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About the Book

'The Squall feed on psychic energy. They spread like a plague and if they are not stopped they will strip the Earth clean...'

London 1910: an unsuspecting thief finds himself confronted by grey-skinned creatures that are waiting to devour his mind. London 3189: the remains of an ancient android are dredged from the Thames. When reactivated it has a warning that can only be delivered to a man named 'the Doctor'.

The Doctor and his friends must solve a mystery that has spanned over a thousand years. If they fail, the deadly alien Squall will devour the world.

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Paradox Lost

GEORGE MANN



This one's for you, son

London, 13 October 1910

He'd never intended to become a thief.

Edgar Miller considered this as he wedged the end of his crowbar against the sill and began to prise open the sash window. He'd always planned to do something worthwhile with his life, to make something of himself. Life, however, pointedly refused provide to him opportunities. For years he'd tried to earn an honest living, breaking his back with manual work, mucking out stables, fetching and carrying. In the end, though, where had that gotten him? He'd been forced to slog his guts out while watching others sit back and grow fat on the fruits of his labour. In the end it had simply proved too much, and a month earlier he had finally taken matters into his own hands. There were easier ways to put food on the table.

The sash window gave way with a noisy splinter of wood, and Miller paused for a moment, listening for any sign that someone might have heard. The night was silent save for the sounds of a tabby cat prowling about in the flowerbeds and the distant clatter of horse's hooves. He gently placed the crowbar on the ground and slid the window up in its frame, wincing as the mechanism creaked loudly in protest.

Miller swung himself in through the window and dropped softly to the kitchen floor on the other side. The room was cast in long shadows, illuminated only by the thin sliver of moonlight that slanted in through the still-open window. He could see shapes hulking in the gloaming: a table, a dresser, a stove. None of these were likely to yield the sort of prizes he was searching for.

Miller crept towards the door, stopping to listen for sounds of movement from deeper within the old house. He smiled to himself as he reached for the door handle. The place might as well have been deserted. If he was lucky, he'd be out of there in a matter of minutes, his pockets stuffed full of baubles he could fence down at the Rose and Crown the following day.

The hallway beyond the door was long and narrow, but filled with all manner of ostentatious decoration: a gilt-framed mirror, a tall vase brimming with peacock feathers, a telephone table proudly displaying the latest receiver. Again, he continued on his way, determined that the stuff of real value would be found elsewhere in the house.

The dining room proved immediately more fruitful, and within a few moments Miller had already relieved the sideboard of its silver cutlery service, shovelling it into a cloth sack he'd brought with him for the purpose.

He started at a sudden sound from upstairs, pausing with a silver ashtray in his hand. His breath came in ragged gasps. What had it been? The mewling of an animal? A family pet? He remembered he'd seen the tabby cat in the backyard. Yes, that must have been it. The cat had probably followed him in through the open window. Nothing to worry about. Cautiously, he continued with his work.

Miller wondered if the family was at home. The mistress of the house would surely have a well-appointed jewellery box, and a treasure trove such as that would mean he wouldn't have to do another job for weeks, if not longer. He decided it was worth the risk to find out.

He left the sack of cutlery at the bottom of the stairs as he crept up towards the bedrooms, his footfalls accompanied by the ominous ticking of the grandfather clock in the hall below. Every sound seemed magnified, echoing out around the still and silent house. If he found someone asleep in the master bedroom, well, he would turn about and hotfoot it out of there the same way he had come, collecting the sack on the way.

The floorboards on the landing groaned as he presented them with his weight, and he found himself tiptoeing along, his back pressed to the wall. His breath was coming in short, ragged gasps. Sweat was prickling on his forehead. Until now, he'd confined himself to quick, relatively minor incursions into people's homes, but now he was taking a real risk. If something happened, if he was caught... well, it would mean the cells, or worse. For a moment he considered turning back. The silver service was enough, surely? He could sense the danger. Yet something made him go on. Whether it was the promise of the treasures he might find, or simply the adrenalin that was pounding through his veins, he had no idea.

Miller passed the door to the guest room, stopping only momentarily to peer inside. It was difficult to see anything in the gloom, but the bed appeared to be made. He considered heading inside to poke around in the drawers, but decided to press on to the master bedroom instead. Anything else was just an unnecessary delay.

Further along the landing, the door to the master bedroom stood ajar. Miller loitered on the threshold for a few moments, attempting to gather himself. He would step in, he decided, take stock, and then back out onto the landing while he decided what to do. If the coast was clear, he would locate the jewellery box and scarper.

Careful to make as little sound as possible, Miller crept into the room. In here, the curtains had been pulled shut against the moonlight and it took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. When they did, Miller immediately found himself wishing they had not.

The two people in the bed - a husband and wife, he presumed - lay still on their backs beside each other, both staring up at the ceiling. Their faces were fixed in

expressions of appalled horror, and dark blood trickled from their unseeing eyes, pooling on the pillows beneath them. It was one of the most horrific sights that Miller had ever seen. He felt his chest tighten in panic and fear. But it was the sight of the creature looming over the two corpses that caused Miller's knees to almost buckle in terror.

The thing was like something derived from a nightmare, a creature dragged from the very depths of Hell. It was humanoid and stood on its hind legs, but its body was strangely angular, as if its pallid grey flesh had been stretched too taut over its bones. Beneath its arms fleshy membranes hung loose, and its face was hideous, with an upturned snout and a mouth glistening with needle-sharp teeth. Its body appeared to be smooth and entirely hairless, and its eyes flashed red in the gloom.

The creature turned and bared its fangs, reaching out for Miller with its bony fingers. He stood for a moment, paralysed with fear, as the thing circled the bed, stalking towards him, its clawed fingers twitching with anticipation. He could hear its rasping breath and the click of its talons against the polished floorboards as it came closer, intent, he guessed, on doing to him whatever it had done to the two blood-soaked victims on the bed.

Miller came to his senses. He had to get out of there as quickly as possible. He stepped back, keeping his eyes fixed on the creature, and immediately collided with something behind him. He cried out in panic, fearing it was another of the things come out of the shadows to grab at him, but it was only the door, hanging open where he'd left it.

Steeling himself, Miller spun around and threw himself out of the opening.

The creature issued a horrifying screech - a shrill, piercing scream that seemed to reverberate through his very bones. Then he was out on the landing, hurtling towards the stairs, all sense of caution now gone. He practically threw himself down the staircase, taking the

steps three at a time, and didn't look back until he'd made it to the hallway below. A quick glance over his shoulder told him the creature was in fast pursuit.

It was then that his foot caught the edge of the sack he had abandoned in the hallway earlier, sending a couple of knives and forks skittering across the tiled floor. Miller glanced down, weighing up his options. Would it slow him down? He didn't have time to worry about that. He reached down and snatched up the sack, hefting it over his shoulder. Then, turning towards the kitchen, he charged along the hallway, intent on making it out of the window before the thing from upstairs had a chance to catch up with him.

He shouldered his way through the half-open door to the kitchen, slung the sack around as if readying himself to hurl it through the open window, and, too late, realised there were another three of the creatures lurking by the dresser, waiting in the shadows for their prey.

Miller screamed and tried to run, but the creature from upstairs was behind him, and it grabbed at him with its bony fingers, scrabbling for purchase, its talons raking his flesh. It shoved him back toward the others and he fell to his knees, whimpering, before them. 'Wh-what are you?' he managed to stutter.

'We. Are. Squall,' they said, each of them hissing a word in turn. 'And. We. Shall. Feast.'

Miller screamed once again as they descended, and bright blood began to bubble out of his eyes.

Chapter 1

London, 10 June 2789

'Hold on!'

'I am holding on!'

'Well... hold on a little tighter, then!' The Doctor shouted this while clutching the TARDIS console and hammering at the controls in what, to Rory, appeared to be a random fashion.

'Doctor...' Amy warned.

'Erm... I think you might want to tell her what's going on now, Doctor,' said Rory, in what he hoped was a conciliatory – and not at all panicked – fashion. 'And while we're on the subject, I'd quite like to have a better idea of that myself, too...' He grabbed for the railing and held on for dear life while the entire ship shook and bucked around him. 'I mean, for instance, are we all about to plummet to our deaths, or is this fairly typical for a journey to the Rambalian Cluster?'

The Doctor glanced up from the console, brushing his floppy hair out of his eyes. Rory noticed that, somewhere along the line, the Doctor had discarded his tweed jacket and rolled up his sleeves. His bow tie was slightly off kilter, too. So, serious business, then.

The Doctor met Rory's gaze and offered him an endearing smile. When he spoke again, his tone was calm and measured. 'Well, I... I suppose we're sort of... crashing. In a manner of speaking.' He turned back to the controls, as if that was the end of the matter.

'How can you crash "in a manner of speaking"?' demanded Amy, and Rory could tell the exasperation in her voice was very much affected. In fact, she looked as if she was actually *enjoying* the experience. He, on the other hand, felt decidedly queasy. He'd rather not have been crashing at all, let alone 'in a manner of speaking'.

'Well, not so much *crashing*, as smashing our way through a few roadblocks. Think of it more like a bad case of turbulence,' said the Doctor, nearly tumbling over backwards with a sudden jolt and only managing to maintain his balance by sticking a leg in the air and clinging resolutely to the console. 'The old girl seems to want to take us somewhere in a bit of a hurry and she's jumping a few time tracks in order to do it. Just like a needle skipping in the grooves in an old record.'

Amy looked at him blankly.

'Oh, now I do feel old,' he said.

'But why?' Rory asked, his knuckles tightening on the rail as he was nearly knocked from his feet.

'Why do I feel old?' The Doctor asked, with a quizzical expression on his face. 'Well, Rory, it's quite simple, really...'

'Why is the TARDIS taking us somewhere in a hurry?' Amy interjected before the Doctor could continue, rolling her eyes at Rory.

The Doctor beamed. 'That's the bit I haven't worked out yet,' he said, leaning forward to pat the console fondly and glancing up at the time rotor. 'But it's not like you to take shortcuts, is it?'

It took a moment for Rory to realise the Doctor was addressing the ship. As if in response, the TARDIS

shuddered and vibrated, and then seemed to settle. Rory watched the Doctor and Amy for a moment as both of them stood back from the console, glanced at each other, and then burst out giggling. Sometimes, he considered, travelling with the Doctor and Amy was like being with two excitable children.

He tentatively let go of the railing, afraid that the ship would suddenly jolt again and he'd go tumbling over the edge of the central platform, but a moment later the TARDIS issued its familiar grating wheeze and landed with a resounding *thump*.

'We're there!' announced the Doctor, rushing around the console, flicking switches and turning dials. He stood back and grasped the sides of the monitor that hung from a bracket attached to the stem of the central column, swinging it around so he could examine the readout.

'Where's "there"?' asked Amy, coming around beside the Doctor, keen not to miss anything. She was wearing a red hoodie, a short black skirt with matching tights, and calfhigh black boots. Rory watched her for a minute as she leaned in over the Doctor's shoulder. He still couldn't quite believe that she was his wife. Somehow, he'd managed to marry her, despite everything. He was the luckiest man alive. He went to join them by the console.

'One thing's for sure. It's not the Rambalian Cluster,' the Doctor said, running a hand through his hair. 'Where have you brought us, old girl?' he said quietly, looking suddenly serious. 'And why?' He tapped a fingertip thoughtfully against his forehead and then turned and clapped a hand on Rory's shoulder. 'I suppose there's only one way to find out!' he announced brightly, before leaping down from the central dais and charging toward the door.

Rory watched as the Doctor flung open both doors and disappeared into the bright sunshine that suddenly flooded in from outside. He looked to Amy. She had a mischievous grin on her face. 'We're going after him, then?' he asked.

'Too right we are!' replied Amy, grabbing his hand. 'We're not letting him have all the fun.' She led him down the steps toward the door. The Doctor was waiting for them there, leaning with his back against the doorframe, silhouetted against the bright sun.

'Come along, Pond. Places to go, things to see.' The Doctor fiddled with his bow tie as if smartening himself up. Rory was surprised to see he'd somehow managed to reclaim his jacket, too. 'And you, Rory. Chop, chop. No time to waste. You're going to want to see this.'

'See what?' said Rory, as he followed the others out into the street. He glanced around, shielding his eyes against the sun and taking in the vista. 'Oh,' he continued. 'That.'

They were standing on the embankment of a wide river, looking out over a futuristic cityscape of the kind Rory had only ever imagined from reading science fiction novels and comic books when he was younger. Glittering towers of metal and glass seemed to extrude from the ground, twisting organically toward the sky. Large, covered complexes sat squat beside the river, built – or perhaps even *grown* – from a substance that resembled pink coral. Huge glass domes encapsulated what looked like forests or plantations amongst all the habitation. Brimming with leafy green trees and lush vines, they punctuated the urban sprawl, little havens of wildlife in the midst of the angular chaos.

Above, the sky was criss-crossed with the vapour trails of scudding aircraft, and below, the river was a hive of activity, buzzing with strange little boats and floating platforms. Amidst all of this shining modernity, however, Rory could see ancient-looking buildings nestling in the shadows, old fashioned brick-built houses and churches of the sort that were old even in his day.

'What is this place?' asked Rory, drinking it all in.

Amy squeezed his hand even more tightly in excitement. 'Is it another alien planet?' she said.

The Doctor shook his head. 'No. It's Earth. London, to be precise. And,' he sniffed at the air, then licked his finger and held it up to the breeze, 'judging by the look and smell of the place, I'd say it was some time in the twenty-eighth century.'

'London?' said Rory, incredulous. 'Really? Everything's so... different.'

The Doctor laughed. 'Am I often wrong about these things, Rory?' Rory shrugged. Well, you're not always right... he thought, but kept that particular comment to himself.

'Look, there are the Houses of Parliament.' The Doctor pointed across the river to the now incredibly ancient – but still stately – buildings on the other side. Big Ben remained where it had always stood, proud amongst the surrounding spires that now dwarfed it, but almost lost amongst those later, futuristic developments. 'And that's Westminster Bridge, if I'm not mistaken.' He indicated a little further along the river. 'They manage to preserve a lot of it. At least for another few decades, anyway.'

'What happens in a few decades?'

The Doctor frowned. 'Good question, Rory. But more importantly, why has the TARDIS brought us here, to this specific time and place, and in such a hurry?'

Rory couldn't help thinking the Doctor was avoiding his question, but nevertheless, he made a good point. They lapsed into silence for a moment while the Doctor seemed to be considering the answer to his own question. He paced back and forth, drumming his fingers against his temples.

'What's going on over there?' asked Amy, who had finally relinquished Rory's hand and had wandered over to the railing that separated the street from the embankment below. She leaned over and pointed to a small group of people who were gathered by the water's edge, lifting something tentatively out of the river on a large pallet. There were at least five men and a woman, plus a handful

of divers bobbing up and down in the water, their faces hidden behind breathing apparatus. Large frames of scaffolding had been erected along the embankment close to where they were working, covered in flapping tarpaulins.

The Doctor produced a small pair of binoculars from inside his jacket and put them to his eyes. Not for the first time, Rory wondered where he secreted all of these things, and how he knew what to bring with him. It wasn't as if the Doctor had stopped to raid the equipment cupboard on the way out. Somehow, though, he seemed perpetually prepared for any and all eventualities. 'I don't know, but it looks interesting. Some sort of archaeological dig, from what I can see,' he said, stuffing the binoculars back inside his pocket.

'Then let's go and take a look,' said Amy, starting out in the direction of the excavation. 'You like museums, don't you, Doctor? Here's your chance to see something new.'

'Something old,' Rory corrected her. 'You mean something old.'

Amy seemed to ignore this. After a few steps she turned to look back over her shoulder to see if they were following, and the Doctor caught her eye. 'You've got that look in your eye, Pond.'

'What look?' she replied with mock-sweetness, as if she had no idea at all what he was getting at.

'Like you're planning mischief,' said the Doctor. He grinned at Rory, and then turned back to Amy. 'That's good. I like mischief. Mischief is what we need. Now,' he clapped his hands together with resolve, taking both of them in with an expansive gesture, 'let's go and see what they've found in the river!'

'This looks *spectacularly* interesting,' the Doctor announced loudly and with a little too much enthusiasm, as the three of them walked along the embankment toward

the team of archaeologists. A number of the men were huddled around the pallet bickering loudly, preventing Rory from getting a good view of whatever it was they had lifted out of the river. Others were drifting to and fro, ducking in and out of their work tents.

Upon hearing the Doctor's exclamation one of their number, the woman Rory had spotted from above, turned to regard them as they approached. She was clearly in charge: she was holding some sort of complicated computer device for a start, and she was wearing a smart blue suit rather than the more casual attire of the others in her group. She was in her mid-to-late forties, Rory guessed, and was pretty and well coiffured. 'Can I help you?' she said to the Doctor, who raised an eyebrow at her unnecessarily severe tone. He reached for his psychic paper and flashed it before her in a rather cursory fashion.

'I do hope so,' he said. 'We're here to make an inspection.'

The woman narrowed her eyes. 'An inspection, you say?'

The Doctor nodded. 'Yes, that's right. New procedure, nothing to worry about. We just need to take a look at the site to ensure everything is in order.' He loomed over the woman, trying to see, but she blocked his way. 'Everything is in order, isn't it?'

'Yes, of course it is,' she said. 'All the finds are being logged and recorded in the marquees over there. I can't imagine there's anything the city conservation board would find interesting, though.'

'City conservation board... right, yes.' The Doctor clicked his fingers. 'Love conservation. So... what's that, on the pallet over there?'

'Nothing but a rusty lump of recently dumped equipment.' She shrugged. 'You'll be wasting your time with that.'

'Nevertheless, we'd still like to take a look.'