

# Hub

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## Issue 36 Contents

Fiction: *The English Dead* by Vaughan Stanger

Reviews: *The Breeding Ground*, *Never the Bride* / *Something Borrowed*

## Another Night at the Brewery

Following a successful (and highly enjoyable) evening at the York Brewery in October, the BFS are to hold another Open Night at the venue on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January. The brewery itself is an extremely atmospheric venue, and as we'll be in Europe's most haunted city, we're going to have an evening of ghost stories.

And beer. Definitely beer.

Non-BFS members are welcome to come along. Details will be posted up at the BFS website and on the forum at [www.BritishFantasySociety.org](http://www.BritishFantasySociety.org). 26<sup>th</sup> January – enter it in your diaries now.

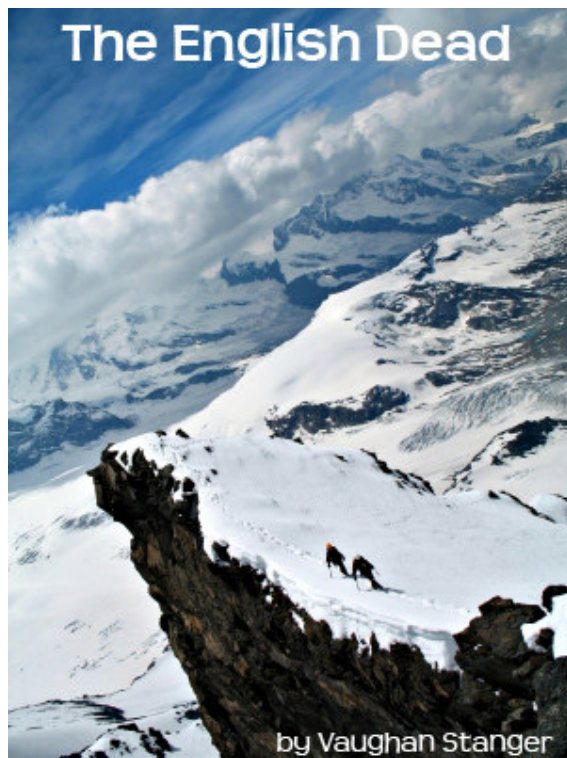
## About *Hub*

Every week we publish a piece of short fiction, along with at least one review and sometimes a feature or interview. We can afford to do this largely due to the generosity of our sponsors over at **Orbit**. If you like what you read here, please consider making a donation over at [www.hub-mag.co.uk](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk). We pay our writers, and anything you donate helps us to continue to attract high quality fiction and non-fiction.



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The body lay on the North Face of Mount Everest for fifty-one years, its exact location known only to the alpine choughs that pecked at its flesh. Other climbers who attempted the same route were too preoccupied with the hazards of high-altitude mountaineering to conduct a search for their illustrious predecessor.

Then, in the spring of 1975, a Chinese climber stumbled upon the corpse while returning to camp. Wang Hong-bao realised the significance of the dead man's hobnail boots. Only pre-war mountaineers had climbed that high on Everest wearing such primitive gear.

On Wang's return to Everest in 1979, he recounted the incident to a fellow climber. He referred to his find as "The English Dead" but neglected to mention the body's resting place, an omission made permanent two days later by his death in an avalanche.

For twenty years rumours of Wang's discovery circulated in the mountaineering community, provoking fresh interest in one of the enduring mysteries of the Twentieth Century.

"One Hundred Years Ago Today: Did These Men Stand On Top of the World?" (The Times, June 8 2024)

#

<< Ben, it's 1400 hours -- time you turned back. >>

The voice in Ben's head expressed justifiable concern. Climbing above 8000 metres on Everest was dangerous enough without factoring in the extra risks a solo venture entailed.

<< Don't worry... beginning my descent soon. >>

Ben guessed that his colleagues on the Chomolungma Clean-Up expedition had inferred his objective as soon as he told them he would be descending alone. Scarcely a single Everest climbing season went by without some foolhardy novice making a detour to pay homage to the most revered mountaineer of them all. But Ben was neither a fool nor a novice. Years of meticulous planning had led to this moment, so he proceeded with utmost caution as he traversed the narrow terrace towards the burial mound.

An uncle had given Ben a book on mountaineering for his twelfth birthday. The famous photograph of George Mallory's corpse had provoked a shudder, but also sparked an obsession that deepened with every passing year. Ever since the fatal events of 1924, countless armchair mountaineers had wondered whether Mallory and Irvine reached the summit, twenty-nine years before Hillary and Tenzing.

Ben had often imagined the scene: an exhausted but triumphant Mallory holding up a fluttering Union Jack against a backdrop of Himalayan peaks; Irvine's hands shaking as he tried to steady the camera. Dozens of expeditions had searched for Irvine's camera after the discovery of Mallory's body in 1999, but without success. His body, too, had never been found. Ben suspected that Irvine had fallen onto the East Rongbuk glacier, where no corpse would remain visible for long. So rather than undertake another probably futile search, Ben had proposed an innovative new approach to solving the mystery.

<< Ben, it's getting late... >>

<< Five minutes, then I'll start down. >>

Buffeted by the chilling gale-force wind, Ben struggled to undo the clasps on his backpack. Even this apparently simple task made him gasp for breath.

Freed from its container, the seeker squirmed in his hands like a rattlesnake poked with a stick, its sensors responding to the warmth that leaked from his gloves. But on this mission there would be no body-heat for the seeker to home in on; instead, its task was to harvest genetic material from a corpse.

Ben placed the seeker on top of Mallory's burial mound. One flick of its segmented tail and the robot began burrowing into a crevice between two slabs of limestone. Anticipation surged through Ben, erasing any lingering doubts about defiling the grave.

George Leigh Mallory would live again.

#

Andrew Irvine gazed at the mess of steel cylinders, rubber hoses and regulator valves that littered his tent. Of the dozen sets of oxygen apparatus shipped from Blighty, not one had operated correctly when he'd unpacked the crates. But after several days spent improvising and tinkering, he had cobbled together enough working equipment to support a single attempt on the summit.

Exhilaration gripped Irvine whenever he thought of climbing with Mallory. Even the knowledge that Major Norton had assigned them to the second summit team did nothing to reduce his feelings of anticipation. Howard Somervell and Major Norton, who would make the first attempt, had jokingly dubbed Mallory and Irvine the "Gas Party". In private, he sympathised with those who climbed without oxygen; but as a first-timer on Everest it was only his expertise with the "English gas", as the Sherpas called it, that had persuaded Mallory to choose him over the expedition's geologist, Noel Odell. So Irvine thanked his lucky stars whenever his comrades made their jibes.

<< Mallory's heading your way, Ben. >>

Odell's interjection jolted Ben out of role. He shook his head in dismay.

<< Odell, you must never use my real name! >>

<< Sorry... 'Old habits die hard' and all that. >>

<< I know it's difficult, but we must immerse ourselves in our personas rather than rely on technology. >>

<< I know, but... >>

The terms of the contract had made their obligations abundantly clear. Universal's board had insisted on absolute authenticity when they accepted Ben's proposal to restage the 1924 Everest Expedition. Respect for traditional values had also helped soothe away the objections of the Dalai Lama, who a decade earlier had paid handsomely to have his beloved Chomolungma swept clean of Western detritus. Neural recording was supposed to be the expedition's sole concession to modern technology. Head-speak came as a bonus, but Universal had forbidden its use except in emergencies.

<< And Odell... >>

<< Yes? >>

<< You know the rules about head-speak! >>

His comrade's riposte was coarse but good-humoured.

A moment later, an unseen hand pulled open the tent flap. In came the inevitable freezing gust of wind, a swirl of snowflakes -- and Mallory. For the first time in a fortnight, that famously handsome though gaunt-looking face wore a grin.

"Great news, Sandy! The weather is clearing. Norton wants us to head up to Camp One. The "Big Push" is on!"

Mallory made the assault on Everest sound like the Battle of the Somme, except here they faced an opponent equipped with avalanches and snowstorms rather than barbed wire and machine-guns. Ben pictured himself struggling up the North Face in the teeth of a howling gale, and immediately slipped back into his Irvine persona.

On a whim, he reached over and ruffled Mallory's crudely barbered hair, turning it into a miniature Himalayas. Mallory responded by slapping him on the back.

"Come on, let's get cracking."

No wonder Mallory looked delighted, thought Irvine. For two weeks, storm-force winds and heavy snow had pounded the mountain, confining the expedition to Base Camp. Mallory had paced back and forth like a caged animal. If the bad weather had persisted for a few more days, dwindling supplies would have forced the expedition to turn back.

Irvine followed Mallory out of the tent. For the first time in a fortnight, Base Camp bustled with activity, with Odell taking the lead in marshalling the Sherpas. Bent double under their packs, these sturdy mountain-men resembled beasts of burden.

Aware of the need for urgency, Irvine trotted back to his tent and began packing spare hoses and t-piece connectors. Emerging again with his first load, he spotted Mallory standing aside from the commotion, his gaze fixed on the North Face of Everest. Those dark rock faces, saw-tooth ridges and gleaming snow slopes would present a formidable challenge to the British Empire's finest mountaineer, thought Irvine.

<< Do you suppose Mallory is thinking about 1922? >>

Odell again!

This time Ben refrained from scolding his colleague. In truth, he, too, had wondered how his climbing partner felt about the disaster that ended the 1922 expedition. Mallory's decision to permit a third summit attempt even as the first snows of the Monsoon began falling had cost seven Sherpas their lives in an avalanche.

<< The neural mapping indicates that Mallory has formed the appropriate memory engrams. >>

<< Even though he didn't actually experience those events? >>

The debate about the fidelity of reconstructions performed by human clones equipped with virtual memories had never entirely subsided, but the demonstrations seen by Ben had convinced him that his project was viable. Universal evidently believed so too. If their fast-tracked clone performed as advertised, then the mystery of Mallory and Irvine would surely be solved. Assuming, of course, that every member of the expedition played his part.

<< Please, Noel. This isn't helping! >>

Odell slapped Ben's shoulder and walked away.

Feeling a sudden itch, Ben peeled back his leather motorcycle helmet and scratched at the stubble that had accumulated on his sunburnt cheeks. If Mallory looked at him now, he would see the boyish features of a twenty-two year-old. But like Mallory, "Sandy" Irvine was not what he seemed.

<< Do you think Mallory will succeed? >>

Ben risked a glance at his climbing partner, who had continued to gaze at the peak while he conversed with Odell. The summit gleamed like a pearl in the morning sunlight, tantalising all those who beheld it with the promise of glory.

<< There's only one way to find out. >>

The time for debate was over.

#

Having completed his final adjustments to the oxygen apparatus, Irvine looked up to see what Mallory was doing. His climbing partner stood in front of their tiny tent, stamping his hobnail boots and flapping his arms while the canvas billowed in the howling wind. Evidently satisfied with the effect on his circulation, Mallory turned to face the rising sun, as if formally accepting a challenge from a Himalayan deity.

Mallory's lack of urgency worried Irvine. They had already lost precious minutes squeezing their feet into boots as unyielding as granite. For that, Irvine could thank Mallory. Shortly after their arrival at Camp Six, he had allowed their primus stove to slide off the snow terrace. Lacking its meagre warmth, they had been unable to soften their boot-leather or melt snow for a much-needed mug of tea.

Typical bloody George!

Irvine ignored his thirst while he gave the oxygen apparatus a final test. Since arriving at Camp Six, he had spent several hours trying to coax a steady flow of gas from the cylinders. Frozen gas hoses and leaky connectors were the bane of the hapless engineer obliged to work at 27300 feet.

Hapless but happy, Irvine told himself, as he contemplated the grand adventure that lay ahead. But if their efforts were to be fully rewarded, he would have to persuade Mallory to carry sufficient oxygen. Thus far Irvine had failed to win the argument.

"We could go with three," he said.

Mallory hefted one of the cylinders, puffing out his cheeks as he did so. Then he shook his head.

"Even two would be a bloody load."

Irvine stared at the North East Ridge -- a jagged switchback that resembled the armoured plates of a Jurassic dinosaur. According to Mallory, if they could climb the pair of "steps" that jutted out from the ridge they would have a fair chance of reaching the summit. But to overcome such formidable obstacles they would need plenty of time and oxygen. Now it seemed they would be short of both.

"But shouldn't we carry as much oxygen as possible?"

Mallory shook his head again. "No, three cylinders is too heavy a burden. We'll go with two."

Irvine felt a pang of disappointment but tried to mask his feelings with an eager grin.

"A quick dash to the summit!"

"That's the spirit."

Irvine looked on in dismay as Mallory discarded sundry items of mountaineering equipment: a spare coil of rope, flares, even a lantern. There would be little hope for them if they became lost on the North Face in fading light.

There was, however, one item of equipment that Mallory dared not discard. If Everest surrendered to his indomitable will, Irvine planned to record the moment for posterity using Somervell's Kodak camera. The surprisingly small device fitted snugly in the pocket of his Shackleton jacket.

<< How many oxygen cylinders is Mallory carrying? >>

Furious at having been jolted from his role again, Ben cursed Odell. The geologist's desire for updates was proving hugely unhelpful.

<< Just the two. >>

<< Then he stands no chance. >>

The argument had raged for more than a century, but the consensus was that if Mallory had climbed with only two cylinders he stood little chance of reaching the summit. Ben tried to mask his own sense of disappointment when he responded to Odell.

<< We shall see. >>

<< We won't, but you will! >>

<< My neural implant will record the climb. But please, no more contact from now on. You know the rules! >>

It took no effort at all for Ben to reassume his Irvine persona. Sweeping his gaze up the North Face evoked the necessary awe.

Irvine turned to Mallory, who was struggling to don his oxygen apparatus. With mask dangling and gas hose looped and kinked, Mallory resembled Irvine's science master at Shrewsbury Public School. Both men were capable of a hangdog expression that made him chuckle.

"Here -- let me help you with that."

Mallory frowned at him.

"Sandy, we are about to embark on the most hazardous adventure of our lives. There will be no time for laughter or debate." Mallory drew a deep, ragged breath before continuing. "But do exactly as I tell you...and we shall stand on the top of the world." He glanced at his watch. "It's time we were off."

Linked to his partner by a hemp rope of questionable strength and carrying a "bloody load" of oxygen, Irvine began clambering over the ice-covered slabs that would lead them into the Yellow Band -- the easiest, yet still treacherous, section of their climb.

Within minutes he was shivering like a victim of Malaria.

#

The oxygen mask plucked at Irvine's sunburnt skin as he pulled it away from his face, making him wince. Half-a-dozen yards further up the slope, Mallory leaned against a limestone outcrop, gasping for breath. Unlike Irvine he had not quite exhausted his first cylinder.

Handicapped by fingers that could barely flex inside two pairs of gloves, Irvine struggled to ease the empty cylinder from its clips. To make matters worse, when he finally managed to engage the second cylinder the renewed flow of gas rasped his throat like sandpaper, making him cough.

Dispirited, Irvine glanced up at the gleaming summit pyramid, which seemed to pulse in synchrony with the throb in his head.

"Looks a long way," he said.

Mallory grimaced. "We must crack on!"

Irvine knew better than to argue. After nearly four hours of relatively easy climbing, they had reached the base of the First Step. Viewed close-up, the rock-face looked less imposing than he'd expected. Even so, Mallory's decision to traverse around it had come as a relief.

"Could we do...the same thing...at the Second Step?"

Viewed from Camp Six that morning, the higher of the two main obstacles along Mallory's proposed route had seemed to jut out from the North East Ridge like the bows of a battleship. To Irvine, it looked unclimbable.

"Did that work...for Norton?"

"No, but..."

Mallory's snort of derision silenced Irvine. Norton's solo traverse across the North Face towards the huge snow gully known as the Great Couloir had set a new altitude record but failed to open up an alternative route to the summit. Irvine admired the man for his bravery and determination, though not for temporarily abandoning the exhausted Somervell.

"It will be quicker...if we make a traverse...here," gasped Mallory. "Then we climb the ridge."

Irvine nodded. If anyone could find a way up the Second Step it was Mallory. The man had earned his reputation by tackling daunting ridge climbs.

Halfway through the traverse, Mallory changed over to his second cylinder. When the Second Step came into view again, Irvine shook his head, despairing of the task that confronted them. Mallory, on the other hand, seemed to find inspiration in the formidable outcrop of grey limestone.

"Come on Sandy, one more big push!"

Irvine groaned inwardly. By his reckoning they had climbed one third of the vertical distance from Camp Six to the summit. And in doing so, they had consumed half of their oxygen. He tried to shake off the mental image of the cylinders they had left behind.

That the remainder of their summit attempt would be considerably more testing became clear to Irvine when he began inching along the ridge. Buffeted by the worsening gale, he struggled to focus on the bent-double figure of Mallory, a dozen yards ahead. But it was the sheer drop to either side that dominated his thoughts. Eventually, the urge to look down overwhelmed his willpower. The serried ranks of Himalayan peaks seemed to revolve in a stately dance, making his head swim. He closed his eyes, seeking temporary relief in darkness.

The tug of the rope brought him back from the brink. Comforted by Mallory's presence, he shuffled forwards another step.

#

Still trembling from his ordeal on the ridge, Irvine sought shelter from the gale while Mallory inspected the final pitch of the Second Step. The rock-face constituted a climber's nightmare: a vertical wall of rotten, crumbling limestone. To free-climb it at sea level would have been a stern enough test of Mallory's skill. As for making the attempt at altitude while burdened with oxygen apparatus, that seemed too much to expect of any climber, even Mallory.

Irvine glanced at his altimeter. The needle indicated 28300 feet, proof that they had climbed higher than Norton. Would Mallory regard a new altitude record as a worthwhile achievement? It seemed unlikely.

Mallory removed his oxygen mask and glanced at his watch. "Ten to one," he said in a tone that betrayed no particular concern.

Hearing those words made Ben shudder, though at first he struggled to understand why. The cause of his disquiet only became clear when he realised that he had slipped out of role.

Ten minutes to one o'clock!

Noel Odell had observed Mallory and Irvine ascending the North East Ridge at precisely that time on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1924. Some experts dismissed his sighting as a mirage, others disputed the precise location on the ridge, but Ben had never doubted that the keen-sighted geologist had spotted the second summit party. If everything were going to plan, his Odell would be repeating that observation right now.

Would history repeat itself in other ways too?

Everything depended on how Mallory judged the situation. Would he risk all for a faint chance of glory? With little more than an hour's worth of oxygen remaining, Ben knew that making a safe descent to Camp Six during daylight would prove a stern test for two tired climbers. But if Mallory climbed the Second Step and pushed on towards the summit, their descent would take place in darkness. Exposed to Arctic temperatures and with no flares or lantern to illuminate their way, the odds would not favour survival.

But that, surely, was the point of the re-enactment. He had climbed this high on Everest to find out what the original Mallory would have done when confronted with the same situation.

Aware that if "Irvine" acted out of character it would bias the re-enactment, Ben forced himself to re-adopt his persona.

"One last big push, eh?"

Mallory slapped Irvine on the shoulder. "That's the spirit!"

Moments after resuming his search for a route up the rock-face, Mallory let out a whoop. He was grinning like a child in a sweetshop.

"Look at this crack," he said, gesticulating at the rock-face. "I think it will 'go!'"

Irvine examined the fissure, which seemed to penetrate deep into the rock. If it extended all the way to the top, there might be a chance of reaching the summit!

"We've come all this way," he gasped. "Be a pity..."

"Good man!"

Irvine looked on with admiration as Mallory tackled the climb. His method was typically unorthodox. He began by sliding his left knee up the fissure until he had it wedged in securely. Next he reached upwards, his body pivoting around his knee, while he scabbled for handholds. Finally Mallory found what he needed and hauled himself several feet up the cliff-face. Then he set about repeating the procedure.

A powerful gust brought with it the first snow flurry of the day. Irvine hunkered down at the base of the cliff with his back to the wind, paying out rope an arm's length at a time while waiting for Mallory's call. If he reached the top, Irvine would have to follow his partner.

For several minutes the only sound Irvine heard over the gale was the scratching of hobnails against limestone. Then he realised that the rope had stopped tugging. Despair filled Irvine's heart as he watched his partner descend amidst a shower of rock fragments.

Mallory jumped down the last few feet, but landed awkwardly and fell onto his back. As Irvine pulled him upright, he asked, "Won't it 'go'?"

He had expected a show of frustration or dismay from his partner, but not a fit of rage, which culminated in Mallory hurling his oxygen apparatus against the rock-face, damaging it beyond hope of repair.

"Oh it will 'go' all right," yelled Mallory. "But someone has gone there before me!" He waved the shaft of a metal bolt beneath Irvine's nose. "Worse, he cheated!"

Irvine peered at the cliff-face, bewildered. No one had climbed this high on Everest before, so how could...?

Imagined scenes from successful ascents of the Second Step formed in his mind. Too late, Ben realised that he had slipped out of role again.

First there had been the Chinese expedition of 1960, whose climbers stood on each other's shoulders to surmount the obstacle. Then, fifteen years later, members of the second Chinese expedition fastened an aluminium ladder to the rock-face, making a hitherto impassable route almost straightforward.

Hundreds of climbers used the Chinese ladder and its successors until, in 2064, the Dalai Lama's expedition began removing the debris left by fourteen decades of mountaineering. Ben recalled watching a party of Sherpas carry the last of the ladders back down to Base Camp. The expedition's geologist had declared that the pressure exerted by surrounding rock would compact the drill-holes. Eventually there would be no trace at all; assuming, of course, that the Sherpas had removed the bolts, not just sliced through them...

The devil was in the detail, as always.

Ben turned to face his partner, arms spread wide in a gesture of contrition. Mallory shoved him aside, his expression so ferocious it threatened to reduce the world's highest mountain to rubble.

#

Unable to see more than a few yards in any direction, Ben had begun to fixate on the tug of the rope, the only tangible evidence that Mallory had not deserted him.

After the debacle at the Second Step, Mallory's flawless mountain-craft had brought them safely down the ridge, but the snow flurries had merged into a whiteout as they traversed around the First Step. Now, Ben and his disillusioned partner were lost somewhere in the Yellow Band.

Ben had considered calling for help, but even if Odell could persuade the others to flout expedition rules and attempt a rescue, he doubted that they would make much progress in such atrocious conditions.

Not that Ben gave a damn about historical accuracy any more. All pretence had been abandoned at the Second Step, likewise any semblance of trust. Even Mallory felt able to break the rules now: leading the descent when standard practice dictated that the less experienced climber should go first.

Ben had compounded his crime by dropping his ice axe just below the First Step. Befuddled by lack of oxygen, he had clambered down the snow-covered slabs for several minutes before realising what he had done. After enduring Mallory's wrath, he remembered that a member of the 1933 expedition had found Irvine's ice axe near the First Step. History seemed determined to repeat itself whether Ben played the game or not.

Sheltering from the gale near the top of a narrow gully, Ben peered through the snowflakes, which he noticed were falling less heavily now. He could just make out Mallory standing at the bottom, taking a breather. Though tempted to hurry down the easy-looking slope, Ben knew better than to take the risk. In any case, one laboured step for every five breaths was the best he could manage.

Ben closed to within touching distance before he noticed Mallory's lips moving. A painful-sounding gasp followed each trickle of words.

"Mapped a route...in '21... First summit attempt...in '22... No other expeditions!" Mallory shook his head, as if doubting his own memories. "No one...could have climbed...the Second Step...before me!"

A glimpse of Mallory's tormented expression convinced Ben that he deserved to know the truth.

"George...this isn't...1924."

"Not 1924?" Mallory gawped at him. "Ridiculous!"

Now it was Ben's turn to shake his head. "Hundred and fifty years ago...Mallory and Irvine...died during...descent." He paused for a moment, his chest heaving. "I wanted to know... Did they summit?"

He let Mallory work through the implications.

"Then who...am I?"

"A replica...the best...science can make."

That moment of confession, so long delayed, brought with it a powerful feeling of release. Exhaustion swept over Ben like an avalanche. His eyes closed as he keeled over. If he could just rest here for a few seconds, he would be fine. He began counting.

One, two, three...four...

A jerk of the rope brought him back from the brink. With a sigh as vast as Everest, Ben opened his eyes. Another jerk pulled him into a sitting position. Then Mallory placed his hands under his armpits and tugged him upright.



"Come on Sandy... One last big push."

#

Mallory's change of heart proved to be just the spur Ben required. For a while he dared to hope that they might make it back to Camp Six, until the storm clouds pulled back across the North Face, revealing just how far they had strayed off course. But if they had misjudged their path so badly, why did the vista provoke such a powerful feeling of déjà vu?

Worried that he might be hallucinating, Ben looked down the scree slope towards Mallory, hoping for reassurance. His partner stood on a narrow snow terrace, staring up at the North East Ridge, as if committing their descent to memory. To Ben, this seemed a perverse thing to do given their perilous situation. Several minutes of lung-bursting effort brought him level with Mallory, who obligingly gasped out an explanation.

"Sandy...if we'd fallen...where you dropped...your ice axe...we'd have come to rest...'bout here."

Realisation came suddenly to Ben. He knew this place. He had stood here before!

<< Ben, we've spotted you! >>

He let his gaze slide along the terrace until he caught sight of the snow-covered mound, situated less than thirty metres away.

<< Ben, I'm moving up from Camp Six with a team of Sherpas. We should reach you in an hour, maybe less. >>

Mallory plucked at his sleeve, dragging his attention away from the strange voice in his head. He waved a trembling arm towards the mound.

"Is this...the place?"

Ben could find no words, managed only the most sluggish of nods. But that was enough to start Mallory on a painstaking traverse of the terrace.

<< Ben, did Mallory reach the summit? >>

Who was this Ben person anyway? Had Mallory decided to climb with someone else?

<< Ben, did Mallory climb the Second Step? >>

Rather than converse with his phantom interrogator, who sounded like some insufferable Alpine Club grandee, Irvine fixed his gaze on the man he revered, but exhaustion made his head drop. The third time he looked up, he saw Mallory standing by the mound. A Union Jack fluttered in his hands.

"Sandy...would you take...a picture?"

<< Ben, you must talk to me! >>

Summoning his last reserves of energy, Irvine pulled the camera from his pocket and pointed it at his partner.

Framed against the darkening sky, Mallory looked down upon the lesser peaks as if he were a god.

#

As he watched his colleagues take down the tents, Ben realised that this was the first day since his rescue that no one had asked him whether Mallory reached the summit. That presumably meant that Odell and co had decoded the sensory recordings from his neural implant. No doubt they were disappointed. So, too, would be Universal. Still, if the board gave the go-ahead, the 1924 scenario could be repeated until they obtained the outcome that Ben had dreamt of since childhood. Just tidy up the Second Step, clone another Mallory, fake another Irvine. Easy.

"What happened to the camera?"

Ben had prepared an answer for that question, too.

Lost on Everest, same as Mallory.

When the rescue party found Ben, he had been lying face down on the snow terrace, mumbling Mallory's name. The last thing he recalled was that the rope no longer tugged at his waist. Despite a frantic search, Odell and the Sherpas found no sign of Mallory or the camera.

Ben liked to think that he had hurled the camera into the void in a last-ditch attempt to renew the mystery. More likely, Mallory had taken it from him after he lapsed into semi-consciousness. He also liked

to think that when Mallory spotted their rescuers climbing towards them, the great man had turned around and started back up the mountain.

With his face warmed by the rising sun, Ben contemplated the summit for what he knew would be the last time. He offered up a prayer to the great Chomolungma, in the hope that any future Irvine would succeed in persuading Mallory to carry a third oxygen cylinder.

## Reviews All reviews by Lee Harris

### **Breeding Ground**

By Sarah Pinborough  
Leisure Books

Although I was familiar with the name, I'd never read any of Sarah Pinborough's novels before *Breeding Ground*. I picked up a copy from Amazon, following its nomination for Best Novel in the British Fantasy Awards 2007. It didn't win (that accolade went to Tim Lebbon's *Dusk*), but as a British author with four novels to her name, yet none of them published in the UK, I was intrigued by Pinborough's output. (Though they are not published in the UK, they are still available from UK online booksellers.)

*Breeding Ground* is pulp horror of the highest order. An effective end-of-the-world novel, it could have been written by James Herbert early in his career, when he was still keen to shock. Minimal time is spent setting up the storyline, and when the horror kicks in, it kicks in with steel-toed size 10 boots direct to your sensitive bits.

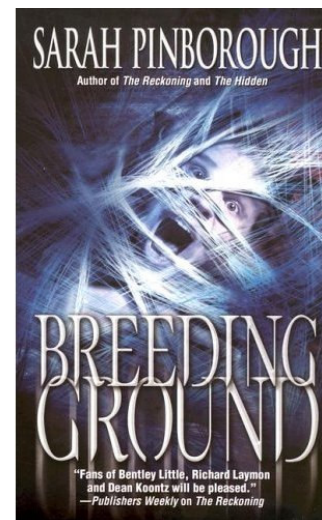
Matt loves his life. True, he finds his day job as a mortgage advisor a bit of a grind, but he has a beautiful girlfriend he adores, and he's planning on popping the question. When they discover that she is pregnant they are delighted. Over the course of the next couple of months, Chloe starts piling on the pounds – so much so that Matt feels physically repulsed whenever he looks at her. He still loves her, but can't bare to touch her – they'd expected her to gain weight, but not as much as this, and not as quickly.

The birth, when it happens, is a nightmare of gargantuan proportions. The creature that crawls from between Chloe's legs is hideous, vicious, and hungry. Even more worryingly, this appears to be happening to everyone, everywhere, at the same time.

The second half of the book winds down the action somewhat, and acts more as a character study.

It has been a while since I have been shocked by something I've read – certainly in the world of fiction. Pinborough manages not only to shock, but also to present us with a believable world, inhabited by believable people, in extraordinary circumstances.

You'll need a to be able to suspend your disbelief when reading *Breeding Ground*, but do that, and you're in for one hell of a ride! It's about time we had another author of this calibre - I've already ordered the rest of Pinborough's back catalogue, and I recommend you do the same.



## Never the Bride / Something Borrowed

By Paul Magrs

Headline Review

I recently reviewed Magrs' latest Doctor Who novel – *Sick Building* – for Death Ray magazine. The review was not the most complimentary, to say the least. It was with a degree of scepticism, therefore, that I was persuaded by to read his novels *Never the Bride* and its sequel.

Set in Whitby, *Never the Bride* and *Something Borrowed* follow the exploits of two elderly ladies with a penchant for solving supernatural mysteries. Brenda runs a guest house. New to the area, she is very old and widely travelled, but feels that Whitby is her spiritual home. Unused to forming friendships she finds herself surprised to find a kindred spirit in Effie, the owner of the local bric-a-brac shop. Brenda and Effie both have skeletons in the closet, and at least one of them has limbs in the attic!

Take a pinch of *Murder She Wrote*, add in a dash of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and mix with a liberal pouring of anything Victoria Wood ever produced, and you have a reasonable facsimile of the Brenda/Effie books. You'll find yourself delving straight into *Something Borrowed* as soon as you've finished reading *Never the Bride*. As for the end of the second book – well, that just sets up the third book perfectly, and you'll be gnashing your teeth until its arrival.

Magrs has borrowed liberally from every genre source you can think of (and a few you may have forgotten). Under other circumstances, this would be a criticism, but Magrs interweaves the strands of other horror and science fiction plots with such ease, and evident love and respect, that you find yourself hoping he introduces more classic references, so you can play the game of “spot the novel”.

Funny, charming, and ultimately delightful.

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