

**YOURS TRULY,
SPRING-
HEELED JACK**

**GLYNN OWEN
BARRASS**

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GLYNN OWEN BARRASS

Glynn Owen Barrass lives in the North East of England and has been writing since late 2006. He has written over two hundred short stories, novellas, and role-playing game supplements, the majority of which have been published in France, Germany, Japan, Poland, Portugal, the UK, and the USA. To date he

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If you would like to learn more about the myths surrounding this story's titular character, Glynn has provided details on the subject at:

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PART ONE

Lord Ainsley was a man bored with his humdrum life. A loveless marriage, overbearing parents who still chose to interfere with his choices... No wonder he sought distractions wherever he could find them.

Nothing as improper as possessing a mistress—though his friends certainly dallied in that, trying to inject some spice into their own uninteresting lives—he sought excitement elsewhere. Chemistry was a passion of his. And also, the many mysterious vagaries of the occult.

And on this windswept autumn night, he sat in one of the Kraken Club's parlors,

observing a séance.

The lights were down, all but a candelabra on the circular table he and the other club members faced.

Low mutterings, the occasional whiff of tobacco. The atmosphere was a genial one, everyone in good spirits as they anticipated this occult display.

A door opened to his right.

Ainsley turned, watched a trio of shadowy figures heading towards the table.

A tall gray-haired woman wearing a high-collared scarlet dress led the three. She was followed by a harried-looking, black-haired man in a green coat. He carried a large wooden box. A plump young woman in a plaid dress, a straw bonnet upon her red locks, took up the rear. She also held a box.

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The eldest of the three reached the table and turned to face the audience. Someone in front of Ainsley stood and approached her.

Lord Harrenhal. Large, florid-faced and bearded. Impeccable in his dinner suit.

He bowed to the woman and shook her proffered hand.

Her companions stepped behind the table, placed their boxes to the floor and began unpacking them.

“Good gentlemen,” Harrenhal addressed the crowd. “We have for you this evening a display from the most talented Spirit Medium of the age, Madame d’Esperance.”

Those around Ainsley began clapping. He joined them.

The woman smiled, placed her hands in a praying gesture, and bowed.

The pair waited till the applause ceased, and Harrenhal continued.

“Most experienced, the madame is. Tonight, she promises to reveal secrets from beyond the grave, exhibitions that prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the souls of the deceased may be contacted, even manifest themselves upon this earthly plane.”

More clapping, Ainsley included. He felt truly intrigued.

Harrenhal returned to his seat, and all attention was on the woman.

“Thank you,” she said, a beaming smile upon her face. “As the good sir says, I shall prove to you that souls continue to exist after death. That it is possible to speak to them. I have many tools to facilitate this, including ones that shall prove no fraud is possible.”

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“Now.” She walked past her helpers, paused near the fireplace on the rear wall.

“The magnetism is best here,” she said.
“Miss Dorris, bring the chair and my robe.”

The girl stopped unpacking, went to the table, and dragged a chair towards d’Esperance. As she passed her male companion, he handed her a black bundle.

“Tonight,” Madame d’Esperance continued, “You may witness automatic writing, ectoplasm, dematerialization, premonitions, and table-turning. This depending on what the spirits gift us with.”

Miss Dorris placed the chair beside d’Esperance and shook the black bundle out. It appeared to be a robe of some sort.

“Place it on me,” d’Esperance ordered, and raised her arms.

“This costume will ensure I can commit no fraud,” she explained.

Someone near Ainsley chuckled. Another voice shushed the man.

Miss Dorris placed the robe on Madame d’Esperance, arms first. She stepped behind her and started to button it up.

The young man began placing objects on the table. Musical instruments, Ainsley could see a bass drum, a fiddle, a trumpet, a tambourine, and more.

“As you bear witness, there is no way to use my hands here.” Madame d’Esperance raised her arms. The cuffs of the robe were tied.

The young woman helped move her shuffling form towards the chair, sitting her down.

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“Miss Dorris.”

Producing a strip of black fabric, she proceeded to cover d’Esperance’s eyes.

The man had finished laying the instruments out. He retrieved the boxes and took them to the side of the room.

“Now...” d’Esperance paused for some seconds before she continued. “I need my girl beside me to help utilize my speaking trumpet. The spirits, on occasion, use a medium’s vocal cords, manipulating our voices to send messages. The trumpet will magnify these words for you to hear.”

Miss Dorris hurried to the table, retrieved a long brass horn from amongst the instruments.

She returned to Madame d’Esperance and whispered in her ear.

“We are ready.” d’Esperance said.

“Clarence. Extinguish the candles. All but one.”

The man returned to the table, licked his fingers, and began snuffing the candles out. A short hiss accompanied each extinguishing.

The room became darker. Ainsley’s anticipation swelled.

“I shall now attempt to contact my control.” d’Esperance said. “He is a departed Red Indian Brave who acts as my spokesperson when I am in trance. Squanto, are you there? I need your assistance.”

Silence. One of Ainsley’s companions coughed lightly. Someone sucked on a freshly lit pipe. The room remained quiet a short while longer, until a loud “rap” issued from somewhere to the left.

“Is that the door?” someone whispered.

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“No, the wall,” an anonymous voice replied.

A rap issued from their right this time, followed by two more from the ceiling.

A chill of fear filled Ainsley’s chest.

“Ah, Squanto, my spirit friend. Are you well?”

Ainsley leaned forward, squinted. The young woman beside d’Esperance remained still. He looked for the man but couldn’t find him in the gloom.

d’Esperance continued. “I kindly ask the Spirit Realm, you my Spirit Guide, to bring forth a soul so I may prove the existence of the afterworld. Oh. You wish to speak through me? Miss Dorris? The speaking trumpet, please.”

Some shadowy movements, then:

“I am here, Mistress,” said a drawn out, echoing voice.

Ainsley experienced another chill.

“There is a spirit close by,” the voice continued, “by the name of Billy Swift. Billy Swift, come forth. Reveal yourself.”

The man beside Ainsley snickered, said, “Billy Swift indeed.”

He turned to see who it was in the darkness. Some other fellow’s exclamation returned his attention to d’Esperance.

One of the instruments, the tambourine, had elevated from the table.

An invisible hand slapped the tambourine, making it jingle. A moment later, a fiddle rose, the strings plucked by unseen hands.

Ainsley was entranced. One instrument could be the work of the unseen Clarence, but

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two?

The tambourine shook. The fiddle issued a discordant noise.

Beyond the floating instruments, Madame d'Esperance and her assistant were vague but visible.

A trumpet rose from the table. It joined the racket with a loud wail.

Butterflies filling his chest, Ainsley felt fascinated by the miraculous display.

The instruments cavorted in the air, producing a cacophony of noise. A tea bell rose and joined the ghostly orchestra.

This continued for some minutes. Abruptly, the instruments dropped to the table with a clatter.

Ainsley wasn't the only one to jump. The silence that followed felt palpable.

Madame d'Esperance issued a low moan.

“She is in trance,” Miss Dorris said. “Billy Swift has done with the musical instruments. He shall now perform another feat. Would you please approach the table.”

Interesting, Ainsley thought, and stood with the others as they made their way forward.

Ainsley felt unnerved being in such close proximity to the instruments. He feared they might jump up, begin playing through unseen hands.

But they remained static. His attention was drawn to Madame d'Esperance as she issued another moan.

He could see her more clearly. Miss Dorris stood beside the Medium's slowly lurching body.

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Someone exclaimed, said, "Look at her face."

My word! Something was wriggling from d'Esperance's mouth. White, glowing matter, it traveled snake-like down her chin.

d'Esperance groaned, her chest heaved.

The men around him spoke in surprised voices.

The stuff worked its way down her chest, the tip twisting like a serpent's head.

"Gentlemen. Billy Swift brings ectoplasm from Madame d'Esperance's very body," Miss Dorris said, and the table-bound tambourine rattled.

The demonstration over, Ainsley stood alone, drinking scotch and water. The lights were up now, other members chatting and

drinking in small groups.

He felt numb, his mind a flurry with thoughts and conjectures.

That stuff, the ectoplasm. If only he could get a sample, examine it in his laboratory.

Madame d'Esperance sat with a glass of port in one hand, a flickering fan in the other. Miss Dorris, having removed the robe, was placing it in one of the boxes. Clarence stood at the table, putting the instruments away.

He took a sip of scotch, felt the warmth trickle down his throat.

The other members didn't appear especially phased. He was the newest one, however, and perhaps this was a common occurrence to them.

Two men nodded to him as they left the chamber. Across from him, two senior

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members stood in tight conversation with a third.

Lord Harrenhal. Lord Smyth-Jones, thin, elderly, and clean shaven. The third man he didn't recognize. The fellow was tall, had a somewhat vulture-like visage. He had a white mustache, black hair with a distinctive white streak above each ear.

It appeared the trio were talking about him.

Ainsley blushed, turned his attention elsewhere.

“Ainsley my boy! Quite the show, eh?”

Lord Harrenhal approached, leaving his companions in deep conversation.

“Ah, Lord Harrenhal. All is well?”

Harrenhal nodded, his thick jowls wobbling.

“Yes, yes m'boy. Exciting stuff. We had

Madame d'Esperance here twice before, you know. Before your time. How long have you been here? She is a hopeless fraud, however."

Ainsley felt shocked. "A fraud? Oh dear, no. Really?"

"Hush, hush." Lord Harrenhal stepped closer, whispered in a conspiratorial voice: "Oh, those assistants of hers. Up to all kinds of tricks."

Ainsley smelled alcohol on Harrenhal's breath, noted his eyes were a little bloodshot.

"We have something..." Harrenhal took a quick look around, and, "Well, we usually only involve established members. We have something a mite more serious than tonight's hogwash. Would you be—"

"Lord Harrenhal. Apsley, is it?"

Lord Smyth-Jones appeared behind

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Harrenhal. Harrenhal stepped aside.

The older man's face held few wrinkles, the skin taut and almost translucent.

"Ainsley, sir, Lord Ainsley," Ainsley corrected him.

Smyth-Jones nodded. "Ah yes, the chemist?"

His gaze was steely, intense.

"I dabble, sir," Ainsley replied somewhat sheepishly.

"Before your interruption, I was about to inform young Ainsley here of the other business. The Shalka meteorite." Harrenhal nodded.

Lord Smyth-Jones stepped closer, their little group as thick as thieves now.

He grinned, baring his teeth.

"Just the thing for a young man interested

in the Spirit World,” Smyth-Jones said.

Both sets of eyes upon him, Ainsley felt a little trapped.

“I am fascinated, sirs,” he said, and took a nervous sip of scotch.

Smyth-Jones and Harrenhal shared a glance, the latter saying enthusiastically, “No time like the present!”

“Seriously?” Ainsley asked in surprise.

“In earnest,” Harrenhal replied. “Now, come along.”

Harrenhal headed towards a nearby exit.

“I shall be down shortly,” Smyth-Jones said to his back.

Ainsley gulped down the contents of his glass and placed it on a sideboard.

Soon after, he was in pursuit of Harrenhal, through the club’s expansive lobby.

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Catching up, he asked, “Who was the man you were conversing with? You and Lord Smyth-Jones? I do not recall seeing him before.”

Harrenhal scratched his chin. “Oh. He is the club’s founder, m’boy. Introductions shall come later.”

The founder? My word. I am in deep.

His companion headed right, paused at a door within the wood-paneled wall. He patted the pockets of his dinner jacket, delved inside one and produced a key.

He waved it at Ainsley.

“There are only two of these in the entire club. Be folly to lose it, yes?”

Harrenhal unlocked the door, held it open for Ainsley after stepping inside.

“Close this behind you. Good chap.”

Beyond the door, a blue carpeted staircase descended to a lower level. Harrenhal waited for him at the top.

He closed the door and followed the man down.

“You will enjoy this,” Harrenhal said.

An open door awaited them at the foot of the stairs.

Reaching the bottom, Harrenhal paused.

“Our chamber of curiosities. Our collected research.”

He raised his arms, bowed in a theatrical flourish. “Please, make yourself at home and examine our collection.”

Filled with intrigue, Ainsley entered the room.

It had similar décor to the rest of the club. Wood-paneled walls, floor and ceiling. The

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rugs, scarlet and threaded with gold geometric
patterns, lined the floor between row upon row
of glass cabinets.

Ainsley looked to the other man, then back
to the room. He stepped towards the nearest
cabinet.

It held a milk-pale human arm.

Taken aback, he quickly realized what he
was looking at. The arm lay upon a blue velvet
base, beneath which a small, script-filled card
proved his supposition.

Spirit Wax Mold

Teofil Modrzejewski Sitting

“Oh my,” he said. The hand’s balled fist
appeared perfect in every detail. The arm itself
terminated below the elbow. Spirit presences,

proven by phantom limbs dipped in hot wax. He knew of the phenomenon, had never witnessed the evidence until now.

He looked to Harrenhal, who had remained at the door. He nodded encouragingly.

The next cabinet held a pair of hands, the digits touching as if in prayer. He leaned closer, saw delicate lines on the fingers, the fingernails, all perfectly simulated in wax.

As he stepped to another cabinet, Ainsley noted a door against the rear wall. He wondered what mysteries lay beyond.

The following cabinet held a human face. A roughly circular, membranous sheet, it was fringed and curled at the corners. It didn't appear particularly organic, more like paper. The face was quite flat; the features looking more painted than shaped.

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The card beneath read:

Ectoplasm

Victoria McCrae Medium

Ainsley recalled the ectoplasm at the séance.

“Sir,” he asked, turning to Lord Harrenhal. “Do you think I could possibly obtain a sample of this ectoplasm stuff? I would so like to examine it in my laboratory.”

Harrenhal strode across the room towards him.

“You may not be impressed by your results, m’boy,” he said. “But it is something I can arrange.

“Now,” he continued. “What I brought you here to see is in the next room.” He nodded,

indicating the other door.

“Before you enter. You must make me a solemn promise. You will not speak of what you see to anyone in the club. Anyone without. Even your wife.”

The usual joviality was gone from Harrenhal’s face. Ainsley could see the seriousness in his expression.

No danger of my telling the wife. We are barely speaking, he thought, and, “Of course, sir, my lips are tightly shut.”

Harrenhal, appearing satisfied, smiled genially.

“After you, Ainsley.”

Before leaving the room, Ainsley glanced at the other cabinets. He saw ectoplasmic shapes in some, wooden objects of unknown function in others.

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All this mystery. Ainsley felt flattered he'd been brought into the senior members' inner circle, yet perturbed at what he'd encounter beyond the door.

The next room was larger than the previous one and shaped like an octagon. The red-papered walls led to a high, domed ceiling. Divided into eight partitions, the ceiling's apex was centered by a candelabra.

Alternating black and white tiles formed the floor. Two dozen glass cabinets, arranged in rows of threes, faced each wall. At the room's center stood something concealed beneath a large black cloth.

The nearest cabinet appeared to hold something large, molded from wax.

Harrenhal entered the room behind him, closing the door.

Ainsley examined the room as he walked forward. He noted an open door to his left. Sounds of sawing issued from within.

Something else. The wall beside the door appeared dedicated to science. There were tools on a worktop, glass jars mounted on shelves.

He went to query Harrenhal over this when he saw what the cabinet he was nearing held.

No wax limb this time. Rather, a naked torso, with arms and a head. The legs, everything below the protruding ribcage, missing.

He sent Harrenhal a shocked look.
“This...thing. Where did you find it?”

“All in good time, m’boy.”

Ainsley returned his attention to the cabinet.

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Thin blue veins stood visible beneath the torso's transparent skin. The arms were slim, but well-muscled. The hands *My God.* They terminated in long, metallic claws. They appeared to have burst from the fingertips: the flesh there puckered and split.

The chest was sunken, and like the arms, hairless.

The head had thick black hair, sideburns leading to a prominent jawline.

Ainsley examined the face with some hesitation.

It was not the visage of a man. Perhaps a travesty of one.

The expression was malignant, even in death, as if the monstrous rage of this being had survived the grave.

Sharp features, a furrowed brow. Mouth set

in a snarl. The eyes, devoid of pupil and iris, were black orbs.

He took a closer look at the teeth. Beneath a coating of dried blood, they appeared metallic.

Ainsley looked to Harrenhal again, then back to the cabinet.

A card, sat upon the blue velvet cushioning the torso, read:

First Integration

Peripheral: Frederick John Basford

First Integration? What does it mean? He dwelled on this only briefly, for there were other cabinets to see.

Ainsley stepped around the cabinet to the next.

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At first, he thought it was dog. But no. No dog from this world, but perhaps one from a fevered nightmare.

He examined the creature from head to tail.

At least, what answered for a head. It resembled a mass of thick green feelers, laid slack upon the blue velvet. There were no eyes, no mouth, nothing that resembled sensory organs in the normal sense.

How could this have even lived? But live it had. The head led to a stocky, reddish brown body, devoid of fur apart from a thick shock of green lining its back. The fur appeared metallic in the chandelier's light.

The legs, of which there were six, ended in metal-talonied paws.

The tail was a fleshy red stub.

Ainsley crouched to examine the

underbody.

An array of dark pink nipples lined the flesh, between which a long, deep gash had been stitched up with thread.

Ainsley stood, turned to Harrenhal.

“You have been inside this thing? What was it like?”

Harrenhal nodded and headed right, towards another cabinet.

“Here. Come see.”

“Be right along,” Ainsley replied.

First, he checked the dog-thing’s display card.

Unknown Organism

Peripheral: Frederick John Basford

He approached the case Harrenhal stood

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before. The man had a hand to his mouth, staring at the contents in apparent consternation.

What Ainsley saw behind the glass made his gorge rise. He gulped it down and paused beside Harrenhal.

“Ghastly object, yes? An absolute abomination.”

He first thought it was a diseased organ, ripped from an equally diseased body. Around four feet long, varying in width from one foot to two, the large, tumorous lump was pale green in color.

Puckered sphincters and thick tubes dotted its surface, the latter neatly sliced off after a few inches.

And is that?

Ainsley couldn’t believe his eyes.

Crouched in one of the tubes sat a diminutive humanoid form. Slender yellow limbs, a somewhat bulbous head, it had three obsidian eyes, a small slit of a mouth. Its hands gripped a nodule protruding from the tube's inner wall.

He sent Lord Harrenhal an incredulous look and returned his attention to the mystery. An examination of other arteries revealed more tiny men, passengers in the ungodly cancerous hulk.

Ainsley backed away from the cabinet.

This was beyond his reasoning. He felt a little light-headed.

“Lord Harrenhal, I—”

Footsteps interrupted him as two figures stepped into the room.

It was Smyth-Jones, accompanied by the man they'd been talking to upstairs.

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Their eyes were on Ainsley. Neither paid attention to the monstrosities they passed.

Ainsley felt glad of the interruption.

“Harrenhal, Apsley!” Smyth-Jones appeared in good spirits. He shook their hands.

“My word, young man, you look a little peaky. What do you think, Bolingbroke?”

The other nodded curtly. He had a predatory air about him.

Harrenhal cut in. “Oh, you have not been introduced, have you? Shameful. My apologies. Sir Bolingbroke, please may I introduce Lord Ainsley. Ainsley, this is Sir Roger Bolingbroke, the founder of our club.”

Ainsley shook the man’s proffered hand, a firm yet cold grip.

“Oh, ah... A pleasure to meet you, sir. May I say, this is quite the museum.”

Bolingbroke grinned, revealing small, perfectly white teeth.

“My pleasure, young man. We are always eager to bring new minds into the fold.” He looked to Lord Harrenhal. “Have you shown him the device?”

Device? Ainsley thought.

“Just about to. We were examining this.” He indicated the nearby cabinet.

“Ah well, follow us, Ainsley,” Bolingbroke said. “You are privileged to be seeing this.”

Before moving, he looked at the cabinet again. Not the tumor—he’d seen enough of that, but the card beneath it.

Contents of Unknown Organism

Peripheral: Frederick John Basford

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They took this from inside the dog? My god.

The revelation brought a heaviness to his chest. Ainsley composed himself, stepped around the cabinet towards the other men.

Smyth-Jones was removing the cloth from the object at the room's center. Bolingbroke, stood at the opposite side of it, watched him lift the cloth away.

The removal revealed a half-moon shaped table, carved from darkly varnished wood. A large glass globe stood upon the crescent's thicker center. Mounted upon a circular brass base, inky fluid shifted within its confines.

“You may approach it, but do not touch,” Sir Bolingbroke said, his expression serious.

Before the table stood a well-padded wooden chair. Iron cuffs were attached to the arms and front legs. To the globe's left was a

wooden box, topped by a life-sized plaster head. A metal skullcap, surrounded by an array of delicate bands, crowned the head. Wires led from the cap to a row of sockets at the box's front.

Ainsley stepped towards the globe, curious and hesitant.

He tried moving the chair away, found it bolted to the floor.

The fluid in the glass swirled like a tempest. He discerned a sound, some sort of hiss, wavering in volume.

Nonplussed, he looked to the other men.

“Would you believe this provides one glimpses of another world?” Bolingbroke said. “More than that. It allows us to draw things from that other world.”

“What? But how—”

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“Came from the Shalka Meteorite,” Lord Harrenhal interrupted. “West Bengal, India.”

“There were other globes inside it.” Smyth-Jones. “Blasted things all broken. But this one...”

Harrenhal walked forward, took Ainsley by the arm.

“Everything in this room came from that orb.”

Such intensity in his gaze. These men were zealots.

And the very concept of their explanation proved difficult to process.

“Is there any danger? From what comes through?”

Bolingbroke shook his head. “No. Absolutely not. Everything we draw arrives dead.”

“You draw them out?” Ainsley turned his attention to the globe.

“More than that, m’boy.” Lord Harrenhal said. “The effect is two ways. We have entered the world within the globe. A sort of scrying.”

Sir Bolingbroke stepped around the table and placed his hand on Ainsley’s arm.

He smiled wryly. “Now. To the reason we brought you here. Would you care to visit this new world?”

Ainsley remained quiet during supper. Nothing new: he and his wife barely spoke during mealtimes, and this time, he had much on his mind.

Ainsley House, his mansion on Hyde Park Corner, was a home accustomed to silence. With no children forthcoming from their

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union, he and Lady Ainsley had long ago settled into separate bedrooms. When home and not at meals, he preferred the solitude of his basement laboratory, where experiments and books livened his dull days.

Tonight, he took to bed early, not to sleep, but to consider the evening's events, process them into something that made logical sense.

As wind battered his window, whistled down the chimney, Ainsley's thoughts had never been so troubled.

Another world, viewed and reached by some arcane object from the heavens. A church-going man but a man of science, he hardly believed in the Hell depicted in the scriptures. Just as he doubted Heaven. Those dead things, stored in the club's most inner sanctum; it wouldn't be difficult to mark them

as devils. Monstrous, fantastic aberrations...

Astronomy told the learned man of other worlds. And what forms would their life take? The concept of an anthropomorphic universe was the abode of the unimaginative.

Science created miracles, visible miracles. Unlike the God preached of in church.

And did science answer for Spiritualism? It would eventually, he felt sure.

Could science explain a globe purportedly linking his world to another? It would if he had anything to do with it.

Tomorrow he'd give Bolingbroke his answer. Tomorrow he would venture into the unseen.

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PART TWO

Anight of fitful slumber made him oversleep, and he awoke feeling groggy. Luckily, the meeting was scheduled for noon. He had plenty of time to prepare himself.

His wife had left before he'd risen, off to one of her society meetings.

After breakfast, he took a walk in Hyde Park. This cleared his head, the brisk, chilly weather invigorating him for the coming event.

Ainsley returned home at some twenty minutes to noon. His carriage driver took him to The Kraken Club, and soon after, he was rapping on the door.

A young servant lad let him in, took his coat and directed him to the club's main parlor.

Lord Harrenhal and Lord Smyth-Jones were there, chatting amiably together.

They were the only two present. Ainsley had never seen the club so quiet. Most members, he knew, only frequented it from the afternoon onwards.

Of the enigmatic Sir Bolingbroke, there was no sign.

“You made it, yes? Good man.” Smyth-Jones stepped towards him, shook his hand.

“No time like the present, eh?” Harrenhal added.

“Is Sir Bolingbroke here?” Ainsley asked.

“Oh no, afraid not, m'boy,” explained Harrenhal. “Some business in the city. We

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have it all under control. I take it your answer is yes? Let us get to it.”

Without waiting for a reply, Harrenhal departed the parlor.

Ainsley followed through the lobby towards the door they’d entered last night.

Smyth-Jones walked by his side. “I have done this many times, you know. A fascinating experience.” He patted Ainsley on the back. “You shall see, soon enough.”

Into the lion’s den, Ainsley thought. They followed Harrenhal down the stairs, into the first basement room.

Ainsley looked at the cases as they walked.

Noticing this, Smyth-Jones said, “These are nothing, nothing to what you will see today.”

He paused at the next threshold, watched

his companions head towards the room's center. The uncovered globe attracting them, and him, like a magnet.

Ainsley fought the pull.

“Not having second thoughts, are you, young man?” Smyth-Jones asked. “Would not be polite.”

“No. Not at all.” He feigned enthusiasm as he approached the pair.

Have I considered this thoroughly? As he neared the globe, Ainsley felt his face redden.

“Just sit here,” Harrenhal indicated the chair, then the table. “We place this cap on your head and connect it to the device. Links to the globe here, see.”

It all appeared very impressive, and quite unscientific. The globe's contents swirled, a tiny tempest of storm clouds.

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Looking at the chair, Ainsley asked, “The shackles here, on the legs and arms. What are these for?”

“Oh. Users have been known to jump sporadically. Just to keep you safe, m’boy.”

Ainsley nodded at Harrenhal’s explanation, removed his hat, and sat in the chair.

Smyth-Jones took his hat from him, placing it beside the globe.

Both men began securing the shackles around his feet and wrists.

“Not too tight, chap?” Smyth-Jones asked.

Ainsley shook his head.

Harrenhal turned away, returning after a few moments holding the metal skullcap.

“Now close your eyes, m’boy.”

He did, and contemplated the ludicrousness

of the situation.

Other worlds... Could this be some crass joke, made at the expense of a junior club member?

No, those dead things in the cases are no joke, and not forgeries.

He felt coldness as the cap was placed gently on his head.

“Plugging you in... Now,” came a voice as soft as the touch.

Ainsley stared at the blackness beneath his eyelids.

“We will remove the cap after ten minutes.” Smyth-Jones’s voice. “This will return you to us.”

A low hissing sound was followed by a queer sensation in his head. Such a curious feeling. Like some phantom hand fumbled

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through the brain matter.

He flinched as an explosion of lights filled the darkness. Warping fractals danced, burst and reformed.

A lurching sensation followed, and Ainsley was tumbling, helplessly, through bright, multi-colored fireworks. Winds assailed his hair and clothing, and then, his body was still.

No wind, no lights, Ainsley found himself standing upon firm ground. He was surrounded by buildings, a yellowish sky looming above him.

“My sweet lord. It worked.”

He felt afraid, vulnerable, yet strangely exhilarated.

Up to this point, he’d not fully believed their claims.

The truth surrounded him. Unless this was

a most vivid dream.

The air tasted dry and contained a spicy scent.

Am I in a city? Low, dome shaped cottages, queerly molded together, lined the street he stood upon. These stretched ahead and behind him. Behind the cottages stood taller, hexagonal buildings of varying heights, some linked together by tube-like bridges. Everything appeared constructed of clay, or some facsimile of it.

The city's dimensions were uneven, not one building exactly matched its neighbor.

Large, hollow windows and empty doorways fronted the cottages.

Clay slabs, gritty with sand, formed the street beneath his feet.

Ainsley examined the sky. There were

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glowing orbs there, some yellow, others
orange and purple.

Are they suns or moons? The surfaces bore
distinct shapes. Not the pocked craters of
Earth's moon. These markings resembled
dragons with devilfish heads.

Fascinating.

What had Bolingbroke said? Ten minutes.
He had ten minutes before his return.

Ainsley walked, scanning empty doorways
and windows. The city appeared barren—no
signs of life.

The street reached a junction, a circular
space connecting to five further streets. A
statue stood at the junction's center. He
approached it with curiosity.

The clay pedestal stood around four feet
high and wide. Some type of cuneiform

writing spotted the surface.

The statue, towering nine feet above the junction, was carved from greenish stone. *Actinolite*, he thought, for iron deposits pitted the stone. Its dimensions contained something of the demonic, something resembling an amalgamation of crabs, sea anemones and octopi.

What a horrid thing. Worse than what I witnessed in those cases.

Again, conscious of time, he chose another street at random, headed towards it. He'd describe the statue to the others when he returned.

If I return.

This was something he hadn't considered.
*What if I am stuck here for the rest of my days?
Wandering this dead city till I starve to death.*

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No, he told himself. Others had come through without issue.

The new street resembled the others; nothing distinguished it from the rest of the city.

I must make the most of this.

This thought sent him towards a doorway. As he walked, he stepped on something that made a crisp, crackling sound.

Curious, he scraped the ground with the tip of his shoe, discovering a partially buried sheet of paper. He bent to retrieve it.

The side facing him was blank.

The other side of the sheet bore writing and a macabre illustration.

A grinning moon, surrounded by bats, hovered over three flying skulls. Beneath them, a group of men and women sat around a

table. Their faces exhibited shock, fear. Two women had swooned. One man, his mouth open wide, pointed at the skulls in horror. The table held a rectangular board covered in letters of the alphabet. A small shape beside it resembled a planchette.

Surrounded by a scroll, the script at the top of the sheet read:

SUNDAY MAY 9TH 1885, 9 P.M. BRAVE
SOULS ONLY.

1885? he thought. *Why, that is decades away.* The sheet's bottom held further writing:

LIVE SÉANCE!
BE SHOCKED. BE AMAZED! LIFE
AFTER DEATH! PROVEN BEYOND ALL
DOUBT!

Will this come with me if I keep it?

He folded the sheet, placing it in his inside

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pocket. Ainsley then continued towards the doorway.

He noted a molded frame around the doorway, which, like the window beside it, had curves in place of angles.

This led to a small antechamber with a descending staircase. The interior stood bare of furnishings and décor.

Conscious of time limits, he made his way down the stairs.

The stairs were short, and after a few moments he was stepping through another doorway.

Ainsley recoiled. Scores of people stood inside the room. By their static shapes and coloration, he quickly realized they were statues.

The room was circular; the walls covered

in intricate-looking bas-reliefs. At around the ten-foot mark, the walls became a domed ceiling. A cluster of glowing yellow orbs hung at the apex. Throbbing gently, their light made the room's shadows twitch.

He turned, heading towards the bas-reliefs. Something about the statues caught his attention, however, making him change direction.

“What in the world?”

The statue he paused before bore an uncanny resemblance to him!

A chill of fear rippled down his spine.

How can this be?

The body was a generic, undetailed, man-like shape. The crude semblance of fingers and toes formed the hands and feet.

But the face? His nose, his chin, the curly

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hair...unmistakable. He saw this face every day in the shaving mirror. And it wasn't this single statue.

They are all me, he realized in shock. With trembling fingers, he tentatively touched the statue's cheek. It felt icy cold to the touch.

Ainsley lowered his hand, started backing away towards the doorway.

He had no interest in the bas-reliefs now, no intent but to escape the room.

Turning on his heels to leave, Ainsley found his way blocked.

All previous fears paled in comparison to this new horror.

Staring at him from hundreds of eyes, a black, pulsing cloud blocked the doorway.

“My God. Please, no.”

The cloud drifted forward.

Those myriad blinking eyes. Their scrutiny made him want to scream.

Instead, Ainsley ran.

Charging through the room, past the bas-reliefs, he hoped another doorway existed.

There, behind the statues.

His luck was in. Ainsley ran to and through the door, finding a stairway twin to the one he'd descended.

Unused to physical exertion, he started to pant halfway up the stairs. He couldn't stop, not with that horrific entity behind him.

The stairs led to a small antechamber, and a doorway.

What Ainsley encountered beyond made him stumble to a halt.

A large circular chamber filled with statues. Bas-reliefs lined the walls, the domed

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ceiling bearing a cluster of glowing orbs.

The same room. Ainsley knew this, just as he knew the entity he'd fled now waited behind him.

He turned despite his terror, resigned to a fate he couldn't run from.

Even prepared, his knees weakened at the sight of it.

Those eyes—dotting the cloud without rhyme or reason. Irises that exhibited every possible eye color, and beyond.

Slender black tendrils drifted from its bulk. Like smoke flowing from chimney pots.

His knees gave way.

“Mercy, please.” Ainsley looked to the floor, unable to bear the dreadful gaze any further.

Hands shaking, hot tears streamed down

his cheeks.

Its shadow fell across him.

Now he screamed.

And found himself back at the club,
struggling in panic, his heart pounding.

He fought the restraining cuffs like a
madman, issued a howl of animal fear.

“Ainsley, Ainsley! Calm yourself, man.”

Hands pressed down on his arms,
forcefully holding him still.

“Breathe slowly,” a voice said through his
shock.

Ainsley looked around, blinking his eyes.

Smyth-Jones stood to his left, Harrenhal,
his right, their faces expressing concern.

“Good man, you are safe now,” Smyth-
Jones continued. He went to free Ainsley from
the shackles. Harrenhal followed suit.

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“You gave us quite a fright, m’boy,”
Harrenhal said. “Cannot wait to hear what you
encountered.”

Ainsley sighed, relaxed back into the seat.
“I... It was an experience,” he replied in a
weak voice.

Before him, a maelstrom of motion filled
the globe. Streaks of lightning flashing in the
swirling black clouds, he could hear the
crackling electricity.

His companions worked to free his feet.
Ainsley leaned forward. The movement made
him dizzy.

He saw his face reflected in the globe. *Is it
my face?* It appeared distorted. The eyes
glaring, teeth bared in a rictus grin.

“Can you stand?” Smyth-Jones asked, his
voice soft, concerned.

Ainsley looked to him, nodded, and went to raise himself, utilizing the armrests for support.

A moment later, he fainted.

They brought him round with brandy and gentle taps on his face. Ainsley spent the next hour recovering, his companions questioning him over what he'd witnessed.

Harrenhal dutifully wrote everything down in a large, leather-bound ledger.

Still dazed, he detailed his experiences as best he could. The memories were a little jumbled.

He described the dead city, the queer vault filled with statues which resembled him.

They found the encounter with the entity of particular interest, shared concerned looks as he described it pursuing him through the

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basements.

He recalled the sheet of paper and produced it from his coat. This made his companions happy indeed.

“Your first card in a display. Well done, m’boy!” Harrenhal said encouragingly.

His lethargy persisted throughout the interview. After making him swear his adventure to secrecy, they finally allowed him to leave. Ainsley had no issues with this. Who would believe him anyway?

They saw him to his carriage, told him to rest up when he arrived home.

This he did, heading straight to his bedchamber and collapsing, fully clothed, atop his bed.

The unsurmountable fatigue sent him into a deep, troubled sleep.

With Miss Dorris stood dutifully beside her, Madame d'Esperance sat cocooned in her seat. The male companion, Clarence, remained invisible in the gloom.

"I kindly ask the Spirit Realm," d'Esperance said, "You my Spirit Guide, to bring forth another soul, so I may prove to these esteemed gentlemen the existence of the afterworld. Oh. You wish to speak through me?" d'Esperance paused, moved her blindfolded head from side to side. "Miss Dorris? The speaking trumpet, please."

The young woman raised a long thin trumpet to d'Esperance's lips.

"I am here, Mistress." A droning voice echoed throughout the room. "There is a spirit close by. By the name of Spring-heeled Jack.

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Spring-heeled Jack, come forth and reveal yourself.”

Silence. Then a menacing cackle filled the room.

“Reveal yourself, spirit,” d’Esperance commanded.

“Eh. What?” a confused voice said from the darkness. A strangled cry followed.

A black-clad figure stumbled into view. Clarence, dressed from head to toe in tight-fitting black velvet.

Miss Dorris rushed to him. The hand she reached out came away bloody.

The audience began to panic, fleeing their seats. Ainsley attempted to move, but strong iron cuffs trapped his wrists and ankles.

A figure appeared behind Miss Dorris. Pale of face, it had a metal skullcap on its head.

More metal, in the shape of long, knife-like claws, sliced Miss Dorris's throat.

"What is going on here? Dorris. Get me out," Madame d'Esperance shouted.

Miss Dorris fell, blood gushing from her lacerated throat.

Ainsley tried to warn d'Esperance, but his mouth proved as unmoveable as his limbs.

The figure stepped forward, giving Ainsley a clear look at its face.

The grinning mouth, the blood-flecked features...were his own.

Breakfast with his wife felt more uncomfortable than usual, the silence between them a thicker wall. On his part, the dream weighed heavily on him. Not just the violent repeat of the events at the séance. That name.

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Spring-heeled Jack... Ainsley recognized it from somewhere. A newspaper, some glanced at but unread Penny Dreadful? It tasked him, almost enough to break the wall of silence and question his wife.

Almost.

While daintily cutting into a kipper, she paused and broke it herself.

“My dear,” she said, with no endearment in her tone. “Were you troubled by nightmares last evening? I distinctly heard you cry out on more than one occasion.”

“I believe so, Margaret,” he replied, considered what he would say next, and, “But I cannot recall what the dreams were about.”

After breakfast, his morning continued much like the one before. A walk in the park, a visit to his accountant on family business.

His anticipation filled his every moment. Despite the encounter with the many-eyed being, he desired more, much more, of that strange realm.

Ainsley chose not to inform the club members of his dream. There could be a connection. Certainly, he'd never experienced anything as brutal, and vivid. He sorely desired to re-enter the portal, and worried revealing it may give them pause.

After his arrival at The Kraken Club, the trio escorted him to the basement. As before, Harrenhal and Smyth-Jones secured him to the seat. With Sir Bolingbroke's hawkish visage observing, Harrenhal placed the skullcap atop his head.

“Fine work with the flyer you found,”

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Bolingbroke said. “Try and do something like that again.”

“Should you encounter the being you came across yesterday, do not be afraid. Attempt communication. Nothing can harm you there.”
Smyth-Jones.

Be not afraid: what the angels commanded the children of God. Yet fear could not be separated from the wonders of the otherworldly.

“Plugging you in,” said Harrenhal.

Ainsley obediently closed his eyes.

“One day we shall attempt to send two men at the same time. Should that be a possibility.”

The voice sounded like Bolingbroke, though he couldn’t be sure through the hissing noise in his ears.

No lights yet, nothing but the darkness of

his eyelids.

“Go through there, not bloody likely. Not for all the tea in India, what?” someone whispered. Harrenhal, he thought.

“Is he under?”

Smyth-Jones?

“Should be, by now. Naive fool.”

“Hush. We need it to work this time.”

A burst of flashing lights. The hiss became a roar. Ainsley fell through a kaleidoscope of colors, tumbled between bulging fractals and shimmering orbs.

He screamed into the kaleidoscope, the noise sounding like shattering glass. It *did* shatter, fragmenting colors into tiny petals that disappeared into the void. Directly below him, a sandy vista appeared, one he plummeted towards helplessly.

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No gentle landing this time. He dropped a dozen feet to land roughly on a sandy surface.

Ainsley expected broken limbs. But, as he gingerly rose, he discovered no damaged bones, no aches of any kind. The strange alchemy of the transition had deposited him safely.

He found himself on a hill, facing two long, wide roads. The air bore a hint of acridity, the residual scent of a conflagration.

The view made the odd conversation he'd overheard slip his mind.

Hundreds of rusted metal shapes filled the roads. What were they? Fairly uniform in design, they resembled horse carriages. Low wheels on each, windows on all sides. Below the windows: flat metal, except for the protruding fronts and rears. The inventor

Goldsworthy Gurney's steam-powered vehicles came to mind. These appeared more advanced, however—ruined as they were.

Beyond the roads, titanic, pillar-like structures stood against the yellow sky. Of varying heights, many appeared tilted, ready to collapse.

This vista was a world gone to ruin. A necropolis of the unreal.

Ainsley turned to see what lay behind him. Beneath the hill, a patch of smaller hillocks led to other buildings. These more resembled those back home. Two-stories of brick with slated roofs, the visible windows were empty. Doorways stood devoid of doors.

Conscious of time, Ainsley started to head down the hill, and froze.

A menacing presence had appeared behind

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him. The hairs on his arms stood erect; he felt his legs weaken.

The presence seethed and bubbled. He sensed hundreds of eyes staring into him, through him.

Attempt communication, Smyth-Jones had said.

Do I dare? Do I run?

Ainsley breathed deeply, raised his arms in what he hoped would be recognized as a gesture of supplication.

He turned to face himself.

Gray pants, black morning coat. Black top hat. His twin wore the clothes he'd dressed in today. Red hair, a face framed with mutton-chop whiskers. The man's eyes glowed, smoldering with an inner fire.

“I...” his fear replaced by confusion and

surprise, Ainsley lowered his hands.

“I can take away those fears,” his doppelgänger said. He removed the hat, and bowed.

“Your fears, your doubts, your inadequacies.”

The following grin revealed a set of sharp metallic teeth.

Ainsley gasped.

“You’re Spring-heeled—”

“I am an explorer,” his twin interrupted.
“Take my hand so we may journey together.”

Honey-coated words. Lusting, hungry eyes.

“We can share sensations beyond the jaded and mediocre.”

Ainsley hesitated only briefly and took the proffered hand.

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He blinked, and opened his eyes to a slaughterhouse.

Kneeling over Lord Harrenhal, a laceration beneath the man's chin had almost severed his head.

“My God!”

The reek of blood—pungent in his nostrils—filled the air about him.

Harrenhal lay spread eagle, arms, and legs limp in death.

Ainsley crawled back in horror, noting as he did something off about his hands.

He raised his left hand, found his fingertips bore long metal blades.

“What?”

His other hand was the same, the metal glinting in the light above, glinting red where blood coated the blades.

His surprise grew as he examined the rest of the room. It was a scene of chaos.

The cabinets were smashed, not only the glass, but the wood frames were cracked asunder.

I did this. All of this. What have I become?

The orb throbbed fitfully to his left, clouds within swirling wildly. He looked to the chair, what remained of it. The shackles had been ripped from the wood; the chair itself bent and splintered. It hadn't had the strength to hold him. Not the thing he'd become, anyway.

“No. Please.”

A low moan followed the protesting voice. Somewhere to his left.

He stood, stepped around Harrenhal, moving gingerly across smashed glass, chunks of wood and dead abominations.

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A nearby trail of blood led to another corpse.

Sir Bolingbroke had died in an improbable position: his buttocks raised, his knees and shoulders touching the floor.

His head twisted around to face the ceiling. Glazed eyes stared into infinity.

Again the moan, again he continued on. Behind a collapsed cabinet he found Lord Smyth-Jones.

Curled up sideways, the man held a bloody hand against his throat. The other arm terminated in a stump surrounded by a pool of red.

The stink of blood was heavier here, rich and coppery. And something else, ripe and pungent. It appeared Smyth-Jones had soiled himself.

Smyth-Jones's eyes were bloodshot. His lips gibbered, dripping saliva tainted red.

The eyes blinked as he noticed Ainsley's presence. Smyth-Jones looked up, eyes widening.

The yammering stopped. He gulped, a loud, painful sound.

I did this. I crippled the man.

“Our Father, who art in Heaven,” Smyth-Jones began, and removing his hand from his throat, raised it palm outwards as if to defend against a blow.

He is terrified of me, Ainsley realized.

The man continued praying.

“Stop,” Ainsley ordered.

Smyth-Jones obeyed, lowered his hand.

“You... Ainsley...are you yourself again?”

“DO I LOOK LIKE MYSELF!”

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The potency of his anger surprised him.

The other cowered, began weeping. "I am sorry."

Ainsley swallowed, attempted to calm himself.

"What did you do to me?" he questioned.

Smyth-Jones dabbed his cheeks with his sleeve.

"The portal to that terrible place. We knew...knew certain entities existed there. One of them possessed poor Basford."

The mutilated corpse in the cabinet, with the claws.

Ainsley looked to his hands, found to his wonder the claws had disappeared.

That fiend back there, he thought. The sensations promised? Tearing flesh like offal; the butchery of a maniac.

He felt the anger swelling again.

“You sent me there, knowing I would return with this horror?”

“Bolingbroke. Yes, Bolingbroke. His idea. Capture the thing. Learn its secrets.”

“But it, I, got free?”

He nodded. “Help me. Ainsley... Benjamin. Please, sir. We may still find redemption for you.”

Sent me to my doom. Tricked me. Left me to the mercy of that devil. Forfeited my life and for what?

The floodgates of his anger burst. Ainsley’s vision became monochrome as something *other* took control of him.

Smyth-Jones shrieked as a clawed hand sliced open his throat. Blood gushed.

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Ansley started laughing. But it wasn't him.
Wasn't through his volition.

“Benjamin?” The glowing-eyed fiend sneered at the dying man. “My name, sir, is Spring-heeled Jack!”