

THE BEGINNING OF THE AGENCY

In 1873, the Ashanti Empire invaded the British Gold Coast, a colony on the west coast of Africa founded six years earlier. In response, the British landed an expeditionary force under the command of Viscount Wolseley and invaded the Ashanti Empire (an area that today encompasses parts of Ghana, Benin, and Togo in Western Africa) in early 1874. Within a month the expeditionary force had made good progress into the West African theocracy and fought a series of battles culminating with the Battle of Ordashu in early February.

Albert Henry Hudson, an energetic but ageing Scottish Captain in the 42nd (Highland) Regiment of Foot, was part of the forces that captured the Ashanti capital, Kumasi. When Captain Hudson led a small company of soldiers into the royal palace, he and his men were astonished at the complexity of the building, its treasures, and its extensive library in many languages, some of which had not been spoken by humanity in thousands of years. While the treasures were clearly valuable, Hudson had orders to search for the Asantehene, the Ashanti King. Finding the door to the dungeons, his men ventured forth into the darkness.

What they saw, evidence of human sacrifice to dark gods, a procedure used for fusing living hosts with the dead, and creatures that no sane man should see, drove Hudson and his men to fight for their lives. Running out of ammunition and relying on swords and bayonets, man after man died under the assault of the crazed cultists, the corpses that walked, the creatures that tracked by emitting harrowing screams and things best left undescribed, before they escaped from the hellhole under the palace. Hudson was convinced that the King wasn't there as the 'cultists' seemed to be of the lower orders and, in Hudson's mind, no King would dabble in such horrors and keep the respect that his people had in him. As he and the three survivors were leaving, they set fire to the curtains and fabrics and watched the palace burn hoping against hope that the horrors beneath had met their infernal end.

In the long term, the horrors encountered in those dungeons would scar Captain Hudson mentally for the rest of his life. In the short term, they led to him losing his stomach for war, his love for Africa, and perhaps his ambition. The remainder of his military career would be unremarkable and rather than remain with his beloved 42nd (Highland) Regiment of Foot when it was amalgamated with the 73rd (Perthshire) Regiment of Foot to form the Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) in 1881, he cashed in his pension and resigned from the army. A year later while living in his family's

London town house at 33 Golden Square, he met Ulysses Victor Brand, a skilled investigative journalist, and started a black watch of his own.

Ulysses Victor Brand had been a reporter on *The Daily News*, the newspaper founded by Charles Dickens, and had a reputable, if not entirely profitable, career. He took to the streets of London every day searching for stories that would gain his paper more readers and himself more income, and while he didn't agree whole-heartedly with some of the paper's left leaning values, he did recognise it as a force for good in terms of workers' rights, housing, and the rights of those without suffrage.

On a cold November morning in 1878, on the banks of the Thames at Limehouse, Brand found himself staring down at the mud and wondering if he could turn back time and forget the sight that lay before him. Seven people, mostly men, but some women and children, lying dead and partially submerged in the mud . . . yet still they moved. Their lifeless eyes stared at him as if, impossibly, they still perceived other forms. They reached out with clasping hands and their mouths worked silently as though calling for him, but it was no plea for help. They seemed primal and desperate for Brand and his companion, grasping for flesh.

The other person with him was his friend and sometimes paid contact, Police Constable George Hayward. George was busy throwing up and saying prayers as Brand steeled himself and stepped from animated corpse to animated corpse, putting a bullet in the head of each with his revolver, using his great coat to muffle the report as best he could. Once done, he handed George his revolver and told him to take it home with him and that should his superiors ask as to his absence, he should cite an upset stomach from some poor meat the day before as the reason. He also said that he would alert the authorities.

When the police arrived, Brand claimed to have seen the bodies while walking past, but the investigating officer, Inspector Alfred Tarrant, wondered why a well-dressed, well-to-do journalist would just be 'walking past', especially given the freshness of the gunshot wounds in the bodies. This, and the fact that Brand was only a moderately competent liar, resulted in the journalist spending a night in the cells. Fortunately, the lack of evidence as to his having done any wrongdoing resulted in his release the next day.

INNING OF THE AGENCY

Arthur J
object w
personal
to live if
a poet ar
great-gran
whilst his
explorer
and supp
zeal amou
Congole
on the Sev
been plac
Upon com
care of the b

STY
RD
E EAST

CHAPTER 2

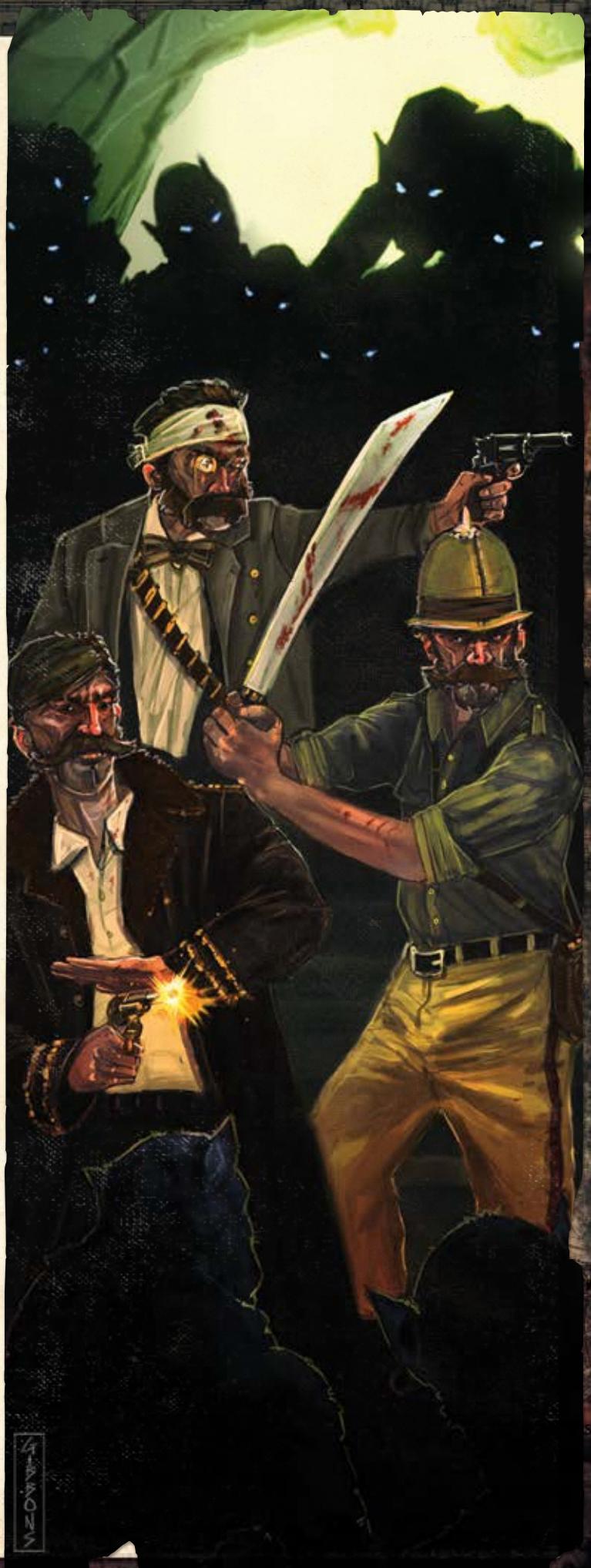
A stinging piece on how the Metropolitan Police liked to lock up members of the public without evidence saw Brand make more enemies than friends, including Inspector Tarrant. Still believing him guilty of 'something', the Inspector dogged Brand's every step, looking for anything to catch him out and be able to arrest him. Despite this, Brand continued to look into 'The Case of the Limehouse Dead', his investigations eventually leading him to a warehouse where a practitioner of unspeakable rituals had been kidnapping men and women off the streets of Bethnal Green before attempting to revive them once they had been murdered. His eventual aim was to bring back his late wife (who was present but decidedly the worse for wear), and the dead that Brand and Hayward had found were his early experiments he had been forced to dispose of in the Thames.

Tarrant, who had been following Brand, arrived in time to see him shoot the necromancer (who to his eyes looked like an ordinary dock owner) squarely in the head. Tarrant was about to draw his own weapon and shoot Brand when he noticed the dead moving around him. After some tense moments and the liberal expenditure of ammunition, Brand and Tarrant became holders of a secret so dire that it would cause open panic in the streets were it to have come public knowledge. With this shared horror and knowledge, they made a deal to face any further horrors together, aiding each other where they could.

For the next year, Tarrant and Brand (and a little later, Hayward) worked together in investigating a number of strange cases. These included chasing down Chinese gangs who were importing a peculiar metal from France which had the strange property of becoming harder when exposed to blood, a corrupt import firm selling strange gold artefacts from the Polynesian islands, and a cabal of industrialists engaging in black magic and human sacrifice as a means of gaining favour with the bizarre deity its members worshipped.

By 1880, the trio had stopped several potential threats to the realm, in the process not only becoming friends and allies, but also incurring the enmity of some of the criminal underworld's darker elements. The majority of London's criminal underclass played by certain rules – no women or children, no 'home visits', no assassinations; this was a code of self-preservation. Shooting an enemy in the street incurred the wrath of the police and would see the streets swamped with 'Bobbies', which was a sure-fire way to ruin business. They also had a distaste for anything vile or ungodly and for that reason, much of London's underworld came to respect 'The Brave Bunch' as Tarrant, Brand, and Hayward became known, for they took care of the underworld's most unsavoury elements and left the 'regular' criminals in peace. Further, it seemed that even these unsavoury elements adhered to this unspoken détente, but one gang which ignored it was a band of Tcho-Tcho, recently arrived in London and led by their sinister boss 'No-No' Namdak.

Brand capitalised on the trio's investigations, writing an ever increasingly astonishing series of articles about the city's criminal underworld that saw the circulation of *The Daily News* rise. Unfortunately, it would lead to his near dismissal from the newspaper, for although



THE BEGINNING OF THE AGENCY

he kept hidden most of the horrifying facts about the Brave Bunch's exploits, Brand's need to warn the public of the menace that he has faced together with Hayward and Tarrant seeped through into his writing and while it was all true, his employers believed him to be guilty of sensationalist reporting. In particular, it was noted that Brand's most recent stories tended to highlight disreputable immigrant groups and when he wrote an article on 'Devil worship amongst the Indo-Chinese', it proved too much for the newspaper's board, despite the small boost in circulation. It called Brand in and suggested that he should resign from the paper lest he be fired. At first Brand refused, pointing out that the newspaper had published the articles and that it would reflect badly upon the newspaper were he to be fired. The board told him that if he stayed, it would not be as a crime reporter and offered him a lump sum if he would resign. Brand agreed and left the newspaper with several months' salary and the good wishes of many in the company.

Three days later, when an anonymous letter was forwarded to him from *The Daily News* offices with a promise of information on the 'Devil worshipping Tcho-Tcho', Brand feared a trap. His suspicions proved right, for when he arrived at the agreed place and time mentioned in the letter with Constable Hayward and Inspector Tarrant, they were ambushed by a crowd of Tcho-Tcho armed with viciously curved daggers. It was immediately clear that the Brave Bunch had seriously under-estimated its adversary as Hayward was killed from a rip to his neck that spilt his lifeblood across Brand's shocked face. As he and Tarrant fled the inspector took a grievous wound to his shoulder whilst Brand received many minor wounds, though they fired many rounds driving their foe back into the shadows. On their exit from the ambush, a haunting voice shouted "Hurry home, Sons of England!" and its laugh seemed to follow the pair through the dark streets to safety.

Ignoring injury, Tarrant insisted they make with all good speed to his home as he feared for his family. His fears proved correct as the Tcho-Tcho had already butchered his wife and two boys. Tarrant's wailing brought the two murderers out from their hiding place and even before Brand could shoot both dead, one had plunged his dagger through the inspector's back, killing him as he cradled his wife's body. With police whistles already sounding in response to the gunshots, Brand fled his friend's house and made for his own lodgings where he discovered his rooms ransacked and his housekeeper, Mrs O'Reilly, faced down in a pool of blood. In a state of panic, he managed to take a hansom cab to the home of Inspector Tarrant's senior, Superintendent Ronald Hooker of H Division (Whitechapel). Hooker had long had the respect of Tarrant and, while disapproving of his 'moonlighting' as some sort of vigilante – Hooker was not entirely sure what Tarrant did and knew better to ask – he was very happy with the results. The Brave Bunch managed to keep in check the worst of London underworld's criminal excesses. That was enough for Hooker.

Superintendent Hooker took in the injured Brand and Mrs Hooker tended his wounds. Upon hearing of the death of Inspector Tarrant Hooker cursed for the first time in his life in front of his wife, and immediately contacted the station to begin preparations for retaliation. The ensuing police investigation was ultimately unsuccessful; a great many Asians and Oriental Londoners were harassed, and some were imprisoned on other charges, but the inability by the police to distinguish the Tcho-Tcho from other Orientals ultimately led them to melting away or staying hidden. The Tcho-Tcho

presence was undoubtedly weakened, but neither 'No-No' Namdak nor the men he had sent to murder the Brave Bunch and their families were ever caught.

It was a number of weeks later that Captain Albert Hudson, late of the 42nd (Highland) Regiment of Foot, approached the recovering Ulysses Brand in Regent's Park and handing him his card, told Brand that he wasn't alone in his fight against the macabre and devious. He told Brand that he had been following his reports of occult crime and other unsavoury deeds in *The Daily News* and found them informative, echoing his own experience in the Third Ashanti War, and that he felt that he should seek Brand out to combine their efforts. Hudson had long been plagued by nightmares of the dungeons in Africa and the idea that those same horrors might now be visited upon the seat of empire here in London appalled him.

However, just as Hudson had resolved to act so that he may excise those night time demons in a small way, Brand had left his employment at the newspaper. Hudson had been searching for Brand for three days. Who knows what fates may have fallen the Brave Bunch, or Albert Hudson, had they met earlier?

He gave Brand lodgings in his town house on Golden Square and Brand eagerly accepted, not only for somewhere safe to stay, but also for the anonymity it would offer in the short term. He felt that it would be best if the Tcho-Tcho didn't know where he was residing. That night, Hudson and Brand moved his belongings (with police guard provided by Superintendent Hooker) to the townhouse and they began to put together what, in a year, would become Hudson & Brand – Inquiry Agents of the Obscure.



THE EARLY YEARS

For two months Hudson and Brand set about preparing 33 Golden Square as a base of operations, setting up a reference library of the strange and unexplained, supplementing it with subscriptions to newspapers they would scour for indications of outré occurrences, and converting a room into a shooting range to better keep up their skills in the fight against the darkness. During this time they often spent their evenings sharing a bottle of port or brandy, setting out their hopes for this common endeavour and bonding over a common cause – the safeguarding of the realm. Bound together as they were through noble, though hidden, purpose, the two men drew comfort from their companionship and common cause.

CASE 1: THE CASE OF THE ARSONISTS (EARLY 1881)

The agency's first case came from a fellow officer in Hudson's old regiment, Sir Lionel Prescott, who following his retirement from the army had joined the Home Office. Over a drink at the Naval and Military Club, he expressed his concern over the actions of certain Fenian groups and wished that he could make use of Hudson's talents in Special Branch. Hudson declined to join the Metropolitan Police, but said that he was not one to see a fellow former officer go without assistance. Within twenty-four hours, Sir Lionel asked if Hudson would investigate the activities of an Irish gang suspected of arson in south London.

The gang, known as 'The Greens', were known to be running an extortion ring in the area in and around the Elephant and Castle. The police had not been able to put a stop to it and while many shopkeepers paid up, in recent months, those who didn't, were found in the burnt-out ruins of their establishments. Although this was not a case that would normally have interested Hudson or Brand, they took it on as a favour to Sir Lionel.

Not one of the gang members was ever seen to set any of the fires that they threatened shopkeeper after shopkeeper with, despite the detectives scouring accounts in papers and carrying out a few of their own interviews. Witness testimony, such as that which could be bribed from the locals, told not of a man carrying a fuel of some kind, but of a large fireball dropping as if from nowhere out of the sky and smashing into the targeted properties. Neither Hudson nor Brand

were entirely convinced by this testimony, but knew enough not to dismiss it as mere drunken imaginings brought on by too much gin. While examining the blackened and burnt out ruins of a butcher's shop Hudson pried loose a brick marked with a strange symbol and thinking that the symbol was somehow a 'black mark' that singled out the property to be set ablaze, they returned to the sites of previous blazes and found the same symbol at several of them. Having confirmed a connection, Hudson and Brand took the brick with the mark and placed it in one of the decrepit tenements that littered the East End. To prevent any conflagration harming anyone or spreading to adjacent buildings, the two men also hid twenty barrels of river water in the upstairs rooms. Brand had hired the local men at a shilling a piece to load and move the barrels so that they would douse any fire that started. Claiming that the 'experiment' was to test a new 'fireproofing paint' and that the public could not watch, Hudson and Brand stood across the street and awaited the arrival of the arsonist.

In the early hours of the morning the pair were just drifting off as a fireball the size of a horse suddenly dropped out of the sky at great speed. It hit the target house with a force that smashed the barrels and threw their contents into the air, shattered the house almost into its individual bricks, and knocked the two men to the ground. As the water splashed back to earth, an anguished howling emanated from the ruins. At first Hudson and Brand thought an animal or man had snuck into the house to sleep, but on entering the broken house, they found neither. Instead the howling came from something akin to a ball of flame, but a ball of flame which inexplicably alive even as it screamed and thrashed as its flames were doused and it began to evaporate into nothingness.



Shocked at what they had seen, Hudson and Brand fled back to their offices and bolted the door. Upon reflection, the pair realised that they had killed their first monster or demon and that there might be more monsters than the ones they had previously encountered. The world was beginning to look a lot more complex than either of them had ever imagined. Just as with Brand's run in with the Tcho-Tcho, both men feared the possibility of retaliation, but it was not forthcoming and although the brick with the mark remained in place, there were no more arson attacks upon the now burnt out tenement block. They determined that they yet remained hidden to those responsible for the arson and now that the creature at their command was no more the fires would stop. While they never found the individual responsible for the summoning or creation of the fire beast, there were no more fires that could be attributed to a similar creature, and the Irish gang's activities quietened for a time. Over the course of the next few weeks, Hudson and Brand searched each of the arson sites for bricks with strange marks and where found, smashed them to bits.

In his subsequent report to Sir Lionel, Hudson said that despite their best efforts, neither he nor Brand had seen any sign of the arsonist. Since there were no further arson attacks, Sir Lionel seemed to take Hudson's report at face value, though he did have his suspicions... In private, both Hudson and Brand had agreed that the best plan of action was not to inform Sir Lionel of the truth of their discoveries.

CASE 2: THE CASE OF THE TWINS (AUTUMN, 1881)

In late October, a man of about 30, wearing a good coat and top hat, was seen to stab another man through the heart with a sword concealed in his cane in Regent's Park. The victim, a man of obviously poorer means, was later identified as Michael Wynn, an unemployed labourer. There were four witnesses to the murder, a clerk and his betrothed, a house maid, and a cab driver. They all described the suspect in detail and their testimonies matched. The villain absconded on foot towards Marylebone Road. The case may not have piqued Hudson and Brand's interest had the witnesses not also mentioned a very strong smell of sulphur that accompanied the man. A week later he was seen again by the clerk in a street near Euston Street and the young man called for a constable. The gentleman, a certain Mr Adam Parvell, was taken to Holborn police station on Theobalds Road and questioned.

He attested to his innocence and gave an irrefutable alibi. At the time of the murder he was taking supper with none other than the noted explorer Richard Francis Burton who was visiting London from his diplomatic post in Trieste. Parvell was released and the case was put to one side until more evidence could be found.

After reading of it in the newspapers, Hudson thought the case worthy of continued enquiry, but that since Adam Parvell had an alibi, the agency should instead investigate Michael Wynn. Hudson learned that the police had dismissed the case after it transpired that the victim was an unemployed labourer

who had turned to thievery, but Wynn's wife revealed that her husband had been offered work by some 'toff'. Initially reluctant to reveal the nature of this work, with promises of money and discretion, Mrs Wynn told Hudson that her husband was hired to steal a very important stone artefact from a bookshop that specialised in hard to find books and objets d'art. She also said that she had a sketch that Michael had been given so that he could identify the desired object and Hudson purchased this from her. The sketch showed a rough stone with an inscription. Hudson and Brand were at a loss as to what culture it came from, but the sketch did include the name of the bookshop to be burgled – The Library of Dark Remembrance.

Located in the backstreets of Soho, when the pair approached the shop they found it closed, and seemingly for some time, given the amount of dust that had gathered about the windows. As they peered in, they noticed in the window the reflection of a young man behind them in the street. Looking bruised, beaten, sporting a nasty deep cut above his eye, and what appeared to be a serious wound in his chest, he was obviously watching the pair. Before either had to chance to act, the young man drew a revolver and began firing indiscriminately like a madman.

As the window to the dark and dingy shop shattered, Hudson and Brand dived to the pavement where Hudson's military experience took over. With one swift movement, Hudson pulled his old service revolver from his pocket and shot the young man dead. Fortunately, no one else was injured, but the sound of gunshots alerted the police and several constables were quickly on the scene.

Fortunately, when they arrived one of the police officers, Constable Williams, recognised Brand both from his articles in *The Daily News* and from his activities as a member of the Brave Bunch. Upon taking a statement from both gentlemen, Constable Williams detained rather than arrested them while his officers cordoned off the area and awaited the arrival of a superior officer. Constable Williams took a keen interest in the exchanges that followed between Hudson and Brand and Inspector Whiting, wanting to learn from all three men. Upon careful examination of the dead man's person, Inspector Whiting found a visiting card that read 'Mr Adam Parvell, esq.', a small rough stone which Hudson and Brand realised looked very much like the drawing given to them by the late Michael Wynn's widow, some money, a key to a room at the Euston Hotel, and a revolver which proved to be eerily similar to Mr Hudson's. It had the same nicks and repairs and the same serial number. Why someone would make a copy of his gun, Hudson had no idea. Inspector Whiting thought it best if Hudson and Brand accompany him to the Euston Hotel where he hoped more light could be cast upon the matter. Upon arriving at the hotel they were surprised to see the very twin of the man who lay dead a few miles away in Soho. When they called out to him, Parvell's twin took to his heels, forcing Inspector Whiting and Hudson and Brand to give chase.

Shouting at the fleeing figure did not halt him and once caught after a short chase, the quarry put up a fierce fight in which he took a firm strike from Hudson which split his cheek just beneath the eye. Stumbling back, Parvell's twin expressed his confusion at the actions of Hudson and Brand, but seeing the determination on their faces, managed to struggle out and draw a thin blade from his cane.

This was of little use against Hudson's trusted service revolver, which caused a nasty wound in his target's chest. Flailing in agony in the close confines of the bloody scuffle, the doppelganger swiped at Hudson with his free hand and in doing so yanked the weapon from him by the barrel as the detective stumbled backwards in the melee.

Before anyone could recover, the wounded figure hissed a sound that caused Brand's eyes to water and Hudson's head to ring with agony before disappearing from right in front of the detective duo, only leaving behind a stench of sulphur.

Inspector Whiting expressed his surprise at the turn of events and was further perplexed when the copy of the Hudson's gun found to be in Parvell's possession in Soho, had also disappeared from his pocket. Brand postulated that the stone had enabled Parvell to travel back in time, say an hour, and what they had just witnessed was the source of the bullet wound, Hudson's copied pistol, and how he was suddenly able to attack them outside the bookshop in Soho.

A day later, Hudson and Brand travelled to London Bridge and threw the stone into the dark waters so that it would be lost in the silt and away from any hands who may seek to use it. Rumours later began to reach 33 Golden Square of a gambler who had fleeced the best card players in London by knowing exactly what they had to play with before they did, but neither detective was ever able corroborate such rumours.

THE BUSINESS FIRMLY ESTABLISHES ITSELF

By the end of 1881, Hudson & Brand had been engaged in a number of mundane investigations, and had taken on a number of employees. This included a manservant named Markham, who had acquired the sobriquet 'The Castellan', to oversee the running of the house; a housekeeper, Mrs. Levi, to come in three days a week to manage the necessary duties of keeping the house-cum-office in good order; and a coachman, Stafford who, while independently employed would work around Golden Square in case he was needed by the agency.

CASE 3: THE SCREAMING SHADOW (CHRISTMAS 1881)

Life was ticking over nicely for the agency and yet, in the back of their minds, Hudson and Brand were ever mindful of the agency's 'vital business' – countering what supernatural threats as what might occur across the city.

With Christmas approaching there were reports of a 'Banshee' or spirit wandering the quiet streets and back alleys of Whitechapel. The local inhabitants had taken to hiding in their homes when the sound of wailing was heard, and whilst Hudson and Brand had no strong leads to go on, they were fascinated by the possibility of encountering such a spectre. Such was their naïveté.

On Christmas Eve, a young girl who was looking after her brother while her mother worked sent a neighbour to the

police, complaining of a mad and frightening old woman in the courtyard next door. The young constable sent to check on the woman found that the entrance had been blocked by a night-soil man's cart left in the alley. As he went to move it, the constable caught sight of the woman and by all accounts soiled himself. It was his sergeant, Archibald Parlow, who having heard of their exploits in such matters, that sent a man to summon Hudson and Brand to the scene.

The embarrassed young constable claimed to have seen a witch and at first, as they peered into the gloom of the courtyard, that was what Hudson and Brand, together with Sergeant Parlow at first thought they saw. When she stepped out of the fog, her black robes and shawl were revealed to be a funeral shroud, and worse, her hat to be a crown made of bone. About her waist was a scabbard and in her hand she held not a walking stick, but a silvered sword. This was strange enough, for not one of the three men could identify her clothing except to say that it was old, but it was her gaze that gave the men a terrible fright. Parlow threw up, Brand fell to his knees, and Hudson froze on the spot. Her face was beautiful, but it conveyed death in a way that none of them could explain. Nor could they identify the language she spoke when she addressed them, though all three claimed that they heard the distant sounds of battle and screaming accompanying her words.

"Who- Who are you... madam?" Stuttered Brand.

Seemingly confused at his words, the spirit opened her mouth again, but this time let forth a terrifying wail before fading away in a strange purple light. 'The Wailing Banshee of Whitechapel' has never been seen or heard again and has since become part of Whitechapel's folklore. Although the three never again spoke of the encounter with the spirit after that night, Hudson and Brand were able to call upon the services of Sergeant Parlow several times in the years to come, particularly when it came to strange goings on in Whitechapel.

CASE 4: THE DARKNESS OF THE GREEN (SPRING, 1882)

As the month of April brought its rains, rumours of increased Fenian activity spread throughout London. The Irish Republican Brotherhood had long been a thorn in the Crown's side and the capitol held its breath, waiting for violence to erupt. When it did, it was in Dublin rather than London, with the stabbings of the newly appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord Frederick Cavendish, and Thomas Henry Burke, the Permanent Undersecretary, in Phoenix Park, at the hand of a radical splinter group, the Irish National Invincibles. It would be followed by a more intensified campaign of violence in London, Liverpool, and Glasgow, and this would lead to the establishment of the Special Irish Branch the following year.

Of interest to Hudson and Brand were a group called 'The Greens', an Irish gang captained by a villain known as O'Riordan, notable from The Case of the Arsonists. It seemed that the Greens had a habit of making their adversaries disappear without trace. At first Brand needed convincing that the Greens were part of their 'special operations' since no direct link had been made between the gang and the rash of arson attacks that had beset the Elephant and Castle the previous

year. Hudson conceded that maybe they were not, but if they could disrupt their operations then it would be good for Great Britain none-the-less.

After observing members of the Greens go back and forth to an old cooperage in the East End, they deduced that illegal betting was taking place on the premises. Wagers were being placed on the outcome of bare knuckle fights and members of the city's criminal fraternities were all invited. It was seemingly a safe place to do business if you were part of the Underworld. Realising that further investigations would be necessary and that they were greatly outnumbered, they deferred raiding the cooperage in favour of gathering more solid evidence so that the police could enact arrests. Brand started to build a case against the seemingly mundane Greens, but both would be dead before their investigation would be completed.

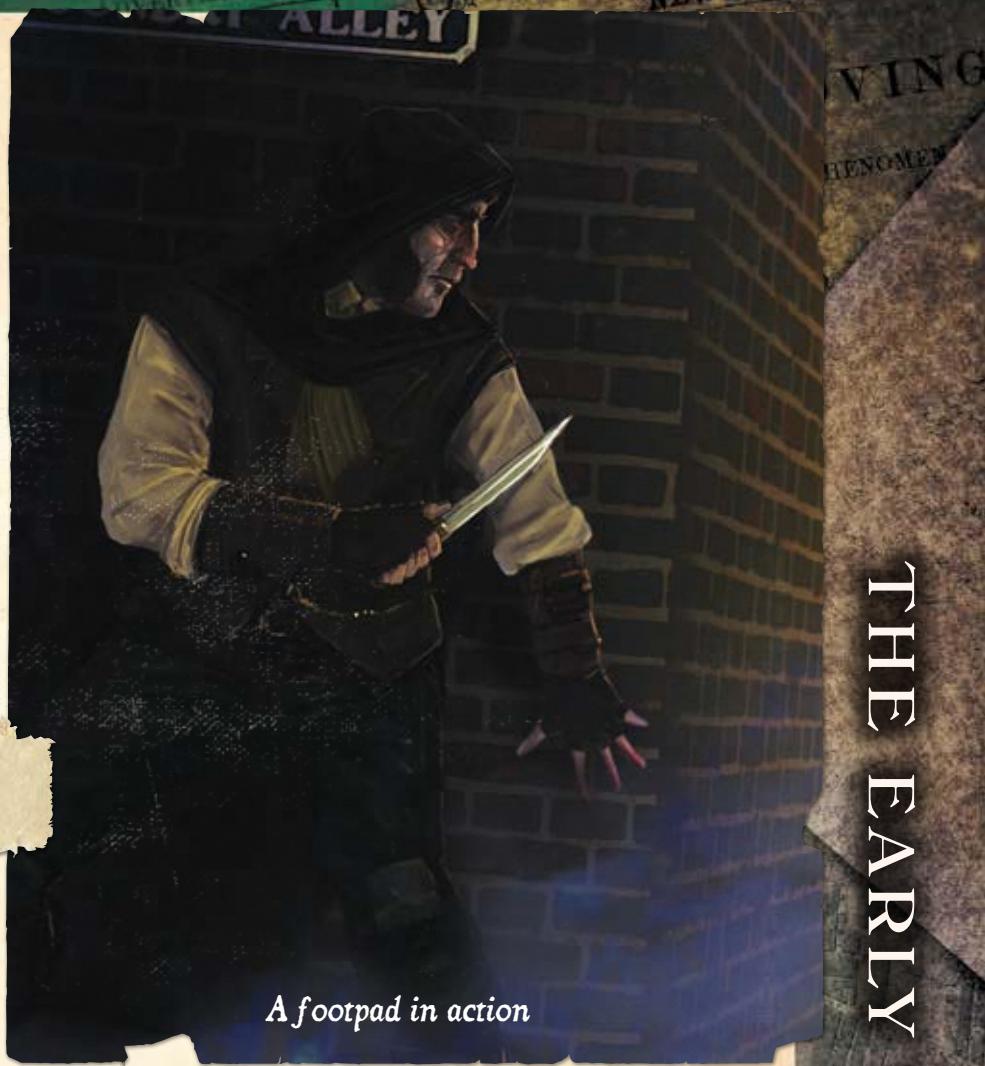
CASE 5: THE CURSED VIOLINIST (LATE SPRING, 1882)

As a lover of music, Brand often took in recitals and performances held across the city. In late April, he was pleased to obtain tickets to a performance by the noted French Violinist, Bertrand Grenier, at St. James' Hall on Regent Street. Grenier's baroque recital began well, much to the delight of the audience, but some fifteen minutes into his performance, the violinist seemed to sicken, becoming sweaty and pale. When he stopped and seemed to stumble, a few voices whispered that he was drunk or with fever. He attempted to continue, but collapsed unconscious onto the stage.

Both Brand and the violinist's agent, Henri Piché, rushed onto the stage to render assistance. As Brand leaned down to check on Grenier, he was momentarily taken aback by the Frenchman's violin, the strings of which he was sure, were 'wiggling' of their own volition, surely a sign of supernatural involvement. Together Brand and Piché helped Grenier off-stage, the agent calling out to the crowd that Monsieur Grenier had a temperature and nothing more. Back in his dressing room, his violin now locked in its case, Grenier seemed to recover, but had no idea what had befallen him.

His agent, Piché, expressed his concern that the violinist was working too much and suggested he take a holiday. Grenier would have none of it however and pushing aside both Brand and Piché, took up his violin again and began to play a most discordant melody. Grenier's playing became frenetic and the sound increasingly horrendous and suddenly before the three men, the air was rent by a swirling pale blue light out of which reached necrotic and leprous tendrils or tentacles into our world.

All three men had a clear view of directly into the light, but only Brand had the will to act while Piché stood transfixed and screaming. The detective quickly drew his revolver and



A footpad in action

with a single shot took off the little finger of the violinist's right hand and severed the strings. This stopped Grenier's playing and as quickly as it had appeared, the pale blue rent faded from sight, the fetid thing from beyond being fortunately denied entry into the world. There was a smell of cordite and brimstone in the air and as the door opened, the stage hands, summoned by the sound of screaming and a gunshot, discovered Brand with his pistol, a man screaming, and a violinist holding his bloodied hand. They set upon Brand and he took a small beating until Grenier told them to stop. Grenier gave laudanum to his agent, which calmed him, and in response to several questions, told Brand that he was given the music by an old woman outside a theatre in Paris. He thought it odd, but the music read beautifully. When he went back to find the old lady the next day he found that she, and the theatre, had disappeared.

This was the first time he had performed it in public and there had been no ill effects during rehearsal. On that night however, Grenier felt as though someone was taking over. Looking down at his violin, he was horrified to see that the strings now consisted of taut lengths of greasy flesh that wept blood as he played. Apart from its broken strings, the violin appeared unchanged, but this did not stop Grenier from burning the instrument a few days later. Subsequently, Grenier retired from public life and his agent was committed to Bethlehem hospital. He is incarcerated there still.

STRAND THEATRE.



EVERY EVENING,
AT 8.50.

CASE 6: A WAR LIKE NO OTHER (EARLY AUTUMN, 1881)

In the early autumn of September, 1882, Hudson and Brand invited Sergeant Parlow to take stock of both their enterprise and their investigations into the outré. The agency had enough regular work to declare a good profit for its second year of business and its library, gun cabinet, larder, wine cellar, and staff roster were well stocked. They had defeated, or at least, investigated six major incidents of supernatural occurrence, yet there seemed to be a lull in such events. Hudson was suspicious of this current lull and thought it the calm before the storm, whereas both Brand and Sergeant Parlow were happy at the relative calm. The Sergeant even opined that Mr Hudson should not dwell on such matters and should instead revel in a new found 'peace' in the war against agents of the darker powers. The 'peace' was not to last long, however.

On the 17th of September, Hudson and Brand received word that Sergeant Parlow had been stabbed and lay in a hospital bed fighting infection. At his bedside, they found the Sergeant awake and lucid, but on morphine for the pain. When asked what had happened, Parlow explained that he had been

assigned to a squad that was investigating the kidnapping of women off the streets in some of the more fashionable parts of London, such as Marylebone. Where they were taken, no one knew. Wondering whether any women from less salubrious districts had been taken, Parlow made inquiries of his own and learned from a 'dollymop' known as 'Black Lucy' told him that several girls had been taken from the streets they worked in recent weeks, including his own Whitechapel. On the fourth night of watching the streets of Whitechapel, Parlow observed a carriage that was being shunned by some of the local girls. In fact, Parlow suspected that they were actually frightened of this carriage, but this did not appear to dissuade one girl from climbing into it. As the coach passed him, Parlow could see it bore the mark of the Heligoland Company, an Anglo-German concern that facilitated trade between Germany and the Empire. The following day 'Black Lucy' told Parlow that Amelia, the girl who had boarded the carriage the previous night, had not returned. Knowing that Hudson and Brand preferred the stranger cases, he chose to investigate this mundane police matter on his own. After all, if there was a case to be broken, Scotland Yard might make him a detective.

Entering the premises of the Heligoland Company proved deceptively easy, the mere levering of a window, and Parlow was in. Perhaps this should have been a warning, but as he peered down from his perch, Parlow blanched at what he saw. Now he understood why the building lacked security, no one would dare steal from the building. Below him, workers were loading crates onto carriages, all women, all with various wounds about their persons and dried blood stains on their garments. Parlow told Hudson and Brand that he was convinced that the women were no longer alive, for all of them had a blank look in their eyes and all of the horses were skittish and restrained by their sullen faced coachmen.

Knowing that this was more than one man could deal with, Parlow decided that he should leave and get help from Hudson and Brand. As he turned to leave, Parlow heard a creaking sound above him and before he could react, a figure leapt from the dark and shoved a blade into the police sergeant's stomach. He could remember little of what happened in the hours afterward, except being chased by someone intent on his murder and then being found by 'Black Lucy' and her girls who hid him before taking him to the hospital.

Hudson and Brand left Parlow to recuperate and made preparations to visit the warehouse themselves. Arming themselves with rifle and revolver, they boarded Stafford's coach and sped their way to the premises of the Heligoland Company. Alighting a street away and creeping their way forward, they found that the warehouse had been cleared and seemingly all trace of activity removed. That was, until Brand noticed the trail of muddy wet footprints that led down and into the river. Hudson speculated that some of those who were carrying the contents to a nearby vessel might have fallen in and, cursed with undeath, not drowned but merely walked out, sodden clothes and all. Looking out on the river, they noticed a small steam ship making all speed down the Thames as though trying to escape. Surveying the vessel through a spyglass, Brand confirmed it to be the vessel they were looking for, the deck was crowded by terrible lifeless forms which somehow still moved. After looking over the ship himself with the spyglass, Hudson took up his rifle and took aim. The loud crack of a single shot rang out and for a moment nothing happened.

"You've missed, Hudson," said Brand.

"Have I?" replied Hudson. A few seconds later the oil lamp that Hudson had shattered spilled its fiery contents onto the crowded deck of the boat. Not enough to cause a serious fire on its own, it nevertheless set alight the hems of the dresses worn by the unliving prostitutes on deck. Even as they burned, they did not move. They just stood there, wreathed in flame and setting fire to the ship they were on.

The boat would be recovered by police the next day and its story would be told in the news-papers as a tragedy, a soiree of dollymops and dockers gone awry through misadventure. Sergeant Parlow's recovery was aided knowing the evil had been stopped and being able to sleep more easily.

CASE 7: THE POST-MORTEM PHOTOGRAPHER (MID-JANUARY 1883)

In January, 1883, several of Brand's former journalist colleagues approached the agency with strange stories of dead children returning to their distraught families, seeking entry into their homes before disappearing. Hudson and Brand, fearing the worst, began to investigate. By all accounts, none of the children were violent and were universally described as pale as bone. The cases had a lot in common – all of the children had come from affluent families and all of them had died within the last three months, though the causes of the death were not the same.

None of the families involved were prepared to talk to the detectives, but the same could not be said of their servants. One such interviewee revealed that the child who had returned to his family was different in one unique way. The young boy had lost an arm several years before his death and when he returned following his death, he was missing the wrong arm. This was the key to the mystery, for Brand quickly realised that all of the spectral children were in fact mirror images. Examining a photograph of the armless boy taken to memorialise him after his death, Brand noted that it too was a mirror-image, which was the norm with daguerreotype photography. Following up on this new lead, the duo discovered that all of these photographs had been taken by the same man, one James Perwick.

Hudson and Brand quickly located Perwick's studio, only to find it locked up and deserted. After forcing the back door, they found alongside the usual plates and chemicals of the photographer's art, some very unusual lenses packed inside crates with what looked like Chinese shipping labels attached. In other crates there were more pictures of dead children and, far more worryingly, possessed a few pictures of both Hudson and Brand interviewing the families of victims. Given the size of the equipment required and the time it took to take a photograph, the duo could not imagine how the photographer had gone unnoticed. They found further signs Perwick had been following their investigation in a notebook, with notes of their movements and even noted down fragments of conversation they had shared. The notebook also made mention of a 'Mr Yuying' to whom he would supply the pictures to.

The investigation was cut short when some of the dangerous chemicals accidentally caught fire as the detectives were moving through the workshop. Hudson and Brand escaped unscathed, but the ensuing conflagration destroyed the photographer's premises. Hudson suspected the fire was some sort of trap left by Perwick, no doubt hoping to rid himself of the pair and destroy the evidence in one stroke. After the fire the hauntings ceased, but the photographer and the camera he used were never found.

CASE 8: THE HORROR IN THE TUNNELS (SUMMER, 1883)

In the spring, work to expand London's sewer system was marred by a series of disappearances. No bodies were found and the police made no headway in the case. The testimony from the witnesses, while unreliable, convinced Superintendent Hooker to summon Hudson and Brand. Warren Pierce, the chief engineer, resented the pair's presence when he learned they were investigating, convinced they were charlatans. He insisted on accompanying them when they interviewed the witnesses.

These eyewitnesses claimed that one of the missing workers, Henry Knowles, had been whistling to himself shortly before he disappeared. Knowles insisted somebody was whistling back. He went to investigate and, after a final shrill whistle, had gone missing in the tunnels. One of the eyewitnesses, Thomas Larkin, went on to say that he saw some of victims after they had disappeared, wandering the sewer tunnels near where they had been lost, apparently fascinated by their surroundings. He claimed that they spoke but 'didn't sound right' and misremembered basic details like their own names (often confusing them with those of other victims). Larkin claimed that Knowles tried to get him to 'come see something', but he got scared and ran away. He refused to go into the tunnels again.

Intrigued, Hudson and Brand resolved to investigate the recently excavated tunnels themselves, and given the events of previous investigations, took the precaution of arming themselves. Pierce, who remained convinced the disappearances were entirely mundane, insisted that he accompany them, asserting it was for their own safety.



CHAPTER 3

With Hudson and Brand armed, and all three of them equipped with lamps, ropes, and picks, searched the tunnels. At the most recently excavated site they discovered that a worker had broken through into a network of chambers far older than the more recent construction. Pierce said that there was no record of these chambers, which were not constructed of brick, but stone with the walls were engraved with strange symbols. Hudson and Brand took rubbings of these hieroglyphs before moving deeper into the labyrinthine tunnels and it was here that they encountered one of the missing workers. When they tried to communicate with him, he echoed the words spoken to him before leaping at the trio and seizing Warren Pierce. Hudson and Brand attempted to pry him off, but he was inhumanly strong and Pierce's leg was sprained in the struggle. Hudson emptied his revolver into the aggressor and while this did not seem to harm him, it was enough to distract him and Brand was able to pull Pierce away. In fact, the bullet wounds merely seemed to fascinate the strangely altered worker and this allowed Hudson and Brand to flee, carrying a terrified Pierce with them. Behind them they could hear the worker, still calling out to them with borrowed phrases. Pierce claimed that, while being dragged to freedom, he saw the worker's human guise slip, but he seemed unable or unwilling to describe the terrible shape and form he saw.

With Pierce's support, as well as the project's dwindling funds, Hudson and Brand managed to convince the backers of the sewer project to abandon it. Pierce's final act as its chief engineer was to fill in and seal off the new construction. Despite their best efforts, Hudson and Brand could not find anyone able to translate the hieroglyphics.

CASE 9: THE DWELLERS BELOW (AUTUMN, 1883)

Apart from a housebreaking attempt in April which Markham saw off with a shotgun, the rest of spring and the summer of 1883 passed without incident. However, reports in the newspapers regarding a recent spate of disturbances at the city's graveyards gave Hudson and Brand pause for thought. They weren't robberies or desecrations, but strange skulking figures had been seen sneaking around cemeteries and strange 'cooing' or 'meeping' sounds had disturbed the night watchmen's quiet vigil.

Eventually the detectives were approached directly by The London Cemetery Company to investigate regarding these nocturnal disturbances, as the police would not as no crime had been committed. While visiting the scene of an encounter, the pair were approached by one Bill Scot, and an unusual story began to emerge. Contrary to original concerns about monsters and the like, Hudson and Brand heard from the stonemason that he often conversed with the 'Nature Spirits' and found them most agreeable. Some of his fellows scoffed and suggested he laid off the liquor but Hudson could sense he was being truthful.

Resolved to learn more about these nocturnal visitors to our world and to see if they posed any threat, the pair decided to wait with the stonemason until after dark and to see if he would be visited upon by these 'gulls' as he called them. Sure enough, a little after the hour of two, a soft meeping could be heard and out popped a repugnant, almost canine creature, spotted in patches of bristles, slightly stooped, but perhaps 5 foot in height. It stopped and raising its head, sniffed the air with its snout. The stonemason stepped out from his hiding



place and pointing to an object the thing clutched in its heavy paw, said, "Here, here little chap. What have you brought for me?" Pausing its sniffing, the creature eyed the stonemason with caution, before inhaling sharply again, this time in alarm. It snarled past the stonemason at Hudson and Brand behind him.

"It's alright little fella! They're friends!" cried Bill, but it was to no avail. The creature grabbed the stonemason and with some force, pulled him into the grave it had emerged from. Hudson and Brand leapt to their feet from behind a tombstone where they had been hiding and gave chase. Jumping down into the grave they found a narrow earth passage, recently dug, and followed it. Even with Brand's lamp it became dark, hard to breathe, and claustrophobic.

After a few minutes Hudson and Brand came to a small room where Bill Scott's clay pipe lay broken together with a long, bone-carved pipe on the floor in a pool of blood, large enough to suggest that Bill Scott was already dead. From all around them came a snuffling, a snapping of teeth, and growling. Though they could not see the sources of this susurruus, the detectives surmised that not only were they surrounded, but the stonemason was almost certainly lost, they retreated at pace the way they came, grabbing the unusual pipe as they fled. With shadows chasing them all the way back down the tunnel, Hudson pulled his revolver and let loose several shots behind him, deafening both himself and Brand in the process. They quickly reached the grave and hauled themselves out, before fleeing the cemetery. Feeling they had a lucky escape, the pair nevertheless kept up an occasional vigil upon the cemetery. The angry glares from the stonemason's fellows told Hudson and Brand that they blamed the duo for their friend's disappearance.

OTHER INCIDENTS OF NOTE

Although the main areas of interest for Hudson and Brand were the cases they undertook (or, in some instances, undertook them), it became apparent all too quickly after engaging with the hidden world of eldritch forces, that just by being made aware of their existence Hudson and Brand's previous blindness to these otherworldly powers would be replaced with horrible clarity. This dark new world that had opened to the detectives would rudely intrude in small ways; it was a rare and welcome night when they would sleep easily. Having their eyes opened to the obscure, they now began to notice its influence upon London.

The agency had also performed a variety of more mundane cases, and it was they who rescued the reputation of Anthony Rowbotham, a foreign office official falsely accused of treason; uncovered a bribery attempt by a foreign power which aimed to cause discontent amongst the British work-force; and solved the robbery of Spaulding & Ross, a London city bank. Perhaps there may be a time when these cases can come to

light without scandal or risk to reputation and life, but for now these other tales must remain locked away.

At the same time, both men began suffering troubled dreams of great silent seas, their surfaces darkened as though an enormous form moved beneath the waves, and of cities of great ziggurats and menhirs raised beneath unknown skies by inhuman masters in terrible worship of their unknown gods, yet long fallen into disrepair. Once Brand attempted to sketch one of the settlements he recalled from a dream, but when Mrs Levi encountered it whilst cleaning his room it apparently caused quite a stir with her and as a consequence, the drawing was thrown into the fireplace and Brand made no further attempts to catalogue these visions through illustration.

There was also more than one occasion where 33 Golden Square was targeted by the criminal element of London – or perhaps something more sinister. One late evening whilst Hudson and Brand were in attendance of a spiritualist's séance (to ascertain whether they were a charlatan or a true practitioner of necromantic skills), a pair of thugs somehow made their way into the apartment's garden. With careful precision that Constable Williams said looked to be the work of professional thieves, they entered via the back door and proceeded to carefully take several items they must have assumed to be of great worth.

Markham, having taken a nap whilst the detectives were out, claims to have been awoken by the most ungodly of squealing wails, later claiming the noise was what he imagined a banshee's scream would have sounded like (putting Hudson and Brand in mind of the Shrieking Shadow). He mentioned that his alarm clock was also going off (set so as to rise in good time for the return of Hudson and Brand), and that by the time he had gathered his wits and turned it off the whole apartment was as silent as the grave. Taking up his cricket bat he went to check the parlour whereupon he was astonished to discover the body of one of the thieves by the library, his face contorted into a rictus grin and his nails drawing blood from the gouges in his head he had made from gripping across his ears so tightly. The man was quite dead, and the bone pipe was found lying by the open door to the garden, with a single shoe, a flat cap (neither of which seemed to belong to the dead burglar) and a bag filled with various items from the parlour also on the threshold. It was assumed the other criminal fled the scene. From that night on, Markham made sure to keep a loaded pistol in his bedside drawer, and the bone pipe tightly secured by twine to the gun cabinet.



THE PRIME YEARS

GOLDEN YEARS OF PERIL

The early years of the detective agency had been the most taxing and arduous periods of either Hudson or Brand's lives, not just physically, but also mentally. By the beginning of 1884, a sort of jaded fatigue had settled in, as if a weariness and resignation to the horrors that they faced had settled into their very bones. Where the detectives saw the minds of others snap or splinter in the face of weirdness beyond what was known, Hudson and Brand held firm. They had their beliefs, a small but dedicated network of allies, and they had each other. In the years to come Hudson and Brand would need all three if they were to survive the new reality of the world around them.

Despite the strain on their resolve wrought by their outré investigations and against the odds, Hudson and Brand's efforts were not without their triumphs. Such victories would often be small with little to mark their achievements. Worse, they felt even smaller given that all too often the darkness would regroup, insanity would once more creep insidiously into the minds of their fellow man, and what they had achieved would last no longer than they could maintain their vigilance in one place.

But against it all, Hudson and Brand tried, and they would not stop.

CASE 10: THE OXONIAN MUMMY (LATE SPRING, 1884)

Hudson and Brand were no strangers to the British Museum, their having assisted in the recovery of several items stolen from the museum as well as having donated certain 'mundane' artefacts from previous cases. By necessity, both had become avid amateur scholars of the past, their having found many clues to more sinister histories and allusions to otherworldly events among the museum's exhibits and archives.

During one such educational visit, whereupon they were taking great pains to examine the text of the Rosetta stone and the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptian language to better understand references to a 'Black Pharaoh' mentioned in a manuscript they had acquired – 'Forgot' Kings of auld Aegypt' – they found themselves in conversation with a young man who expressed a similar interest. As their conversation turned from linguistics to Egyptian theology, the young man

careless explorer had

been placed in a madhouse at Huntingdon.loathsome black woman from Guinea.
after the death of Lady Jermyn, he himself assumed complete

introduced himself as Peter Wellingham, a Classics student at Oxford with an interest in Egyptian history. Although of a friendly and open disposition, something in the student's earnest speech and turns of phrase gave the detectives pause for thought as the young man made references to thaumaturgy or 'heka', which from their previous researches they knew to be Egyptian magic. He spoke of the spells he had read of in Birch's translation of the *Book of the Dead* and airily jested as to what would happen should the spells ever work, but something in his manner told suggested to Hudson and Brand that Wellingham was not being merely flippant. Saying his goodbyes, the student said that he had planned to examine several of the mummies that the museum held in its collection.

Uneasy at the direction of the conversation, Hudson and Brand politely took their leave and immediately paid a visit to the Keeper of Oriental Antiquities, Samuel Birch, also the translator of the Book of the Dead, to warn him of the Wellingham's interest in the museum's collection. They informed him that under no circumstances should the Oxford student be allowed access to a mummy, but fortunately, Birch informed that he had already denied the young man access to the museum's collection of mummies. Indeed, the young man had taken it poorly and seemed most put-out at the denial. When Hudson and Brand returned to the exhibit, there was no sign of the student.

That night, there was a strange incident at the museum. One of the glass cases containing a mummy was heavily damaged and a night watchman was found dead, great blue-black bruises about his neck and a look of pure terror on his still staring eyes. Nothing was taken and no means of entry was discovered for the would-be-burglar. When Parlow dropped by to 33 Golden Square to inform the detectives of the particulars, he also noted that what the papers did not report in their sensationalist coverage of the incident was that the display case glass appeared to have been broken from the inside. Hudson informed the police sergeant that they already had some idea as to the culprit.

Fearing the possibility of another incident, the detectives asked Samuel Birch for permission to spend the night in the museum. The curator was reluctant at first, but relented in the face of Hudson and Brand's determination to prevent any further loss of life. After waiting for several hours in the darkness of the closed museum, alone amongst the ancient bodies of Egyptian royalty and their possessions. Then, Brand fancied he could hear something akin to chanting in an unknown tongue and this was quickly confirmed by Hudson who pointed to a shadowy figure standing on the ledge outside a window overlooking the exhibits. The pair drew their revolvers and as they carefully moved to get a better look, they heard the sound of tapping upon glass, not coming

from the window, but nearby. Turning their heads to look, they were shocked to see a withered, bandaged arm reaching out of its sarcophagus and knock against its display case. Startled at the sight, Brand froze and involuntarily pulled the trigger of his gun, the bullet shattering the window through which they could see the shadowy figure. In the instance that the glass shattered, the arm emanating from the sarcophagus went limp. Of the figure that they had spied lurking, there was no sign.

The next day, Hudson and Brand sent a telegram to Exeter College, Oxford, enquiring about Peter Wellington. There was no time to follow up on their suspect, as they were soon embroiled in the Case of the Observant Butler, but the British Museum's Egyptian displays were not troubled again. Several days later the detectives received a telegram informing them that Wellington had left the college for Cairo, stating that he wanted to pursue his interest in Egyptian history in the field.

CASE II: THE OBSERVANT BUTLER (EARLY SUMMER 1884)

Late one Friday night in early June, Markham informed Hudson and Brand that a Mr Edgar Thomas had called upon the agency. Before admitting him to their offices, Markham noted to his employers that judging by his countenance and smart appearance, that Mr Thomas must also be a butler or a personal servant of some kind. When shown into their office, Mr Thomas was revealed to be roughly thirty years of age with a prominent nose and dark hair, smartly-dressed and well-spoken, and clearly troubled.

Markham's summation proved correct for Mr Thomas explained that he was the gentleman's gentleman to one Robert Protheroe, the son of a successful businessman. Robert had a house on Berkeley Square and maintained a rather free and easy lifestyle, spending the allowance permitted by his father on entertaining young actresses, frequent dining out, and indulging in all the delights that the city had to offer a young man of means. There was no condemnation in Mr Thomas' story, for as he explained, he was paid a reasonable wage and Robert was not an unreasonable employer.

However, as of late, the valet had noted a change in his employer's attitude. Robert's father had expressed his disapproval of his son's lifestyle and Thomas had even heard him threatening to reduce not only his allowance, but a portion of his inheritance. This led to an ongoing animosity between father and son, and rather than compromise his lifestyle to suit his father's demands and become an active part of his father's successful export company, Robert sulked. Further, while he still kept fashionably late hours, these were no longer in society, there were fewer visits from glamorous young ladies, and he stopped attending shows. When he was home, he frequently retired to his study to read with a bottle or two of burgundy. This continued for some weeks before Robert received a parcel wrapped in yellow paper containing a book, the only clue as to its sender being a note signed 'N' and some scrawled oriental script which Thomas could not identify. The young man devoted all his attention to this book, reading until the small hours in his study. Worse, Robert grew surly towards Thomas and took to spending hours at a time in the cellar, in the dark. After listening at the door, Edgar thought he could hear some manner of grating, as though glass against stone or similar – a sound he was quite unfamiliar with, but that that was the closest he could describe.

Jermyn went
which had a
al appearance
if possible,
and so
grandfather
his great
ers of the C
opposed ant
mounting all
these civilisa
Several Pa
placed in a r
coming bac
the boy.

E PENN

Jermyn went
which had a
al appearance
if possible,
and so
grandfather
his great
ers of the C
opposed ant
mounting all
these civilisa
Several Pa
placed in a r
coming bac
the boy.

OMS
LUTHER
TOMAS
HOLMES
LUTHER
TOMAS

OMS
LUTHER

With their interest already piqued by the mystery of the parcel, Hudson asked the valet if there was anything noteworthy about the book that he could recall. Thomas said that it seemed quite ordinary, except that it had what looked like shards of stained glass embedded in the cover. Nevertheless, the detectives thought that this matter at least worth a cursory inspection and so resolved to accompany Thomas back to his master's house. Once there, the valet quietly let Hudson and Brand into the house where it was confirmed that Robert was in the cellar. As they listened at the door, Hudson and Brand confirmed the sound of glass grinding on stone that Thomas had heard, but there was also a quiet voice, speaking in a language they did not understand, but Brand was able to recognise – Aklo, a tongue spoken by the Tcho-Tcho sorcerer.

Sharing a look, the detectives drew their revolvers and requested a light from Thomas. Alarmed at this turn of events, the valet insisted that he should go in first to confront Robert for the sake of his father, although as a precaution, Thomas also armed himself with a poker held behind his back. Softly opening the door, he entered, lamp held out before him.

There was a brief cry of "Put it out!" before a long, piercing scream was heard coming closer to the valet out of the shadows. At this, both Hudson and Brand seized the back of Edgar's coat and pulled him backwards towards them as the screams turned to a strangled gurgle, guttural and bubbling, before finally ceasing. Keeping their revolvers firmly trained on the door, Hudson and Brand had Thomas go for help from the police, and to tell them it was Hudson and Brand requesting assistance. Sergeant Parlow returned with the valet and together with the detectives, they entered and examined the cellar.

All they found in the cellar was a strange series of shapes chalked on the floor, shapes that made eyes water if the detectives tried to follow them, and the prone form of Robert Protheroe. It appeared that he had clawed out his own eyes. Sergeant Parlow sent for his superiors and a doctor and within a few hours, once Robert's father was contacted, the situation was quietly hushed up. Thomas took severance pay from Robert's father and moved to Paris where he entered the service of the famed French singer Madame Adelaide. As to Robert Protheroe, he spent the rest of his unhappy days in an asylum, occasionally mumbling about the moving lines and of the eye within the rods.

Of the book mentioned by Thomas, there was no sign.

CASE 13: THE LOST PENDANT (WINTER, 1884)

Captain Hudson had long been friends with Major Sir Reginald Burnett through their mutual membership of the Naval and Military Club and thus also friends with his wife, Lady Emily Burnett. They maintained this friendship by letter as their military postings took them to different parts of the world and this correspondence continued between Hudson and Lady Emily after her husband died in 1883. Thus, Lady Emily was aware that her husband's friend had established a detective agency and was working with an ex-journalist whose work she admired.

In September, 1884, Lady Emily invited Hudson and Brand to tea. Although the agency was busy with several cases, Lady Emily and her husband had spent many years in India and amassed quite a collection of curios, so both men were keen for the opportunity to visit and peruse this collection. Further, Lady Emily not only had an interest in foreign fauna and flora, her husband had had a hothouse built into their Westminster town house.

As they sat done to tea, it was clear to Hudson and Brand that Lady Emily was in a distressed state. When pressed, Lady Emily revealed that she had lost one of her mother's pendants, a little-worn piece, but still something of great sentimental value. She was sure that it was still in the house, as there were no signs of a break in and she had never worn it herself. Since it would give them a chance to look over the house's curio collection, the duo offered to help her look for the lost pendant. After briefly describing the pendant to them, Lady Emily suggested that she show Hudson and Brand the portrait of her mother in which she was wearing it. As she led her guests through the collection to the portrait, Lady Emily casually informed them that they should also be on the lookout for a snake that had recently gone missing from the house's small collection of reptiles, assuring them that it was not venomous, but rather a constrictor of the python family. Both men found this more amusing than alarming and insisted they would detain the creature should they discover it.

Unfortunately, Hudson and Brand's amusement was cut short at the sight of the portrait. Their mood became one of the utmost seriousness. Visible through the amber of the pendant was a symbol they had both encountered before in a disturbing pamphlet from the Library of Dark Remembrance, that of the Yellow Sign. Discovery of the pendant was now of the highest priority, as was discovering how such a piece of jewellery could have come into the family's possession.

When asked about it, Lady Emily told Hudson and Brand that her father had picked it up on his travels and given it to her mother shortly before she became ill; a terribly sad period for all concerned as she was quite disturbed before the end came. The physicians were at a loss to explain her demise and attributed it to cancer.

At that moment, Brand noted a swift shape moving at the corner of his eye and realised it was the escaped snake. Bending down to search for it beneath a case containing taxidermised birds of paradise, the thing that confronted Brand was no mere python, but a twisted creature with blackened, barbed skin and burning yellow eyes. He cried out in alarm and stumbled backwards, barely having time to move aside as it lunged for him, fangs bared. Within he glimpsed the shine of metal and the sheen of the amber set into the pendant which was now lodged in the serpent's throat.

Seizing a polearm from a nearby display, Lady Emily shooed the creature away from Brand so that he could attain his feet again. Hudson was also in the process of arming himself when Lady Emily let out a cry and fell to the ground, the slithering creature's jaws locked onto her ankle. Her complexion turned grey with an alarming speed, her skin beginning to crack as though made of old paper. Before them, her eyes glassed over as they wept black, oily tears, but there was nothing that either Hudson or Brand could do; in a minute her body had cracked and partially crumbled away into a pile of ash leaving not even a solid bone in her body. With a grim

resignation, Brand sought out the most flammable materials he could muster and began a fire, which would soon engulf half the house before being extinguished. Although regarded as suspicious, neither Hudson nor Brand were charged, and it was concluded that Lady Emily must have dropped a lamp or candelabra when startled by the escaped snake.

Despite a thorough search of the property, the Yellow Serpent was never found. What were thought to be Lady Emily Burnett's remains were interred at her family crypt in Hampshire, which Hudson and Brand would visit more than once to pay their respects before their disappearance.

CASE 18: THE MATCHSTICK GIRL (SUMMER-WINTER 1885)

One fine, warm evening in July, 1885 Markham answered the bell at 33 Golden Square to a raggedly dressed matchstick seller. Instead of offering to sell the boxes of matches on the tray, the young girl began to speak about knives and bodies and singing in a cellar, and realising that the girl might be related to one the agency's outré investigations, Markham asked her to wait and called for his employers' attention. By the time Hudson responded and came downstairs, Markham had hold of the girl's wrist, which he described as being deathly pale, to prevent her from running away. As Hudson reached out for her, she broke Markham's grip and in a frenzy of young limbs and tearful apologies, the latter as if she had suddenly realised the improper things she had been saying, she ran out of the square. By the time Hudson was able to follow her, the matchstick seller was lost in the evening crowd.

In her haste to get away though, the young girl had dropped several boxes of matches from her tray, each bearing the Three Beacons brand. When Hudson discussed the matter with Brand later that evening, it was decided that they should avoid investigating the brand's manufacturer directly, since its employees could be the very people that the girl was attempting to tell them about. Instead they decided to split their efforts. While Brand would investigate the matchstick brand and its manufacturer, Hudson would arm himself with sweets and halfpenny bribes and spend the next day approaching other girls selling the same brand to find out more about it and to perhaps find the girl.

By the end of the day, Hudson had little to show for his efforts; there were hundreds of matchstick sellers and whilst some gave him information he thought could be useful, there was nothing solid. As he was returning to 33 Golden Square at dusk and the lamps of London were lit, Hudson was sure he spied a familiar face across a busy street – the pale girl was standing, watching him intently as all the world moved about her. She seemed to be speaking, but amidst the din of the traffic she was inaudible. Yet as he hurried to cross the street, a hansom cab blocked Hudson's way, and by the time he reached the spot where she was standing, she was gone.

Meanwhile, Brand had identified the Three Beacons brand as being manufactured at a factory owned by Simeon Chadwyck, an ambitious industrialist with a string of unsuccessful business ventures behind him, though his luck appeared to

have changed of late with his involvement in the matchstick industry. Reputed to be an impersonal fellow with a rather abrupt and rude manner, Chadwyck was known to have held a minor managerial position within the Heligoland Trading Company before leaving under a cloud in 1882. As he delved into the agency's records, Brand caught sight of a short, female figure standing in the room behind him, out of the corner of his eye. At first he thought it was Mrs Levi, but then he got the impression was that it was a young girl and that she was not moving, but simply watching him. A slight chill ran down his spine as nothing happened for a few moments, but slowly with one hand reaching out for a letter-opener, Brand turned to look. When he did, there was nothing there. Brand was quite alone and he chided himself for jumping at phantoms and went to pour himself a brandy. When he returned, it was then that he noticed the Three Beacons brand box of matches sat on the mantelpiece. He was sure that it had not been there before, after all, Hudson had taken the only box they had with him.

This was to be the first of these semi-regular incidences, with both Hudson and Brand catching sight of the match seller several times more while in pursuit of other cases. Each time the detectives attempted to reach her they would be unsuccessful and none of those they questioned would, or could, provide any firm clues as to her whereabouts. So, they turned their efforts to determining what it was she was saying. In the meantime, every now and again, just when another case seemed to be confounding the detectives' efforts, another box of matches would appear in 33 Golden Square.

The Three Beacons factory itself was briefly investigated in the dead of night with the aid of stout rope and dark clothing, but it yielded nothing more than an appreciation for the tough nature of Sheffield-made locks. Whilst conditions did not appear ideal, the factory yielded no secrets.



It was only after months of sightings and some difficult lip-reading that Hudson and Brand finally pieced together the words that she was mouthing, "They lie beneath the place of Simeon". Obviously, this pointed towards Simeon Chadwyck, which suggested several possible places to search, but none of them stood out as likely candidates. While discussing the matter, Mrs Levi overheard them and suggested that its meaning in Hebrew could be interpreted as "He who listens to the word of God". From his research into Chadwyck and the Three Beacons factory, Brand knew that it possessed a chapel. This gave the detectives somewhere to commence their search. As they approached the factory in the dead of night, Hudson and Brand spotted a pale-faced girl watching them from a doorway, then another on a street corner, and then again, silent sentinel after silent sentinel. Stealing into the factory, the detectives located the chapel where they could hear the faint sound of a man's voice – it was coming from below. Although there was no obvious means of access, a search of the chapel eventually revealed a latch which opened a hidden door beyond which steps spiralled downwards. From below, the man's voice was heard more clearly, lyrical and pleasant, but with a sweetness that turned foul and sickly as the detectives descended the steps, and which could not be removed save for harsh scouring.

The sight that greeted the two detectives from the bottom of the stairs incensed them and drove both into a blind rage. Though they would not speak of the horrors they witnessed being performed, three bodies were recovered by police that night, all male and with multiple gunshot wounds – including Simeon Chadwyck. A dozen emaciated young girls were discovered and freed from underground cells, along with the remains of a dozen more, while multiple specialist 'ritual sacrifice' blades, including several used for flensing, were also recovered, and later destroyed.

When Hudson and Brand asked the freed children about the girl they had encountered, they already had a dark suspicion to the nature of her fate which was confirmed by the survivors. Her name had been Emily and she had been the very first girl chosen by Simeon Chadwyck a year ago to the day the detectives descended below the Three Beacons factory.

CASE 14: UNDERGROUND SURPRISE (WINTER 1885)

In the winter of 1885, Superintendent Hooker brought a case to the agency. He reported to the detectives that during the recent winter months, vagrants had been taking to underground stations to seek shelter from the cold. Now this had been reported in the newspapers, but what was not widely known were the rumours that some of them failed to leave their refuge. This was first noticed by Terrence Shovel, a member of the Salvation Army who noted that several regular patrons had stopped coming to the army's soup kitchens. Shovel alerted the local constable, Harold Dosett, who made some enquiries. From these Dosett learned that there was no record of the vagrants having perished and that no one seemed to have seen them since their having gone into the Underground. Dosett reported this to his sergeant and suggested that either London Underground staff or vigilantes had encouraged the missing men and women to move on.

Upon learning of this, Superintendent Hooker had questions of his own – where were these people going? Why had they not been seen since being spotted going down into the Underground? What might be causing this?

From the following night Hudson and Brand began spending their nights observing certain Underground stations and questioning London's homeless population. What was gleaned was patchy at best, with the promise of beer or a hot meal more likely to garner useful information than the prospect of helping their fellow man or pointing out that they could be next to vanish. Hudson also went to interview Terrence Shovel, only to discover that the Salvationist had also gone missing. When he re-traced Shovel's last steps, Hudson uncovered uncomfortable intelligence – the Salvationist had travelled home via the Underground a few nights before and not been seen since.

Terrence Shovel's disappearance led Hudson and Brand to question other Salvationists and one intimated that she knew something more than her fellows. Alice Moorcock, who worked at the same soup kitchen as Shovel, approached them as they were leaving and quietly informed the duo they could uncover more if they visited the Rose and Crown, a public house in Whitechapel. Her concern for Shovel was obvious, but Miss Moorcock also seemed afraid and would not say nothing more.

The following evening, Hudson and Brand visited the Rose and Crown, a back-alley establishment thick with smoke and unwholesome odours. After asking a few subtle questions, they were directed to a bedraggled gentleman sitting by himself in a booth. The man was ill-kempt, having foregone a shave for several days, and he had clearly been partaking of a large quantity of beer judging by the empty bottles and strong smell of it on his breath. Although he had wrapped himself in rough blankets, it was clear from the soiled Salvation Army uniform that he wore underneath that this was Terrence Shovel, something the man confirmed with a sob. Previously a teetotaller, Shovel said that he had fallen from grace, having spent the past few days attempting to drown his thoughts here in the Rose and Crown after ceasing all communication with the Salvation Army apart from Alice – the two had previously been close and he had warned her away from using the London Underground in a garbled, rambling tirade of curses and pleas.

It took a little persuasion and the promise of more beer to extricate the man from the pub, but Hudson and Brand managed to bundle Shovel into a cab and take him back to 33 Golden Square to sober him up and ask further questions. When they passed an Underground station in their cab, Terrence became visibly agitated and started moaning and sobbing, and this would last until it was long out of sight.

Once safely returned to Golden Square, the babbling Salvationist was calmed with a mug of coffee by Markham and began to tell a foul story in a quavering whisper. He had followed a vagrant, a regular at the soup kitchen, down into Shadwell Underground Station where he watched the man slip off the platform and into the tunnel where he found himself a comfortable spot to sleep away from the tracks. Nothing happened for some minutes, but then both the vagrant and Shovel were startled to hear the voice of a child drift from the darkness of the train tunnel, calling for help. The Salvationist waited a moment or two to see what the vagrant would do

THE PRIME YEARS



STLY
RD

EASIE

THE MUTILATION

NEW ISSUE

VING

PHENOME

and he watched the man rise and call out, asking if everything was all right. When there was no reply except another call for help, the vagrant carefully edged into the darkness. Again, nothing happened bar the calling of the child, then everything went quiet.

Then the vagrant came haring out of the tunnel, running back towards the platform as though all of Satan's riders were at his back, but to no avail. A thick net struck him firmly in his back, its translucent tether going back into the shadow into which the vagrant was dragged, writhing and cursing all the way. Shovel was frozen to his hiding spot and could only watch in mute horror as part of the tunnel's shadow seemed to detach itself and reach out with many hairy legs to haul its victim away. The screams echoed down the Underground tunnel for quite some time and behind it was the sound of a women's laughter...

Hudson and Brand resolved to investigate further and together with Sergeant Parlow and Terrence Shovel, by now, seemingly recovered after a night's rest, returned to Shadwell station and entered the Underground shortly after it opened. Fully armed and holding lanterns aloft, they slipped into the tunnel, ready to confront whatever nightmare lay in its darkness. All seemed normal until they found a service hatch which had evidently been pried open and was covered in a sticky residue. Hudson's remark that the residue seemed similar to a spider's web was to prove remarkably prescient. With the first of the morning trains due, the men quickly stepped into the parallel service tunnel and within minutes they discovered a chamber criss-crossed with thick ropes of translucent webbing, as though from an arachnid of unusual size.

Casting the light from his lantern about, it was Sergeant Parlow that noticed the bodies hanging from the webbing. Some were clearly the bodies of the missing vagrants, but Hudson and Brand were surprised to be able to identify others as being of foes they had faced before – the Tcho-Tcho. Also scattered about the floor were several crates, which though covered in unnaturally thick webs, were still clearly marked with the Chinese-looking script that Hudson and Brand had previously seen in their vile lairs.

As the men looked about them, some of the webs begin to twitch and a woman's voice echoed out of the darkness, beseeching the small company for aid, begging them to step just a little further into the chamber. Unsure as what was going to happen next, Hudson, Brand, and Parlow all drew their revolvers, but it was Shovel who reacted first. Before anyone could do anything, the Salvationist made a grab for the sergeant's gun and as the two men grappled for weapon, it discharged several times. As the sound of the gunshots reverberated down the tunnel, the women's plea turned to laughter, which descended into a hiss like a thousand legs scuttling across flesh. The web twitched again, now more violently, and a bloated form lowered itself down upon the group at speed – there were flashes of gunfire and human-like screams of anguish before Hudson pulled a weapon of last resort from his coat. It was a single stick of dynamite he had acquired from Warren Pierce and lighting it, he hurled it towards the thing descending upon them with a shout of, "Run!".

There was no need to tell the group twice. The explosion brought down part of the service tunnel and blasted the men with a cloud of dust and something unnameable yet

bitter. The collapse of the tunnel prevented Hudson and Brand from checking up on what had been there, but after this, there would be no more disappearances of vagrants in the Underground. Parlow would later file a report blaming a faulty gas line, while Shovel scurried away in the confusion. Whenever possible Hudson and Brand preferred to take a cab from then on.

CASE 15: THE BOTANIST'S CURSE (SPRING, 1886)

Whilst perusing the newspapers one morning, Brand came across a story that left him with a nagging sense of unease. Horace Stanbury, a botanist employed by Kew Gardens had been reported missing, which though potentially tragic was not directly related to the agency's line of work. What made him take note though, was the fact that according to the newspaper article, this was the third botanist in as many years in the post. The article did not elaborate further, but trusting to his journalistic instincts, he immediately set to following up the story. Searching previous articles revealed that the two prior holders of the position had apparently absconded in a hurry; one to join the French Foreign Legion and the other to take up a job with the Emir of Bukhara. From the journalists who wrote the articles Brand also learned that both men had left letters announcing their resignations in the wake of monumental life decisions on their desks and nobody had actually seen them leave. Both Hudson and Brand decided that a visit to Kew Gardens was needed.

Unfortunately, Hudson and Brand found themselves unwelcome at the botanical gardens. The gardeners, groundsmen, guides, and other staff were not only unhelpful, but in many cases actually scowled at the detectives. Brand managed to persuade a secretary to let them into Stanbury's office, but they found it to be spotless, clearly showing signs of having been cleaned and cleared of any trace of its previous occupant. In the meantime, the other staff had summoned officers of the Royal Botanic Gardens Constabulary – Kew's own constabulary – who dismissed Hudson and Brand's questions and threatened to arrest them for wasting police time should they continue with their enquiries. Fortunately, Brand had found some notes slipped into a book about certain plants to be found in the gardens' hothouse and their interactions with various foreign varieties of aphid. When they made their way to the hothouse, their way was barred by two burly groundkeepers who curtly told the detectives that the hothouse was shut for the duration. As the duration of what, neither groundskeeper would say... Hudson and Brand decided to return that evening under the cover of darkness wanting whatever malignity was being perpetrated at the heart of Kew Gardens.

Slipping with practised skill into the gardens not too long after midnight, the pair found the place oddly devoid of night watchmen. As they approached the hothouse, it was clear that something odd was going on inside. The glow of a naked flame could be seen throwing the shadows of strangely exultant plants against the glass and as they crept closer to the doors, both Hudson and Brand could hear voices first raised high in praise, then lowered in supplication, then raised high again, the pattern repeating in a tongue that neither

man could identify. They were able to steal easily into the hothouse, their entry unnoticed under the cover of the many voices. Inside they watched as scores of men and women in hooded robes, their arms raised, some holding flaming torches and one a small bundle that they fancied made a strained cry, stood in praise around a great tree that loomed over them, its great tendril-like branches writhing in time to the rise and fall of the voices, reaching out to scrape the glass ceiling with a sound that seemed to scratch at the very inside of the skull.

The scratching and the suspect cries of the small bundle proved too much for Hudson. Momentarily transfixed by the voices and the swaying of the robed supplicants in time with the unnatural movement of the arboreal tree-beast, the former soldier found himself unable to take another step forward. Instead, with a whimper he backed away and then throwing all caution to the wind, turned and fled into the darkness of the botanical gardens. His exit did not go unnoticed. Cursing, Brand started after him, pulling his revolver from his pocket in case the worshippers in the hothouse gave chase...

Reports of a break-in at Kew Gardens the next day, in which a vigilant member of the Kew constabulary was injured by a bullet, made all the papers. No culprit was captured, and although one Superintendent Hooker had thoroughly been over the relevant areas with skilled investigators, nothing was uncovered. Due to Hudson's still-shaken nature, Hooker suggested that some rest would be in order, as the strains of the role were clearly taking their toll.

With no appetite to return to the scene on Hudson's part, Brand made a series of notes to plan a new approach and investigate more fully, including covert surveillance of Kew employees and the acquisition of more explosives. However, other cases took prominence, and despite receiving an unasked-for lifetime membership to the gardens shortly afterwards, Hudson and Brand never stepped foot into Kew Gardens again.

CASE 16: THE MANY-STARRIED STONES (SUMMER 1886)

After the shock of their encounter in Kew Gardens, Brand decided that Hudson needed the chance to rest and recuperate, if not take a sabbatical from investigating the outré. Reluctantly, Hudson agreed, but even while holed up at 33 Golden Square, supposedly confined to his bed, he would not give up scouring the periodicals and dailies for signs of the supernatural or the mysterious. When he believed that he had found something of interest, Hudson would direct Brand and Sergeant Parlow to investigate. This though turned up nothing more than the odd doings of the city's criminal underclass and as high summer drew closer, Brand and Parlow grew ever more concerned about Hudson's wellbeing. It was Mrs Levi who suggested that the gentleman deserved a proper holiday, but it was Markham who suggested that they visit Wales. Unfortunately, their break in the principality was not without interest.

The interest of both detectives was aroused by an article in an issue of Cheshire Pageantry, a county periodical that

Brand found in the lounge of their hotel in Chester. The magazine mostly concerned itself with the doings of the rich and well-to-do in the county, but this issue contained an article describing the singular weather patterns above a town in the nearby county of Caernarvonshire. Once a month strange dark clouds gathered over Betws-y-Coed and unleashed torrential rain, complete with tumultuous thunder and lightning. The residents just seemed to adapt to the storm and rain, this being North Wales, but a visiting magistrate and his wife from Chester were caught quite unawares and made much of their predicament in the letters that followed. While dismissed as a 'freak event' in the magazine, Brand suspected otherwise and soon the pair were journeying west along the hillsides of North Wales to the small market town of Betws-y-Coed.

It was market day when they arrived and the streets thronged with not only with locals buying produce – locally grown with much of it being unnervingly spectacular in size and quality – but also holidaymakers and visitors from far and wide. It was a beautifully sunny day, but it would not last – the detectives had chosen their timing well. As the clouds broke later that evening Hudson and Brand, watching from the windows of their guest house, noted that the majority of the lightning strikes fell upon a small hill top. Donning their rubberised cloaks and much to the consternation of the owner, ventured out into the rain and towards the hill. From a patch of scrub near the crown of the hill, they observed a procession of the townspeople, wearing robes and carrying lit torches, slowly ascend to the top of the hill where there stood a ring of stones. The detectives kept watch from their position for two hours while the congregation chanted in a strange language in the centre of the ring. During this time the rain continued to fall and the very centre of the ring was struck several times by lightning. After two hours, the congregation made their way down the hillside to their homes.

As odd as it seemed, the ceremony did not have the oppressive sense of foreboding that Hudson and Brand had felt in previous encounters with the strange. Even the grass where the lightning had lashed the ground seemed unharmed. Given that no-one had been hurt, the detectives departed Betws-Y-Coed the next day convinced that they had seen an ancient Celtic right of fertility and that no action should be taken at that time. However, on their return to London, both did find it perplexing that despite researching the chants, they could find no references to a Celtic deity named 'Shuvnegureth'.

CASE 17: THE CURSED LADY (WINTER, 1886)

It was clear that Mrs Elizabeth Mortimer was a distressed woman when she arrived at 33 Golden Square. Her complexion was pallid, her eyes were bruised as if she had little sleep of late, and she constantly tapped away with her fingers or her feet in an agitated fashion that left those in her company quite ill at ease. Upon being invited into the study, Mrs Mortimer accepted and with somewhat unladylike decorum, guzzled a glass of brandy and launched directly into the reason for her visit. She said that she believed that a curse had been placed upon her, and it had almost entirely removed

CHAPTER 4

everyone that she cared for in the world. By removed, she explained, she meant permanently. She was a widow. Her husband, the foreman of a textile factory in Birmingham, died not one year ago. As had her youngest son, her brother-in-law, her husband's employer, her brother, and her niece. She had even noted that a couple of the women that attended her church had recently perished, as had her local green grocer.

Wherever she went, stated Mrs Mortimer, death would surely follow, and she wished for nothing more than to be free of this terrible curse before it claimed the lives of her other two children. Should Hudson and Brand be unable to render assistance, she informed them that she had recently acquired a revolver and was quite prepared to make her own arrangements should they be so required.

Upon enquiring about the causes of death of those around her, Mrs Mortimer produced a small journal, kept in a tidy hand. The front page had the Lord's Prayer written out on it, while the rest of its contents consisted of notes taken on the nature of the deaths of those around the poor woman. She informed the detectives that the contents of the pocket book very obviously written in her hand, but that she had no recollection of ever having written in it.

Upon hearing this, Hudson and Brand's first thought was that the woman before them was nothing short of a mad serial murderer, but this notion was stayed when they examined the journal. What was strange was how each entry always began in Mrs Mortimer's hand, but would morph into spindly and increasingly difficult to read letters. Sentences, even words, would begin in one form and end in the other to unsettling effect.

Even more troubling than the transformation of the handwriting was the actual content of the entries. Each listed the name of one of those Mrs Mortimer identified as having died, below which a report detailed exactly how the deceased had died. These reports however, were framed in a scientific language that was not only advanced, but beyond the understanding of either Hudson or Brand. Despite having access to a number of medical works in the library at 33 Golden Square, both men found the reports beyond their understanding. So they agreed that they should consult with Dr Isaac Gaster, an associate at the constabulary morgue in Whitechapel. The doctor was sent for and upon his arrival, set to reviewing the journal with ever-increasing horror etched onto his face. Nevertheless, he read on with a morbid fascination until he had completed the whole book. Once

done, he explained to Hudson and Brand, in as few words as possible, the nature of what they had read, including some of the terms and procedures they were unfamiliar with. The book was, he said, a vivisectionist's record, one of a decidedly evil nature, for the subjects had not always been deceased persons at the time of their 'surgery', which ranged from examination of muscle composition in the legs to nerve endings inside of teeth. Dr Gaster returned to his morgue a pale man, having drained the better part of a decanter of whiskey.

Elizabeth Mortimer was easily as shocked and could only say that those around her had died and not had insane surgeries performed upon. It was clear that she was terribly afraid for what might yet come to pass and with this in mind, the two detectives asked her to spend the night at 33 Golden Square for observation. To that end she took residence in the large guest room, whilst Hudson and Brand examined their library for a reference to any similar incidents. There were a few scattered allusions in folklore tales, but nothing concrete to aid in any meaningful way, and so the two men watched and waited, with Mrs Levi on hand should entrance to Mrs Mortimer's room be required.

After several hours, Elizabeth Mortimer emerged from her room. Both Hudson and Brand started, as she seemed almost to be another person – her bearing had transformed from nervousness to an almost regal nature, contemptuous of the two



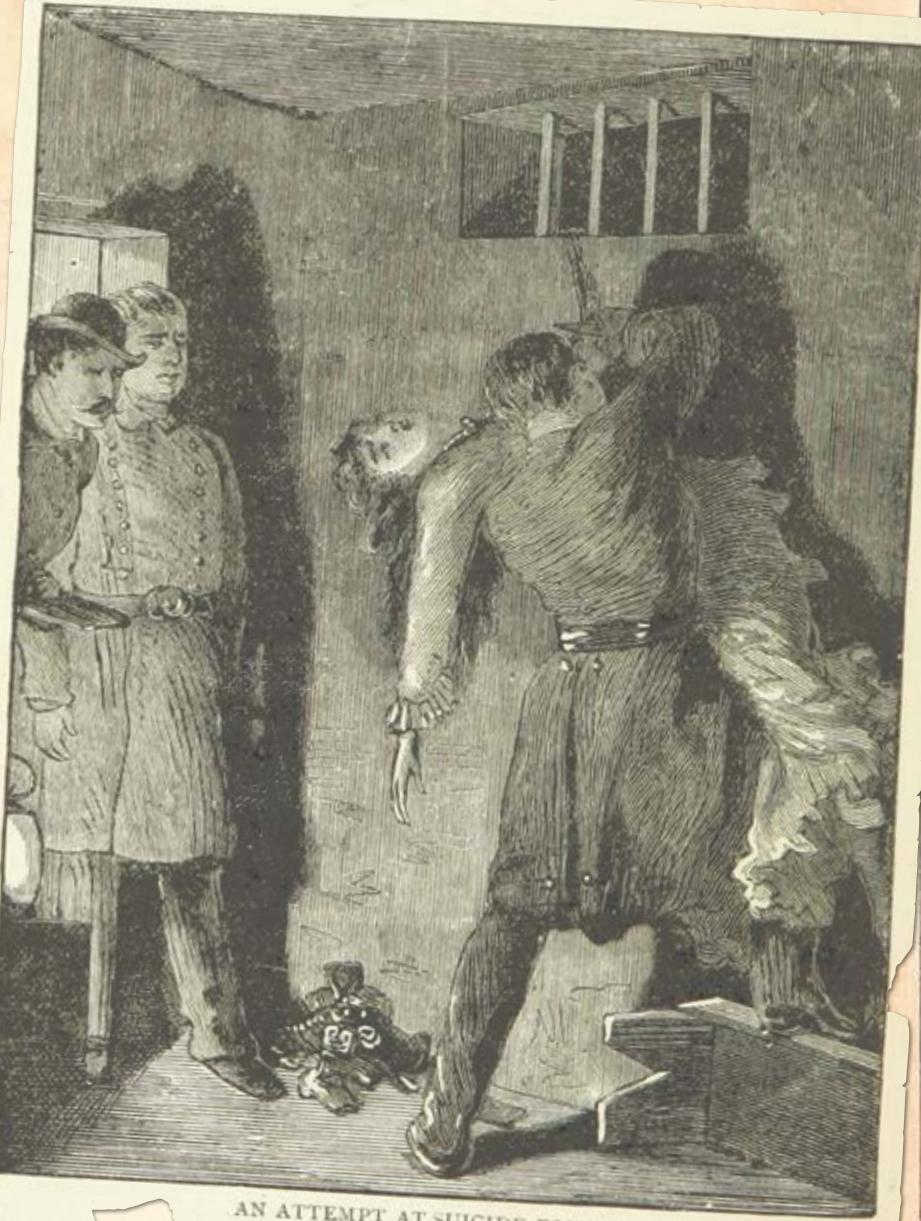
THE PRIME YEARS

men and the half-asleep butler and housekeeper she discovered by the fireplace. When she spoke, it was not with the trembling voice of a desperate soul, but with a voice of majesty heard through the wingbeats of a thousand beetles, directly into the very soul of the listener. Neither Markham nor Mrs Levi stirred, but both made terrible moans at the words coming from Mrs Mortimer.

"You know of our work. Your proof is negligible. Continue or interfere at the peril of your servants becoming our next specimens. This one's time is nearing termination."

With that, she returned to her bedroom and left a shocked Hudson and Brand to discuss their actions. Hudson thought that death might be her only release, but Brand wanted to consider her children. Both detectives were puzzled by what Mrs Mortimer had meant by 'this one's time is nearing termination' and wondered if they were endangering the lives of both Markham and Mrs Levi by interfering.

In the end, they thought it best to leave Elizabeth Mortimer well alone, informing her in the morning that nothing had happened in the night and that she should return to Birmingham, but maintain correspondence through letters. Clearly with a heavy heart, Elizabeth agreed to this and her subsequent letters were frequently a source of sorrow, barring one piece of joyful, if perplexing news – she had fallen pregnant, although not having been with a man in at least a year. Perhaps it had been part of her sleep disorder? She was confused but resolved to care for the child, no matter the scandal.



It would not come to that, as nine months later a letter arrived at Golden Square to inform Hudson and Brand Elizabeth had perished in childbirth, but that she had had a healthy baby girl who would be looked after by her cousin – one Edward Healey of the Heligoland Trading Company, an import/export concern based on an island off the coast of Germany.



many of
If he had
ame. The
h Arthur
ine faces
ir Wade,
friends.
uch as
the
the
ke

CHAPTER 5

THE LATER YEARS

Death and misery were constant companions to the inhabitants of 33 Golden Square in the later years of their investigations. Hudson and Brand were rarely without work during these dark days, but more and more they found themselves without friends. The aid that allies could give often proved short-lived, typically because they either lost their lives or lost their minds. A sense of dull cynicism seemed to settle over the apartment and the sound of laughter – or Hudson's efforts on the piano – were rarely heard.

What passed between the two detectives in those grim times is not known, but it could at least be said that both had given into a determined fatalism. Perhaps both knew that they were living on borrowed time and perhaps that in the prosecution of their cases, they knew they had seen more than any man should. It is to their credit that despite the grim futures they must have known awaited them, they did not falter in their duty.

CASE 18: THE SAVIOUR SUFFRAGETTE (WINTER 1886)

The hour was late when one Emmeline Pankhurst of Russell Square paid a visit to Hudson and Brand's lodgings. Pankhurst was a notorious political campaigner for numerous causes, mostly notably for equal suffrage between the sexes together with her husband, Richard.

Apologising for the late hour of her visit, Mrs Pankhurst asked whether it was true that the Hudson & Brand agency investigated the unusual and the esoteric. The detectives gave each other knowing glances before confirming that there was little that they had not experienced in their investigations into London's secret underworld, but did no more than provide generalisations as to their nature, of their exploits so as to alarming their guest. This satisfied Mrs Pankhurst, who immediately began her explanation for her visit. There was to be an important meeting with several fellow campaigners for women's suffrage at her home in Russell Square within a few days, but recently, both herself and her husband had encountered an otherworldly spectre on the property. Mrs Pankhurst wanted the detectives of Golden Square to investigate, and hopefully resolve her ghostly predicament.

Agreeing to take the case, Hudson and Brand went to Russell Square the following morning to interview the household and investigate for any signs of supernatural forces. Mrs Pankhurst introduced them to her children and her household staff, as

well as Auguste Dubeau, a French socialist who was staying with them. Hudson and Brand established themselves in a spare room and decided that the best course of action was to make regular patrols of the house. Two tedious days followed, but on the second evening, a maid scuttled into their room and panted out that she had seen a strange, buzzing spectral sight in the pantry, before collapsing on the floor in shock. Pausing to check that the maid did not require immediate attention, the detectives made their way to the pantry. There they confirmed the maid's breathy report – there was an indistinct apparition in the pantry, hovering visible in the gaslight cast from the kitchen. Both men felt a strange revulsion at the sight of the apparition, a sickly glowing thing with tendrils and what could have been trailing robes or even wings. – It did not remain in the pantry for long, but moving with a precise nature and constant infernal buzzing, it glided through walls and floors as though they did not exist. After trailing it around the house, the detectives followed it to the top of the stairs down to the cellar. There they paused, for coming from below they could hear a voice speaking French. It appeared that the Pankhursts' guest was communicating with the apparition via a metal cylinder which translated his words into the infernal buzzing noise. Equally, it would translate the buzzing into French tinged with a dead, metallic voice. From what Hudson and Brand could understand, something was to be laid in the London sewers, although they could not tell what. Whatever it was, Hudson and Brand agreed no good could come of it, and arming themselves with a nearby broom and rolling pin respectively, they sneaked down into the cellar and confronted Dubeau.

At the sight of the detectives, Dubeau cried out in alarm and the ethereal vision fizzed and vanished. The Frenchman retrieved a strange device that looked like a bundle of flutes bound together and aiming it at the interlopers, made it spew a freezing fog towards them. Where the fog touched them, intense frost burns spread across their skin and so Hudson and Brand were forced to retreat behind a stack of old furniture, hemmed in by the deadly chilling mist.

"Do not meddle with what you do not understand, bourgeois swine!" Dubeau exclaimed triumphantly, his form just visible as an advancing silhouette. The fog crept ever closer as the pair of detectives frantically sought a means of escape from their predicament. Then suddenly, with a muffled 'thud' followed by the sound of something heavy falling to the ground, the advance of the mist stopped.

"Gentlemen, are you there?" came the voice of Mrs Pankhurst.

It had transpired that Mrs Pankhurst had followed the pair of detectives and while Monsieur Dubeau had been intent on freezing the detectives, had crept up on the unsuspecting

Frenchman and struck him firmly on the back of the head with the old frying pan she had retrieved from storage in the cellar. At that moment, the strange metal cylinder that appeared to have been translating the conversation between the apparition and Dubeau began emitting a static cackle. Hudson approached it carefully, but could see no way of disabling it, so threw several heavy blankets over it.

In the wake of the strange encounter, Dubeau was tied up and Hudson and Brand led upstairs for a round or two of hot drinks, there to await the arrival of the police. Unfortunately, the Frenchman was able to get free using a knife he had hidden in his boot, wounding Richard Pankhurst in the process, and then escape by means unknown. The police would issue a warrant for the Frenchman's arrest, but it appears that he fled England before he could be apprehended. For her timely help in coming to their rescue, Mrs Pankhurst earned Hudson and Brand's eternal gratitude and both swore to be in her debt until she had requested of them some great task. Both the tubular ice-fog gun and the strange French-speaking cylinder were taken back to 33 Golden Square for safekeeping (astute Investigators may notice that the cylinder is nowhere to be found at 33 Golden Square).

CASE 19: THE GERMAN EMPEROR (SPRING, 1887)

It was while they were celebrating the end of another case with one of Markham's sturdy breakfasts that a young woman burst in upon Hudson and Brand one morning in May, 1887. Declining to give her name, the woman, who obviously had a German accent, withdrew from her bag a yellow silk cloth that was bound about a blue-purple crystal. She immediately sliced her finger on its sharp edge so that a drop of blood ran down a facet of the crystal and thrust it between the detectives, imploring them to gaze into the crystal. Both breakfasters, perplexed yet intrigued, did as she requested.

Staring into the crystal, both men saw a glow begin to take shape. First the German flag could be seen flying, followed by the flags of Britain, France, and Russia. All four flags then ran red with blood and were trampled under the boots of marching soldiers in strange uniforms with helmets of an unusual design. Above them mechanical bird-like devices flew across the sky while great metal boxes propelled themselves across mud-strewn landscapes that were filled with explosions. The vision faded and the detectives sat back eyeing the young woman as they waited for an explanation.

"That, gentlemen, is the future – our future, Europe's future. What happens with the Crown Prince and Doctor Mackenzie will directly impact on this coming to pass," she said.

"Hah!" exclaimed Brand. "This this could be some form of trick! Why should we trust you?" Again, she pointed at the crystal and this time it showed them things which had already come to pass – previous cases, the Ashanti War, private things that they had told no one. When this was done, both Hudson and Brand were sombre and dumbfounded. Having been convinced of the



The young German visitor

young woman's earnestness, Hudson asked her, "By Doctor Mackenzie, do you mean Doctor Morrell Mackenzie of The Hospital for Diseases of the Throat and Chest? And when you say Crown Prince, are you referring to Frederick, the Crown Prince of Prussia?"

When the woman nodded in confirmation to both questions, Hudson and Brand at least had some background to her statement. Doctor Morrell Mackenzie was at least known to them, being the highly admired chief doctor at Hospital for Diseases of the Throat which was housed next door at 32 Golden Square, with most of the hospital taking up the floors above Hudson and Brand's lodgings. The reputation of the pioneering institute was such that it attracted patients from across the realm – and beyond. Frederick, the Crown Prince of Prussia, who was married to Victoria, Princess Royal, the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria, was a public figure, known for his liberal views in contrast to those of his father Wilhelm and his father's chancellor, Bismarck. With Queen Victoria's upcoming Golden Jubilee, Frederick and his wife were making a well-publicised visit to London.

They sent for Doctor Mackenzie, waiting in stony silence until he arrived when they directed him to look into the crystal. When the doctor had done so, his face was ashen. He shared quiet words with both Hudson and Brand, the three of them discussing the nature of what they had seen. How should this intelligence be acted upon? Was it reliable? What would the consequences be if acted upon?

As they were discussing this, there was a scream from the German woman, who all at once had leapt to her feet and fled the apartment. Markham would later recall, observing everything as he did, that he was sure that he had heard a faint howl from the direction of the crystal. When Hudson picked it up himself and stared into the crystal, it is unclear exactly what he saw, but from that moment on he had a marked aversion to visits to the zoo, tiger rugs, and indeed even the famed lion statues of Trafalgar Square made him visibly uneasy.

Subsequently, and despite an extensive search, the young woman was never seen again. The three men agreed uneasily to be wary, but Doctor Mackenzie affected an air of disbelief concerning what he saw. The crystal was secured in a lockbox and stored in the master safe. The following year, Crown Prince Frederick would succeed his father as Kaiser, but reign for just 99 days. The cause of death was cancer of the throat and some would lay the blame of his death squarely at the feet of Doctor Morell Mackenzie.

CASE 20: THE HYBRID (WINTER 1880)

A few months after being called upon for consultation by Hudson and Brand, Doctor Morell Mackenzie, the British Empire's pre-eminent laryngologist, received one of the most unusual patients of the entirety of his career. A pallid and clammy man, who gave his name as Joshua Lipscombe and who was of a rougher cut than might be supposed by his available funds, arrived at the Hospital for Diseases of the Throat seeking Doctor Morrell's immediate attention, his voice urgent and possessing an unusual quality that was part rasp, part croak. As was usual, the man did not see Doctor Mackenzie straight away, but was referred to a junior physician. When the man allowed the doctor to remove the thick scarf he had tightly wound about his neck so that he could examine, the young man fainted clean away at the sight before him and the attending nurse let out a scream.

Doctor Mackenzie was quickly sent for and during the now private examination, the patient was first heard to express his sorrow at the reaction of both the junior doctor and the nurse, but then to beg and plead with the laryngologist concerning his physical state. Doctor Mackenzie would later say that the patient produced pockets filled with golden charms and trinkets, treasures he said he had recovered from his voyages to the East, and he would gladly offer them up to whosoever could find a cure to his condition. After he had had several glasses of brandy, Doctor Mackenzie would also confide in those he thought would not mock him for it, that what the man had on his neck and was covering up with the thick scarf were horizontal slits which to all appearances took on the form of the gills of a fish. All who had seen the man confirmed that he exuded an odour not unlike that of Billingsgate, site of the famed fish market. His being dressed in the garb of a mariner may have gone some way to account for this, though Mackenzie would claim he was sure that the stench was from the patient directly rather than his clothes.

Facing such an unusual physiology, something which to all accounts of medical science should be impossible, Doctor Mackenzie was almost as shocked as his junior colleague. Nevertheless, his instincts as a physician and man of science



remained, so first he accepted Mr Lipscombe as a private patient and second, asked that a man be sent next to the offices of Hudson & Brand, next door at 33 Golden Square. He already knew that Hudson and Brand investigated the strange after being asked to attend their offices some months earlier and as much as Lipscombe's medical condition fascinated him, he suspected that that the man's situation involved more than just the medical. Only then did he retire to his office where he kept a decanter of brandy.

Yet when Hudson and Brand found him in his office, Doctor Mackenzie had barely touched his glass. They enquired as to the soundness of the patient's mind, whether he had been speaking in any unknown tongues, what items had he seemed to be in possession of, and other questions which to Mackenzie's mind seemed trivial or unusual in the circumstances. It was at this point that Doctor Mackenzie realised that Hudson was questioning him about his tightly-clenched fist, the skin of his hand white with small beads of red running from between his fingers. The doctor snapped to, aware now that he had lost track of his actions, and with slight intake of pain, slowly opened his fist to reveal one of the patient's golden trinkets, a disc engraved with what could have been faces of monstrous countenance, the small treasure gripped so tightly as to draw blood. With a start, he flung it away across the desk, only for Brand to snap it up and examine it, and within moments he drew forth a revolver from his coat.

By the time all three had rushed to the patient's examination room, the door was ajar, the patient had fled and the only thing that remained of them was the overpowering smell of the sea.

CASE 21: THE GALIC CONNECTION (SPRING 1866)

Having just seen the famed French soprano, Zulma Bouffar, perform at the Theatre Royal, Hudson and Brand were en route to a suitably Gallic bistro – Francophilia clearly being the theme of the day – when they were approached by a well-dressed pair of gentlemen. Brand recognised one of them as Michel Maurier, a fellow journalist who had been the London correspondent for *Le Petit Parisien*, a French newspaper. They had lunched together on more than one occasion and the two journalists shared a mutual respect for each other.

Revealing that their meeting was by design and not happy accident, the two Frenchmen – for Michel's companion was also French – requested that the Hudson and Brand join them. They were only too delighted to learn that the detectives were already on the hunt for a French dinner and once a suitable restaurant had been found, Maurier was happy to enlighten them as why he and his colleague – revealed to be an official at the French embassy – had sought them out. Over moules marinière, Maurier said that he now also worked for the French foreign office before, with a dramatic flair, launching into his explanation, “The hurts of Europe, though long silenced by Metternich's efforts at the Congress of Vienna, have found their outlet in revolutionary, even radical politics. France in particular, has suffered from unrest and violence on the barricades on more than one occasion, and the memory of the lost war with Prussia is still a raw memory to many... including one who even now dwells in this city.”

Maurier then went on to inform Hudson and Brand of one Auguste Dubeau, an anarchist who had seized Paris alongside the revolutionaries in 1871. The ardent radical was suspected of having committed several murders and after barely escaping arrest by the Gendarmerie in Normandy, he had been tracked to London where it was assumed he was gathering support before returning to wreak havoc in France. Then he made the point that, “Certainement, with a man as unpredictable and dangerous as Dubeau, his next target could equally be the Houses of Parliament.”

Throughout the Frenchman's explanation, Hudson and Brand remained silent on the fact that they had already encountered Dubeau. Clearly his throat, Hudson asked, “This man must clearly be stopped, for the safety not only of France and Britain, but all Europe. We have some small experience in dealing with those of extreme views ourselves, but why have you approached us about this villain?”

“You see, monsieur, there is an area in which Dubeau shares common ground with you – the man has an interest, a very keen one, in matters of, how should it be put... *le surnaturel* – the occult. We would wish you to discover his whereabouts.”

Agreeing to such a matter was easy enough; Hudson and Brand readily recalled Dubeau's attack upon them in the Pankhurst's cellar with the fearful ice fog device which they now had in their possession. They also knew that the anarchist had plans that involved London's sewers, but despite discrete enquiries, they had been unable to determine

what they were. Nevertheless, in taking up Maurier's commission, the detectives knew that the sewers would be their primary line of enquiry and in the days that followed renewed their efforts to that end.

Although it took several weeks, they learned that a Frenchman had been seen on the mud flats of the Thames, each time clutching a bag as though it was the most precious thing in the world and acting nervously, constantly glancing about himself as though fearing attack or pursuers. The mudlark who had ventured into the sewer after him said that he had seen the Frenchman reach into the bag and draw from it a bar of what looked like black soap which he gripped with a rag before carefully placing it in the sewer. Further enquiries confirmed that the Frenchman had been seen doing this at other sewer outlets across the city. No one had stopped him – he seemed to be an unhinged foreigner with no valuables to steal or malicious agenda. The detectives promised payment to any mudlark who would report the Frenchman's whereabouts along the Thames and a few days later were told that their quarry had been seen.

The mudlark's report proved to be true. Dubeau was on the mudflats, thankfully unaccompanied by strange apparitions, but still clutching the bag. Upon approaching their quarry, the Frenchman pulled a revolver from the bag and motioned for Hudson and Brand to enter the sewer. Telling them to keep quiet, Dubeau made the detectives walk deeper into the network of tunnels until they reached vaulted chamber lit by grey shafts of sunlight. Here Dubeau explained that he would have vengeance against all tyrants and that his allies, the enlightened agents of Yuggoth, had provided him with the means to do so. He threw back his head and released a rattling cackle at this, but before either Hudson or Brand could react, it was shortly cut off as a bulky form in a tattered old pea coat and a tattered cap flung itself from the darkness the Frenchman, fists swinging.

Dubeau's assailant was heavy-set and despite his pallid grey-green flesh and bug-eyed aspect, there was definitely something familiar about him. With a dawning realisation, Brand placed the fist-flailing figure – it must have been Joshua Lipscombe – the patient with neck complaints who had fled the Hospital for Diseases of the Throat the previous autumn. Wasting no time, Brand moved to aid their new ally, only for Lipscombe to turn and roar at him in a manner that evoked the crash of waves upon the shore. Lipscombe's breath was rotten and his eyes gleamed with a cold malevolence. Brand staggered back and as blow after blow landed upon the Frenchman, Hudson grabbed him and the pair fled back the way that they had come. When they paused for breath some minutes later they thought they heard a blood-chilling cry of desperation and pain echo in their wake.

When Hudson and Brand returned a few hours later accompanied by Sergeant Parlow and several police constables there was no sign of either their captor or their saviour, or the bag that Dubeau had been clutching. Nor were there any signs of the bars of black soap that the Frenchman was supposed to have been keeping in the bag. There was, however, a large pool of relatively fresh blood. Auguste Dubeau has not been heard of since, for which the French government has quietly issued its thanks to Hudson and Brand.

CASE 22: THE BLOODY SPIRITUALIST (SUMMER, 1886)

Edmund Rose was the last man that Hudson and Brand expected to appear on the agency's doorstep. The ardent anti-spiritualist, best known for calling for both the disestablishment of the Church of England, and greater secularisation in British society, was highly unlikely to want their special brand of investigative services, but given their expertise and the number of unusual clients the agency had had, their reputation among certain quarters had spread. Nevertheless, they received the austere man into their parlour, whereupon he exclaimed, "For the good of all true-thinking men and women in this prosperous nation, you must discredit the charlatan and merchant of misery, Miss Louisa Emsdale!"

When asked for an explanation, Mr Rose told the detectives that Miss Emsdale was a spiritualist and clairvoyant, supposedly talented at contacting the afterlife, but no doubt a fraud working to extract monies from the vulnerable and the gullible. He had been to one of her séances himself and was surprised to find no sign of the usual tricks of the trade that other fraudulent spiritualists usually employed. Indeed, he found the experience so unsettling that he was convinced that Miss Emsdale had been employing some hitherto unknown form of trickery or illusion. Although this was not their normal line of work, the man was clearly earnest that they undertake this case, and his funds were evidently as earnest as he was to see the matter satisfactorily concluded. Conferring only briefly, the detectives confirmed that they would investigate, with the caveat that the matter's conclusion could not be wholly assured. Mr Rose considered this fair and agreed to wait for the outcome of their investigation.

A few enquiries revealed that Louisa Emsdale would shortly be hosting a meeting for those who wished to commune with the spirits of their dearly departed at her home. Although neither man had cause to investigate a spiritualist before, consultation with Mr Rose informed them as to how some fraudulent spiritualists performed their séances. Armed with both this knowledge and a revolver each – bitter experience had taught them a degree of caution, if not healthy paranoia – both detectives were confident that they could identify any tricks played by Miss Emsdale and handle any possible consequences.

Arriving at Miss Emsdale's residence, Hudson and Brand were shown into the drawing room and instructed to take their seats around a massive circular table with four other attendees. There was nothing in the house to indicate their host's outré calling. Indeed, the décor was almost spartan, a few small framed paintings of woodland scenes on the walls, the only furnishing of note being the large Persian rug on which the circular table stood. Once seated, both men took the opportunity to surreptitiously examine the room. Ostensibly, Hudson bent down to retie a shoelace, but it gave him the chance to both examine the underside of the table and lift the rug that it stood on. Lifting the rug revealed a series of strange symbols – unrecognisable at least as far as Hudson was concerned – which appeared to encircle the table. Whilst this was no indication of actual otherworldly

danger, he alerted Brand and with one finger he quickly poked at them to ascertain what the symbols were drawn in. In doing so he inadvertently smudged a few, which was to have ominous consequences...

It was at this point that their host arrived and Hudson quickly sat back up. Hudson and Brand's initial impression of her was less a 'mistress of magical mischief' and more that of a governess or school teacher. Miss Emsdale was of middling height and indeterminate age, dressed in conservatively cut clothes, with her hair was drawn tightly into a smart bun and a pair of brass half-moon spectacles on her nose. She introduced herself and briefly explained to the guests the fashion in which the session would proceed, with strict emphasis on doing as she requested, so as not to provoke the spirits into thinking any disrespect was intended towards them. Miss Emsdale was quite adamant on this point; the spirits would not brook improper behaviour and she could not guarantee their response should anyone give cause so as to give insult to them.

With that, the group joined hands as Miss Emsdale requested and she asked everyone present to think of a lost relative, friend, comrade, or even a departed pet. Then she began asking questions and making generalisations about the men and women around the table, the generalisations being spun into statements vaguely agreeable to the attendees. Neither Hudson nor Brand were taken in by this use of cold reading' and all but concluded that the medium was as fraudulent just as Edmund Rose had claimed. The pair did their best to mask their scepticism, but neither could hide it from Miss Emsdale's 'cold reading' skills, so when she came to address Brand, she addressed them both and it was not about deceased relatives or pets. Instead she said, "I see you have both suffered great pains in your lives, gentlemen, wounds of a cynical nature. Think of me as a physician to your soul, and like all good physicians know that I have only your best interests at heart. I will help heal your scepticism."

At this point, she began to mutter, half-heard words that made the listener wince at their hearing. Her eyes rolled into the back of her head and the table creaked ominously as the candles lit about the room guttered and died, one by one, until only the candle in the centre of the table remained.

To the horror and amazement of the onlookers, something began to manifest into being above the surface of the table, a translucent shape of pinkish hue that shimmered into clarity as though emerging from a fog. Its outline was vague, perhaps forming a head or the form of a human in possession of a great bloated abdomen and the room filled with a soft tittering that grated on the ears.

"And so spirit, begone!" Miss Emsdale commanded, suddenly sitting up straight and throwing her hand forward at the thing floating above the table. Nothing happened. The form swayed, but did not vanish.. The medium stayed a moment before taking a deep breath and exclaiming, "I command you, be here no longer!"

Still the apparition remained. Its form growing sharper, more visible as dendritic protrusions that moved of their own accord about a globular mass, its hue darkening redder and redder into the colour of blood as the titter deepened into gurgling laughter that seemed to roil in the pit of the



The horrific apparition

listeners' stomachs. Miss Emsdale groaned and seemed to be held in place at the sight of the strange anemone-like thing, but almost as if her will had given out, she collapsed forward onto the table one arm outstretched towards the horror she had brought into this world.

This appeared to be a signal for the thing. It stretched out in all directions, the guests no longer transfixed in horror, but panicking, scrambling to get out of the way, out of the room, out of the house as its appendages surged forward. Its many twisted and tortured faces screaming in agony, its withered limbs grasping at any solid object in the mortal realm. The room was snapped into darkness as the last candle was knocked over and all order was lost. The gentility of the drawing room was rent by the sounds of urgent whimpers, soft limbs on hard furniture, and a wetness that drew everything back to the centre of the darkness. Above this cacophony rose the gurgling and the laughter, louder and louder, until all was silenced by a pair of gunshots. In that madness of fumbling, Hudson found the door and wrenched it open, dragging Brand through, though some

foul appendage had latched itself to his arm and seemed to be drinking directly from his veins with a vile pumping action. The ex-military man slammed the door, severing the greedy appendage, which flopped to the floor, its mouth end sucking futilely at the air.

From within Hudson could hear screams and cries, and a frantic plea for aid, but he held the door firm shut alone as all the staff had made good their fearful flight, his eyes screwed closed and his hands vice-like on the door handle even as it rattled and shook with great force.

After he did not know how long, Hudson released the door handle and realised he had gripped it with such strength he had bruised the palms of his hands. Brand lay on the floor of the house, softly panting, and his eyes affixed on his companion with a look of pained horror.

Eventually the gurgling and the gurgling seemed to recede from the room beyond. Then it was gone. How long the detectives remained at the door they could not recall, neither one looking at each other. When Hudson offered his companion a hand to help him up off the floor, Brand did not take it straight away. Hudson only responded by saying, "It was the only way, Ulysses. The only way!"

Then they pulled open the door and surveyed the drawing room and the bloody chaos it had been reduced to. Limbs had been violently removed, viscera painted the walls and everywhere they looked gore softly dripped.

There was no way that this could be explained to the police or the world at large and Hudson and Brand had no choice but to cover up the incident. Tiptoeing around the chaos and the horror, the detectives took an oil lamp and spilled its contents around the room before relighting the candles and knocking them over, waiting to ensure that the oil caught. Then they retreated from the room and the house, ushering the remaining staff with them as they went. The terrible, 'accidental' fire quickly spread, and following the anonymous notification of the police, proved to be an easy explanation as to what had happened to Miss Emsdale and her guests to both the authorities and Edmund Rose. The anti-spiritualist and secularist was unsatisfied with this explanation and left 33 Golden Square a disgruntled man. Neither Rose nor the detectives decided to pursue the matter further.

CASE 23: THE RIPPER OF WHITECHAPEL (AUTUMN, 1888)

It was a dark shadow that hung across the city of London in 1888. A murderer was on the loose in the East End, horribly mutilating the bodies of his female victims, causing all manner of alarm and distress in the heart of the empire.

Hudson and Brand observed these events with a clinical eye. None of the five deaths that autumn – Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, and Mary Jane Kelly – seemed to involve the supernatural. None the witnesses interviewed by the police had reported anything unnatural and although the deaths were all that sensationalist newspapers seemed to write about, they had thus far avoided sinking too far into the fantastical in their reporting of the crimes. Still, the particulars of what became known as the Ripper murders were strange enough, most notably the removal of body parts from the victims. After discussing the cases, the detectives concluded that they should undertake a more thorough investigation themselves, for even if it transpired that the criminal was a ‘mundane’ killer, they would at least be doing their civic duty.

“The police seem to be having a tough time of it, and Parlow has told me the top brass are leaning on everyone to get a result. I know it may seem a little unorthodox, but what if we used, well . . . you know. The German lady’s–” Brand began, but he was immediately silenced by a look from Hudson.

“I will thank you not to make mention of that strategy again. We of all people should be aware of the peril that lies in having truck with the supernatural. By God man, do not make such a suggestion again or we may have cause to submit you to Bedlam!” Hudson remarked as he looked up from his monograph on human anatomy.

Although he knew in his heart that Hudson’s approach was that of the rational man, Brand also could not shake his thought on the crystal and its abilities. Surely it would not hurt to take the slightest of glimpses as any slight benefit gained could help in removing a dangerous criminal from the streets of London? With a quiet and subtle resolution, Brand decided to make an observation of the crystal in Hudson’s absence and use any intelligence gleaned to aid in the apprehension of the ‘Ripper of Whitechapel’.

One evening, whilst Hudson was at the Morana Club entertaining an old comrade-in-arms, Brand did exactly as he had resolved. With the utmost care he removed the crystal from its lockbox in the master safe and took it into the drawing room where he unwrapped it with quick but nervous fingers. The small thing gleamed in the twilight of the unlit drawing room, an inner fire spreading across its sharp surfaces so that it appeared to glow. Peering intensely into the crystal, Brand sliced his thumb on one pointed edge of the crystal and as the blood ran down one facet, focussed his thoughts on the identity of the Ripper of Whitechapel. Within moments a figure seemed to coalesce within the crystal, a whiskered gentleman of a martial bearing. His face was not wholly distinct, but he carried a cane topped with a golden sovereign and he could be seen entering a

public house which bore a sign above it of three horseshoes. The place thronged with sailors, one of whom greeted the gentleman, calling him ‘Harry’.

Armed with this knowledge, Brand informed Markham that was going to be taking a stroll by the river. Given the often dangerous and odd nature of the agency’s investigations, the manservant thought nothing of Brand pocketing a revolver before he left, though had he been aware that Brand also carried on his person a length of strong wire and a vial of chloroform he might have had cause to pause for thought, if not query Brand’s intent or inform his partner.

The Three Horseshoes public house proved easy to locate and equally proved to be popular drinking house for sailors and stevedores, as well as gentlemen who wanted to enjoy the base and ‘rough’ experience of a low class establishment, disreputable enough to not want to mention it in polite company, but still safe enough to be worth a visit. Hoping to find his quarry inside, Ulysses Brand slipped into the Three Horseshoe, one hand fingering the grip of his revolver and the other coiling his fingers around the length of wire he intended to use to bind his prey.

Inside, Brand noted that London’s recent, dour mood was absent. Dollymops and strumpets squawked at the sailors’ ribald humour, gentlemen puffed at their cigars and quietly took in the raucous atmosphere, while an elderly Indian gentleman furiously hammered at a piano surrounded by men and women accompanying him in the choruses of bawdy music hall number after number. Surveying the bar, there seemed to be no likely candidate that fitted the figure seen in the crystal and so Brand settled down to wait. An hour passed and having nursed a glass or two of gin, Brand readied himself to leave, sure that the vision had been nothing but lies . . . Then he heard somebody say, “Alright, Harry?”

Looking up, Brand saw a gentleman entering the bar, tall with a military bearing and holding gold sovereign topped cane. This Brand was sure, was the likely candidate and now that he had him in his sight, he resolved not to lose him. The man took a seat and ordered a glass of gin, placing his cane across his lap, his beady eyes darting across the room. Nothing happened for an hour, but Brand’s fears that he was hunting for his next target was confirmed when the man, in a slightly agitated state placed his gin untouched on the bar, and left the establishment after a young woman had exited. The detective jumped to his feet and followed as quickly as he could, but once he got onto the street, any chance of catching up with the gentleman was hampered by the thick mist that had seeped up from the Thames. The same issue seemed to beset the gentleman and as he paused to decide which street to take next, Brand managed to catch up with the man and place the barrel of his revolver squarely into the small of his back, his other hand on the man’s shoulder.

“I have you now, you bastard. Will you confess here or should we move somewhere a little less public?”

Perhaps any other man might have panicked at Brand’s assault, but the man’s military discipline held up and he calmly replied,

“I do not know who you think I am, sir, but I must maintain that you are confused as to my identity. I am Major Henry

Beasby, formerly of the Somersetshire Light Infantry, and I will thank you to take my purse and be gone if that is what you are about!"

Ignoring Major Beasby's entreaty, Brand directed the man into a nearby alley. Witnesses later reported hearing two muffled bangs, perhaps gunshots, but since the streets were fog-bound and most people abroad at that time of night were more worried about a knife-wielding murderer on the loose, no-one paid too much attention to the noises. The police officially ruled the case a robbery with violence, announcing in the press that Beasby's cane and wallet were missing. What the police did not disclose was the fact that Beasby had been found kneeling on the ground with his hands bound with wire behind his back and two gunshot wounds to his head.

When Brand returned to 33 Golden Square later that night after having disposed of Beasby's wallet and cane in the Thames, it was clear that Hudson had been entertaining a former comrade after their meeting at the Morana Club.

Hudson and his comrade had returned to the apartment to examine some of the more esoteric artefacts and weapons in his African weapon collection, some only recently cleaned, whereupon Hudson went into great detail concerning how different items would cause different wounds. The visiting gentleman soon took his leave, bidding his old compatriot 'Harry' Hudson (so named in the regiment for his middle name) a good night, with a momentary fumble in the apartment's foyer as he had evidently taken one of Hudson's canes and not his own. This was brushed off with a laugh as Hudson told his old war chum that it was no bother; he had purchased the sovereign-topped cane quite recently and didn't usually take it out; in fact he was sure he had taken it out only five times or so since August.

The next day Hudson suggested over breakfast that the German crystal be interred within the brickwork of the fireplace, he having been thinking about its dangerous nature of late, to which Brand dumbly acquiesced. Markham had completed the task by the end of the day with such attention to detail any layman would never have guessed at the removal of one of the bricks.

There were no more murders attributed to the Ripper of Whitechapel.

THE LATER YEARS

