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## Issue 73

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### Hub's New Home

Don't forget we've moved - from now on you can find us at [www.HubFiction.com](http://www.HubFiction.com). Please amend your Favourites list. Our first home ([www.Hub-Mag.co.uk](http://www.Hub-Mag.co.uk)) will be maintained for a while, but the new address is where it's all happening.

### The Scores on the Doors

Huge thanks go to Vaughan Stanger, Ro Smith, Marie Faye Prior and Wendy Reynolds for their generous donations to *Hub*. These will go toward paying our authors, hosting bills, etc.

To donate, please head on over to [HubFiction.com](http://HubFiction.com) and click on the "Support Hub" link. Donate a one-off payment for as little or as much as you like, or set up an automatic monthly donation of £1 (about US \$1.43)

### Hugo Awards 2009

If you're eligible to vote in the Hugos this year, remember *Hub* is eligible to be considered for the semi-prozine category. Just sayin'...

### Next Week

Next week we welcome a new member to the *Hub* team – Phil Lunt.

Phil will be looking after the overall design of the 'zine, and making it look as good as it reads!



## BEHIND GLASS by Simon Strantzas

Hawksley's eye cracked open. He'd had the dream of her betrayal again, and though ten months had passed, it still hadn't become any easier. He doubted he would ever be free of it, the pain that had crushed the air from him. He no longer believed he could live past it; eventually something would reach down inside of him and dredge it back up, just another in a long list of failures revisited. He kicked his legs violently, desperate to be freed from the top sheet before claustrophobia suffocated him.

He wished there were some way to survive without money. All he wanted to do was retreat from the world, but it was impossible. Life had made it so and there was no sense in fighting against it. He had submitted to its power four years earlier and used the economics degree his father had forced on him to find a meagre data-entry job. It had barely paid his bills, but it did not require concentration, a commodity of which Hawksley had run quite short.

But the job was gone, the company consumed by a foreign-owned business Hawksley knew very little about. Everyone from the old location was offered a position at the new one, but Hawksley didn't know anyone who had planned on accepting. Some said the move to the factory district was too far to travel. Others felt the company too low on the corporate ladder and thought their careers might wither and die if tucked away amid hidden lake-front streets indefinitely.

There buildings stood indistinguishable from one another, large greyish brown structures that seemed to bend towards Hawksley as he travelled past them and engulf him in shadow. No matter how quickly the bus moved, he could not shake the feeling that the mountains of brick were descending towards him.

The address, at the end of a *cul-de-sac* off Commissioner's Street, shared little with those crumbling ancient behemoths. Its small rectangular shape was formed of muddy brick and stood only a single story high. It did, however, appear to stretch back an eternity, its true length obscured by the copses of trees that sprang from neighbouring lots. He walked along the path towards the structure and could smell the lake just beyond the canopy; it filled the air with a claustrophobic dampness, and Hawksley found it clung to his hands like a fishy film.

It took some force before the front doors swung open, and once he was inside Hawksley's vision required a few moments to adjust to what he saw. A vacant reception desk sat between him and a long straight corridor of frosted glass offices. He could see their occupants moving within, lit like strange shadow puppets against the translucent walls. Hawksley heard no sound from them beyond the scratching of pens on paper and the clack of keys of computer terminals; there was no one speaking, no telephones ringing or radios playing, only the electric buzz of the fluorescent lamps above. The silence filled him with a strange reticence to knock on any of the doors and ask for instruction. It would be better if he spoke to as few people as possible.

Past the bright offices, the walls of the building became dark and grey, absorbing the surrounding light. The clack of his shoes echoed through the hushed corridors as he searched for the office of the Manager. Then he noticed one sound was augmented by another, a reverberation from somewhere deep inside the building, like something being pounded. It made Hawksley feel alone, isolated, and the volume only increased as he made his way further into the building. Its rhythm continuously shifted and, without realizing it, Hawksley was drawn into following the sound's strange communication.

He turned a corner and found himself in another passage containing a pair of windowless doors that were separated by only a few feet. From behind one the sound was resonating — pounding machinery which became louder as it slowed — and it drilled into his brain. Hawksley reached for the rattling handle and then froze when he felt thick stubby fingers squeezing his shoulder.

Immediately, the pounding in his ears stopped.

"Who... are you?"

Hawksley turned, his tongue too thick to speak.

“Who... are you?” the man repeated, eyes bulging, ruddy skin glistening as if he were fresh from the womb. Hawksley stammered the answer.

“I’m looking for Mr Davis’s office.” The man’s eyes were blankly uncomprehending and Hawksley faltered. “He should be expecting me.”

The man emitted a strange snort at last, shoulders jerking, and said: “Come... with me.” He walked off without waiting to see if Hawksley followed. When they passed through the bend in the corridor, taking them out of sight of the doors, the pounding noise behind them resumed.

“That door...” the heavy man said, taking a pause before finishing each sentence in a flurry of words, “was the door to the factory. You... needn’t go in there.”

“A factory? Why is there a factory here?”

“The company... has other interests, other... world-wide interests. We... must handle different types of work. There... is little I can say on what transpires within.”

The path twisted through a series of hallways of varying lengths. Hawksley was still feeling disoriented when they stopped before another door, this one with only enough frosted glass for a small window and the name Davis stencilled in block letters across it. The man removed a key from his pocket and turned the lock, then delicately opened the door as if he were anticipating the escape of some small animal. He slipped through the gap.

“Come... in.”

The man who was presumably Mr. Davis took a seat behind the desk, but it wasn’t until he retrieved a single file folder hidden in the drawer that he spoke again.

“You... would like to resume your job?”

“Yes, I would.” Hawksley did his best to sound sincere.

“You... will be the second. There... is already a data-entry employee from your company here.” Mr Davis pressed his fingers into his eyes and rubbed them until they turned blood-red. He snorted again.

“When... are you able to begin?”

“Tomorrow?”

“Yes... tomorrow. This... will do.” He took Hawksley’s hand across the desk awkwardly between his own. They were damp and cold and they added to Hawksley’s discomfort. “You... will start tomorrow.”

The pouring rain slowed the bus down, yet he managed to arrive just as the clock struck nine. Down the gauntlet of pale windows, the furthest door on the right was his new office, and Hawksley found the small room constricted with its oversized desk and terminal. He removed his coat and hung it in the corner.

He sat down and ran his hands along the damp wood of his desk. Placed in the centre was a copy of the employee handbook, its yellowed onion-skin pages more like a bible than a set of regulations. He moved it to the bottom drawer of his desk, well out of reach. Beside the desk, affixed to the wall with yellowing tape, was a curled list of employees. Over time, names had been crossed off it with a shaking line and their replacements illegibly written beneath. Hawksley ran his finger down the page, leaving a faint streak of grime behind, but he recognized none of the names other than Mr Davis’s. He pulled the old telephone towards him and dialled the number.

The line rang without answer.

A sharp series of knocks startled him. A blurry silhouette stood waiting behind his door, and Hawksley opened it to find a face he barely recognized smiling widely and topped by rusty hair spurred with tufts of grey.

“You made it here too! It’s great to see a familiar face. I was beginning to feel like the only one who’d come over.”

“Hello, Daniels. Nobody else is here?”

“Not that I’ve seen so far,” he said, resting his arm upon the frame, “but I haven’t been everywhere yet. None of my team came, that’s for sure. Lucky bastards all found better jobs.”

Hawksley smiled weakly. “That’s too bad.”

“Yeah, for me!” Daniels laughed. “Listen, I know we both got stuck coming here when everyone else got out, but don’t worry about it. It’ll be okay. You and me? We’ll stick together, all right?” Hawksley shuffled his feet, unsure of what to do. He barely knew the man, yet now he felt tied to him by the past. He wanted to escape and instead life was trying to suffocate him. “I’ve got to get back to work, but we’ll meet up at lunch and I’ll show you around... well, at least as much as I’ve figured out so far. If you need me, I’ve got the office right across from you.” Daniels pointed with his thumb. “We’re neighbours!” He clapped Hawksley on the shoulder and walked back to his office. “I love these walls, at least,” he said and stepped inside, closing his door behind him.

Muted shapes passed across his windows all morning as Hawksley tried to focus on his work. The new computer system was not much different than his old software, and he picked up its nuances fairly easily. Still, every so often, he encountered an error that filled the screen with pages of some alien language, and he was forced to reboot the computer just to regain control. He wondered if the cause was his fingers, spreading the disease of misfortune to everything he touched. It wouldn’t have surprised him. He felt tainted, as though everything he did was a mistake waiting to be discovered.

True to his word, Daniels returned just after noon, knocking at Hawksley’s door. “Come on,” he said, “I think I can get us to the cafeteria.”

The floors were marred by scattered footprints and puddles — remnants of the rain outside. Hawksley felt lost immediately — at some point he’d stepped from the familiar into the unfamiliar, and now had no idea where he was. The hallways carried a faint pervasive thumping, like that from beyond the factory door. He feared if Daniels left him he might never find his way out.

“The cafeteria is just up here. I think.”

From out of nowhere, a set of double doors stood wide, light spilling into the storm-dark passage. The sound of voices crackled towards them, and Daniels’s step quickened. He smiled as he crossed the threshold, and it hung there, awkwardly, when he found no one to greet him.

The entire room of people sat watching the two men, row after row of employees clumped together in groups. They were of different ages, different statures, but all shared the same silence. Hawksley swallowed. Daniels seemed unfazed.

“Hey, there,” Daniels said, approaching the nearest of the tables. “We’re from — “

“We know who you are,” said the oldest of the faces, the word maintenance embroidered in thick script above his breast. All other eyes stared blankly. “We’ve seen you around.”

Daniels hesitated. “Do you mind if we sit here?” The table snickered and Hawksley wished he could fade away.

“Sure,” the old man said, an odd smile in the corner of his mouth. “Take a seat.” He pulled out an empty chair beside him, a chair coated with thick milky grease. The table burst into laughter. “We’ve been saving it for you.”

Daniels looked from face to laughing face, all full of scorn. Then he turned to Hawksley and said, “Maybe we should go.”

Hawksley didn’t need more convincing.

Outside, though, Daniels’s confidence returned. “They’ll warm up, Hawksley. It’s only a matter of time. I’m sure of it.” Hawksley, however, had his doubts. “Come on, I want to show you something.”

Daniels hurried ahead, looking back only intermittently to ensure Hawksley followed. “I’ve spent my lunches here trying to make some sense of these hallways. Whoever put it together — I think he designed mazes or something. It’s crazy! I’m pretty sure I got the hang of them, though.” He turned suddenly, taking an unseen passage. It gave the impression he had been swallowed by shadows.

They arrived, quite shortly, at the factory doors, much to Hawksley’s discomfort. Daniels tried the first lock, but it did not yield.

“I always hear work going on in here, but I have no idea what they’re doing.”

“Mr Davis warned me away from that door earlier,” Hawksley said. “He told me not to worry about what it contained. It’s something for one of the other branches of the company.”

Daniels ignored him. “Listen,” he said. “Can you hear anything now?” Hawksley stopped, closing his eyes and tried but couldn’t. The noise of industry was not there; the door was as silent as the rest of the building. “Maybe they’re on lunch, too?”

Hawksley checked his watch. "We should go back."

"In a minute. I want to check the other one before we go." He sized up the second door. "I know it says it's a supply room but I saw a bunch of guys go in yesterday — too many for it to just be a closet. Maybe it's another door into the factory. What do you think?"

Hawksley was unconvinced, but Daniels's eyes had already filled with curious excitement. He pulled at the supply room door, shaking it on its hinges. "Damn it!" he said. "Is *everything* here locked up?" Hawksley resolved to unshackle himself from the situation.

"I'm going back."

"I suppose you're right."

They returned to their separate glass offices. Hawksley slumped into his chair and sighed heavily. He tilted his head back as far as it would go until he could no longer close his jaw, and remained that way, eyes shut tight, waiting for the muddle in his head to clear. Above him, the ventilation rattled to life, and he opened his eyes. There along the drop ceiling was a faint brown water stain, its shape spreading across the tiles. It looked dry for the moment, and Hawksley tried to ignore it and return to work, but could not shake the heavy threat. It hung there as though the stain was barely preventing a torrent from dropping down. He searched the soiled telephone list for the number to the maintenance department, but was hesitant to call. He had not had success dealing with them once already. He watched Daniels's foggy shadow move behind the frosted partition, and then sighed again and stood.

Finding the maintenance department was easy; it was not very far from the bank of glass offices, sitting just around the corner, bridging the way to the labyrinth that the factory was hidden within. He found the department's wooden door standing open an inch, drab light falling across the hallway. He knocked, then pushed the door and peered in. There was no one there.

He was about to leave when he saw, unattended upon the desk, a ring of keys. Hawksley stood still and looked at them, absently wiping his hand along the side of his trouser leg. Faintly audible behind him was the pounding like a reminder of all he had lost. He grabbed the keys and hesitated only a moment before putting them in his pocket.

Hawksley hurried back only to notice his office door was wide open but no one was waiting inside. Daniels's office was closed, and its lights were out. Hawksley sat at his desk, twisting the keys in his hand. He shouldn't have taken them, yet he was unable to return them. Perhaps later, and hopefully *before* their disappearance was discovered, but until then he needed them — how much, he hadn't realized until that moment. There were so many questions and he had always had so few answers. It tired him. He placed the keys in his upper desk drawer, hoping they would not be missed until he could use them the following day.

A crowd of people stood gathered on the path toward the bus-shelter at the end of the day. They were huddled in the rain, surrounding the supine body of a man, a pool of darkness radiating from his head. He wore coveralls and had the word maintenance sewn above the breast. Hawksley gasped, yet seemed to be the only spectator affected by the accident. No one else was concerned, though their hands still silently attended to the body.

Hawksley breathed to speak when the words died in his throat. He saw, in the darkness and rain that surrounded them, the man's head cracked open like an egg, liquid seeping out. Light flickered, casting the illusion that the grey flesh in the wound was pulsating arrhythmically. Then, that flesh slid against itself like the coils of a reptile. Hawksley blinked the rain away, but before he could focus once more the crowd had clustered around him, blocking his view. A set of hands was then upon him, and Hawksley was pushed back hard enough that he nearly stumbled to the ground.

"Go home," his attacker said, face wet with rain. "Nobody needs you."

Hawksley shrunk away, the crowd of people disappearing into the storm as he approached the bus-shelter. Somewhere in the distance a series of sirens wailed across the city, yet none arrived before Hawksley's bus departed.

Two things surprised him the next morning: Daniels's failure to come in, and that there was no mention of the previous night's accident. The building went about its day as usual, ignoring Hawksley, which left him free to plan his infiltration of the factory.

He waited until mid-afternoon, when everything was at its quietest, then stood and slipped the key ring into his pocket. His walk was nonchalant past the rows of offices, yet shapes still moved towards him behind the glass, a series of shadows, watching.

Hawksley quickly lost his way in the corridors, wandering directionless without Daniels to guide him. The sound of thumping came and went, but provided no indicator of the path to its source. It wasn't until he found the cafeteria's twin doors, quite by accident, that he managed his way through his memories and found the route to the shadowed corridor Daniels had taken him down.

The corridor did not look familiar, yet he found at its midpoint the factory door. It shook from the pounding noise as though it promised answers.

He produced the key ring from his pocket. It felt heavy, and he chose a key at random, then inserted it into the lock. The corridor fell silent immediately. The lock, though, would not turn. He tried another key, then another, until he had exhausted them twice over. He shook the handle in frustration, and the thumping returned, mocking him. His fists slammed against the door, air hissed through his teeth, then all at once his rage dissipated, and his shoulders slumped. He let out a long slow breath and looked over at the supply room door. He remembered Daniels's theory.

The lock on the supply door greedily accepted the keys, and on the fifth try the mechanism sprung open.

The room was far darker than he had expected, filled with the pungent odour of stale lake water. He ran his hands along the dark walls until he found the light-switch. A single forty-watt bulb flickered to dim life, painting the room and its contents a sickly yellow. There was row after row of empty fish tanks, running the length of the space, filth in the joints and corners as though something had crawled from them a long time ago. He hurried through the aisles to the back edges, looking for the door Daniels hoped would be there, but there was nothing other than a shaking brick wall, and it separated him from the room he so desperately wanted to enter.

Hawksley dropped the key ring outside the door, suddenly exhausted. He wished he could be free from the lead weight that rode his shoulders. There seemed to be no release from it; every step felt like it weighed hundreds of pounds, and Hawksley was sure that as he walked those heavy footsteps could be heard echoing throughout the building.

Finding Mr. Davis's door surprised Hawksley from his stupor. He looked around, sure that he was in the wrong hallway, yet there was the door, and as Hawksley peered through the small frosted window it seemed every piece of furniture was also accounted for.

The only difference was the large object that lay long across the middle of the floor. It looked like some lumpy mass, a rolled carpet or sack, but it was impossible to determine exactly what it was through the scored glass. Through some trick of the light, shadows squirmed at the rounder, more misshapen end, but there was no other movement or indication Mr. Davis was inside.

Hawksley heard footsteps echoing through the hallways coming towards him. He moved off quickly, then realized he no longer had the key ring. He sat at his desk for the rest of the day, waiting nervously for a reprimand that did not come.

The next morning had not gone well for Hawksley. Freshly awake from torturous dreams, he found he had risen far too late, and couldn't make up the lost time before he arrived to work. He passed Daniels's dark office and found solace in his own. He tilted his head back and closed his tired eyes.

They snapped open when he felt something cold hit his forehead. He jumped to his feet and wiped his greasy brow, then looked up at the thin bubble of liquid that was already reforming between the ceiling tiles. As its size increased, it began to slowly descend towards the floor, stretching like a spider on its silk. Hawksley gingerly touched his foot to the puddle beneath the chair, his shoe coming away with a slight stickiness, yet he could not guess what the viscous substance was.

Careful to avoid the stain, he stretched a foot onto his chair, then swung the other onto his desk before casters rolled the chair away. He pushed up on one of the ceiling tiles and looked for the source of the leak. A weight slid along its length, and when he removed the panel a book fell to the floor, landing cover-first in the puddle. Liquid trickled over a thick ceramic pipe in the drop ceiling, and Hawksley tied his handkerchief around it as a temporary seal.

He leapt down from his desk and crouched to retrieve the book. It was greasy, covered in the thick stale liquid, and he wiped it clean with a handful of facial tissues. He turned the volume over and, on its cover, written in block letters, was printed: employee handbook.

He shook his head, flipping through the soggy, thin pages indiscriminately. He stopped when he noticed the fine handwriting printed in the gutter, as close as it could possibly be to the spine. The words were tiny, barely noticeable, as though the author wanted the notes to remain undiscovered. Hawksley

looked closer and tried to decipher those smears not made incomprehensible by the leaking pipe. The text ran page after page, one line at a time, and Hawksley pieced together as much as he could. What he gathered made little sense, and he could not determine just when it had been written.

*... know whats happening — the message, as much as he could understand, read — or if I mean but everything seems... since I think I... hiding where I dont think it will be found... I managed to conceal... from him when he left for a few... and snuck away soon after... God I hope you know what Im about to do scares me... I keep hearing... while Im asleep but I cant... see inside of it... I had to look... but no one was there... I thought I heard something before I could try and I... ran away... Im leaving these things together so I... later but if... the only thing that makes me doubt myself is my own eyes...*

The text ended, picking up again about twenty pages later, and even then with only a single entry that may not have even been the same handwriting. It seemed looser, less controlled, and had begun to bleed into the moisture around it. Hawksley could not be sure, but he thought it read: *I have to find it before they move again my God if they move again...*

Taped to the back cover of the book was a single key similar to those on the ring he lost. There was no indication of what it opened, but Hawksley knew there was really only one place it could go. He peeled it free from the cover.

He did not run down the halls, though his feet itched to do so. Instead, he forced himself to walk slowly, cautiously, in case anyone noticed him in the corridors. He did not want to arouse suspicions.

Though the corridors refused to conform to the map he held in his head, he managed to recognize enough of his surroundings to find the poorly lit passage. It seemed smaller, the walls closing in tighter and tighter until he worried he would not be able to escape them.

The air around him went quiet. He saw the factory door, its lock shining dully, brass tarnished and faded. He listened for footsteps before pulling the sticky key from his trouser pocket. It slid into the lock without difficulty, cylinders falling into place.

He slipped through the open door into pitch black. The walls were damp, the roughness of the concrete scratching his fingertips. When he found the light switch, he flipped it on, and stood bewildered.

A wall of glass a foot thick spanned the entire width of the empty room. It reached from floor to ceiling, and was covered in long deep scratches and chips. Behind it, murky white water like dilute milk moved in slow eddies and whorls.

Hawksley was compelled to touch the glass, to lay his thin fingers upon its great face. He was dumbfounded as to its purpose, what possible reason the company would have for such an awesome tank. He could feel the tension in the barrier, as if it were waiting for the right moment to burst.

Over the sound of gently lapping water he heard a single footstep before being startled by the voice.

“Leave, now.”

Hawksley turned, hand still touching the glass. Daniels stood unsteadily, eyes sagging, hair and skin slick with oily sweat. His whole complexion was pale, sallow. He appeared delirious.

“What *is* this thing?”

“You aren’t wanted here.”

“What do you mean?”

Daniels shook his head, his teeth parted and his pallid tongue protruding. He lunged at Hawksley, latching tightly onto him.

Hawksley panicked as his attacker starting flailing wildly. Daniels seemed rabid as he pulled and clawed at Hawksley’s arms and face. Hawksley fought for his freedom, shoving Daniels blindly with all his might, launching him headfirst into the thick glass barrier.

A dull crack filled the room, then only cold silence followed. Daniels lay crumpled on the floor, head resting crookedly against the concrete.

Thick liquid spilled, spreading along the ground. Sweat made his face look plastic, and the eyes — like two glazed opals, like fish eyes — stared up at nothing.

Then, those eyes moved.

They sank back into lidless sockets, pulling away from Daniels face as if it were only a mask. From the crack across his head greyish flesh uncoiled, a greasy tentacle flopping onto the concrete, twitching. Hawksley stumbled back, wanting to cry aloud but the air would not leave his lungs. He raised his fists to his eyes, hoping to somehow scrub the sight of the dying appendage away.

The cloud behind the glass then parted, and, from its milky depths, a dark shadow slipped towards him. It was large, over two foot thick, and its grey flesh was covered with row after row of tiny undulating discs, like mouths trying to feed. It curled and uncurled, pushing against the glass, agitated. Hawksley couldn't move, his mind reeling. The appendage swelled, then tightened, and rammed against the glass again and again. The sound shook through the room, throwing his heart out of rhythm. He covered his ears but could not drown it out.

Steadily, its volume increased, a tremendous booming, that almost eclipsed the other noise, the noise that came hurtling through the hallways. Like the crackle of hundreds of hands clapping, a flood of footsteps raced towards him. He stepped through the door and saw a mass of shadows growing larger across the ends of the corridor. He slammed the heavy door shut, leaning his body tight against it.

An army of hundreds of fists began to pound upon the barrier, the accompanying voices muffled by the thickness of the door. Hawksley felt the walls, those blind featureless walls, sucking the air from his lungs. He was trapped.

The room suddenly went quiet, hurting Hawksley's ears. Everything, all pounding from either side of him, stopped, and Hawksley heard only his own harried breathing, loud and rasping, echo in the windowless room. Daniels's lifeless body watched from the corner with uncaring, hollow darkness. A quiet scratching sound became audible, the sound of gears, of old mechanics creaking, and the thick glass wall began to shiver. Then, it did more than just shiver, as water began to stream over the top of it. The wall was sinking into the floor, the puddles at Hawksley's feet getting deeper. He tried the handle of the door, but it would not budge. Pipes above his head spouted water and the room quickly filled to Hawksley's knees, then to his waist, higher and higher until he was thrashing, mind screaming in terror. He swallowed stagnant metallic water by the mouthful, coughing up the foul liquid, desperate for breath. Around his ankle he felt something tighten like a noose, and with a sudden tug he was beneath the surface.

Hawksley struggled violently, able to see little in the milky water. Long, thick appendages appeared from within the murk, constricting his flailing arms and legs, immobilizing him. Their touch was strange, soft and calming, and they pulled him closer to the shadow at their core and wrapped him in a velvet embrace. From out of that dark centre something like a long smooth tube reached towards him. He was held tight as it slipped easily into the base of his skull, and he had already stopped struggling by the time it deposited its heavy burden within.

## REVIEWS

*I, Zombie* reviewed by Andrew Edwards

*Saturn Returns* reviewed by Mark Chitty

*The Incredible Hulk, season 1* reviewed by Ro Smith

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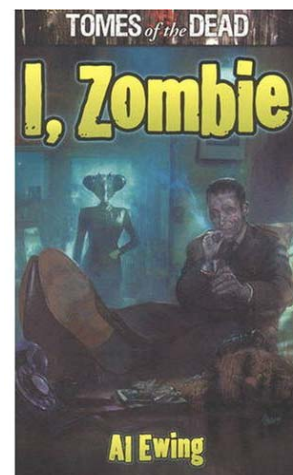
### ***I, Zombie***

by Al Ewing

Abaddon Press, £6.99

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Modern horror is undergoing something of a resurgence recently, with authors such as Joe Hill and Neil Gaiman setting the bar for intriguing modern horror, and greats such as Stephen King (Hill's father, incidentally), returning to classic form in books such as the recent novel *Cell*, which re-established the freshness and relevance of King's voice for the modern horror reader. Abaddon Press are staking (pardon the pun) their claim in the horror market with a range of fiction described by no less a leading light than Clive Barker as "the fallen angel of the abyss".





*I, Zombie* is Al Ewing's second novel for Abaddon Press, written specifically for the 'Tomes of the Dead' Imprint, and it's his attempt to create a horror novel through demolishing the established rules of thousands of creative writing classes, often to great effect. The opening of the novel is an attempt to create a narrative in a language reflecting a pre-historic perspective, and owes much to the opening chapter of Alan Moore's *Voice of the Fire*, which attempts a similar technique. Both novels ignore current wisdom which states that you need to engage and capture the reader from the very start, as such unconventional openings require you to work from the start to decode the odd syntax and language constructions.

What the opening does do is locate the zombie within an historical context which reaches far back into the ancient past, which in itself is an unusual approach to such material which tends to locate the creatures firmly within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Another innovation is the reinvention of the zombie itself: the shambling slowness of a Romero-zombie, still an influence on contemporary imaginings from *Shaun of the Dead* to Image Comics' *The Waking Dead*, is given a Matrix-style make-over. It shouldn't work, but it does, largely due to the protagonist, named John Doe, who adopts the narrative voice after the prologue in an engaging, intimate manner, grabbing your attention and never letting go.

The second part of the book engages in switching between various narrative viewpoints, settings and historical periods, and again, Ewing ignores established conventions by not sticking to one narrative perspective throughout the book. He seems to challenge the reader to keep up with him and his story, and there is a breathless zest to what could so easily have become a confusing exercise in manipulating the narrative. The book is crying out for sequels, which would give Ewing further opportunities to develop this intriguing interpretation on the standard horror genre of *Zombie* tales.

### ***Astropolis Book 1: Saturn Returns***

by Sean Williams  
Orbit, £7.99

The Slow Wave has hit the galaxy and has wrecked the Continuum in its wake. The Forts are no more and the line is in chaos as information travelling along it is trawled to find information on this disaster. What was once a united galaxy is now in turmoil as individual systems take control for themselves, resulting in more fighting for power.

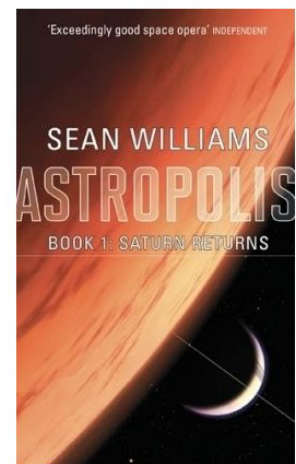
When the Jinc find pieces of debris from a large artefact on the edge of the galaxy they painstakingly gather all of them together to reveal a drum, one with a back-up of Imre Bergamasc contained inside as data. After they re-create his body and mind using all this data, Imre awakens 150,000 years after his last memories, in a brand new body, unfortunately of the wrong sex, and a patchy memory. Although the Jinc try and reassure him it could be due to the recreation of the drum, he has other thoughts and wants answers.

A former mercenary for the corps, Imre remembers his team and plans on finding them. After escaping the Jinc with the help of a mysterious object and the key phrase 'luminous', he heads for the familiar: the Mandala Supersystem. On entering this system he sees first hand how the Slow Wave has affected the galaxy; no united front and a nagging feeling that he shouldn't just go straight to the first planet he comes across.

We follow Imre on a journey to reclaim his past life, to uncover the memories he is convinced are buried and to find out what exactly the Slow Wave is and who is behind it.

Firstly, I enjoyed *Saturn Returns* quite a lot. It's a widescreen space opera with elements of military sci-fi thrown in, which is almost always a good combination. As the first part of projected trilogy (plus one short story) it does everything that it needs to do: the story, universe and characters are set up nicely and good descriptions are used to portray the technology in use. Also, plenty of questions are raised (and some answered) that make *Saturn Returns* a novel that is difficult to put down.

The characters we meet are all unique and each have their own motivations within the main narrative. Although this may sound like it can get messy, it doesn't. All of the former corps members are given enough depth and personality to bring them to life and behave in a way that is both believable and interesting. Constant questions are raised about alliances and the history between them, but it just fits together nicely. As the story revolves around Imre and his journey we spend a lot of time seeing things from his perspective, flashbacks that reveal a little at a time and events that make the pages just turn



quicker. We also know only what he does, so there is always the questioning and guessing, trying to put the puzzle together.

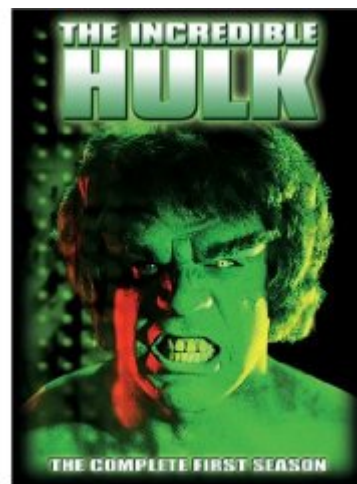
One of the better aspects of the novel was the time span involved in the galactic history. With the technology to make time pass quicker or slower than Absolute (normal time), hundreds of years can pass in mere days, or days can last hundreds of years. This brings up interesting questions about how this time difference affects the population, but is dealt with convincingly and effectively. There is also the fact that many characters have clones of themselves that run around the galaxy and occasionally the memories are combined when this happens. This is looked upon as an extension of that person, not a separate entity, which is a strange view to understand. Although it's justified in the story, it's a subject that I wasn't entirely convinced about.

All in all, *Saturn Returns* is a great Space Opera novel that has set up the sequel very effectively. With characters and a universe that I look forward to revisiting, *Saturn Returns* has set the bar high for the sequel – I'm just hoping it the story will continue in such a great way. Highly recommended.

### ***The Incredible Hulk, Season One***

Universal Pictures, £34.99 (but shop around)

I'm a sucker for *The Incredible Hulk* – always have been, always will be. It contains two of my favourite things: angst (particularly, secret identity angst), and smashing things (especially super-powered smashing). So it's unsurprising that I became rather squeeful in anticipation of last summer's movie, starring Edward Norton. Don't get me wrong, I was one of the handful of people who actually enjoyed Ang Lee's *Hulk* – and it's not just because I'm a sucker for all things Hulkoid. I found it intelligent, action filled, and surprisingly well made. It has to be said, though, that the Norton version pushed more of my buttons. I left the movie theatre with an insatiable appetite for More Of That Please.



Coming to the sad realisation that movies take time, and I might just go insane with the waiting if another movie was what I wanted, I turned, with some trepidation, to eBay. My target? The late 1970s, early 1980s TV show, starring Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno. The DVD boxed sets have been released in a somewhat patchy fashion since 2003, but seasons three and four were released to coincide with the release of the film, with the last season to come in October 2008 (just after I moved house and became poor(er), the bastards!). But, of course, I started with the beginning, and that's what I'm here to talk about today.

It's always a risky course of action, returning to programmes you loved as a child, but I decided it was worth it, and I have to say: it really paid off. I'm sure there's a hefty dose of nostalgia caught up in my enthusiasm for TV's *The Incredible Hulk*; but, as I say, nostalgia is easily defeated and disappointed by the failure of reality to live up to your memories; and I was not disappointed.

Not that it hasn't dated. It has. There's no mistaking the 1970s timestamp, from the ubiquitous flares to the cheesy opening montage of the pilot episode. Overall, the pilot is not the crowning glory of the first season. The montage of David Banner's Happy Life prior to his wife's death is like a lesson in cliché. They walk through a field of flowers, they get caught in the rain, they have a *hilarious* accident falling out of a fishing boat – there's even a kitten. I could list more, but it would make for as tiring a read as it was to watch. I felt like screaming at the TV: I get it! They were happy, they liked to goof around, she was beautiful, and he was a wonderful husband who even chipped in with the cooking – *enough* already.

I don't think it's the sort of opening sequence that today's audience would willingly sit through. But it would be a mistake to judge the series by this. Despite what makes for a frustratingly slow pace when you know the story, the pilot has its moments – most famously, that iconic line, quoted at the beginning of every episode throughout the programme's run: "Mr McGee, don't make me angry – you wouldn't like me when I'm angry." It's a line I couldn't help

but grin to hear in context, especially knowing how rare a moment of contact it turns out to be for Jack McGee and David Banner, despite the deep and interesting relationship they go on to develop as protagonist and not-unsympathetic antagonist.

Susan Sullivan does an excellent job in her supporting role as Dr Elaina Marks; overcoming with impressive skill what is, at times, a rather clunky script. She moves with deceptive ease through the info-dumptastic dialogue she and Bixby are forced to negotiate. Unfortunately, Bixby himself struggles a bit in comparison (although I do think he does beautifully later on in the role). That said, the techno-babble is kept to a minimum, and much of it is surprisingly convincing, even if it's perhaps best not to dwell too much on the idea that a massive dose of radiation, combined with an episode of rage, could turn you into a hulking, nigh-on invincible green monster. But, let's face it: if you weren't prepared to turn your brain off for that part, this show was never going to be for you.

Overall, the realism in scientific talk and equipment (however superficial it may actually be) is something a lot of modern sci-fi shows could learn a thing or two from. Sometimes fancy computer graphics simply aren't as convincing as looking down a good old-fashioned microscope. From the same point of view, I'd choose Lou Ferrigno's impressive, and remarkably unweiny, green-painted physique over the various cartoonish and/or skin barely-stretched-over-muscles computer generated visions from the recent films. But that's me.

I give the pilot a tentative thumbs up, on the condition that someone removes about half an hour's excess baggage.

If the pilot provokes mixed feelings, though, the next episode more than calms the nerves. It is everything you could want from a Hulk story, and *just* shy of too much.

Allow me to set the scene: a dark road, somewhere in America. Banner enters around a corner of dry, red rock. He's unshaven and downbeat, a brown duffel bag slung over one shoulder. He thumbs a ride from a truck, and reads a newspaper by the dim light of the road. There's a radiology unit somewhere nearby: hope.

We fade to day. Another vehicle drops him off, that little bit further on along his long, long road. It's the town he read about in the newspaper. However, before he can get there, Banner is distracted by some appealing looking lemons. (Lemons? Really? I guess he *is* hungry.) No sooner does he deviate from the road, however, but he encounters the first of many, many good deeds that he just cannot leave alone whilst in search of his own salvation. A young woman on crutches (Laurie Prange) visits her father's grave. She denies any need for Banner's help at first (and what exactly is he doing in her orchard? Probably best not to ask); but of course, she collapses, and he has to carry her home. And yes, I have made peace with my inner feminist over that.

By helping the damsel, Banner gets embroiled in her life. He's offered a job, and let's face it, if he's stealing lemons to eat, he can't *really* afford to refuse. Of course, there's an Evil Plot afoot, including a hot blooded young man who is persuaded to beat up on poor Banner, prompting the transformation that we've all been waiting for. Various Nefarious Happenings ensue (if 30 year old spoilers bother you (and I can respect that) don't read the next paragraph).

Our crippled damsel witnesses Banner's transformation (thus satisfying those of us with a soft spot for ye olde Secret Identity Angst). They are then chased through a swamp, reluctantly aided by a hermit, attacked by a snake, and hounded by dogs. And just when you're really starting to question whether we've crossed the boundary from romp into silly, Our Heroes are forced to cross a river in which there happens to be a bear. That's right, a bear. The Hulk fights a bear. In water. His green comes off on the bear's fur. Awesome.

How is this awesome and not awful? I'm not sure, but it's not. I admit: I burst out laughing when I saw the bear. But it was good laughter. I'm laughing with them. It's... they're clearly just going to town on it all and having a Very Good Time. Somehow they stay just this side of sane. Supposedly, when Stan Lee saw the script (he had retained the right to advise) he loved it, and when he reached this part, he had just one suggestion to make.

It should be a robot bear, he said.

They didn't take him up on that, and I think that kind of encapsulates how it manages to work. I laughed out loud when I saw that the Hulk was going to wrestle a bear. But if it had been a robot bear? That would have been too much. That would have been: throw the poignancy out the window and let's *just* be silly. Don't get me wrong, I like a good robot bear. Long live Shardik, and all that. But there's a time and a place.

That's the thing about *The Incredible Hulk*: it somehow walks the magical line between the fact that it's about a guy who turns into a green monster who likes to smash things and is nearly invincible; and the fact that it's also the achingly human story about a guy whose life has been destroyed. A drifter – as alone as we all hate to think that, really, we might be: walking that road, hitching each lift, trying to save himself and maybe return to the almost mythical prospect of a Normal Life. As though he ever had one. As though any of us did.

We want him to be saved. We want to save him.

But it's the drifting we love – the drifting we identify with.

We want to know that sometimes, somewhere, it all works out OK. But we don't want to actually see it happen. At least... not yet.

There are so many wonderful things about this season, and I should love to go through each episode in detail, pointing them out. I'm relatively sure I would bore you, though, even if I didn't spoiler you. Rediscovering these gems is what it's all about. There a few priceless moments to look out for. The Hulk being soothed by the petting of a baby tiger (one that then clearly does not want to leave poor David's post-transformation lap); the Hulk running through Times Square or iconically crashing through a brick wall; and the ever-interesting dynamic between Banner and McGee.

Jack Colvin (McGee) always delivers a surprisingly subtle performance. McGee is self-serving, true, but he's not inhuman. He believes he's witnessed the Hulk murdering two people, after all. One almost feels that in another life, in different circumstances, he and Banner might have been friends. Almost.

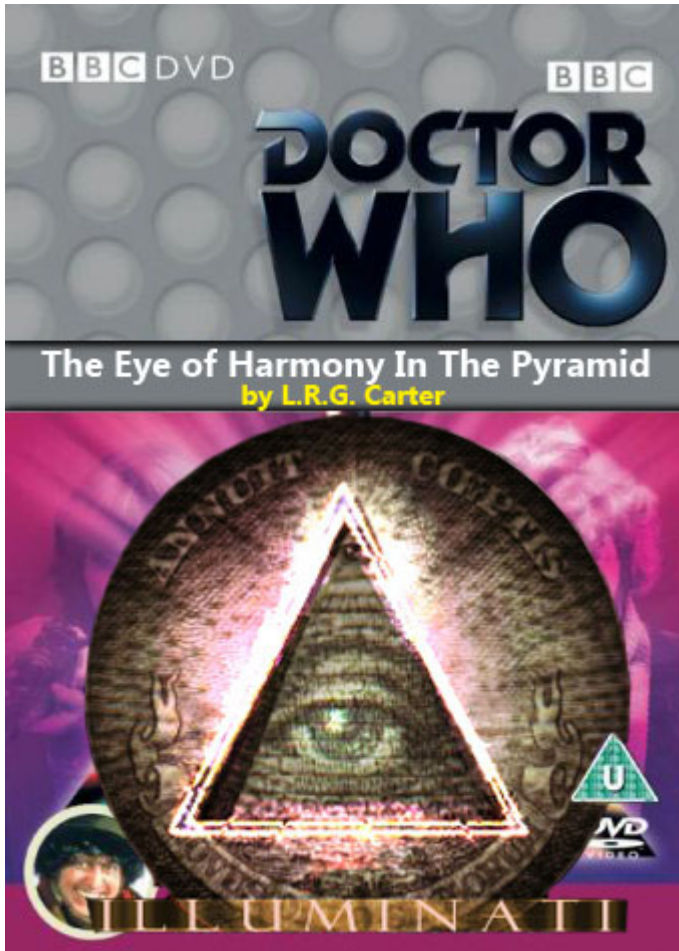
The special features in this box set are not extraordinary. There's a commentary for the rather unexceptionally directed pilot, and a bonus episode from season two. I value the bonus episode more – at least it fills up the space in what is otherwise quite a short season; even though it's ultimately useless to anyone who goes on to buy the second season (which I heartily recommend). One rather feels that there was a desperate scrabble to include *something* simply because extras are what's expected these days. But I don't mind. Buy this boxed set for the series itself in all its nostalgic, rompish poignancy; not for the extras.

Cue the sad going away music...



## The Eye of Harmony In the Pyramid

By L. R. G. Carter



“... the dates of the assassination of John F. Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald, November 22 and 24, also had a conspicuous 23 absent in between them...”

Simon Moon – *The Eye In The Pyramid*

I was lying in bed the other night, thinking the sorts of thoughts that stop you returning to sleep despite the time being well past three, and it occurred to me that there was no absence at all between those two days, simply an absence of anyone seeing what was there. For on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 1963 the world saw the beginnings of the most insidious and resilient Illuminati project of the recent fifty years. It was a television series called *Doctor Who*, and the more I thought about it, the more I could see their mark upon it.

At first I smiled at the way the Time Lords are classically said to have thirteen lives, correlating with the thirteen steps of the Illuminati Pyramid, and jested that their society was founded on “The Eye of Harmony.” The good Doctor has defined time and space as dimensions four and five, nicely tying in with the Law of Fives. Time Lord robes and ranks have all the trappings of a cult and the interpretation that not all Gallifreyans are Time Lords gives the idea that there is an outer circle and an inner circle, allowing you to gain hidden knowledge upon achieving illumination.

(Orwell showed a similar society in *1984* with inner and outer parties and they bumped him off because he was getting too close. With *Bad Wolf* it all comes full circle and the Illuminati once again take control of Big Brother’s All Seeing Eye.)

The Doctor is a character whose motivations are as difficult to pin down as those of the Illuminati, who are at the same time “the people in charge” as well as “the people trying to pull down the established order for the sake of their own”. The Doctor bears many symbols of authority, the name *Doctor* and his mode of transport being the most enduring, yet seems to be a force of discord (note the capital ‘D’ in both Doctor and Discordia). He is equally happy working alongside or against the establishment, often fulfilling both roles within the same story. This becomes particularly apparent when facing the Master, for whom all the previous points also apply. Just as the Illuminati and their enemies appear to be one and the same, so do the Doctor and Master become the two ever swapping sides of that Discordian symbol, the Ying-Yang with a golden apple on the one side and the Sacred Chao on the other.

About that Chao, the pentagon, that beautiful demonstration of the Law of Fives. It has been said that if Christianity comes in threes and Buddhism comes in fours, then Illumination and its Law of Fives is the next natural stage of religious evolution. You have to wonder then what esoteric knowledge led to the TARDIS control panel having six sides, and what exactly Dapol knows that led them to give it five sides instead (fitting Davros’s extra arm together with the rest of this is, for the present, beyond my powers).

*Thinking back to the day before this all starts*, the Fourth Doctor remembers noticing the glint of the gun in the crowd. He picks up the rifle sat nearby, but before he can act he notices the scarecrow in the book depository and the little fellow on the overpass and the old man on the grassy knoll and he thinks to himself “How many does it take to assassinate a president?” He remembers all this as they create their 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary story. This completes the steps of the pyramid, and they are finally safe to flout what happened right in front of their audience (the sight of the Doctor’s gun is a triangle with a “Y” in the middle, Y being letter twenty five, or five sets of five, but I digress).

They did that for years, right out in the open. So many monsters with one eye, others with a third open pineal eye (perhaps the reason for the second arm, to complete the pyramid), all those sea monsters, by different names, but all the Leviathan. Then there's the theme tune, da-da-da-dum da-da-da-dum da-da-da-dum ooo-eee-ooo, reusing Beethoven's (one of *them*, naturally) opening to the fifth symphony, which makes a V in Morse code, a five in roman numerals, and a two dimensional pyramid if you turn it upside down. The numerology is pasted all over the show. To pick an example at random: Adric came out of E-Space, E is the 5<sup>th</sup> letter of the alphabet, and looks a little like a W on its side, which is the 23<sup>rd</sup> letter, the first letter in the word "Who" and the shape of spread-eagled legs, which will soon bring us back to Adric coming out of E-Space.

"It has the Illuminati written all over it," says the Sixth Doctor, eyeing Peri. "Just lacking sex, can't involve the Illuminati without that common denominator."

So there's Katy Manning sprawled naked over a dalek.

"I thought you liked to believe six impossible things before breakfast," she purred.

"Well yes," said the Fifth Doctor. "But the way Adric's face is peering out at me is more than merely impossible. I mean, how can he be in there? He's dead, I saw the spaceship crash into Earth and wipe out the Dinosaurs..."

"No, you didn't. You saw a spaceship explode far away from any planets, then added for yourself the extra narrative they had programmed you to expect."

And while the Doctor mumbles an excuse about falling debris as he's wrapped up in those sparkling boots and the dalek watches in silence from that single unblinking eye, I realise the sixth doctor didn't regenerate, we just see a man in a wig roll over. Their agents spent so long persuading us the special effects were worthless that we actually started believing them, finding excuses for what we saw, instead of accepting that we saw it. What if he's still out there, spreading his own brand of violence, anger, chaos, and discord? This means there were only 23 series. This denial of evidence has been there since the beginning. As some deny the very existence of the Illuminati, so do others deny the existence of "Doctor Who", despite being present in countless credits and being mentioned explicitly in *The War Machines*.

If this thought process seems somewhat convoluted, please remember that this was well past three and I knew the next morning I would be good for nothing, rendering even more of the day useless than usual. I ponder, as many do, that there never seems to be enough time in the day: what if there are only 23 hours, and they just slap the word "fnord" all over our clocks so we don't realise what they're up to? Gives a different understanding to the name "Time Lords" (And the Master's TARDIS looks like a clock).

Taking us back to the numbers, I started counting out the letters R, T, and D. 18, 20, and 4. There's a twenty four, twenty three once again conspicuous by its absence. Eighteen is three sixes, and there are those who oppose the new order of 2005 onwards who claim the man is the Great Best. Even without such ominous overtones  $2/3$  is 0.666... but I digress once again.

On the topic of that new order, I note the first episode is called *Rose*, a possible Rosicrucian connection? No, that's getting a little too paranoid; next I'll be suggesting the name Sydney Newman is a message about being the first newcomers to return to the meadows of Eden. Even if that is a bit of a leap, the name Verity Lambert directly translates to "True Light of the Land". Then it struck me that there has always been one champion that has defended the show all these years, even in its later times of supposed stress and aiding the return of those mechanised pyramids with eyes in their "Save the Dalek" campaign: the *Sun*, greatest of all Illuminators, a light that only the Hand of Omega could extinguish, that tool of Time Lord design that the Doctor himself has been hinted at having a hand in, the ultimate means by which to Immanentise the Eschaton.

Tomorrow morning I contemplate that Omega first appears in *The Three Doctors*, which is followed by *The Five Doctors* but the trend is bucked by *The Two Doctors*, but only if you expect the numbers to continue getting larger, instead of marvelling at the completion of the trinity of certain significant numbers. If you count Peter Cushing, then it is the Fifth Doctor and not the Fourth who is conspicuously absent from *The Five Doctors*, that story in which everyone is swallowed up by a black pyramid.

(Now he mulls over the recent suggestions of who is next to take on the mantle and he cannot help but think of the secret Eleusinian Mysteries, "Osiris is a black God." A month from now he will look at the youngster's fringe and decide that this thought process still holds true. There are Moby Dick/Leviathan connections to be made here, but I leave the readers to draw these for themselves.)

Where is this all to end? Are we to see each new Doctor as the next step on the road to Illumination? By the tenth step you appear to turn into a gibbering fool who takes bananas to parties (I

hear the Discordians prefer apples), so what will the later heights hold? I have no desire to fulfil this ordained path (though they would say that is because I have been programmed not to see its brilliance). Their plan is close to fruition; Jack says that the twenty-first century is when everything changes, a phrase that makes no sense at all unless you know what they are talking about. I don't know what they are doing, but recent episodes suggest it will all end in Cardiff. There would seem to be no way of stopping them, and as I fall asleep I realise that I never truly woke and there is a whole host of evidence that I have not touched upon as everything goes dark...

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