

A Strange Occurrence Of Mayhem In Westminster

An Accounting of the Zombie
Apocalypse of Victorian London



TIM E KOCH

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a novel by Tim E Koch

A Vintage Science Fantasy

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Chapter 1

In which portentous explores are undertaken

The West End was in such strait as ne'er had London seen, for even the great fire had shortly exhausted itself and the Londoners of that time had gone about its rebuilding, but the mania which gripped the West End endured—nay! it excelled. And so, with himself and the children famished and the larder barren, Patrick Douglas donned spectacles that abstracted his reflection in the looking glass to a silhouette save the two shimmering circles of the blue lenses. When first he'd shown himself to Tamara in them, she'd chided him as quite the dandy, but such had of late become the necessity about Soho, for thusly was secured protection from contagion of the deviants thereabout.

A Strange Occurrence of Mayhem in Westminster

Dug, as he'd been styled by a lover prior his wife, was in his four-and-thirtieth year, of height and build typical when compared to the average male Londoner, but not of average complexion, for his African ancestry lent pigmentation which set him quite apart from his coworkers. His industry and employment was of the theatre: his contribution the composition of lyric and tune to accompany the stories presented.

Stephen, Dug's son in his tenth year, downed the stairs in a thunderous rush, inciting of his mother a great howl from beyond the door to the bedroom, which until a fortnight prior husband and wife had shared. Dug put up a hand to stay the child's descent and a finger to his mouth to remind him the need of quiet. Phenn paused at his father's gentle reproach and mouthed: 'I'm sorry,' his caramel skin, resultant of his African father and Irish mother, deepening in his reproach. As in reparation, Phenn proffered in an extended hand a pair of half-ovals cut from paperboard, each with a pair of holes meticulously bored through. At the narrowing of his father's eyes, the lad placed them demonstratively at his either temple.

'Ah,' breathed Dug, and made receipt of them.

He slid the tips of the temples of his spectacles through the holes in either piece and slid them up to the sides of the lenses, thereby imparting shields of his peripheral vision.

'Just as the peelers,' whispered Phenn as Dug donned the protection.

‘Very good,’ returned Dug quietly, turning his gaze left and right about the hall. ‘Thank you.’ At his son’s beaming pride, Dug prest: ‘What does Connie?’

‘Writing,’ Phenn informed, perhaps a bit louder than should’ve he.

‘A story?’ enquired Dug.

‘A missive,’ Phenn replied, thumbing o’er his shoulder suggestively.

‘Right,’ Dug replied. ‘Can you ask her down?’

Committing three forgetfully bloviating strides upward, Phenn hesitated, looked to the notorious door at the top of the stairs, and proceeded thence with caution, giving Dug to appraise the justification of his leaving the children alone with Tamara.

Dug donned his old brown bowler hat and was doing up the buttons of his tweed waistcoat when Phenn returned about the upper newel, escorting Constance. The elder Patrick child, likewise of caramel complexion but with her mother’s intense green eyes, gained instructive gesticulation from her junior toward silence as they downed the stairs together. At the impartment of no small injury to her pride, Connie rolled her eyes. Dug knelt between them and bowed his head that he might see them above the dark lenses. With a glance up the staircase, he submitted:

‘I must go out.’

‘Why?’ cried Connie to immediate admonishment from her brother.

‘We need food,’ declared Dug. Toward her consol-

A Strange Occurrence of Mayhem in Westminster

ation he brightly emended: 'I shan't be long. I'll go quickly into Leicester Square and get a loaf and shank of whate'er be out there, and then I'll be right back. Two shakes,' assessed he.

'Can you get some sweetmeats as well?' pled Phenn, now becoming the recipient of disapprobation betwixt the two siblings, to which he could only shrug in his despair.

Asudden, his own brown eyes grew wide and sparkled as he implored: 'May I go?'

'No!' responded Dug, eliciting further baying from beyond the upper door.

Phenn sharply and pleadingly whispered: 'I should provide you an escort: a second pair of eyes.'

Constance darted quandary betwixt them until her father wagged his head and Phenn bowed his own, admitting:

'I hunger for the outside.'

'When I return, we'll up to the roof,' countered Dug, 'and watch for Fogg's airship, and wave to Captainess Fogg.'

Slumping, Phenn gave acquiescent nod.

Dug rose, transforming Connie and Phenn into mere silhouettes beyond the dark lenses, and glanced once more at the door above before turning to that which gave to the street without. Taking hold of the beam that had more than once barred entry, not of deviants but of pil-lagers, he looked o'er his shoulder and commanded: 'Return this straightly upon my exit and remove it for

nought save myself.’

At the vehement nods of his two beloved children, he heaved a great sigh and heaved the beam from its keepers at either side of the door. Feeling as having plunged with the action into the icy waters of the sea, he stiffly delivered each end of the beam to each beautiful child. With the desperation of a man swimming ashore from a sinking vessel, he turned away from them, gripped the door-knob, turned it, and opened the door only an inch.

He first made assessment of the street of the mews, whence his flat was a part, through the lenses, with shoulder firmly against the door, lest some deviant be without and rush him. When none such was in immediate sight, he dipped his chin to make more thorough appraisal, though at greater risk. With one final quick glance o’er his shoulder, first down at the children and then upwards at the door behind which the demon possessed his wife, he swung the door open sufficient only for his sidling through and pulled it hard closed. There he paused, hands pulling firmly against the pewter handle of the midnight blue door, glancing nervously o’er his either shoulder, until the sound of the beam falling into its keeps reverberated throughout. He then whirled about and reperformed the assessments through and above his spectacles. Finding the mews vacant and silent, he quitted the stoop and made for the alley that mitigated hence to the street beyond.

His glance back at the planks covering the broad front windows of the flat was involuntary, intimating a time

A Strange Occurrence of Mayhem in Westminster

when Connie and Phenn should have waved him off with opulent smiles. With leaden strides he walked the worn cobbles between the facades of flats that had once, prior the advent of the auto-motivated carriages, driven either of mainspring, pressurized air, or steam engine, housed the coachmen and their teams. Two dozen comfortable flats made the mean and close little street. Dug wondered how many were now occupied, which occupants had not succumbed to infection of mind or attack of those so infected or possessed the good fortune of having some place other than the West End to abide.

As he pondered thusly about at the various doors along the way, he took a sudden fright at a pair of eyes peering through the narrow gap of an open door. Mrs Satterthwaite her name was, a widow who lived alone, never before the least warm to a couple such as Dug and his wife, nor friendly toward the children of such union. He stood fixed for a moment, first at the wonder of the woman's bare eyes until she closed the door and then at the wonder if she should reopen. He crossed to the door and stood without its crimson panels, eyeing the brass knocker formed in the likeness of a bull's head, and listened for hint of movement within. When none came, he backed slowly away, assessing the value as he did so of Phenn's thoughtful gift, as the pair of paperboard cutouts served likewise as shields and blinders, for when he turned his head toward it he again caught the closure of the door. In the confines of the arched mouth of the mews street, he risked removing his spectacles to the

removal of the side shields. With the protection re-donned, he at last ushered himself into the broader thoroughfare of Greek Street.

Dug quitted the seclusion of the mews for the street of greater breadth, length, and height wherein was manifest the debauchery of London's West End: shops stood as rows of pallbearers bearing the weight of the deceased precinct upon broken shoulders; windows not planked over were shattered; a horse-drawn carriage lay upon its side, its team's carcasses lying one upon t'other where a wraith had attacked them; still was there the remains of a man lying on the walk, limbs splayed unnaturally, neck twisted so that vacant eyes stared Dug's way.

So captivated was he at the sights that he quite nearly ventured into the path of an oncoming spring-driven omnibus, only its wheels crushing the detritus scattered across the paving alerting him to its presence. 'Twas one such conveyance refitted for the Metropolitan Police especially for the current strait: grids of iron bars covered half-silvered casements; roundabout its roof a cage of iron bars wrought safety to half a dozen men in the livery of the service, long blue coats to which a high collar had of late been added, tall blue top hats, and, of course, deeply tinted goggles with side shields as Phenn had mentioned but made of tinted glass rather than opaque paperboard. The vehicle bore south possibly en route from Soho Square to their headquarters in Charing Cross. With a suddenness and threat that stopped Dug's heart, first one and then others of the guard hefted

A Strange Occurrence of Mayhem in Westminster

firearms and discharged them in his direction, sending him sprawling onto the pavement. When the carriage withdrew, Dug found himself lying mere feet from a dying man, who, with his final effort, turned his unprotected eyes toward Dug that he might bequeath his infected state thereto. So was the vehemence of the great infection of mind that plagued London.

Toward the determination of the source of the dreadful epidemic which had lain waste to London's West End, the stealthy conveyance of the Metropolitan Police Service sallied forth, indeed from Soho Square but not immediately toward headquarters but to a private residence in Leicester Square, that of the former home of the deceased Dr Henry Jekyll. The occupants of the omnibus, beyond the several officers of the MPS, included two inspectors, *Misters Lestrade and Newcomen*, Dr John H. Watson, and Gabriel Utterson, solicitor to the late doctor. Though the lights of their conveyance, a smoothly expeditious carriage, were silvered sufficient to safety of threat without, all passengers wore the department mandated goggles with silvered lenses, lest any among them had been exposed of late to the infection of mind but had not yet shown symptoms thereof. Thus, each witnessed only shifting shadows of each other, silhouetted against the rectangles of the casements.

To this end, Watson bothered not at all directing his question, 'You assess Jekyll's work related?' toward its

intent, as he had no idea which of his companions might be Inspector Newcomen, who had been involved in the investigation of the late doctor's scandal.

"Tis one of many possibilities,' responded the voice of Lestrade, which surprised Watson not the least and pressed him again to silently curse his old friend for leaving the world to fend for itself in such a terrible time.

Newcomen spoke next into the silence. 'Were I a betting man, I should put my lot upon it and all that I might borrow, so certain am I.'

At the odd sight of a solitary man standing at the edge of the paving along the street, Watson turned to consider him, though naught might be determined from the silhouette beyond the grid of protective bars saved that he seemed untouched of the disease as he wore spectacles.

'Oh! Oh!' Watson cried, gesticulating to the sight of another figure beyond the man, a hand extended in supplication as the lachrymose among the wraiths were wont to do, shuffling hastily and stealthily toward him at his blind side, as the man's attention was set fully upon the carriage.

All heads within the carriage turned to see after the terrible fate of the man, but before the wraith might attack, shots sounded from the roof above as the guards dispatched the infected predator.

'Fool!' barked Lestrade. 'Stay indoors.'

'I do hope he has learned a lesson thence,' pronounced Watson, 'or has a good reason for being out.'

'There is nothing for it,' decried Lestrade, 'but the

irresponsible advancement of the disease.’

The conveyance travelled not another fifty paces before the guards took shots at another wraith, but this one made adroit evasion of the threat and scampered to the cover of another overturned carriage. The captain of the guard hammered excitedly upon the carriage roof. Through a vent open in the roof, he reminded:

‘Only those posing a direct threat!’

Of the creature, Newcomen commented: ‘Did you see that way it had about it? The hunched way it crept about? I own that that thing might have been Mr Hyde himself.’

‘But we know that it wouldn’t be,’ submitted Mr Uttersen, inciting a sudden sullen withdrawal of the inspector.

Upon reaching the open green of Leicester Square and the front stoop of the Jekyll residence, the armoured omnibus halted, and the several peelers quitted the carriage to stand in sentinel lines betwixt its door and that of the stately home. Nearby stood a female one among the weepy, lachrymose variety of those infected and a male of the chatty, loquacious type, it speaking great volumes of some stores of memory from its life prior infection.

From the rooftop of the carriage, a guard whispered: ‘Captain?’ desirous of permission to dispatch both.

But the captain replied: ‘Not before they pose a threat to the sane. I know:’ prest he, ‘that they all pose a threat, but we have specific instruction of present directly from Whitehall, and by such rule we must abide.’

Watson’s heart was broken in pity for the sobbing

woman as she drifted near to the guards, reaching out beseechingly toward the nearest of them, and the captain scoffed:

‘Give’r something to cry about.’

Taking delight in his obedience, the guard withdrew a short shaft from his coat, removed a cap to expose two threatening prongs, and jabbed it to the woman’s throat. At a bright arc of voltage, the woman wailed and lurch backward, baying woefully. On all fours, the afflicted scrambled along the paving, wallowing as she did in a most unbecoming manner in the remains of her skirts, but glancing back to impart cries of great protestation toward the officer. The man then looked to his superior and implored:

‘May I do ’m too?’

‘If he advances,’ remarked the captain, to which the officer himself broke ranks to advance toward the babbling man.

Meanwhile, Mr Utterson had exited the carriage and made his way to the stately and richly appointed portico of the residence where, with no small apprehension, he rapped upon one of the black lacquered panels thereof. At the withdrawing of the door and the appearance of the late doctor’s manservant with eyes bared for all to see, the solicitor cried out:

‘Poole, for the love of God, man, where the bloody hell is your protection?’

The old butler’s voice was the sound of gravel poured out as he apologized: ‘I forget. I have them right here in

A Strange Occurrence of Mayhem in Westminster

my pocket.' Guffawed he: 'We'd become so unaccustomed to visitors even prior this wretched blight.'

Utterson issued a mighty huff as he pressed round the man toward the safety of the interior only to repeat the altercation with the maid as she fumbled at donning her own tinted spectacles. At last within, the visitors attempted introduction with Poole indecorously lowering his chin to peer over his lenses at each man and thusly negating the means of protection. Bringing in the tea tray, the maid caught the arm of Dr Watson's chair and quite nearly overturned the lot into his lap.

'Must I?' implored she in reference to the restrictive spectacles, 'for I've not been without in days.'

'I am afraid so,' declared Lestrade, 'for 'tis now the way of things.'

Grumbling, she poured five cups only to have Newcomen further her distress in suggesting: 'Please pour yourself a cup as well, as our business will prove most expeditious if we may enquire of you both at once.'

The silhouette of the woman considered Poole before she obliged. When she'd taken her cup and a seat and all had taken of milk and sugar to their liking, Poole proceeded in his sibilant parlance.

'We owe you a great debt for your security of the house, Mr Utterson, after the untimely demise of the doctor. Any that we might do for you, be certain that we shall.'

'We shan't mince words or beat about the bush,' opined Lestrade. 'We've come that we might determine

Dr Jekyll's part in this detestable blight upon our fair city.'

'Now see here,' wheezed the butler, 'for it's been some years since the poor doctor's unfortunate demise. Why should any he did only now rear up in such vile manner?'

'That is the precise determination with which we are charged,' submitted Newcomen, 'by order of Queen Victoria's own special examiner. You must admit that it is most curious that such outbreak of disease should be traced to the vicinity of these premises.'

'I'll say,' put in the maid in words contrastingly sharp after her companion's rasping. 'If we weren't so naturally hermitic, and if the young doctor's visits were still conducted with their former frequency, we both likely be among the deranged.'

'What young doctor?' enquired Newcomen, sitting forward in his chair.

'The one that was apprenticed to old Dr Lanyon,' informed the woman.

'Yes,' imparted the butler. 'Dr Bradshaw, who continued Dr Lanyon's practice in Cavendish Square after his own decease, has made much use of the facilities here. His remuneration was a godsend to our keeping of the place along with the few boarders we've managed.'

'So you've had boarders?' pried Newcomen, 'and a practitioner of the medical arts who might have been made privy to Jekyll's work?'

'Only the young doctor,' assured Poole. 'The boarders were disallowed entry to the surgery theatre and cabinet.'

A Strange Occurrence of Mayhem in Westminster

‘We should speak to them all,’ declared Newcomen with his best attempt at eye contact with his associates.

‘All are gone,’ replied the maid, emending: ‘since the wretched plague began.’

‘Two fled London of late when the trouble reached crisis proportions,’ added Poole, ‘but one was likely amid the initial wave of the stricken, for he abandoned even his own belongings.’

‘We should see his rooms and his things,’ declared Lestrade, replacing his cup to the tray and rising, ‘and any which pertains to this doctor.’

About the time Patrick Douglas determined his need to forage the wastelands of the West End for food and the investigative team quitted Soho for Leicester Square, Ann Veronica Stanley was summoned from the dissection of a cadaver. In what had once been the grand ballroom of Whitehall Palace but now served as the principal laboratory toward the understanding of the affliction of mind that plagued London, the young biologist took receipt of a most urgent missive. She washed the ichor from her hands, doffed her blood-smearred apron, donned protectively tinted goggles, and hurried across the forecourt of the palace. At the gatehouse, the guard on duty recorded her departure.

Without the iron fence, which within had been draped with black bunting to on the one hand mourn the many lost to the epidemic and on the other provide

visual protection for those on the palace grounds, a sleek, black steam carriage idled at the edge of the pavement, gouts of black smoke issuing from its stack, all but its front windscreen silvered against insight, a dark figure at the helm. The carriage's design derived from the Brougham but with smaller wheels and lower suspension, as there was no need of the operator oversee a team. Likewise, the enclosed dickey box sat as low as the aft seats, thusly proffering ease of boarding and alighting. A convenient storage boot had been built out before the dash and foot boards. The rear quarter housed the tank, boiler, firebox, and drive pistons of the steam engine.

When Veronica strolled toward the driver's light, the person gestured her round to the other side. Veronica disregarded the directive and continued her approach. A gloved hand slid downward the light to reveal a complex pair of lenses, Veronica's own darkened face reflected therein.

'Hello, Mrs Harker,' submitted Stanley.

'Get in,' commanded Mina Harker to her latest client. 'I believe I've found your man.' At Miss Stanley's peering futility into the depths of the carriage, Mina informed: 'I have not apprehended him but have ascertained his location, not far hence in Leicester. I desire you accompany me to confirm his identity and the job complete.'

'Is he?' Veronica began but could not finish.

'Indeed,' pronounced Harker coldly, 'he is infected.'

'In what way?' Veronica implored, wondering which of the three forms the infection had been manifest in her

beloved, though she had her suspicions.

‘For the sake of closure and your own peace of mind, Miss Stanley,’ Harker opined, ‘I should advise you, once again, to board that we might be about this matter’s resolution. I have other clients awaiting my attention.’

Veronica obliged, entering the darkened interior of the carriage and taking in the aroma distinct of gun oil. At Mrs Harker’s advancement of a valve on the dashboard, bracers about her wrists were revealed ’neath the sleeves of her bodice, these fitted with complex tubing and mechanicals. Something being set to a rumble behind them sent a great issuance of smoke wafting up Whitehall Road before them. Following after the cloud of her making, Mrs Harker took the vehicle up to Trafalgar. The guards manning the gate through the barrier which protected the greater part of St James from the infected remainder of the West End made at first to see her through without stopping, but when one among them made sight through the windscreen of a passenger, order to halt was given.

When the light slid open, the guard greeted: ‘Mrs Harker.’

Harker informed: ‘Miss Veronica Stanley of the Whitehall commission to identify an infected person of interest within the quarantine zone.’

‘Very well,’ the guard replied, adding, ‘you ladies take care in there.’

Mina deigned smile, for the danger posed of these pitious creatures shouldn’t be compared to the shadow of

things she'd faced. As she pressed the carriage through the open gate, she softened her tone in asking: 'How long have you been in the employ of Whitehall?'

'Only a week,' informed Miss Stanley, 'that is, as you say, at Whitehall. I have worked with Dr Thoreau for a twelve-month now. I had to do something toward the cause.'

'And have you,' prest Mina, 'accomplished anything toward cause or cure?'

Veronica could not restrain a laugh. 'A cure, no. I and my associates have confirmed a sudden mutation of the brain.'

'It is good that you've employed yourself so,' commented Mrs Harker in dismissively patronizing accent.

Discounting such condescension, Veronica leaned forward and cast her attention to the degree possible through her lenses skyward, and there she found the dark profile of the airship which regularly moored at Whitehall Palace. "'Tis Fogg's ship,' remarked she. 'I believe the doctor is aboard.'

'Dr Thoreau?' enquired Harker.

'Right,' replied Veronica. 'The doctor is making assessment of the infected zone.'

At her post in the flight deck of the airship with which she had, before the dreadful disease of mind had disallowed, regularly retraced the exploits of her husband's global circumnavigation, Captainess Aouda Fogg, Mrs Phileas Fogg, noted the rising plume of smoke festooning above a speeding carriage and hoped its occupants

A Strange Occurrence of Mayhem in Westminster

well, but likewise did she doubt any need should warrant such risk.

The airship's gondola was comprised of four primary compartments. At the fore was the flight deck wherein was housed the helm and the captainess's station with desk, davenport, log recorder, and periscope. Directly behind to starboard was a broad gangway wherein a magnificent stair swept upward to the keel gangway. Also within, as fire was a great threat aboard such a vessel, was the standpipe and hose, tucked discreetly behind the stairway. Alongside, to larboard, was the navigation and communication suite, in which was house the several aviators, mechanical birds with purpose of conveyance betwixt ship and ground. Aft was a luxurious gallery with dining and lounge seating for the premier passengers. The galleries trailing casements could, from the helm, be opened for unobstructed views should such be the whim of the boldest passengers. Partitions of light-weight softwood wainscots with clear glass casements above demised these several compartments.

Flipping down the darkened lenses of her goggles, the captainess turned thence to check her own passengers in the gallery. Several men of the Whitehall research regiment investigated the streets of the once-affluent shopping district of Soho wherein the outbreak had first been discovered. Fogg cared not the least for the reckless way the men studied the scenery below through powerful scopes, for what should happen if perchance one of those infected wraiths below might look upward at the ship

and infect one among the men? All should be lost. Though Dr Benedict Thoreau had gratefully determined the means of contagion and had likely saved all of London and possibly humanity itself, she assessed his current behaviour as far less than prudent.

Though the barrier of solid planking on timber framework mitigating the West End from St James was clearly visible, no delineation needed designate the infected area: the disdainfully anomalous procedure within the stillness of the zone of one smoking steam carriage and one of the MPS's own conveyances attested the deadly result of infection. Sadly, her own husband's home, Number Seven in Savile Row, stood abandoned therein.

When a sharp rapping and vehement vociferation disturbed her own assessment, she returned her attention aft but maintained her own protection, for she hoped to shortly return to Phileas at their current residence of Kingston House in Knightsbridge. The doctor's wild gesticulation, seen as a silhouette, informed of his desire starboard.

She advanced the command to the helmsman, and the great steam-motived propellers and rudders aft the gondola responded to his manipulation of the controls. Shortly, at another great pounding at the glass partition, she turned to find Thoreau shaking his fist over his head, signing to hold the current position.

'Windward,' commanded she her helmsman. 'Engines to stay.'

A Strange Occurrence of Mayhem in Westminster

As the great ship turned to a westward bearing, her passengers danced about the compartment as if among vermin, several of them deigning shout remonstrations toward her, but with the wind from the west and their prior heading southward, there was naught else to be done in order to hold a position. Shortly, the engines found the perfect rate to resist the wind, and the ship achieved stasis.

The passengers were then overjoyed at gaining whatever view they'd desired. They seemed suddenly captivated: enthralled—mesmerized! She uplifted her goggles to peer through her own periscope and search the direction of their interest, shortly finding a band of hoodlums careering down a narrow street in Leicester Square, quite near the station of the police conveyance and the intension of the steam carriage. To her surprise and horror, she found the lot of them absent of eye protection, proving them likely infected. When faces among them turned upward, Aouda spun away from the view and reset her goggles darkened lenses. When her helmsman made to face her, she commanded:

‘Keep your gaze forward.’

She turned her own attention aft to observe the passengers. Should one among them show sign of infection, it would be up to her to open the aft hatch and flush the lot of them out with the firehose, national hero among them or not.

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