped her hands together and the entire top half of her torso burst into a cool, green flame. It illuminated the tunnel and two camouflage-clad Nazi soldiers standing to either side of them. The sight of a septuagenarian immolating herself was enough to shock the special forces operatives, at least for a second or two, and the bright fire succeeded in dazzling them. Thankfully death had not affected General Brown's reflexes and he had drawn his service revolver in less than a second, shooting the soldier in front of him in the head. The Nazi fell like a sack of sauerkraut to the ground and Monty turned, putting himself between Annie and their remaining assailant.

A shot rang out, but this time it was not Monty who had fired. The soldier had aimed and shot in the time that Monty had dealt with his friend, but he had been aiming at Annie. Monty however had caught the bullet for her – it had pierced his array of medals on his chest and lodged itself somewhere around where his heart had once been. Looking down, the zombie General looked more inconvenienced than angry.

“Bloody hell! That’s another hole to sew. Uniforms like these don’t grow on trees, Sonny Jim!” he said. He let off a barrage of shots, but the soldier, seeing his bullets had no effect, had taken cover around the next corner. “Coward!”

Lady Annabelle gently moved Monty to one side.

“I’ll get this one, if I may?” she said. She summoned the green fire that had engulfed her body and it crept over her skin to form a large flame in her right hand. “*Ecumenitae flayucitae!*” she muttered. The flame turned from green to purple, burning with more intensity. She pulled her arm back and threw the ball of violet fire with a force that would have made WG Grace proud. The ball shot through the air and curved around the corner, landing with a ‘thwoomth’ that told Annie she had hit her target.

The second thing that told her she had hit her target was the man that charged past them screaming German profanities, his head aflame

and his eyeballs melting from their sockets. He ran for around twenty yards and then fell down, his limbs flailing as the last embers of life were burnt away.

Monty waited for the fire to burn itself out and then he approached the black husk of a corpse. Annie approached behind him, her hand a flaming torch. She clicked her fingers and the light surrounding them switched on again.

“You could turn the light back on the whole time?” said Monty. “Why didn’t you do that in the first place?”

“Where’s the fun in that?” Annie shrugged. She stepped over the charcoal soldier and carried on her merry way.

“Lady Drummond, remind me to never piss you off..”



“SO YOU MUST BE THE strongest member of the group, eh?” asked Bunty. He was trailing behind Dervla somewhat. This was partly because she was striding so fast that his infantile legs could not keep up, and partly because the pre-pubescent hormones in his body got a kick out of watching her bottom as she paced up the floor of the tunnel.

“I wouldn’t say that,” she answered, her attention concentrated on the task of avoiding assailants.

“Oh. You’re the most powerful then?” he asked. “Magic-wise?”

“Hmm, no. That would be Annie,” Dervla mumbled. She approached a corner by clinging close to a wall and angling a mirror to peer into the next part of the tunnel. When she was satisfied it was clear, she beckoned Bunty onwards.

“Most experience?” Bunty chanced.

“That’s Ginger, the immortal demigod,” stated Dervla firmly. “Why the game of twenty questions?”

Bunty shrugged and moped for a while, kicking a pebble along the ground, before piping up:

“It’s just...I’m clearly the most valuable asset on your mission, yes? So I was wondering why the human chappy had entrusted me with you. You must be the strongest, most powerful or most experienced, do you get my drift?”

Dervla stopped and looked the Soul of the Nation direct in the eye. The face of the young boy stared back, but she could see in his expression the worry of a thousand years; an immortal being stuck inside the husk of a child.

“I reckon Colin thought I was the least likely to kill you myself for asking annoying questions,” she said. “At least, I *was*...”

Bunty’s spirit fell and his cherubic face morphed into that of a whimpering child before a fit of the screaming ab-dabs. Dervla rolled her eyes.

“Ah, buck up, will ya?” she said. She really needed to work on her sympathy, she reminded herself. “Look, I can predict death, alright? So Colin knew I’d be able to sense these Nazi bastards and defend you if need be.”

Bunty swallowed down the lump in his throat and held back the tears. The immortal being inside of him was silently cursing the fragility of being in the body of a young boy.

“You’re sure?” he asked.

From the shadows behind Bunty emerged a fully hooded German soldier, his rifle aimed at the boy’s head.

“Of course. Here, I’ll prove it,” said Dervla. She smacked Bunty aside with her left arm and pulled out her handgun with her right, firing three shots immediately. There was the sound of the crumple of a body as it hit the floor, and Dervla stepped forwards.

Lying on the floor, the Nazi corpse kept the expression of shock that the man had formed when the first bullet hit his brain. Dervla had hit the head in the first blow- the two smoking holes in his chest were just for good measure.

“Is he...dead?” asked Bunty.

“Yup,” answered Dervla. “I foresaw it.”

“Thank you.”

Bunty touched her on her arm. Dervla reacted when he touched her, shrugging it off and smacking him to the side again; Bunty was about to mention that she really needed some sort of sensitivity training in her new position when he saw a second special ops agent appear out of the darkness; he must have been waiting there silently for some time, even when he saw his friend gunned down by the mad banshee. The soldier fired and the sound was deafening. Bunty fell to the floor and covered his ears. Dervla, shielding the Soul of the Nation with her body, went to return fire but was surprised to see the gun no longer in her hand. The German's bullet had knocked it clean out of her grip. Reacting quicker than the German would've liked, she ran forward and grabbed his rifle by the barrel. Pulling it towards her, she grabbed the butt of the gun and pushed it forward, slamming it into the man's nose. Blood spurted out onto her shirt and into his eyes, rendering him blind. He fell to his knees.

“Tell your boss, Herr Zimmer, to send more boys next time!” said Dervla. She ditched the rifle and grabbed the man's head in her hand. Her fingers reached around his skull perfectly, and she grimaced as she squeezed hard. He gave out an almighty scream that rivalled her own banshee's wail as her hand formed a fist, his head crushing under the pressure like it was in a pneumatic clamp.

Bunty was glad he had put his fingers in his ears, as the sound of a man's skull being crushed, the resulting blood splatter and squish of brains between Dervla's fingers was not one he would have been able to forget for quite some millennia.

He stood in the now silent tunnel. Dervla wiped her hand down her trousers, pieces of grey matter sinking into the fabric. She stared at the caved-in head with a look of fascination.

“You...you had a gun,” he muttered. “You could have shot him.”

Dervla turned to Bunty, a black look in her eye.

“The bastard didn’t deserve a quick death,” she said, before pacing on ahead through the tunnels.



GINGER WALKED AHEAD of Colin. This was fine with Colin, because although he was meant to be in charge and taking the lead, Ginger was the demigod and Colin reckoned that mortality outranked superiority any day. He had heard a few scuffles in the tunnels behind him, but trusted his crew to let him know if they needed help, which they undoubtedly didn’t.

“*Dum-de-dum...Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer doooooo...*” sang Private Fox, sauntering along without a care in the world.

“Um, Ginger?” whispered Colin. “Maybe we should keep quiet. You know, in case the Nazi death troopers are around the next corner?”

“Hmm?” said Ginger, a blank look on his face. “Oh, was I making a noise?”

“Yes. Singing,” said Colin. “I mean, you’ve a lovely voice and everything, it’s just...well, we’re on a top secret mission.”

“Gotcha!” said Ginger with a wink. He turned back to the tunnel, but just as quickly turned back to Colin. “What was I singing?”

“Um, *Daisy, Daisy?*” said Colin. “The ‘bicycle made for two’ song?”

“Ah, yes!” said Ginger with a smile. “Do you know, I haven’t heard that little ditty in years!”

“But...you were just singing it. Just now?” said Colin. His eyebrows knitted together in a way that he saved for the most extreme types of confusion. “Never mind. Let’s press on, yes?”

They had not moved more than fifty yards when-

“*Dum-de-dum...Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer doooooo...*” sang Private Fox.

“Ginger!” Colin cried in a whisper. “You’re doing it again!”

“Doing what, dear boy?”

Colin shook his head in exasperation and overtook the Private. He rounded the next corner and froze. There was a doorway – the wrecked, bended metal of the doorway that Dervla and Ginger had ripped apart a few hours before. Framed in the light from outside was a pair of the aforementioned Nazi death troopers. Guarding the exit with their rifles, they stood facing outwards, and so did not notice Colin as he held his breath and tip-toed back around the corner. He held up a hand to Ginger to stop.

“There’s good news and bad news,” whispered Colin. Ginger lit up like a kid at Christmas.

“Oh, I love this game!” he said. “Give me the good news!”

“Good news is that we’ve found the exit,” said Colin.

“HURRAH!” called Ginger, a tad too loud. Colin shushed him and peered around the corner to check the German guards, but they had not heard. “Sorry! *Hurrah!*” he said, more softly this time. “What’s the bad news?”

“It seems to be guarded by two soldiers,” said Colin.

“Oh, that doesn’t sound too bad!” said Ginger brightly. Colin had to agree that Ginger’s positive attitude, or what some might have called ‘naivety’, was a breath of fresh air. “So we’ve still got to alert the others to say we’ve found the exit. Is that right?”

“Um, yes. That’s right,” said Colin, shocked that Ginger had even remembered what they were there for. “What are you thinking?”

Ginger took out the hand grenade he had produced earlier and winked.

“I’m thinking: Two birds – One stone!”

Ginger walked straight past Colin and up to the German guards. Placing a cigarette between his lips, he tapped them both on the shoulder to get their attention.

“Entschuldigung?” he said in flawless German. “Haben Sie ein Licht bitte?”

The guards turned and looked confused for a moment. They were clearly prepared for an attack and as the handsome young man in the uniform in front of them was not attacking (and was, in fact, asking for a light in the politest way possible), they were rather taken aback. The guard on the left was so baffled that he actually produced a book of matches and lit Ginger's cigarette for him.

"Danke schön!" said Ginger with a winning smile. Almost as an after thought, he held out his hand and the soldier on the right took it immediately. "Tschüs!" Ginger was so amiable that the soldiers had not even noticed that he had handed them a live grenade, minus the pin.

There was a brief moment of realisation and panic on the guard's faces before-

*THRA-BOOOM!*

The explosion rocked the tunnels and Colin had no doubt that Annie, Monty, Dervla and Bunty had heard it. Ginger himself had stayed close to the soldiers as the grenade went off. He had not wanted to give the game away by running away as he handed them his surprise, and anyway, what did it matter if he got blown up a bit?

Colin approached the doorway, wafting away smoke.

"Ginger?" he said, his ears ringing. The handsome private walked through the mist like an angel.

"Yes, chief?" he smiled. Colin was once again amazed at his new friend. He had gone through yet another explosion with such grace and style.

"Um, you've got a German eyeball on your lapel."

Ginger checked his uniform and brushed off the eyeball from his jacket, a few specks of blood from his trousers and kicked a Nazi testicle from his boot.

"Must get this dry-cleaned," he muttered. "So, what now?"

Colin looked around the disturbingly beautiful landscape. It was nearing sunset on the picturesque Cheshire hills, sheep in the field next

to them calling their lambs. Their train lay in sidings in the distance. What next? The truth was – he hadn't a fucking clue.

“Now we wait, Ginger,” he said. He sat and pulled out his hip flask, taking a long, hard swig. “We just wait.”



## Chapter Fifteen



It didn't take them long to assemble at the exit; Monty and Annie were just around the corner from them and Dervla and Bunty came running soon after. Dervla looked down at the charred Nazi bodies.

"Yikes," she said, deadpan. "What happened, Colin? Barbecue accident?"

"I'd like to take the credit, but Private Fox here was the head chef on this occasion," he said. "Everyone alright?"

The assembled freaks nodded.

"Two Gerries tried to put a bullet in my breast, but General Brown was my knight in shining armour!" said Annie.

"You were quite the Amazonian warrior yourself, Lady Drummond!" said Monty.

"Well as much as I'd like stay and hear you flirt, we should get on the train," said Colin.

"Right. Zimmer will have detected the lack of life signs from his soldiers by now. I assume he can do that, Annie?" asked Dervla.

"Simple life-force spell," Annie confirmed. "He'll be putting a Plan B together as we speak."

"Then let's scarper, at the double," said Monty. They stepped forth to leave, and Colin caught sight of Bunty, staring out to the horizon. The sun was just dipping behind the hills, making a dazzling pink and orange light show out of the cumulo stratus that peppered the sky. A light breeze blew through a nearby oak, and the cows in a nearby field trudged back towards a shed for milking.

“You alright there, Champ?” said Colin. Bunty had gone white and was gazing open-mouthed at the surrounding landscape. He nodded absently.

“It’s... it’s beautiful,” he murmured. “I’ve been around a while, you know. Millennia. I saw the Romans invade, the battle of Hastings, the civil war, even the industrial revolution. And the beauty of this country never fails to amaze me.”

Colin realised that it was the first time in decades that the Soul of the Nation had been outside. He let him take a few breaths of fresh Cheshire air, and then he beckoned him forwards to follow the others.



ABOARD BETSY, GINGER helped Monty load the firebox with fuel, for which he felt compelled to strip off his top half and reveal his strangely smooth chest and bulging pectorals. It made Colin feel so inadequate that he took himself off to the carriage. There they installed Bunty in the centre, away from any windows through which a sniper might take a shot. Dervla took the opportunity to strip down and clean a few of her rifles, and to refill her ammo. Annie took the time to lay on a chaise longue and ‘recharge her spiritual energy’. It soon became clear that this meant masturbating loudly while everyone else tried to ignore her.

“Where are we heading?” asked Dervla. Colin sat at the bar, his chin perched on his fingertips in a fashion that he hoped made him look wise. Deep inside however, he didn’t feel very wise. If he was honest with himself, he hadn’t a fucking clue where he was taking them.

“Annie?” he said. Lady Drummond stopped mid-rub and raised an eyebrow. “If we go back to Wychacre, could Zimmer find us?”

“The house and grounds are protected by a number of my own protection spells, so in theory he wouldn’t be able to track us using regular magic, but...”

Annie let the ‘but’ hang in the air for a few moments. Colin looked over and was about to impatiently prompt her to finish her sentence, when he saw that she was frozen on the spot, her mouth frothing.

“ANNIE?”

Colin and Dervla raced over to her. Her eyes had rolled back into her head and only the whites were showing. Her hands were balled so tightly into fists that she was piercing the skin of her palms with her fingernails.

“BUT – AS LADY DRUMMOND WAS ABOUT TO SAY, I AM A SUPREMELY POWERFUL WIZARD.”

The voice that came out of Annie’s mouth was not her own. It had a distinctly Teutonic tone and her movements suddenly became highly masculine.

“Ah, fuck,” said Dervla. “She’s possessed.”

“No shit,” said Colin. “Herr Zimmer, leave Annie out of this. She admires your talent for sorcery but I think she draws the line at having you inside her.”

“LADY DRUMMOND HAS NEVER OBJECTED TO HAVING ANY MAN INSIDE HER,” said Zimmer through Annie’s mouth. “SHE USUALLY INSISTS. HOWEVER, I WILL CONSENT TO DISPOSSESSING HER IF YOU HAND OVER YOUR CARGO.”

Colin’s eyes flicked to Bunty, who sat terrified in the centre of the carriage.

“Can’t do that,” said Colin.

“THEN I WILL RUIN LADY DRUMMOND FROM THE INSIDE OUT. IT IS EASIER THAN YOU’D THINK. I’M INSIDE HER MEMORIES NOW. ALL I NEED TO DO IS TO BRING A TRAUMATIC THOUGHT INTO THE FOREFRONT OF HER MIND AND I CAN SEND HER CRAZY IN A FEW MINUTES.”

“Stop!” screamed Dervla. “We’ll meet you.”

"Hey!" said Colin. "I'm the one giving the orders."

"Then do it quick, before he turns my friend into a vegetable!" snapped Dervla.

Colin paused. He glanced back at Bunty, then over to a map that he had laid out on the bar. Finally he looked to Annie, who was growing weak from the possession.

"OKAY!" he yelled. "There's a quarry near the line around Sheffield. We'll meet you there and we can talk like civilised people. No possessing anyone – got it?"

Annie's eyes rolled back and she screamed as Zimmer's aura left her. Dervla gathered her up in a hug.

"Is he gone?" Colin asked. Annie nodded, shaken by the event. Colin walked over to the bar, where – professionalism be damned – he fixed himself a neat vodka. Bunty stared at him from his chair in the centre of the carriage. "Sorry kid," said Colin, not daring to meet his eye. "It had to be done."



BETSY PULLED TO A STOP at an abandoned quarry. It was quiet and eerie once the engine had stopped. Their voices echoed off the sheer rock walls.

"What's the plan, chief?" said Ginger, leaping down from the footplate and jogging over athletically. He was still topless. Colin found himself transfixed by his nipples and suddenly saw what all the homosexual boys he had known in boarding school saw in the male form. *If I had to...* he thought. He pushed the thought from his mind and shook his head to clear it.

"Um... no plan," he said finally. He thought that if they were going to be destroyed by some maniacal Nazi, then his team at least deserved the truth. "Zimmer will be here soon. We'll hear him out."

"Hear him out?" said Monty, incredulous. "He's a fucking Nazi! He's not going to suggest we place Bunty under joint custody, is he?"

What were you thinking? The Germans would have him weekdays and we'd take him to the zoo every Saturday?"

Colin marched up to Monty and grabbed him by the lapels.

"He's too powerful! He possessed Annie!" he shouted into Monty's face. He tried to ignore the stench of rotting meat coming from the zombie's mouth. "If you've got any bright ideas, General Brown, then be my guest!"

He dropped his grip on Monty and walked away.

The rest of the team disembarked from the train. Annie was still shaken from her ordeal.

"Is he here?" she said, finally looking her age. Colin shook his head.

"No. We said no possessions, so I'm not sure how he will do it. Can wizards... I dunno. Fly? Zap themselves through space?"

Annie shook her head.

"We're magic, not bloody comic book superheroes..." she said with a disdainful look.

The six of them stood in the centre of the quarry for a few awkward moments, instinctively surrounding Bunty to protect him.

A few trees stood on the edge of the quarry. It was an airless, hot summer day and the sky was cloudless. Until...

"Something's coming," said Annie. But you didn't need to be a witch to realise that evil was on its way. The leaves rustled on the trees and a wind whipped up out of nowhere. The quarry darkened, the sun somehow dimming and the heat from the air dissipating. Colin felt a chill come over him.

"He's here."

And he was. At least, the *essence* of him was. Each of the Wychacre crew felt him around them. Then the wind rushed past and buffeted the trees once more. The quarry was silent again.

"Was...was that it?" asked Monty.

"No," said Annie. "That was just the start."

Colin heard a rustling to his side and he turned to see a black line moving across the ground. He peered closer to see that it was a trail of spiders, moving in single file across the ground.

“What the hell...?” he muttered.

“Um, guys?” called Dervla. “You should see this!”

Colin turned to see a similar queue of spiders filing past Dervla.

“Over here as well!” said Ginger.

“Arachnids, twelve o’clock!” shouted Monty.

“Annie, what’s going on?” said Colin.

Annie peacefully watched the line of spiders move past her with intense, almost scientific curiosity.

“Well, blow me...”

The rustling of the spiders continued and grew louder. They varied in size now; money spiders, common household varieties, pregnant ones with swollen bellies full of eggs, baby spiders. They had been summoned from around the surrounding countryside and obeyed immediately, scuttling to the quarry. Then the rustling became a roar, and Colin looked up to see the edge of the quarry turn black as hundreds, thousands, maybe even *millions* of spiders crept towards them.

They swarmed near to where Colin and his friends stood. They ended up in one great black mass, climbing on top of each other, forming a mound of twitching legs and bodies. Slowly, the mound of arachnids began to form a shape.

“Shit...it’s him,” said Colin.

It was at this point, Colin did not mind admitting, that he shat himself with fear. It wasn’t a huge shit, but nevertheless his bowels opened and deposited a token of his fright into his y-fronts.

The spiders settled, forming the shape of a man, standing eight feet tall in front of them. The man had a short goatee beard, wore a peaked hat and a suit that Colin assumed to be a military uniform, all recreated in the medium of freaky black spiders.

“Greetings, Mr Powers,” said the figure. “It is a pleasure to finally meet in the flesh... more or less.”

“Zimmer,” acknowledged Colin. It was all he could do to stop himself from screaming and running for the hills. “Good trick. You really don’t like travelling much do you? I assume the real you is safely in Berlin?”

The ArachniZimmer nodded.

“It is far more convenient, and I do not like to waste the Fuhrer’s resources. Planes are not cheap, you know.”

There was an awkward pause. While there were six of them, Zimmer clearly had the upper hand. He stood tall, and paused to brush a speck of dust from his shoulder. The spiders manoeuvred themselves to mimic the man.

“What now?” said Colin.

“Now? I thought that was obvious. I take – Bunty, was it? - and you will be free to return to your base. Tell Winston I said hello.”

Colin caught sight of Bunty out of the corner of his eye. He too was shaking with fear, tears running down his face. Too scared to talk, he simply looked at Colin and mouthed the words ‘Please, no.’

Colin didn’t know what was more upsetting; the image of an eight year old boy begging for his life, or the thought that this immortal being who had seen his country rise up to greatness through thousands of years, seen battles and wars and millions of his country’s sons laid to waste, was shaking with fear at his fate.

Colin fixed Zimmer with a stare. He summoned all the courage in his body and forced it out into one single word.

“No.”

Monty twisted his head to the side (making a sickening crack as he did so) and looked at Colin with surprise, and more than a little pride.

“Take it we’re fighting the bugger, then?” he whispered to Colin. Colin gave a nod, never taking his eyes from Zimmer. Monty rubbed his hands together. “Marvellous!”

“Mr Powers,” said Zimmer, the spiders rearranging themselves to move his lips. “I am very disappointed in you.”

“Yeah, I get that a lot,” Colin smirked. “Attack!”

Monty drew his revolver and fired in to the centre mass of the ArachniZimmer. The bullet entered the body and succeeded only in removing a few legs from one or two spiders. The rest simply moved out of the way and let the bullet fall out the other side.

“Hmm,” said Monty. He stroked his chin like he was trying to work out a particularly tricky long division sum. “Looks like my usefulness here may have peaked...”

“Keep him busy!” said Colin. He grabbed hold of Bunty and picked him up, shoving him under his arm. He ran, taking the Soul of the Nation over to an overturned tractor that the previous occupants must have used to haul rock.

“Don’t move. We’ll deal with Mr Magic over there,” he said, giving Bunty what he hoped was an encouraging wink.

“Hey freak face! Over here!” Dervla called to Zimmer. The weirdly shifting, crawling body looked over. Dervla had decided to use all of her banshee strength to pick up a large rock that lay on the ground. It had been cut from the quarry but for whatever reason, never taken away and used. It was about the size of a refrigerator but the petite Dervla managed to grab hold of it and swing it around and around, gaining speed until she let go. The rock flew through the air with all the grace of a morbidly obese ballerina, and landed with a bang on Zimmer’s right leg.

“Yes! Good shot!” called Colin. The rock lay on top of Zimmer, with the creatures that had formed his leg crushed to a pulp underneath the giant stone. It only took a few seconds for the spiders to reform, some shifting down to make a new leg, reducing the overall height of the ArachniZimmer to a mere seven feet.

Dervla tutted, disappointed.

“Slippery little shit, ain’t he?” she complained.

“Annie, you’re our best hope!” said Colin. Zimmer was stomping his way towards the area he had seen Colin hide Bunty, while Monty attempted to keep him occupied by blasting bullets into him. It slowed him down for a few short seconds each time the trigger was pulled, but even Monty knew that the solution to defeating him lay elsewhere.

Colin turned to see Annie knelt down on the floor, a small travel-kit of potions and ingredients laid out in front of her.

“Cooking something up now, my darling!” she said in a sing-song, yet somewhat stressed tone. “If you could buy me a couple more minutes, that would be marvellous!”

“Annie, we need something *now!*”

She looked up, glaring at Colin with black eyes.

“I’m sorry dear, but if I had known that I’d be fighting a FUCKING IMMENSE NAZI MADE OF SPIDERS, I’D HAVE PREPARED SOMETHING AHEAD OF TIME!” Annie roared, her face reddening.

Colin stood back, holding his hands in front of him to calm her. He turned and slapped Ginger on the back.

“Private Fox, you’re up next,” he said. “Give him the old demigod magic!”

“Hmm?” said Ginger.

“Kill him!” shouted Colin. “Now! Please?”

“Ah, yes! No problem...”

Ginger stepped forwards and stripped off his shirt yet again, which Colin thought was unnecessary, unless he was planning to enchant Zimmer using his nipples. He stepped forwards.

“Herr Zimmer?” he asked politely. “I’ve come to kill you.”

Zimmer laughed. The deep, Germanic voice came from the heavens somewhere, projected from Berlin using an enchantment, but the spiders seemed to find it amusing too. They matched his laughs with a shuffling of legs, making a truly horrifying sound, the like of which Colin had never heard before and never wanted to hear again.

This seemed to rattle Ginger, as his breathing grew deep and he clenched his jaw tight. A low growling came from his direction, which sounded like someone had started up the quarrying machinery again.

“Kneel before your GOD!” he called. His voice had broken quite spectacularly, becoming a guttural drone. Dervla stopped hauling another rock she had found to fight with and looked on in fascination.

“Crikey!” she whispered. “Ginger’s gone all fire and brimstone on us!”

Ginger grew in size, his muscles flexing and rippling, his body changing. He soon matched Zimmer at seven foot tall and kept going. Eight foot... nine foot...ten...

“So this is what he meant by his ‘wild side,’” smirked Dervla. “Now this is a side of Private Fox I can get on board with...”

“I said *kneel!*” Ginger cried, but Zimmer’s spider-figure laughed again.

“You don’t get it do you?” he said. “You will never stamp me out! I will never die! I will defeat you!”

Ginger, his veins pulsing purple under his skin, let out a primal scream and launched himself at Zimmer. He landed on the spider figure and they toppled to the ground. Ginger stamped and smashed the spiders underneath him, making an arachnoid paste of parts of the wizard. But with a scuttle of eight million legs, Ginger found himself pounding the ground uselessly. The spiders reformed themselves behind him. Having lost another few hundred of their brethren, Zimmer was still mighty, but a tad shorter at around six foot six.

“You’re doing well, Ginger!” called Colin. “Piece by piece, that’s how we’ll get him!”

Ginger stood and launched himself at Zimmer once more, diving to drive him to the floor, but this time Zimmer was prepared. The spiders split the body in two, leaving a pair of half-Zimmers standing on one leg, while the Super-Ginger flew through the middle. He realised too late where he was heading, which was straight towards the fridge-

sized rock that Dervla had carelessly left lying around. He hit it head-first, a sickening crack echoing around the quarry.

“Ginger?” said Dervla, but the demigod was sleeping soundly, knocked unconscious.

Colin turned to Zimmer.

“We’re getting to you, aren’t we? You’re tiring, I can tell!” he said. It raised a smile from Zimmer. “You’re getting smaller! Give up now, Zimmer, it’s not like you can just summon more spiders at will and rebuild – AW CRAP!”

A mountain of black spiders crawled over the ridge of the quarry towards Zimmer, scuttling to their friends and becoming part of the ArachniZimmer. Soon, he towered over them again at a humongous ten foot high.

“Submit?” Zimmer boomed.

“No can do,” shrugged Colin. “ANNIE! HELP!”

Annie stood, two bottles of potions in her hand.

“Okay sweetie, ready!” she shouted. “*Aleflore, macratore, Palay tumorick, homlay corfay!*” she chanted. She was about to mix the two bottles when Zimmer leapt up and covered the twenty yard gap between them in a single bound. The spiders that made up his body tensed and used their combined force to pull back a leg and kick her in the face with extreme power. She fell backwards, tumbling over and over. Colin heard a snap, and watched as Annie’s elderly bones gave way and her arms bent back on themselves, well and truly broken.

“Aaaaaggghhh!”

“Fucking hell!” screamed Colin. He hadn’t known how squeamish he was until he saw how her arms rested. They were bent into a zigzag shape, a small bit of bone sticking out through the skin on both sides. She crawled back towards the area where her ingredients lay. Zimmer meanwhile set off towards the overturned tractor, and Bunty beyond it.

“Monty! Dervla! Stop him!”

Annie was in great pain, but she still tried to reach through the agony and grab the bottles for her spell. Her arms were so broken and weak however that it was like trying to pick up a bowling ball with two pieces of wet lettuce.

“Annie, give it here!” called Colin, running over to her. He grabbed the bottles and was about to pour one into the other when Annie stopped him.

“Colin! Stop! You don’t know what you’re doing!” she shouted.

“Hasn’t held me back so far!” he smiled. “What do I do?”

Annie, wincing through the pain, pointed at each bottle in turn.

“One part liquid hemlock. Two parts badger’s blood. Four parts essence of misery. Mix them together and add the toe of a traveller,” she said, pointing to a dry, gnarled, bony item that Colin had assumed was some sort of poor creature that had died a horrific death in the quarry a few weeks prior. While he tried to concentrate on Annie’s instructions, the shots of Monty’s gun in the background rang out. “Hurry! They can’t hold him off much longer! But be careful. If you add too much or less of any of the ingredients, it will either not be potent enough or react explosively and kill us all.”

Colin stared at her.

“No pressure then?”

She nodded at him to get to work, but he was suddenly paralysed with fear. His internal critic, which usually only surfaced when he was either in bed with a woman who was way out of his league, or if he was in the rare position of sobering up, started to ring out in his head.

Who was he to do this? Why had he be chosen? What the hell was Churchill thinking? He was a nobody. He had no skills, no training, no prospect and no way to get out of it all. He had traded his whole life on being the son of the brilliant Bertie Powers and where had it got him? Arse-deep in trouble and about to kill off his new team of freaks. The only skill he had, if it could be called a skill, was being able to -

“That’s it!” Colin said aloud, silencing his inner critic (who went to sulk in a corner of his mind because it had a lot more to say on the matter and did not like being interrupted). “It’s a Southside Fizz!”

“Sorry, dear?” asked Annie.

“It’s a Southside Fizz! One part sugar syrup to two parts lemon juice, and four parts gin! Only with, well, hemlock and stuff. Add a sprig of mint, or in this case, disgusting dried toe, and *voilà!* The perfect cocktail!”

Annie sat still, staring in confusion, but it didn’t matter. Colin had renewed faith in his abilities. His special skill, apparently, was being a complete lush, and it was about to come in handy.

“Lemon juice... Sugar syrup... Gin...” he muttered, pouring the mixture into a small cauldron that Annie had provided. One gift he had was being able to measure shots of alcohol by eye. He put the lid on, fashioning a make-shift Boston shaker, and shook the hell out of the potion, which was beginning to smoke slightly. “Won’t taste the same without the ice, but still...”

Zimmer was being kept busy by Monty, who continued to blast away like a demented cowboy, while Dervla threw around any rock she could find, large or small, but Zimmer kept on coming.

“Add the toe!” shouted Annie. Colin’s cocktail showmanship made him sniff the mixture (making him cough and splutter) before adding the toe with a flourish. It sank to the bottom and he and Annie peered in the cauldron, waiting.

“Hmm,” said Colin. “Do you think it needs more misery?”

“Say the words. It has to be you!” said Annie urgently. “Repeat after me: *Aleflore, macratore, Palay tumorick, homlay corfay!*”

“What? Slower!” he said, watching her lips intently.

“*Aleflore, macratore...*” said Annie.

“Al-e-flore, mac-ra-tor-e...” parroted Colin.

“*Palay tumorick*”

“Pallay turmeric?”

*"Homlay corfay!"*

"Homme-lay corf-hay!" Colin yelled with vigour.

For a second, the mixture just started to fizz, like adding a dram of club soda. Then...

THRWOOM!

The mixture shot into the sky like a volcanic eruption, bubbling and frothing and turning in on itself. It created a mushroom cloud above the quarry, the mass of smoking potion reaching upwards. Dervla looked up and froze.

"My banshee sense is tingling!" she called above the rumbling noise of the explosion. "Someone's gonna die!"

Colin looked up with wonder at the potion he had created. He had no idea whether he had done what he was supposed to, but it certainly looked cool...

The cloud rumbled again and the head of the mushroom appeared to close in on itself, forming into a large fist, over twenty feet across. It rotated and the fist faced downwards. Even Zimmer in his bodysuit of creepy-crawlies looked upwards.

"Time to move out," said Dervla, pulling the unconscious Ginger backwards and following Monty, who had already started to hide behind the tractor with Bunty. Colin and Annie, a safe distance away, looked on.

The fist began to plummet, falling down towards the quarry floor. The only thing in its way was the ArachniZimmer, which watched with fascination as the fist fell down upon it with a BLAM!

The force caused a dust cloud which when it cleared, left a hideous black pulp of spiders on the floor, each one squashed dead. Colin helped Annie to her feet and they went to survey the damage. The others appeared from behind the tractor, Ginger now regular-sized and conscious, rubbing his bruised head.

After a few solemn moments they all gathered around the pond of liquid spider.

“Well...” said Colin. “I think that went rather well, don’t you?”



## Chapter Sixteen



A week later, Dervla lay on the table in the grand dining room back at Wychacre House. She wore a black dress with black boots and black market nylons. Annie sat on a sacred rug in the corner, her arms now re-set and bandaged, hanging in a double sling. She was muttering some enchantment under her breath and was, for once, fully clothed.

Monty entered the room, carrying a silver tray covered with a silver-plated cloche.

“Not here yet?” he asked.

“Clearly,” dead panned Dervla.

“Well, I’m not waiting for them. I’m famished!”

Monty lifted the cloche to reveal a confused-looking rat sitting on the silver tray, munching on a side-salad. The poor rodent didn’t have time to blink before the decomposing soldier swooped and grabbed it, ripping off its head with his teeth.

“Monty!” said Annie from her corner. “Manners!”

“Mmf... sorry!” said Monty, mouth full. He took a napkin from the table and delicately draped it over his lap, before continuing to devour the still-twitching animal.

Ginger entered the room from a door that Dervla was pretty sure was the entrance to a storage cupboard, which begged the question of how long he had been in there.

“Chief here?” he smiled.

“He’s standing right beside you,” said Dervla, without turning to see. Ginger, as gullible as a brain dead gorilla, turned to look, found no

one and continued turning, until he was simply spinning around on the spot like a dog chasing its own tail.

“Dervla, don’t tease!” said Annie. “Colin will be here in a moment.”

Moments passed and Colin arrived as predicted like a semi-prompt Godot. He held the door open and Winston Churchill followed in behind him, followed in turn by a fug of cigar smoke.

“Winnie!” said Monty. He reached out to shake the Prime Minister’s hand and pointed to the cigar in his mouth. “Careful, those’ll kill you.”

Winston, quieter than usual, made the rounds of the room and shook hands – except for Annie, of course. Colin watched as the great man pressed the flesh and laughed with the small team that he had come to know so well over the last few weeks.

The PM finally sat down at the head of the table. Everyone sat to listen, except Dervla, who just turned over on her front and propped her head on her hands, giving Churchill a good view of her cleavage.

“Gentlemen, ladies, it is at this point that I would normally say to a serving unit that I want to thank you on behalf of myself, His Majesty and His Majesty’s Government for your service. However as I am the only person out of those listed who knows about your mission, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my very soul. What you have achieved is extraordinary, in every sense of the word.”

He paused for the usual rounds of titters and laughter that a sub-joke like this would bring, but there was none.

“Sir?” said Ginger, raising his hand like a schoolboy. “Can I ask, what happened to Bunty?”

Churchill looked confused.

“*Bunty?*”

“He means the Soul of the Nation,” said Colin. “He named himself Bunty. We haven’t seen him since you took him from us over a week ago.”

“Ah, I see. The Soul has been taken to a secure facility and is being looked after by the military,” Churchill said. He sensed the tone in the room. “Your care for it is touching, but you have completed your mission, and the Soul is safe. Try to move on.”

More silence, until Dervla raised herself up on to the table and walked down its length, her boots stomping on the rich mahogany. She stopped as she came to the PM.

“He’s a ‘he’ Winston,” she said, towering above him. She placed down a boot and extinguished the man’s cigar. “Bunty was a real, live boy, with thoughts and feelings. And if I hear anything has happened to him, then there’ll be hell to pay.”

Churchill locked eye contact and stood, gathering his briefcase.

“Good day to you,” he nodded, before turning to leave. As the door swung shut behind him, his voice could still be heard in the hallway, muttering to himself. “*Fucking freaks!*”

A moment of silence.

“We won’t see Bunty again, will we?” said Ginger. Dervla refused to meet his eye, but Monty simply brushed some blood from his moustache and gave a regretful shake of his head.

Colin put his hand on the doorknob to leave.

“Where are you off to?” asked Dervla.

“The PM said he’d give me a lift back to Westminster. I need to touch base in the outside world, phone my family. That sort of thing,” said Colin. He felt an icy shot of guilt run down his spine. His new friends couldn’t come and go like he could. They were stuck there in a rotting stately home.

“Ah, your loss,” shrugged Dervla. “It’s movie night tonight. Monty’s going to project his old Charlie Chaplin reels on the wall, Annie’s going to provide music on the piano, and Ginger and I are going to throw rotting veg at the screen.”

“Sounds fun,” Colin smiled. “Maybe next time.”

Dervla reached up and gave him a peck on the cheek.

“You know, for an Englishman, you’re not half bad, Colin Powers.” She disappeared through the door. Just as Colin was about to follow her, he was summoned again.

“Colin, dear!” called Annie. “I need you!”

Colin approached Annie in what she called her ‘healing corner’. Although she certainly knew some spells that would heal her arms quicker, they all involved an element of ... self-pleasure. As it was tricky to do so with two broken arms, she had had to resort to traditional Wiccan methods (but not before unsuccessfully begging all the residents of the house to help her out with the self-pleasuring element).

“Annie, I’ve told you, I’m not putting my hand down there,” said Colin. “I don’t know where it’s been.”

“Oh shush you!” smiled Annie. “I just needed you to scratch my back!”

He nodded at the fair request and knelt down to begin scratching.

“Ahh! Bliss!” said Annie. “But as I have you here, my dear, I have been meaning to talk to you. The potion you mixed, back at the quarry?”

Colin smiled at the memory. A few weeks ago he was not aware that witchcraft even existed, then he goes and mixes a spider-killing foam-fist of doom!

“Yeah, pretty powerful stuff, huh?” he said. “Or was it too powerful? Did I over do it on the badger’s blood?”

“Not quite,” said Annie. She was almost purring like a kitten at the back-scratching. “You mixed the quantities perfectly. On their own, they are a powerful poison, but once you say the spell, your own power drives itself in the mixture.”

Colin let that sink in.

“Okay,” he said. “Your point being?”

“Darling, when I mix that potion and cast the spell, I would usually get a light rain cloud that could position itself over the victim and rain acid. Effective, but somewhat tame compared to your fist of death,” she

said. "Colin, to cast a spell so potent – so violent! - you would have to be an experienced warlock and have been practising magic for decades. You barely had minutes to crack it and you hit the nail on the head with one blow."

Colin froze. Was *this* why he had been brought on board as the Wychacre leader? A latent magical ability? Did Churchill know?

A car horn sounded outside, jolting Colin from his thoughts.

"If Churchill knows, and is not telling you, then he probably has a reason," said Annie as Colin rose, straightening his suit. "But the motives of that reason? I could not be sure."

Colin left silently, his head buzzing with questions.



ONE EXTREMELY AWKWARD, brake-neck speed car journey later, he stepped out of the vehicle feeling sick and woozy.

"Good job, Powers," said Churchill. He extended a hand and they shook like gentlemen. He hadn't dared to broach the subject in the car, and he didn't dare now. For some reason, Annie's warning of Churchill's motives rung true. "Off to see the family? Give Bertie my best, won't you?"

And with a slap on the back, Churchill was gone, already yapping to some military fellow about dates and troops and other war things.

He stood for a second and saw the sunlight dribbling through the leaves on the trees. The light was different to Wychacre. London light had a greyish tinge to it. It was a light he loved, but Wychacre light somehow seemed so much more vibrant. Magical, perhaps?

He walked into Number Ten Downing Street through the back door, the guards not even asking to see his credentials. Maybe he had one of those faces now, he thought. A face that says 'Yes I bloody well am important, and it's so top secret that if I tell you I would have to cut out your tongue.'

Walking through the busy, cramped corridors of power, he stopped and realised he had no idea why he was there. He could go home and leave the rest of the world to get on with the war. Then he saw a figure silhouetted in the door frame and remembered exactly why he had come back.

“Colin?” said Gena, stepping into the light. While it felt like a year and a day since he had left in that car, it had only been just over a week. He expected to see her looking older, her hair different maybe. When he looked closer however, he was pretty certain she was even wearing the exact same outfit.

“Hello Gena,” he said. He smiled. He had only known her for a day but to him she was the touchstone of reality. “Good to see you.”

“You too,” she said. An awkward pause followed. “What? No flirting? No smooth moves? No hints at a stationary cupboard fumble?”

He shrugged.

“No. I’d love to take you for a drink after though. It’d be nice to chat.”

Gena looked him up and down, clearly wondering what had happened to the cocksure guy she had met a week ago.

“Chat?” she checked.

“Chat,” he confirmed.

“Honesty and respect?” she frowned. “That’s a new one on me, but I’ll take it. I get off in an hour, you can walk me home.”

Colin nodded and walked off down the corridor, drinking in the normality of everyday London life.

“Better enjoy it while it lasts,” he muttered to himself. “I’ll be back with the freaks soon enough.”

## Epilogue

DEEP IN A TESTING FACILITY in the heart of Wiltshire, an aircraft hanger sat in a field, where two men with white coats and clipboards walked briskly towards the doors.

"It's a unique case," said the one with horn-rimmed glasses.

"Indeed," said the one with the overgrown eyebrows.

"And you're certain this is what they wanted to do with it?" said Horn-Rims

Eyebrows nodded and took a memo from his clipboard. He passed it to his colleague.

"Signed by WC himself," he said. Horn-Rims took the slightest glance at the memo, which he had seen a hundred times before, but could not quite believe was true.

"Alright then," he said, and pushed open the door.

Sat in the centre of the vast hangar was a cage, big enough to hold a single bed, a chair, and a television. Sat on the bed was a small figure. He looked around eight years old, and thoroughly miserable. Guards with guns were positioned at ten yard intervals around the perimeter of the hangar. Although the boy knew these were for his own protection, he still didn't like the soldiers standing there. He had seen enough guns to last a lifetime, or in his case, many, many life-times.

"Hello Bunty," said Eyebrows.

"Hello Eyebrows," said the Soul of the Nation.

"You know that's not my name, don't you?"

Bunty shrugged.

"You won't tell me your real one, so I thought I'd make something up," he said.

"How inventive!" said Horn-Rims, smiling in what he assumed was a friendly manner. "And what name have you given me?"

"Dick-face," said Bunty.

The guards did their best not to laugh.

“We’ve had some news about your future,” said Eyebrows. Bunty sat up straight at once.

“Am I leaving? Are you moving me?” he said. “Am I going to back to Wychacre?”

The white coats were silent.

“I’m sorry Bunty,” said Horn-Rims finally. “I’m so very sorry.”

He gave a signal to open the hangar doors and a truck backed its way inside. Atop the truck was a rotating cement mixer.

“What’s that for?” asked Bunty. He turned his innocent blue eyes on the pair of scientists, who refused to meet his gaze. Another truck drove in, filled with timber. Eyebrows nodded to the guards, who left their posts and pulled off the large slabs of wood. They positioned the wood at the sides of the cage and pushed them together, making a huge packing crate. They hammered the sides together.

“Are you shipping me somewhere?” came the call from inside the box. “I’m happy to fly second-class, if that’s an option?”

One of the soldiers helped to back the concrete mixer in even further, and positioned the spout to the side of the box.

“What does that do?” said Bunty.

Eyebrows and Horn-Rims looked at each other, each afraid of what they were about to do. The driver of the concrete mixer waited for their signal, then started to pour.

When the screams came, the two white-coated men turned and left the hangar. They did not speak of the atrocity they had just committed, but instead stuck to their trusty clipboards.

“It says here the concrete will keep the being encased and safe from harm. As it is supernatural in origin, it will not harm it. We can chip it out whenever we need to.”

Eyebrows nodded and held up the memo again.

“Signed by WC,” he said. “We did the right thing.”

Horn-Rims swallowed.

“I’m glad you think so.”

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## One of Our Warlocks is Missing – Sample



**L**ONDON, 1941.

Colin Powers was in dire need of a blow job.

It wasn't that he was a sex maniac, exactly, just that his usual schedule of casual affairs with women-who-should-know-better had been put temporarily on hold. He was trying a new tack in the world of romance – namely getting to know the woman in question first. In fact, knowing their second name was progress for Colin. No, he was attempting to embrace some new concepts that had come into his life fairly recently: Responsibility and maturity.

“Colin?”

He looked up from his paper, which he had been pretending to read. He had, in fact, been trying to ignore the throbbing erection in his trousers. He looked over to his date; Gena Harris. Pale, English rose complexion, brown hair pinned up in the style that was in vogue and dressed in plain, neutral colours that a fashionista could creatively describe as civil-servant chic – but she made it look irresistible. He smiled.

“Sorry, I was miles away,” he said. He turned up the dial on his smile to ten, giving her the full Power Grin. He usually had the ability to make women melt into a puddle (metaphorically, obviously) when he beamed at them, but not Gena. She was a tough nut to crack, which was so alluring about her. She didn't put up with his shit.

“You can turn off the grin,” said Gena. “You know I won't fall for that shit.”

See?

"Yes. Of course," said Colin. "Did you ask something?"

"More tea?"

They were sat at a cheap, wobbly table in a small cafe in Westminster, not far from Whitehall. It was a brief lunch-date. Gena's work at Number Ten Downing Street meant that she worked long hours for low pay, but as everyone you met in London insisted on reminding you, there was a war on, y'know.

"Yes. I'll be mother!" he said. He grabbed the teapot and topped up their cups. "Now, is it one lump or two?"

"None," said Gena. "As I told you less than ten minutes ago. You're not great at retaining new information, are you?"

"No, but I'm trying," he shrugged. "It's a new thing for me, all this."

"What is?"

"You know... communicating, relationships. All that guff."

Gena gave a half smile as she brought up her cup to her ruby red lips.

"Such a romantic!"

Colin could not pull his gaze away from her lips. They were good lips. Truly amazing lips. Had they been around four hundred years earlier, Shakespeare would have written a sonnet about them, the old perv. They made Colin wish that he could write a sonnet about them, or even made him wish that he knew what a sonnet was. Voluptuous, full, sensual lips that he delighted in kissing. They had kissed, of course. Gena was not a prude, and had allowed some goodnight kisses as he walked her to her door of an evening. The kisses had been magical – better than any face-pressing fumble Colin had been party to before. Yes, Colin loved those lips, but he couldn't stop the depraved, sex-hungry part of his brain imagining another use for them...

"What are you reading?" asked Gena.

Colin held up the Evening Standard. 'TWELVE DEAD IN BATTERSEA RAID' read the headline. It was a variation from the other

headlines that week. The number of dead, the location. London was under siege from the skies and there was nothing he could do about it.

“So bloody stupid,” he said.

“What is?”

“This!” he hit the paper. “All this. The war. I just want it to stop. No: I want to stop it myself.”

“With your new top secret unit?” smiled Gena.

“Yes, exactly! I could-” He paused. “What do you know about it?”

“Nothing, of course. I haven’t got the clearance you have. But it is obvious that you have sway with the PM, that you are in a position of responsibility – though God knows why – and that you have a base somewhere in the country.”

Colin looked impressed.

“Very astute, Miss Harris,” he said. He took a sip of tea. “And if I either confirmed or denied any of that, I could be executed for treason.”

“Just testing.”

They drank up and walked back towards Downing Street, arm in arm.

“What time do you finish tonight?” asked Colin.

“Ten. Or later, most probably. The PM keeps strange hours.”

“And company,” said Colin under his breath. He was thinking in particular of the special unit that Gena had successfully deduced. Just a few weeks earlier, Colin had been placed in charge of the Occult Defence Division – ODD for short. It was a strange posting; top secret and housed in a crumbling old mansion in the countryside, accessible only by a private car which barrelled its way through the London streets and out into the home counties at a speed which was not only illegal, but inadvisable and possibly impossible. The unit was the most unorthodox thing though, consisting of a crack team of unnatural freaks. Colin wasn’t being unkind when he thought of them in those terms (well, maybe a little). They really were freaks in the purest sense of the word – out of the ordinary: A witch. A zombie. A banshee. A demigod.

And him, a vain, under-educated junior civil-servant at the head of them. As Gena had said - 'God knows why'.

"I'll walk you home," he offered.

"Will you now?" Gena paused to show her papers to a soldier at the gates to Downing Street. "Why?"

Colin shrugged innocently.

"No reason!" he smiled. "Just want to see you home safely. London can be a dangerous place. There is a war on y'know. How is the new flat, anyway? I'd love to see inside..."

"Ah-ha! That's it!" Gena smirked. "You're after a little more than a goodnight kiss, aren't you Powers?"

"How dare you!" Colin showed his papers to the soldier and exchanged a wink. "I simply want to know you're safe."

Gena led him up to the famous black door of Number Ten. She stopped, leaned in, kissed him on the cheek and whispered into his ear.

"All in good time, Powers," she said. "When the time comes I'll suck you so hard you'll beg for mercy."

She turned and walked in. Colin went to follow her but was stopped by the burley policeman at the door.

"Sorry, sir," he said. He glanced down at the front of Colin's trousers, where little Colin was firmly making his presence known. "You can't go in there with that..."



## Afterword.



**I**t all started with Winston Churchill's scrotum...

Hi! Ed here. Just wanted to say a humble thank you for being so unrelentingly awesome. Wychacre has been a little labour of love for me. I have been working in the publishing industry for some time, mostly in the children's area, but something was lacking from my writing. I wanted to emulate the writers I loved and I wasn't quite getting the levels of satisfaction that I thought I would get when I started making books. I realised that I had to go back to the stories I loved the most. The funny ones. The filthy ones. The fucked up ones.

So I started working on a story in my spare time – an hour here, an hour there and I happened upon Wychacre. I knew at once it was going to be not safe for little ones, so I looked into pen names and realised that I could be whoever I wanted to be. So spoiler alert: Ed Zenith is not my real name. I just needed something to differentiate my children's books from adult ones because I hope you'll agree that the Wychacre world is one which children should not visit! Ed isn't my real name, but please don't feel cheated or disheartened. The spirit of Ed lies within me. Hey, these aren't even my own eyebrows. I don't know whose they are, just found them in the street one day...

So you just read book one of the Wychacre Chronicles, and I hope you'll join Colin, Dervla, Annie, Ginger and Monty in many more adventures. I have lots planned, so come and join us.



## You like free stuff ?



To get 'Welcome to Wychacre', your free short story based in the Wychacre world, and to find out how Dervla, Monty, Annie and Ginger first joined the team, just pop along to Welcome To Wychacre where you can subscribe to the newsletter to get news of new books and recommendations. In return, I'll give you a free short story, which promises to be as funny, filthy and fucked up as the book you've just read.

I won't pass your details onto anyone nasty, I'm not like that and frankly I'm hurt that you think I might do such a thing. No, it's fine, I'm okay really, but just when did people stop trusting each other? But anyway, the past is in the past and I'm ready to move on if you are.

[Click HERE for free stuff.](#)<sup>1</sup>

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1. <http://eepurl.com/c4k361>



## Before you go



I'd love to hear about your reader experience. Let me know what you thought of the books by leaving an honest review wherever you bought it. Cheers.



## Also by Ed Zenith:



The Crimson Blade

### **The Wychacre Chronicles:**

Welcome to Wychacre – Book 0 (Free when you subscribe to the Ed Zenith newsletter - [HERE](#)<sup>1</sup>)

No Nazis Please, We're British – Book 1

One of Our Warlocks is Missing – Book 2

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About the Occult\*  
(\*But Were Too Afraid to Ask) – Book 3

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1. <http://eepurl.com/c4k361>

