

Behind the Masque

By

Andrew M. Boylan

Andrew M. Boylan asserts his moral rights to be identified as the author of this work. © 1990, 2006, 2007 by Andrew M. Boylan. All rights reserved.

Author's Note:

This Novelette has been written in a certain style, which is meant to invoke half an image, and allow the other half to come from the imagination of the reader – that dark part of the psyche that see monsters in shadows and demons in twilight.

Any resemblance of the characters to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All songs written, produced and performed by Electric Masquerade.

Author's Note Addendum:

This is a retype of a manuscript I wrote back in 1990. It was my first real attempt at long prose and, whilst it is very stylistic, looking back on it I believe it reveals certain immaturities in my writing. Now, 16 years later, I hope I am a stronger writer. The manuscript has lain fallow for a very long time and I have decided to resurrect it and create an online home for it – so that others can read it and, I hope, gain something from it. If I did not do this, I would do nothing with it. I have not really changed this from its original, it is a snapshot and it would be unfair on the person I was to change what he created, having left that creation alone for so long.

Please be gentle with its style and content, for it is the child of another age, when I had read far too much of the "Beats".

Andrew M. Boylan April 2006.

“The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science.”

Albert Einstein

Prologue

A thousand years of sweat and toil, crushed into just eighteen months of preparation. Pain, the blood of the work, the stain of the art.

In Agony begun, now...

Completed.

Six young men discuss their futures, plan their careers upon a cornerstone composed of dreams. A fantasy that is fuelled by ego – we cannot fail.

Every sacred pound and holy penny had been offered forth. Every conceivable moment had been dedicated to getting this far. A myriad brain cells on fire, each exploding into inspiration ray – piercing the soul. Jarring melodies, clashing rhythms, dark lyrics, searing backdrop lightshow. All ready.

The band was complete, though their skill was (as yet) untested in the public arena. Keyboard, guitar, violin, drums, vox; and songs to sing, a message to deliver.

To be thrown, with passion, at an unsuspecting, adoring world.

The emergence of Electric Masquerade.

Prog. Rock of the nineties.

Soon... the shroud shall be lifted and the corpse seen to become alive.

“...In two weeks at the Raven Bar; if we go down well the man says every week...

“...we’ll start with ‘Hunter of the Dark’.”

PART ONE: Coincidence?

Chapter One

Incense boils, seas of smoke; the curls of waves, heavy fragrance grasping upwards. The infusion of plumes creates a dense fog; illuminated and animated by flickering flames – the candles in ritual position. Stars suspended in the heady, intense atmosphere.

The chants, sinister calls in barbarous tongues, incantations rise to their God.

Diablo.

Black velvet robes sway with body movement, hypnotic wave and the individual becomes lost within the bond of the many. The group mind intent on a sole purpose.

Mute fear is locked within the naked girl's eyes. Paralysed by the exotic drug she can only lie, and fear. Her mind reels, betrays prayers to a God left beyond the heavy, bolted door. Prone, spread-eagled across the wooden, dark stained altar.

He approaches her – he who was the blind date and is now the sinister enemy.

His voice calls to an entity, a Lord – his God; the Enemy.
Entreating him to bestow a gift.

“Hear me, oh Lucifer...”

Confusing, passionate dirge of Latin and guttural English swells
through the room. Carrying the prayers of the faithful.

His robes part, his phallus erect.

Forced entry of rape.

His orgasm parallels the second penetration, the plunge of
knife. Her blood spills as does his seed.

The atmosphere crackles as dark energy and stolen life-force
flood the room.

Some of the disciples collapse, others, now elevated, couple
within a rising torrent of orgy. And the high priest laps her blood.

Chapter Two

Moonlight steals through the granite crack. The rotten lid of the wooden crate is rent asunder with splintered ease. It reveals decaying satin, and tattered rags; and the translucent, and yet strangely incorrupt corpse of a man.

His face seems carved from marble, the illusion shattered as the eyes slowly open. Ice blue irises unveiled after ten years of dreamless sleep, they fill with disdain as they move across his rotten garb.

Hunger pounds...

He lifts himself slowly out of the 'final' resting place, the hermit retreat.

A cruel smile briefly flickers across his white, bloodless lips, disclosing ivory daggers – the cruel weapons of the stab and puncture.

His hand tenses, opening and closing in a stubborn mortal habit, attempting to move blood through fingers with no blood. Moonlight glints upon the bone white, razor nails.

Heartbeats call...

Hair as black as raven wings betrays the pallid flesh of the unblemished living corpse. He carefully stands, he legs unused to carrying any weight, the weakness of hibernation.

Why now? Why awaken now?

First to feed and then... Then to find more suitable clothing. Theatrics? Living up to mortal expectations.

He eases open the granite door. For now I must be hidden.

The hunger is all consuming

Chapter Three

“Ok, from the top...”

Here comes the candle, to light you to bed,
Dark Nosferatu chops off your head.

Lone voice and then the piercing scream.

Thunder, the drums explode in frenzy. Furious rhythms burst across the room.

The wail of guitar rises through the percussive storm and manages to calm Thor’s wrath to a steady beat.

Wait four bars, in burst the other instruments, advancing like armed forces following a well rehearsed tactical battle plan. The bass and guitar now become rhythmic lovers, flesh to the bones of the drumbeat. The keyboard sings in a sinister voice, a melody of atmosphere. The violin soars above, a bird of prey upon the wing.

In the dark of night, for too many years,
The Hunter rises still.
Beneath pale moon, stalks your darkest fears,
Searching for the kill.

The singer weaves in a tapestry of dance; mimed expression bestows a power to the words he sings.

This is the final rehearsal, the last check before the maelstrom is unleashed. The energy builds to fever pitch, spiraling upwards. A select audience, friends and hangers on, find themselves carried away by the front man's presence and power, carried far to a dark landscape.

Hunter of the dark,
Gonna make his mark,
To feed his evil hunger,
He'll tear your soul asunder.

See you at the Raven, Friday night.

Chapter Four

Midnight walking, homeward bound. Paul saunters through a nightmare daydream. He is a man who lives in dreams, weaves fantasies. Yet he believes. He knows. Knows that they can cross the border, tear the temple's veil and invade reality.

Gold crucifix weighted at his neck.

The folds of his rain coat flow around him. In his coat's inner pocket, banging securely against his thigh is The Book. Words of fact now read as fiction – the classic work of Victorian literature. Timeless. Bram Stoker's 'Dracula'.

Old Bram knew a thing or two, he saw beyond the gossamer veil into the truth of the dark.

He dreams of hunting the evil, he is the saviour of civilisation as we know it. Defending mankind from the encroaching army of Satan. The undead, darkest of living corpses. The suckers of blood, polymorphs who possess an ancient evil knowledge.

...He wades across the stagnant pond towards the open yawn of the grave. Rising through the pungent mists, the vampire mistress. Scars from her wolfen claws, evidence of his previous

narrow escape, burn in warning.

She leaps at his throat, hungry for his blood, eager to drink his mortality.

With reactions of lightning, he pins her to the sky with the wooden stake. A thorn from the true saviour's crown.

He is the hero, the new myth...

The dream shatters. For a second he stands confused until he comprehends, the scream echoes along the dark alley.

He races to the rescue, the hero who runs with God's grace... and freezes as his fantasy and reality clash before him. Suddenly destiny weighs upon his shoulders.

Already do the foes reveal themselves. Now the hunter shall be the hunted.

In rotten clothing bends the man, the beast, above the now limp body of innocence.

The hero holds forth the crucifix and steps forward boldly. The faith in a golden image.

The glow of evil is the only spark within the frozen azure eyes.
The enemy grins revealing bloodstained ivory daggers.

Not now, it is too soon, mark my time.

He effortlessly picks up the rag doll prey, his muscles now
warmed by her blood. A child with a toy.

He mocks the symbol of faith on Earth before him, his lips spill a
mocking laugh of disdain, his free arm lifts the brave hero. He
looks at him for a second, narrows his eyes then shakes his
head slowly before throwing God's soldier violently into the far
alley wall.

The hunter vanishes into the dark whilst the hero lies
motionless.

Above the alley a curtain twitches. The witness does not move,
but simply smiles. The gift is here. Thank you, of Lord.

The lamplight swims haphazardly as the pain swamps his body.
Paul lifts an unsteady hand towards his face and wipes the

blood that trickles from his nose. He tries to stand, staggers and then uses the wall as support. He staggers again, this time through the realisation that floods through him. The ache through his body offers evidence that this was no dream.

Across the alley is a poster, smeared with a hand trail of blood, but still legible. A clue?

Electric Masquerade

Live at the Raven Bar

This Friday

Chapter Five

“I’ve seen it...”

“What has he sent?”

“Bloodsucker.”

“You’re sure?”

“Positive.”

“Excellent.”

“What’s next?”

“We await the visions...”

Chapter Six

Dropped an Aum, the mystic science herb, lysergic acid diethylamide. The bringer of augury, of oracle, the revealer of signs.

Slowly the room brightens, its colours intense, confusing, all around is radiance.

Outside he can hear the bird calls, a thousand songs, new laments offered to the empty sky. In the distance a car's breaks squeal. The music playing on the stereo transforms and takes on a new meaning as the instruments separate into individual waves of an ocean that floods around him. Images swim in the audio ocean, the message approaches.

There she stands, the slut of the temple. The prostitute of horn, Harlot. His lover. She melts, her image cascading in a prism above the ocean. Now whole.

She shimmers in dawn light as a black sun burns through the horizon. Her clothing vanishes in a firelight point of flame. Now she is naked, beautiful, before Eve – she is Lilith.

Explosion.

For dazed seconds he recalls the sacrifice.

Sacrifice: noun: to make holy.

Sanctity on HIGH.

Back in view is the saintly whore. Is she the Mary who tries to raise the spear of manhood in the Christ? Magdalene.

Her body is clothed in light, shifting, wedding gown. She carries the vial of oil. Perfumed priestess, temple dancer.

She cracks the vial above her breast, white silk and lace dyed crimson.

It is now clear.

“You, who were once my love and my priestess, you are to be his bride. In marriage you will forge a covenant, you shall enslave him to our will.”

Blackout.

Chapter Seven

The crypt door creaks to reveal a yawning entrance. Mist crawls across the moonlit graveyard, casting a vague silver shadow onto the rough hewn cross. Burial site.

She walks across the cemetery, garden planted with human seeds producing a crop of crosses; it is the short cut to the comfort of home. She starts at the creak, spins around and catches her foot. She falls, ankle twisted.

Out of the mist, in caped splendour, he rises...

SCREAM

She buries her head in his chest.

Jeez, what a way to spend your Thursday night. Sat in a dusty, decrepit cinema. Your nervous date sending messages of tension deep into your subconscious.

Stomach muscles tighten.

A bad "B" movie could only cause indigestion, not fear. The nerves are for tomorrow, but all is prepared.

Our first gig, I wonder if it will really be alright on the night?

Just remember the words, give them your all; all they can ask for is a night to remember. But that is not until tomorrow, try to forget until then.

Tonight just try to get her home, into your bed.

Throw all your nervous energy into making love, take advantage of the cuddles she will want to protect her from the night.

Tomorrow belongs to tomorrow.

Tonight is for love.

Stardom calls, just don't fall. One step at a time.

Part Two: Confusions

Chapter One

Stolen money taken from the man with the ripped throat; he provided a satisfying draught. He has provided further strength and his money provided clothing, the dark disguise. Oh, the comfort of strangers, the love of the good Samaritan, they are all such good friends. He lies cold in an alley, miles away, but he offered his life, his warmth, his wealth. Now he pays the entrance fee to the club. An Introduction to more strangers.

In the club the strobe lights weave their wild, erratic dance, turning the dancers into frozen snapshots of motion.

His ivory hand pushes the crumpled note towards the bartender, points towards the cheap red wine. "Keep the change," ...there's always plenty more.

The music ends and the crowd cheer. He looks across towards the stage, the band are veiled by a rolling mist of dry ice. The singer thanks the crowd.

His voice has a familiar ring.

He turns away as the singer talks to the audience, telling them about Lovecraft and of the horrors that haunt the black depths of

the night. Oh, how little he really knows! The singer vaguely sketches the outline of one of Lovecraft's tales, then announces, "This is a song we call – 'Erich Zann'!"

The violinist explodes into a fury of motion, filling the air with unusual, clashing harmonies, his arm jerks backwards and forwards in a frenzy, his notes long and sustained try to hold the Old Ones at bay.

A slight smile, flickered cold...

Ivory daggers flash for a brief moment...

Outside the neon sign crackles in the light rain as it slowly flashes red lettered swirls...

"The Raven Bar"

Chapter Two

Paul had felt a moment of doubt as he walked slowly into the Raven Bar. The previous night felt unreal, like a fast fading dream. Yet he knows it was real enough, his body still aches. But, even so, could the Beast truly be here? And, even if he was, what could Paul do? His eyes blink, unaccustomed to the smoky, dark room and the flash of dancing lights.

The band throws a cacophony of sound out towards the crowd, like the crushing waves of the darkest storm. People dance and clap, their attentions focused upon the stage, caught up within the atmosphere that the band sweat to weave throughout the club.

Every night, down the Rue d'Auseil,
Every night, the music so unreal,
Secretly I worship the satyr man,
The crazy violin played by Erich Zann.

There had been no expense spared to make this first gig the most memorable event that they could conceive of. Behind them the costly, rented, projection screen twists with demonic images against backgrounds of disturbing clashing colours.

Paul looks across the crowded bar but can see nothing bar the

throng of anonymity. There is nothing to do but bide his time, buy a drink and wait for the Devil to reveal himself. Surely this must be an ideal haunt, this unholy temple to a blind, diseased lord.

Chapter Three

“Hi!” The girl shouts, straining to project her voice above the music, her eyes hungrily tracing the face of the stranger.

“Hello,” he motions for her to sit by him.

Beyond the confines of time and space,

“You’re new here, aren’t you? I’m Candy...”

Protect me from the evil race,

“What’s yer name?” Her eyes glint, her pupils – already ample - grow wider, he reads lust.

“Jonathon.”

The city crumbles

In my vision, replaced,

He places his hand against the soft flesh of her inner thigh, his other arm reaches out and draws her towards him. She can see nothing but Jonathon, lost in the cold blue of his eyes, all reason

numbed by the burning ice of desire.

By a far dimension,
I never should have faced.

Chapter Four

Paul sips at his Coke and looks around the bar; people weave tapestries of motion around each other. He watches hearts on fire and hearts breaking. He watches lusts and loves and hatreds. He sees the hunters stalk the new savannah. And he too hunts.

He sees danger in every shadow, wary of movements all about him. Still the patrons weave around him, oblivious to the danger, only he sees...

His heart skips a beat and then pounds heavy, like a hammer trying to burst his brittle chest. He sees his quarry, the Beast sits and ensnares innocence within his silken web, his sensual trap.

Only the Almighty God can save this child and I am His chosen angel. I must make her see the evil that tries to engulf her within its poisoned mists.

I must act quickly and not falter.

Father in Heaven, do not forsake me.

Chapter Five

Lust is often mistaken for love, especially when alcohol is involved. Yet Candy could not begin to describe the intensity of the feelings that Jonathon instilled within her. Beyond the sensuality that thrills her, beyond the fascination that compels her; there is a hunger – a need. In a few short minutes, which seem to stretch to infinity, she has become addicted to his presence. He is a drug and she is the junky, desperate to maintain the connection. She has never known anyone like him before.

He leans towards her, kisses her neck and gently runs his tongue and teeth across her skin. A shiver courses her body, a dull ache calls in her vagina. A need to be possessed by him, body and soul.

Almost in a dream state she sees the stranger before her, realises slowly that he screams at her. He tells her of evil and of the beast. He tells her of God. He points out a killer. A destroyer. But she does not heed his words; she clings tighter to her love. The angel in a black silk shirt. Jonathon will protect her from the crazy man. She will love him always. She will offer him everything and give unto him all that he wants.

His arms motion and suddenly the crazy man is gone and, in an

instant, forgotten.

He is not her love, she realises, he is her very life.

He leans to her and whispers, "Let's get out of here."

She nods, and her passion builds to a fever within her. Her body gleams with the sweat of need. The fire within has blazed out of control.

Suddenly being the hero is no longer easy. Perhaps Paul had expected her to look up and see the horror with eyes he had just opened. Instead she just clung tighter to the beast, lost; the wings of innocence are clipped and burnt.

And the Beast did not even look at him, just used his hand to motion with his finger. All the time his eyes burned into hers.

A jerk. It takes a moment for Paul to realise that he is being pulled, rough hands dragging him towards the dark recesses of the bathroom. He is thrown hard into a cubicle, secluded and isolated from the herd, and then the pain burns into his stomach and face. He glimpses leather and fists flashing as he falls. Heavy boots kick into him. The pain becomes so intense and

then it moves full circle and he no longer feels it, then no longer focuses and, in the blackness, he is alone.

Chapter Six

And still Zann played on,
Although fear gripped my heart,
The fury weaved a magick spell
Stopped our souls being rent apart.

Chapter Seven

The end of the night and the house lights burn bright. The band, still buzzing with excitement and adrenaline, work like an army of ants, dismantling the equipment and packing it away with so much care that it might be the most precious of jewels.

They talk in quick, excited bursts, their faces set with permanent grins. Two encores, could you believe it. Oh man, what a high.

The owner of the Raven sits with a scotch and water, he betrays a smile. These guys are hot. The crowd really did love them, and you wouldn't have known it was their first night. His eyes shine with the cash till chime. He stands slowly, deliberately, and walks towards the stage.

“You were pretty good, boys,” His smile now lost, he looks like he is barely complimenting them, “Listen... I'll tell you what I'll do for you. Come back tomorrow. Saturday's a tougher crowd. We'll see if they're as enthusiastic, and if you go down well we'll put you on weekly... for a trial period. One hundred and fifty per night.”

Elation. Saturday night, the prime time. A celebratory joint is passed around. We're on our way.

Chapter Eight

His reflection betrays the story. Black eye shines like a twisted sun above the desolate landscape of a thick lip and twisted nose. He plays gently with his nose and winces as it screams back in protest; probably broken. His hand moves gingerly on, touching the bruises, hurting wherever his fingers trail and yet, somehow, the pain is addictive. He tentatively opens his mouth, causing his entire face to throb. The porcelain of his front incisor is badly chipped.

He hadn't seen them coming, and if he had he realises that he could have done nothing to protect himself. The beating was like a blur, black leather jackets, fists and feet; a terrifying melee directed only at him.

The vampire already had his mercenaries protecting him. Just like the Count's gipsy guards. Wherever they go they always find willing thralls.

But what now? The omens had led him to the hunting ground. It had seemed almost insane, yet the sign of the blood smear had shown him the way.

He needed more, he needed some oracle. Some augury to take the modern day Saint George forth to the lair of the serpent, to

bury his lance deep within the putrid heart of the worm.

That's it, he needed to prostrate himself before the altar of God, offer himself and pray for the answer... in the church of Saint George.

Chapter Nine

Tonight had been a damn good evening, better than he would have ever hoped for; he would never have dared believe that they would have been offered a second gig so soon. But he knows they have got to keep working, keep on rehearsing and creating new material.

He is still high on adrenaline, in the grip of insomnia. He may as well work on a new song, for practice means perfect and perfect means contract. Electric Masquerade becomes the darling of the music press. Their faces adorn the covers of glossy magazines, they headline the biggest stadiums, a thousand hearts and lips are offered in reverent sacrifice to the new Gods of the stage.

Just a dream that will sustain him through the long night.

He picks up the acoustic guitar, picking at the strings and turning the keys until he is satisfied that it is in perfect tune. His hand starts to move across strings now held in the bondage of chords. The guitar vibrates in harmonious melody, waves of sound pour into the night.

You walked into the room,
You were a thousand miles away;
And I guess I should have known
That our love had died this day.

His voice is deep, melancholy, and vibrates with emotion. His eyes hold a tear of recognition as the words and music combine to produce a poignant story of love that was lost. Twisted and stolen.

The cold edge of daggers
That filled your icy stare,
Flying in a murderous arc
Along your marble glare.

His head nods slowly in rhythmic agreement, as he remembers romantic pain. It seems like years ago, perhaps it was. Lost within a haze of love turned lust turned hate.

And I knew,
She had murder in her eyes.
It took me by surprise,
But I knew our love had died.
Murder,
Murder in her eyes.

He puts down the guitar and rubs his eyes; tired and sore with the pungent incense that he burns in the room. Murder. In his mind he can see scarlet, like the colour of the heart, in a candy romance. Why, he thinks, do I only see in scarlet, colouring my imagination, stained within my dreams? Why does the flood of blood always haunt my every fantasy?

He bows his head for a moment and then, thoughtfully, opens the guitar case and gently lays the instrument within.

Chapter Ten

The ancient graveyard is filled with dreams of dusk. Jonathon stands within the grey twilight, just before the first rays of the morning sun creep above the horizon, looking at the headstone of an old, old grave. The chiselled epitaph is timeworn, yet still legible and his eyes move along the words.

*Here lies
Robert Michael Raynard
Beloved son of
Jonathon Raynard*

*Born on the 3rd day of June in the year of Our Lord 1763
Died on the 22nd day of July in the year of Our Lord 1780
May God have mercy upon his soul*

A tear plays in the corner of the vampire's eye. A tint of red within the icy blue, like the sunrise that melts the morning frost.

Why was I too late? You could have been here with me even now, my son.

The graveyard is on the East side of the city, far even from the Raven to leave the authorities with a twisted mystery.

He turns and picks up the white, bloodless corpse of his latest love. He holds her limp husk in his arms and briefly kisses her pallid lips. He visits butterfly kisses down to the ragged puncture wounds at her throat and murmurs in her ear, "Thank you my sweet."

He turns back and places her across the grave, like a flower cut in the fullness, a macabre wreath; as though her corpse could raise his son from the blackness of death. The immortal gardener looks for one second more at his monument of grief, before turning once again and racing through the last scattered shreds of night, before the rising sun.

And still the hunger roars.

Chapter Eleven

The stonework climbs skyward in a patchwork of textures, providing a varied landscape for the stone outcrops of statues. Sinister gargoyles line the walls, and overlook the small parish graveyard, monstrous guardians for the Faithful.

Stained glass tapestries, now dulled with inner city grime, capture the pious actions of the saints. The largest depicts a knight on white charger, his mount ensnared within the coils of a giant serpent, which the knight stabs viciously with lance.

The Church of Saint George, the dragon-slayer. Warden of the house of the God who stole the crown of the Blessed Isles; and now watches helplessly as the people turn away. The era crumbles as the time of Pisces falters.

Yet Paul still holds true his faith, and walks through the heavy oaken doors that stand open like welcoming arms.

He walks slowly down the aisle, and drops to one knee moving his hand quickly in the sign of the cross. He moves down the pew and kneels below the shadow of Golgotha, his head bent silently in prayer.

Give me a sign, Oh Lord, my God.

His body begins to shake as he starts to cry, tears sear the bruised flesh.

He looks up at the cross, beseeching the stricken man of peace, nailed in living agony. His vision is blurred by the flood of tears and it seems that the statue cries also. A drop of liquid running the length of the smooth marble cheek, the tear of an angel.

Oh, thank you Son of Man, Son of God.

He follows the statue's gaze to a window, from which pours a rainbow of colour, lit through the outer grime by the morning sun. The window dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Andrew.

The disciples...

The brothers...

His brother...

Yes, that is it, I must go to John.

Oh, thank you, my Lord.

The priest walks towards the altar, he stops when he sees something left on the pew. He leans and picks it up, a book. He turns it to the spine, cracked with use, and reads the title, "Dracula" by Bram Stoker.

Chapter Twelve

He walks down the muted grey of the city street. Cars idle past at a funeral pace, sometimes so slow that he walks past them. They pay their respects to another dead working day. No one rushes during rush hour.

The air is heavy with the baying horns, impatient men in business suits, respectable pillars of the community – now revert to savage tendencies.

It is a relief to move away from the cacophony of the main street, into the litter strewn area of residential flats.

Paul's arm lingers for a second, the distant buzz strains until he lets his hand drop. He closes his eyes for a second.

John will believe me, he must see the truth, he will help. I mean, after all, he did believe me about the ghost. Everyone else mocked, but he believed...

Chapter Thirteen

“But Jeff, I did see a ghost... in the old cinema. Come on, everyone knows it’s haunted.”

“Ain’t no such thing as ghosts... Besides, you’re too chicken to go in the cinema on your own.”

Paul looked up at his antagonist with the soft pleading eyes of the puppy dog; he needed to be believed, needed the acceptance. “I’m not too chicken... I did see it...” The final words came out as a whine.

But Jeff couldn’t believe that Paul had dared to go into the cinema. He hadn’t the guts to go in himself, and there was no way he was going to let Paul get the better of him. Paul the wimp, Paul with no friends. No... It was just too unbelievable, he had to be lying.

Paul begged for reason and Jeff mocked.

Tears welled in his young eyes. Being mocked hurt, being called a liar was agony.

Jeff saw the tears, felt that victory was in sight and punched.

Paul struggled back but was no fighter, and Jeff was the

archetypal infant bully. Paul fell to the floor and Jeff fell onto him.

Then John came to the rescue, like a shiny cavalier on a steed of rusty bike frame. And when, quickly, Jeff had been chased away, John listened, John believed.

Chapter fourteen

Once it had been a concert hall, artists trod the boards and the crowds had laughed and sang along to their favourite songs. The artists had been chased away, and a screen hung across the stage... the images of Hollywood had flickered in the darkened room. Finally it had been abandoned, all the customers went away and it had become a derelict wreck. People walking past wondered when the council were going to do their job and pull it down. It had always carried a reputation.

The schoolroom whispers told of ghostly visitations. It was the most perfect location actually. The building sat like the torn hull of a sunken treasure ship. Broken and battered, a sinister monument in the city centre. Its window eyes smashed and sightless.

Paul had shown daring when he had entered the architectural corpse, daring that was quite uncharacteristic. But he needed to be accepted by his peers, and so, with flashlight clutched in hand, which searched the dark in brave sweeps, he had entered the lost land.

His feet stirred clouds of ancient dust, as he walked with care past the rows of empty chairs.

High above, cherubim with cracked plaster features peered down with skeletal grace. Like guardians of a tomb to a grand past, sentinels of antiquity.

She only stood there for a moment.

A memory of lost days. A sad, sad spectre; her face illuminated by an inner sorrow. She surveyed the room where once she had offered nightly performances.

You could just hear the laughter of the crowd, all the more melancholy because it sounded so distant.

Slowly she moved towards the stage, as though floating upon a gentle zephyr. Her ghostly fingers brushing across the chair backs, the dust remaining unstirred.

Then she was gone.

Paul had stood, unafraid, spellbound by the vision and trapped within the reverie of awe. His crucifix hung heavy on his chest. He choked back a tear, empathy welling within for the lost soul, trapped in a neglected present – but longing for a past that she could never regain.

Chapter fifteen

He brushes his face with his moist palm, and again stabs impatiently at the doorbell, as his left hand curls around the golden cross which hangs around his neck.

“Deliver us from evil...”

Chapter Sixteen

The next time he visited the old cinema, John accompanied Paul with the hope of seeing the melancholy spirit. Perhaps she would speak to them, in icy breath warm their hearts with the recollection of her yesteryears. John never doubted her reality, and yet she never came, ignoring their vigil of hope.

They left through a rotten, empty window frame, leaving the gothic wonderland for the grey reality of the street – the miracle unseen.

Paul wept, he had wanted John to share the experience so much, but John simply encircled his shoulders with strong, big brother arms.

It didn't matter, he still believed and they would see her one day. He led Paul home, protecting, caring.

Yes, John always protected.

John the hero, the sportsman, the leader of the gang.

John, who at night, in the sanctity of their shared bedroom would help Paul search through books of the unexplained, attempting to reach beyond the silken veil, looking for the

otherworld. Trying to regain wonderland.

Until the fateful day when John packed his travel bag, heading off to university.

And despite the fact that he abandoned him, Paul still loved him.

When, three years later, John returned, Paul expected their world to return to normal, but John did not return alone. He now lived in a flat with Julia, the lover he had met at university. Yet his door was always open, he was always there for his little brother.

It seemed strange now, however. John always had her sat, like a dark shadow haunting the background. Paul had begged his brother to come to church with him, as they had always done on a Sunday. Yet John explained that he had no need for the dogma of the church any longer. That he found the heavy fog of incense and the dirge of hymns repressive. He worshipped the One in his own way.

But Paul missed the unity they used to feel at mass.

Sometimes he wished...

He wished he understood.

Chapter Seventeen

The door opens and from the shadowed entrance a voice greets, “Paul, hi... What the Hell happened to your face?”

“Julia... Hi, err... nothing... John in?”

“Upstairs.”

Paul races up the stairs without a second glance at the woman in the doorway. A tactical withdrawal. Julia watches him hurrying up to the flat. Her full, red lips, framed within the darkness of her hair, betray a slight smile.

Chapter Eighteen

John sits in his arm chair, lost within the book in his lap. The door opens and he looks up, at first his face contorted into a look of minor annoyance – there is always something to disturb you. He recognises Paul and the look twists briefly into a beaming smile and then transforms into deep concern as he registers his brother’s battered face, “Christ man, what happened?”

“It’s a long story, you got some time?”

Concern becomes worry, he pulls up a chair for the fledgling with a broken wing, “Yeah, sure....” He offers Paul a joint, “You wanna smoke?”

There is a flicker of disgust, even repulsion, across Paul’s face, “You know I don’t...” The sentence hangs unfinished, the words locked in Paul’s mind by a sharp bitten tongue; and you wouldn’t either if it wasn’t for her!

“A beer then?”

Paul nods acceptance, his eyes track his brother as John vanishes into the kitchen.

Julie walks into the room, pushing shut the open door. “Don’t mind me, I’ve got to get ready to go out...” Paul detects the eagerness in her voice, as though the dislike is mutual – and that is just fine. She moves into the bedroom, as John returns with two ice cold beer cans in hand. He throws one gently to his brother and quickly pulls the ring on his own can.

They sit and talk. Two brothers held together by a common bond of love. Paul talks, weaving the tale of the recent events. John listens, understanding, believing – like he believed in the ghost. He listens with a weary sadness in his eyes that Paul cannot interpret, bearing the knowledge of Paul’s self-destructive, and naïve honesty.

Chapter Nineteen

Tonight will bring the second gig. The success of the first night has calmed our nerves a little, yet butterflies still invade our stomachs in tension hungry packs.

Don't panic, they love us!

Not even my unnatural confidence can calm us.

So, I let my mind drift into elaborate daydreams...

Of album covers, poster designs. Intricate ideas for distant stage shows...

Am I a poor, deluded dreamer? No. Soon. Very, very soon. Call it destiny, or fate, or karma. But I know that it's soon. Events will happen, the making of a man. To find a purpose in life and see the pieces fall into place.

A gut instinct.

Chapter Twenty

John sits looking openly shocked, waves of disbelief crashing over his face. The truth is too easily stumbled upon, the insanity of innocence. A crime revealed by the cold light of faith.

How much... no, he couldn't.

Paul is confused by the shock. He expected gentle understanding – could it be that the rift had grown so deep. No, it couldn't have, “You do believe me?” The words a plea, the look in his eyes a reflection of a lost childhood; the melancholy imploring of puppy dog eyes.

John composes himself, throwing the shake that threatened to enter his voice, “Now, you know I've never doubted your word Paul... but... what can we do?” The question more rhetoric than discursive. A look of sadness in his grey eyes.

They sit in awkward silence, quietened by an inability to act, lost in private swirls of thought.

Finally John breaks the silence, “I need to speak to Julia, before she goes out... stay there... we'll talk some more later... OK?”

Paul just nods

Chapter Twenty One

Julia. It was always Julia. Oh, he dare not speak against her, he could never risk pushing John away. John is all he has left.

Paul had not gone to university, fear had held him back, tied to his home. When he left school he had found a job, for a while anyway. A clerk in a local business, the office junior, he had hated that job beyond all things. But there had been Helena...

Best forgotten? Wounds can heal quickly, but the razor of emotion is want to slice open the wounds afresh. She had been the one, the only one...

The one who had managed to reach his fragile heart, who had gained his trust – before smashing it.

The one who had tried so hard to understand him, had reached beyond reality's veil, to where he hid – before rejecting him.

The one who had shared his bed, awakened his primal passions and made the child a man – before finding another.

Then his job was made redundant (the Recession blues, oh Mr.

Musician play that guitar in a slide fall solo); and Paul was left scraping a life together on Government benefits. He could have done so well, if only he had gone to college – his parents had rejected the unemployed prodigal.

The only thing left to give him solace was his painting. Slowly, when money allowed, canvassed tapestries opened new landscapes in dark baroque tones, exploring his faith and illuminating his pain...

To be rejected by society, by the girl, by his parents.

Then John had returned; John, the one who still cared, who still loved.

John, who was the same as ever and yet strangely, painfully changed. John who had returned with Julia.

Oh, Julia would not treat John in the way Helena had treated him.

Chapter Twenty Two

“...And so now he wants you to hunt the... Vampire...” The statement was laced with heavy sarcasm, which bit like the poison tainted blade. “And will you indulge this... whim?” Her laughter was filled with more sarcasm.

“Of course not! ...But, he’s still my brother... I have to... humour him...” The final words trickled a deep felt pain, the subtle tug of responsibility. He could not abandon Paul, despite it all, he was the only person who still felt anything for him, who cared for him; who pitied him? The ropes pull, the horses of action and event tear the charioteer apart.

The razor blade chopped and shaped as Julia traced the line of white powder into a neat, final line. She placed the blade on the dresser and rolled a narrow paper tube. “I want him out of here!” Her voice raised slightly into a shrill tone.

A look of disbelief, “You know I cannot do that, he is my responsibility.”

“My love,” she drawled, her voice deeper now, velvet and sexual, “For one who can be so strong, you can be pathetically weak! I am going to try and make the contact tonight. Get him out!”

John's voice dropped to a whisper, yet it was edged with granite, "I will give him something to make him sleep, he will not get in the way – I promise you that." His hand shot out, grabbing her milk white wrist. He pulled her violently towards him, "Do not dare to tell me my business, nor to comment upon my powers or your fantasised lack of them." He released her wrist, already beginning to burn with the red marks of his grip, his eyes on fire.

Julia shuddered, involuntarily, and then sniffed the white powder, a nasal hypodermic, ecstasy mind death.

Chapter Twenty Three

The door opens and Paul is jolted from the melancholy of old sepia memories, his tears well in his eyes, the past and present coming together in a confused mix, he looks across, “Helena!”

Julia laughs, the sound devoid of either humour or emotion,
“John, I think your brother needs you!”

Chapter Twenty Four

Back at the Raven, the darkness, the hum, the sweat, the press of bodies innocent in the ways of the night. The happy hunting grounds.

Buy a drink, it will remain untouched but it adds a semblance of humanity to the guise of the hunter.

The dim lights fall lower, the myriad strangers are hushed.

Out of the blackness of the stage...

Here comes the candle to light you to bed!

The spider lights reach to the high ceiling of the club.

Dark Nosferatu chops off your head!

The lights plunge into a sweeping arc, levelling at the shoulder level of the crowd, the lighting engineer changes the filter – the beam drips crimson.

The story unfolds, the story revealed.

How little they know!

The hunger pounds!

Chapter Twenty Five

Tears flow, he weeps with the weight of past events; with the terror of the return of the Beast to our modern land; for the disbelief, the naiveté of the innocents; for the suffering of his body beneath the bruising of physical brutality; for his faith – as the cathedrals and churches are slowly strangulated under the grip of contemporary understanding {perhaps that is for the best, perhaps the world is ready to progress, and when the old Gods become new and the circle returns, we find that we have evolved – Oh sweet Jesus spare me from these heretical thoughts!}; for his brother who still tries to care whilst he drowns in the scarlet seas...

Paul sobs inconsolable tears whilst he is held tight in John's arms.

For his part, John sheds a solitary tear, a melancholy tear for a brother who he tried to save and yet stands so very far away.

Chapter Twenty Six

Sat, the spider watches from within the deadly, heady web of pheromone trap. Waits for the kill, why should he chase? Oh, they come to the slaughter so willingly – offering their lifeblood to quench the thirst, to appease the Hunger.

A dead tongue flickers across a carnal fang, hidden behind his pale, marble lip.

Hunger... Pain...

It pounds to the rhythm of the heartbeats, in syncopation.

See... Already the stranger approaches, the fly enters the inescapable web, she – unknown – prepares to become the bringer of peace to the walking corpse.

Never rest, only momentary peace.

She catches his eye, holds onto the cold blue gem set perfectly in a marble statue that is so handsomely and yet cruelly carved.

The black silk of her dress sways sensuously.

The victim enters the parlour.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Together we flew, in the summer sky,
Raised by passion, we soared so high;
And I loved you,
Never coulda hurt you,
Sad song bird.

She seeks out the stranger and she hopes to find new love.

Brutal arrow, pierced your heart,
Cupid's passion drips red as we part;
And I never saw you,
Never could have stopped you
Falling away
My love bird.

Julia approaches the stranger in black, so pale of skin, with eyes that burn with distant blue icefire.

Chapter Twenty Eight

“That was a song that we call ‘Lament of the Love Bird’, for all you incurable romantics! Now Electric Masquerade are proud to début a new instrumental, this is ‘Alpha 99!’”

The singer rushes from the stage to the distant bar, just enough time to get there, get a pint and get back. On stage musicians who worked in beautiful harmony just moments earlier now explode into frenzied musical warfare.

Julia summons every last ounce of sex appeal, she pouts her lips, slightly parted, as she floats towards the man in black and prepares to flirt.

The spider sharpens his knives.

Chapter Twenty Nine

The weeping has now ceased, yet the red raw eyes bear testimony to the explosion of emotions which has wracked his body.

“You must sleep,” John implores as he reaches for a mug of steaming liquid, “Please, drink this... Oh... Don’t worry, its only herbs... It’ll just help you sleep...”

Paul nods a reluctant acceptance, takes the cup and, trustingly, gulps down the bitter draught.

Chapter Thirty

She sits before him, her black silk dress fallen open seductively at the leg, revealing the sleek nylon clad leg, the suspender just visible.

He looks; his cold blue eyes drink her in as an unfamiliar need stirs through his body, the passion of sexual desire. Yet it is only an afterimage and is quickly subdued. What do the dead care for the sweating and groaning of such activities? Perhaps once, before his creation, but now he will leave love for the living. Such as he find their passions only within the dying pulse of gushing blood.

She tosses her long brown hair and offer him a flirtatious smile that would have left a mortal man weak at the knees, if strong in the groin. “Hi... I’m Julia,” her voice is filled with soft laughter and drips sexuality. She runs her scarlet talons lightly along his statuesque profile, a seductive gesture.

He smiles, it is so easy, “Jonathon.”

Chapter Thirty One

His eyes stray from hers for just a moment and his vision locks stubbornly to the figure of the singer. He holds a watery pint of beer in his hand as he weaves his way back to the stage, his head held aloft with arrogance, his long hair streaming in the air-conditioned wind.

“Jonathon, I must go; this is my address – look me up.”

Her voice brings him back and suddenly he is alone, a scrap of paper floats on the breeze of her wake. He reproaches himself mentally for letting the spell break so easily, then his attention is drawn back to the stage, upon which the vocalist is climbing, his hand reaching for the microphone. His voice thunders out as he introduces the next song.

Jonathon picks up the paper and his eyes run across the address.

No need to worry... the reason is beginning to dawn, the purpose of his awakening is suddenly very clear and the timing nothing short of a gift.

He turns the paper in his fingers, it is an invitation and this time the spider must leave the web.

He smiles once more, his upper lip turning slightly and revealing the tips of cruel daggers and his blue eyes blaze bright with cold fire.

Oh yes... the reason is now very clear.

Crystal.

Chapter Thirty Two

The keyboard sparkles in the bejewelled night.

Never knew why you found another man.
Only realised that my love was betrayed,
Stood like a fool in the pouring rain
Believing the lies, your love portrayed.

And now you're gone.

Jonathon leaves the Raven.

Chapter Thirty Three

Dream of night... the carnival begins.

The book explodes into flame, he knew nothing.

The lessons are to be revisited.

I am crucified, in memory of Christ. Could you begin to forgive, oh my Lord, my heresies?

The cross is rammed deep into the flesh of the hill, my rain soaked hair is whipped by the vicious wind; and yet still flames flicker up the wooden phallicy.

A thousand, no, a million dark creatures of yesteryear watch, with gross intent, my suffering. I scream at them, "Why do you not cower before this crucifixion, this icon of sacrifice, this idol of good?"

"Pisces is dead," they retort, as if one, "The Old Gods rise once more. They do not judge on the repressed morality of frigid, impotent priests."

Julia cuts a wake through the crowd.

She stands before the cross and bows her head in mockery.
She then takes my erect penis into her red-lipped mouth. She
sucks hard as her mouth moves up and down and her teeth
scrape the flesh. Unknown pleasure sears my body, a thousand
taboos are rejected within my ecstasy. I ejaculate, and within my
orgasm all my repression explode and the creatures all crumble
into dust with an ecstatic sigh.

A figure in a robe of brilliance carries me down from the cross
and I snuggle against her firm breasts.

I watch as dawn splits the infinite skies.

By the mountainside I paint a white dove of peace and the living
brushwork flies to the high peak. An eagle swoops and snatches
the dove from the sky, its talons draw blood sluggishly from the,
now broken, neck.

And I am hit by a cacophony.

A web of words.

I strain to hear what they say.

A name... John... no, not John.

Jonathon, Jonathon.

Black angel, night warrior...

For me there can be no peace.

JONATHON!

Chapter Thirty Four

Julia sits upon her bed, John is in the kitchen and John's weakness sleeps.

She sits in the luxury of satin lingerie, the cool black material brushes her skin with a seductive softness, like the ocean breeze. She runs her hand over her full breasts and lets it drift down to her crotch, revelling in the moist warmth. How long will he take?

The answer comes in a whispered name, "Julia..."

Out of the melting shadows he stands before her, his white skin glows in the soft lamplight.

"I am yours, Lord." She cries softly, "My husband, take me with you in the eternity of your kiss." She waits, hungering for the inevitable.

Confusion plays for a moment across the dead man's mind. She knows him, wants him. Perhaps she seeks to escape this mortal existence, live everlastingly in the shadows; a creature of two worlds and yet of none.

He looks deeply into her pleading eyes, beyond and into her soul. From all eyes the soul shines and he, who has lived so

long, could read them, know them, recognise them as they
raced from incarnation to incarnation.

Hers so new, so corrupt, so mislead.

Yet the hunger has become a deafening roar in his head.

He walks casually to her expectant form.

Chapter Thirty Five

Paul bolts upright from his troubled sleep, his mouth still calling the name, “Jonathon.”

He races, driven by instinct, into the bedroom and there stands the Beast, poised for the strike above Julia.

“You,” His voice carries a new found power, “In the name of the Gods, both old and new,” (his voice stumbles for a moment, shocked by his own heresy), “I order you to leave this woman.”

Jonathon spins around fluidly. “You!” He cries out in recognition, identifying at last the one who has tried to intervene so much and is now revealed, is now unmasked – he is the one who killed my only son.

Blue eyes flash blood red and an ancient anger rises in the vampire’s twisted, decayed heart.

A distant crash and an expletive cursed. The sound of running feet – he has reinforcement, the dead man thinks, I’ll bide my time. I have, after all, eternity.

“Next time, Aleister.”

Paul shudders, cold grave waltzing, that name meant something... once, a memory so distant, yet perhaps it could be remembered... the thoughts shattered by the glass which splinters outwards as the walking corpse leaps through the window, tumbling down towards the deserted alley below – to vanish.

Chapter Thirty Six

John races through the doorway, to the sound of breaking glass. He looks at Paul who stands, a distant, troubled expression playing upon his face. Julia upon the bed, an anger flashing in her eyes.

Paul breaks the silence, “He was here John, he came for her...”

John looks once more at Paul, at Julia, at the jagged shards of broken window – the curtains billowing, and his gaze coming to rest again upon Paul.

He spits out the words, his voice filled with venom, “I know.”

PART THREE: Revelations

Chapter One

In a flash of metal, ballistic grey and black, the threat unforeseen and bringing the look of incredulous shock. Where had John got a gun? Why is it aimed at me?

The questions melt into a dazzling confusion, with the drifting winds of disbelief and the forked lightening of betrayal. Paranoia explodes into an emotional overload as insecurities rage.

“...John...?”

“Paul.” John’s voice grown hard and cold, a voice alien in origin, “I wanted to spare you this, perhaps bring you to us... But, no, you’ve stumbled into the truth...”

“But John...” Paul’s arms held out, imploring, trying to catch the last shreds of fleeting reality, tears score silently along his face as he seeks a reason lost within the maelstrom of nightmares.

“Don’t move! He, the Nosferatu, is ours... a gift from the Dark Lord himself. Julia is to be his bride, tying him to us...”

“And you... you will not stand in our way, little brother!”

Chapter Two

In the dark, the dead man's anger explodes. With ears grown sensitive through the miracle of undeath, he hears the plot, now unfolding, though his grief has driven him miles from the scene. Blood tears stream, leaving their red tracks scored down his white flesh, escaping through anger and pouring for Robert.

My only son.

Aleister Sheraton – I will tear you limb from limb. You bastard.

Chapter Three

The story unfolded and fires of disbelief ravage the cords of reason. Holocaust! The truth is so bitter, so twisted, that it ravages the synapse land; threatening to destroy the mind of the brother betrayed.

John, a mage of the Dark Path. Worshipper of the Fallen One – the dark angel who rebelled against Heaven. Like the brother turned prodigal, the fold feels betrayed.

Master of the Temple, proud drug addict, rapist, murderer (though he claims it to be sacrifice to the 'True Lord' – the usurper). He who lived behind the mask of brotherhood and love.

Who only loved Babylon, high priestess, Temple prostitute – Julia.

Deadly rites of vicious intent used to summon the vampire, their weapon of destruction and gift to a world gone mad.

So often the traitor had tried to convert Paul to his ways, invaded deep his mind. Unknown battle of wills, misplaced love versus the golden cross adorned with a man of peace; an idol Paul unconsciously clung to like a leech.

And now... what coincidence had led Paul to stumble upon the sordid truth. The ancient trust of brothers' lies shattered upon the floor – the shards rip bitter pain.

Now he was to be taken, gagged and bound, to the Temple, held locked in a cell to await the time of sacrifice. Aztec lost blood graffiti – the heart beats still, when removed with speed; held high in the gory hand of triumph.

“You know, Paul, I never wanted it to be like this.”

Paul spits defiance into the hideous visage revealed behind a once beautiful mask.

Chapter Four

The flower grows quickly, unseen; alien within the dull grey of the sprawling metropolis.

Rising up to distant sky, tunnel vision following the skyscraper path to the glow of the sun.

Delicate petals unfurl in the sunshine, when it finally breaks a path through the smog.

Then – the flower crumbles, its purple bud bursts into dust; the green is now corpse grey, decay.

Beyond the confines of perfection, the advancing onslaught of cynicism rots the flesh.

Chapter Five

The eyes of the owner of the Raven now spin pound signs, like some cheap cartoon show, with the venom of digital overload. Cigar smoke halos the brow of the capitalist saint. Inside his balding skull, with limp rag-tag ponytail, figures are calculated; cover the costs, sow the seeds and reap the profits. The light is green, project go.

“Rob,” he calls across to the band’s vocalist. Rob looks up from the other end of the room where he busies himself with gig dismantling.

“Bring the boys over here for a second.”

Forward, out of the shadows, the rock battlelords; modern heroes prepared for aural war. The uniform of satin and leather, bandanas flutter beneath the air-conditioned wind.

“Have you boys,” the drip of the Blarney Stone begins, “Considered hiring a manager... now it just so happens... think I could arrange... reasonable fee...”

Let the negotiations begin.

Chapter Six

Pain. Reason is aflame.

Hunger...

Reaches fever pitch, the need unlimited and blinded by anger.
All semblance of humanity has been lost within the pounding
Hell.

Racing the shadows, ancient predator, the streets have no
meaning within the slicing, tearing pain.

Footsteps, heartbeat...

The hunger explodes!

“Robert!”

He leaps from death alley, with an animal grace – land shark –
carnivore ultima.

Sharpened talon nails rip into the neck of the cheap Magdalene.
The five-buck-fuck whore.

Weight of pain collapses down, sending victim and hunter

sprawling.

Flight of momentum through the air, smashing into the wall.

Ivory fangs tear deeper at the love-bitten, no broken, neck even as they fall.

His rage engulfs him, he smashes her head into the red-brick wall, smearing brains and blood.

Amongst the carnage the hunter drinks.

The hunger, for a moment, subdued.

The anger numbed.

Only a cold hatred remains...

Revenge.

Sheraton, I will hunt you down...

You fucking bastard.

Chapter Seven

Lost in the shadows, dust swirls l'dance macabre in the cold,
grey chink light. The cell door is locked. Strange how, within the
calm of silence, the impossible can be accepted. John's death
at University, mind-destroyed by Julia. And now a stranger
wears his mask, impostor, and the pretence has crumbled.

Rest In Peace, my brother...

No benediction...

No Last Rites...

No God in Heaven.

The cross has melted into a stagnant pool of lies, festering
within his mind. Who are the Old Ones? I'll probably never find
out; lost within the reaper's shadow, devoid of a focus for any
faith.

The golden chain breaks as it is violently tugged. The crucifix
clenched in the white knuckled fist bites into the soft flesh of the
palm. Paul throws it into the far shadows. It tumbles upwards
and glows as it passes through the chink of light at the peak of
its ascension; falls rapidly away. Splintering sound, how brittle

the gold has become with all faith drained away.

Shards of gold explode like glass, fall useless onto the floor.

Only the figure of Christ remains intact.

Chapter Eight

It was the year 1780, and the Right Reverend Aleister Sheraton hunted me in the night. I was just a fledgling then, new born to the darkness. Night after night I would hunt the sweet darkness until the dawning realisation came – the hunter had become the hunted.

But, what did I care. He came at me again and again, charging from the shadows with the cross and the stake, cursing me with book, bell and candle – to no avail. Yet, after a while, he became a nuisance, like a fly that constantly buzzed around the wake of the carnage I left. A fly which, for some reason, I had been unable to crush.

Somehow, I still know not how, he discovered my name, the position that I had held when still in the world of the mortal.

All I knew was that one night his attacks ceased. I thanked the stars, who were my constant companions.

Then I received a message, he had taken my sweet Robert, held against his will. He was still a mortal, my ambition to make him one with me in the night had not yet been realised. The price of his freedom, my head atop a silver platter – the melodramatic bastard...

But, as I have said, I was young, the violence of blood running fresh and strong in my veins. Impetuously I flew to Robert's rescue, unplanned and violent, I massacred all of Sheraton's men that I could find. But Sheraton himself was not to be found, neither was my sweet Robert.

I walked from the carnage, my head held proud and vain, my hunger drowned in an ocean of blood that lay behind me, when I found Sheraton's gift.

My son had been returned to me, butchered like a swine. I could feel the agony he had endured, each hack wrenched at my dark soul, each scream rang phantom like in my acute hearing. He had been ripped apart, packaged into a parody of the canopic jars and left where I would find them by the whore spawned devil who called himself a priest.

Long I wept blood tears, crying for the loss of an innocent, when all I knew was darkness and corruption.

Fearing my anger, unparalleled in my life, Sheraton had fled. I searched the corners of the globe, yet never found him...

Until now...

Sheraton, cursed bastard of my darkest dreams, I will have my revenge.

Chapter Nine

With a new manager we can go right to the top. So he believes, at least. Revelling in the success and fame of the burning limelight. Pulling a few strings, friends of friends, and the record companies will be there. The whole band can feel their nerves on fire and new material floods in inspiration, through dreams... dreams of blood.

Bless me father, your name I will remember.

...Who is the shadow who haunts my dreams, the figure lost in the darkness, calling out to me, who claims parentage?

New songs weave a tapestry through the depths of my dreams.

A rough version, the lyrics need some work, the melody finally solidified, a working title is needed; I call it "Red".

Black night of the Hunter's glory
The ethereal dancers tell the story
Of revenge upon a satin bed;
Innocent white is stained to red.

The dove is diseased, poor neck broken,
The coil's severed, a nightmare's token,
Under the cross of hypocrisies I scream
Awash in the blood of a nightly dream.

All dreams are plagued,
At night they play,
In red, always red.
A deadly vision,
Of my cerebral fission,
In red, always red.

Not bad, but it definitely needs working on; two more verses and perhaps a middle eight.

Chapter Ten

“Okay, I’ll fucking kill him now then...”

Julia’s face coiled into a sneer, breaking her beauty into a visage of violence, “He is still your weakness John. You know that you can’t kill him until the dark moon and then, only at the height of the Great Rite... Oh... don’t worry... I’ll kill him, I’ll enjoy offering the little bastard’s heart to the Dark One.”

“I bet you will... But for fuck’s sake, he’s my brother!”

“Enough, this is not for discussion! Besides the shit is somehow caught up in this thing with Jonathon.

“...I wonder why he called Paul ‘Aleister’?”

The puzzle was set, somehow the Nosferatu had known Paul, or believed he did. How could that be?

“Look, I’m going back to the flat in case he returns tonight. Don’t do anything stupid.”

She grabs his hair and pulls his lips to hers, kissing him deeply,

their tongues entwined. Then she throws his head backwards and, briskly, coldly, turns away. She walks from the sanctity of the Temple, and merges into the encroaching twilight, the herald of a new night.

Chapter Eleven

Another rehearsal, we've got to get it right. The Record Company Men will be at the next gig. It could be a gift from the gods, but we have to get it right. Doubt encroaches as the rollercoaster flies away at breakneck speed, the dawning of insecurities, are we good enough? We've got to prove ourselves; the band is a single organism, the individuals lost within a wall of sound.

Who could have guessed that things would happen so quickly? The winged sandals of myth take the unwary away to undiscovered territories.

It's just a rehearsal, not the real thing, but already the nerves burn with fire and the adrenaline flows. Where is the vanity of certainty now?

We have got to get it right.

Chapter Twelve

Julia pauses, the door is slightly ajar. Someone is inside, she can sense his presence. She becomes the cautious predator, her hand curls around the handle of a knife, an extension of her blood red talons. She creeps forward, without fear, only vigilance.

She sees his form, sat in a chair with his back to her, a silhouette in the soft glow of a flickering candle. As she enters he turns slowly, so that the iridescent light illuminates the marble of his dead skin. His cold fingers are gripping a crystal goblet, fragile vessel filled with deep red wine.

No, not wine... it is not the fruit of the sun-blessed vine, but a more sinister fruit squeezed from the dying pain of a human heart.

The razor-edged blade falls uselessly to the floor. Her hand trembles, not with fear but anticipation, her dreams sit before her. The steel clatters uselessly as it strikes the floor, the stark sound of metal...

Her throat is dry, her voice a whisper, "Jonathon..."

"Come to me," not a request, an order. His spell is weaved, the

fly entangled in the spider's web. She could never refuse him, her new dark lord.

She stands before him, expectant, her senses thrilling before the evil which commands her.

“Tell me, my dear, what do you know of Sheraton?”

She knows nothing, entranced, she longs to answer but cannot. She would never lie to him nor deny him.

He draws himself up before her, her skin burns as his icy breath brushes her soft cheek. His hands softly trace her black blouse, then he tears and it falls from her body in tatters. His long, ivory nails hook beneath the strap of her bra and slowly, delicately he removes it, revealing her full, firm breasts. Her excitement, her expectation is drawn up into bold nipples, her breathing is fast and shallow.

His eyes are ablaze with white fire, his irises burning; yet cold, un-melting.

He lowers his head and begins to kiss her breast, his tongue traces around her nipple, so softly.

The bite.

His fangs sink slowly into her and she starts for a moment at the searing pain at her breast; and then he begins to feed, an image of an infernal Madonna and child.

She is held upright in his strong arms and can feel orgasm after orgasm coursing through her blood, a small trickle of scarlet running down the white curve of her body.

Slowly he drains her, a connoisseur relishing each drop of her life – feeling her passion and her heartbeat as it pulses slower and slower.

She is left a husk, a broken eggshell without life.

Strangely her beauty is enhanced in the paleness of her corpse.

“Now let us leave these fools a gift so that they might understand.”

Chapter Thirteen

A song about addiction, the need for a fix. The burning pain in every junkie's mind. A social comment hidden amongst the nightmare entourage of songs and love sick ballads.

The rehearsal is going well but we have to play each song again and again, we quest for perfection.

We've got to get it right.

The scent of perfume, heady air,
Eau De Blood, without a care;
Needle pain, jabs at your vein,
As endless junk drives you insane.

Led to the dealer,
Like a lamb to the slaughter.
I'm left to drown
In the drug's storm water.

And on it goes, the instruments mirroring the junkie's pain. The guitar screams in a feedback frenzy, the rhythm rises and falls in a, seemingly, uncontrolled manner. Then the middle eight, the pace slows; the tone falls to melancholy as we find the reflection of an addict's doubt.

You shroud my head in black
Watch my brain decay
Shaking with addictive force
To rise from dead today.

Chapter Fourteen

The key fumbles, scratching around the lock, before it slides into the hole and turns with a deft movement and the door opens to a blaze of lights. John walks casually into the room. She must have made contact and, in bedroom love scene, is tying the fiend to the will of the Lodge.

Just leave her to it; her marriage in the black light of passion. The whore entraps the blood drinker, the weapon of Diablos.

To the kitchen, a juice and a fix.

He pushes the kitchen door open and there, on the floor...

His senses reel...

For a moment he cannot comprehend what he sees before him, the shock is just too great.

It cannot be!

His love in crucifixion satire.

She lies so white, so still, a delicate rose displayed upon the cold linoleum floor. Brutal knives hold her wrists and ankles in

place. Her arms outstretched, a welcome home of macabre love. Her legs spread-eagled, a statue of Mary wedged into her ripped vagina. Her breast pierced where the beast had fed.

John sinks to the floor, his hands gripping his spinning head, random memories rise unbidden to his mind. He sees her...

College years, her dark moods setting his world alight in the throes of violent sex.

Standing before the Altar with her blade dripping with a babe's blood.

Telling him that he is a fool with regards his weak, spineless brother.

His brother...

Paul...

He weeps Judas tears, sobbing at the desecration of his love.

He is to blame. Somehow, in some way.

Fucking bastard, got in the way and fucked it all up.

His mind snaps as he screams the hated name, "Paul!"

Chapter Fifteen

The cell door crashes open in a splintered fury. John stands within the doorway, his eyes blazing with mad fire, his mind snapped and broken. The lunatic with a gun in his hand. His wild, senseless eyes searching through insanity's fog for elusive answers, for sweet revenge.

“Get up! On your fucking feet! Now!” The order barked, though his voice is shaking.

Paul stands and tries to carry an air of defiance in his posture before the impostor who was once his brother, the betrayer of his own blood.

“Julia... is dead... I want to know what you have done, you bastard?”

“Nothing.”

“Tell me you cunt! It called you Aleister, why? Fucking tell me”

Paul feels the panic spreading through his body, he is faced with death carried on the aroma of Frankincense that fills the air.

“I don't know.”

“Liar!”

Paul suddenly leaps, his instincts burning and John’s finger pulls against the trigger. An explosion as the gun fires but the shot is wild, wide, the bullet scores the cell wall. Under the duress of disaster Paul’s reactions peak. He knocks John off balance and flies into the illumination of the Temple.

John pulls himself up and runs into the Temple. His arm is rigid before him. He sees the form of his brother diving behind the altar. Wild gunfire, irrational, bullets fly ineffectually towards deadened walls. The gun clicks, and clicks empty.

He runs forward and is faced with his own ritual dagger, held in Paul’s hand. It slashes at him again and again. Suddenly he feels the bite as it slashes his chest and then the plunge. He falls clutching the hilt where it emerges from his own chest, blood fills his mouth and foams at the wound.

He looks up and, for a moment, it is John, Paul’s John. Paul stares into the melancholy eyes and then John falls forward, his spirit flown.

The light has died.

Chapter Sixteen

A form in the formless void of night's black mystery steps forward, deliberately into the last vestiges of the Temple's light.

“Aleister.”

Sadness presses like a weight on Paul's shoulders. A memory returns of a long time gone, of a different life, of a crime committed that he believed was just. Sorrow; have mercy, please, for I was a different man.

“Wait, it wasn't me, not this body, not this person...”

Jonathon steps closer still and stands before the man who was,
“The soul is the same.”

Like lightening the dead man's hand strikes, red weal of bloody scratches adorn Paul's cheek.

Paul holds his hands up before him, uselessly, begging mercy.

Once more the hand strikes out, the vice fingers grip tight to his throat, the talons piercing his skin. Paul weeps tears of remorse, his life collapsed, his brother dead, his very existence doomed.

A marble smile of victory draws arabesque upon the face of the corpse.

The hand jerks back, ripping open the throat – the body collapses pumping a fountain of blood across the pentagram inscribed into the floor.

The vampire spits into the spilling blood, for once he ignores the pounding hunger.

You are avenged, my son.

In the light of eternity, a disembodied, heretical soul sees once more the circular truth; understands the necessities, freed at last from the chains which held him down.

Epilogue

The rehearsal is over; Rob walks towards the river, beneath the twinkling lights of the city facing the long, cold walk home.

He sees a figure ahead, memories, dreams and reality converging onto a single point – fixed upon the person standing before him.

He stands, arms outstretched, his hands drip with blood.

Reunion.

Creation.

“I have come to take you home, my son.”