

Snowfall

Vampire Hurricane, Part One

By Gavin Collinson

'Do you - yes you - want to see something incredible? Something so remarkable that it will thrill you until the day you pass from this world to the next? Then come with me...'

David Kershaw shifted in his seat. He sat in a small auditorium in a cinema on London's Southbank. The room had been hired to a private party and he was one of about twenty people who sat rapt. What David Kershaw was about to see would change his life.

'You will witness something that has been unseen for centuries. And you will see it...'

The black and white footage on the screen had every member of the audience enthralled. The onscreen presenter, a long-dead American explorer, was beckoning his audience and they needed no further invitation. For David, an expert in the lost civilisation of the Incas, this reel of film, depicting the legendary and mysterious opening of the Tomb of the Bear in 1934, was one of the two great Holy Grails of Incan-lore. The other was the Great Bear itself but that had been lost since the tomb's excavation. This reel of film, recently discovered in Cairo, was being played for the first time ever and was being seen -

'Now!' declared the explorer.

Natives of the Mexican jungles slung ropes as thick as their arms across their shoulders and pulled. David's eyes widened as they moved away from the huge pyramid. The ropes tautened and began to open the fifteen foot door at the foot of the stone slopes.

'A moment in history! No-one has seen this since the dawn of time!'

Drums began to beat, slowly at first then faster, faster, faster... The door was hauled open and the drums reached a mad crescendo and then -

Nothing. A tiny onscreen cough.

The dust started to clear from the pyramid's doorway and from inside the tomb a silhouette appeared. David squinted. What? Tall. Tweed. Bow tie. What?

'Blimey O'Reilly,' said the man emerging from the pyramid.

He raised a mug to the screen. A large porcelain mug that David recognised because shards of it were on display in his museum. 'You could have waited till I'd finished my

tea.' He smiled. 'I do like your hat.' A pause. He was looking over the explorer's shoulder. 'Less keen on the spears.'

The screen became a blizzard of scratches and jagged scars. And then David and the audience were back in 1934 as the cameraman and about 50 natives raced after the man from the pyramid. It was difficult to focus on the figure but under his left arm he carried a tiny stone cube that David recognised from manuscripts as the Great Bear. He was sprinting towards a small white circle that hovered about two feet off the ground. As he careered through the jungle foliage he pointed a cylindrical device at the ring. The natives had almost reached him and judging from their cries they weren't about to slap him on the back and ask if he fancied another cuppa. Their quarry let out a yell and dived through the hovering circle. It disappeared immediately. But then something even more amazing happened.

The man in the bow tie tore straight through the cinema screen and landed on the raised area in front of the seats, still carrying the Great Bear. He peered into the audience, got to his feet and brushed the dust from his sleeves. Absolute silence.

'Hello,' he said and gave the kind of smile that makes other people want to smile, too. 'I'm the Doctor.'

They pre-date the memories of most men. They wear black bowler hats, pin-striped suits and carry umbrellas even in the height of summer. Grey faced and unsmiling they can be seen on the streets of the City before most people have hit their snooze alarms. This morning, like most mornings, they walk to work. A newspaper vendor idly wonders just why they wear those hats, but as usual, no-one greets them and few notice them. On the fiftieth floor of Lyttle Monsters Inc., the lift doors open and four of these City denizens step onto the Axminster and troop into the boardroom. They sit at an oval table. No-one speaks until each of the 13 chairs is occupied. The figure at the top of the table, hidden by shadows, waits until the door to the room swings shut.

'Good morning.'

'Good morning,' the men in suits intone and now they remove their bowler hats. If the newspaper vendor had been present he'd have had his question answered. But he'd have had a few more questions and a lot more nightmares. Each of the figures sat around the table has a small, stubby pair of crimson horns protruding from their heads.

The figure in the shadows leans forward a little. 'We meet to discuss the matter of the Doctor...'

David Kershaw and the Doctor were strolling along the promenade that runs alongside the Thames. London looked happy and pleased with itself, all twinkling lights and Christmas decorations. 'Well, I hitched a lift with the Bom-borradohs. That was the ring you saw. Got into the pyramid and borrowed the Great Bairn.'

'Great Bear,' David said automatically. 'But why?'

'To give to you. For your museum. Heard it was in trouble and I rather like museums so having this on display should -'

'Should save our bacon!' He took the statue, a dark cube with richly decorated concave faces, and gazed on it. 'All my life...'

He looked up. The Doctor was gone.

Exactly one year later David Kershaw was on the sixteenth floor of Lyttle Monsters' London HQ. He'd reluctantly accepted an invite to their Christmas party, turned up alone and when the lift doors opened in the foyer he'd been dumbfounded to find the Doctor waiting for him. He joined him in the elevator and the attendant said, 'Going up!'

'Hello, David. Merry Christmas and all that. Actually, not Merry Christmas and all that. I'm disappointed in you, David.' His voice lowered. 'You've done something very bad.'

'It can't be all that bad.'

'I think you may have triggered the imminent and complete destruction of mankind.'

The lift doors opened. 'Welcome to the party,' said the attendant.

The room was warm and full of people and music. It was broad and lined with floor-to-ceiling windows that offered a stunning view of the city. But neither of the new arrivals noticed the party or the panorama as they stood by the Christmas tree. 'What did you do with it, David?'

'I put it on display. It was a huge hit. Saved the museum and -'

'And?'

'And then six months later the clamour began to die away. Then this toy company, Lyttle Monsters, offered to make models of it to sell in our gift shop. It was a great idea, Doctor. They took it and they're working on it now.'

The Doctor looked like he'd just been told he'd swallowed poison. 'You gave the Great Bairn to a toy company? Do you have any idea how cataclysmic -?'

A booming voice interrupted. 'Well, hello, David!' Its owner was a broad-shouldered monolith of a man. Expensive suit, skin as brown and lined as an old chamois leather. Cocktail glass in one hand, cigar in the other. 'Did I hear you say Doctor?' He spoke with an American accent, over friendly, as if he was trying to sell them something. 'Good to meet you, sir.'

But the Doctor had been distracted by a table of party food.

'I'm Hawke Lyttle the Third. I run this empire. Howdie.'

'Good nibbles, Mr Lyttle.'

The American stepped closer. 'Do you want to see the future, Doctor?'

'Nah. Seen it already. I'm starving. Haven't eaten since the siege of Mafeking. What is it?'

'It's couscous,' David replied.

The Doctor looked delighted. 'Couscous? Ha! Nine hundred years and I never... You know, I even like the name. Couscous. Couscous. Couscous,' he murmured, trying out the word with different spins of inflexion.

He turned back to the table and Lyttle added. 'If you don't see this, Doctor...' Something in his tone was unsettling. 'You'll regret it for as long as you live.'

The Doctor faced him. Serious. 'Well, that's a very long time, Mr Lyttle. After you...'

When they reached the lift the attendant stepped out and Lyttle punched in a PIN. The elevator began its ascent, rising above the lower portion of the building and sliding along the side of the narrower, higher levels. This part of the journey afforded more breath-taking views of London. 'I run a toy company that needs to know what people are interested in. And I couldn't help noticing that vampires are pretty hot right now. Books, films, television series. Vampires, vampires, vampires.'

'So you're making some vampire toys?' David asked. 'Nice idea.'

Mr Lyttle looked amused but didn't reply.

They reached the penultimate floor. One room, dominated by an arc that curved along one half of the chamber. The arc comprised 13 steel tubes, each about five feet high and three feet wide, glass-fronted but unlit.

'I'm developing the ultimate Christmas present for the high end market. People talk about a world recession but rich folk are still rich. They've got their cake...' He sauntered over to the side of the arc, pressed a button and stood back as a bank of buttons sprang from the wall. 'And I'm gonna take a slice! Or three. By offering them the ultimate accessory.'

The Doctor said, 'I know what this is Lyttle. You took the Great Bairn and I don't know how but you unlocked the DNA it contained and artificially created –'

'Oh, you know?' It was the first time Hawke Lyttle the Third had been surprised in a very long time.

'Got a message about it.' The Doctor nodded. 'Snooped around. Saw David's name on the guest list and put two and doom together. Mr Lyttle. This ends tonight.'

'Will one of you share the secret, please?' David sounded tetchy and nervous.

'No, Doctor. This begins tonight!'

Lyttle pressed a button and the half-cylinders lining the wall lit up, revealing their occupants. Each container held what looked to be a child, five, possibly six years old. They were similar but not identical. Dark hair scraped back to emphasize a widow's peek. Pale faces, red lips. They wore miniature versions of old-fashioned black dinner suits, white waistcoats and capes lined with scarlet velvet.

'Those aren't toys...' murmured David.

'We took the DNA evidence and genetically created the next generation of vampire merchandise.'

David flinched as he saw one of the caped figures twitch.

Lyttle spread his arms to the arc. 'Vampires!'

The Doctor was suddenly at the American's side. 'You've created a dozen vampires? Do you know how powerful these children are?'

'They've been baking a while but I brought you up here to witness them becoming sentient. They will be completely formed in...' he glanced at his Rolex. 'Thirty seconds. Hallelujah, gentlemen!'

David was frozen. 'Why?'

'I thought seeing their genesis would impress you. Convince you to loan me more artefacts like the Great Bear and as the Doctor came up with the original I figured-'

'Lyttle!' shouted the Doctor. 'We have about twenty seconds until Armageddon. Switch them off, now! When they reach sentience-'

'If something does go wrong, which it won't, those tubes could hold a silverback and his mamma without a dime o' trouble.'

'Doctor!' said David. 'Look!'

The vampire children were beginning to stir. Fingers flexed, bowed heads became erect, blood-shot eyes sprang open.

'Don't you worry!' boomed Lyttle. He leant across the tube nearest to him. 'Now, little fella, you close your eyes and go back to sleep. You hear?'

But the 'little fella' simply smiled revealing two terrifying fangs. And then he shook his head.

'I said, I said go to sleep, now...' Lyttle was still booming but fear underpinned his words.

The child banged his fist against the re-inforced glass and a spider's web of cracks spread across the surface.

'Oh my god...' Lyttle stepped back.

The Doctor was at the controls. 'You've been fooled, Mr Lyttle. These don't operate a thing. Someone else is controlling this.'

David called out, 'Can you stop them, Doctor?'

More of the vampires were pounding against their chambers. The glass was breaking and the children ripped away the remaining shards.

'There's nothing I can do from here!' The Doctor looked up from the instrument bank. 'These strings have been cut!'

'The elevator!' yelled Lyttle. He reached the lift and punched the call button. 'No response!'

'We're trapped!' David shouted, but the Doctor's attention had been hijacked by a tiny blinking box attached to the ceiling.

In the boardroom on the level above the arc of vampires, a solitary figure sat at the oval table. He looked at a monitor which now hung over the table, studying the eyes of the Time Lord who starred into the camera below.

'Who-ever you are,' the Doctor was saying, 'this will destroy you and millions more if you don't pull the plug now!'

'Too late, Doctor...'

The vampires were out. Some had smashed the windows of the room and leapt into the night. David had gasped, stepped forward and shouted, 'No!' until he saw the figures swoop and whoop and zoom past the shattered panes. 'No...' he murmured.

Lyttle had pressed himself into a corner of the room. 'They can fly!'

'Well, of course they can fly!' the Doctor replied. He was pointing his sonic screwdriver at the lift button. 'Come on, come on... Deadlocked!' An anguished cry. He span around to face the room.

Six of the vampires had formed a line and were moving towards the Doctor, David and Lyttle. 'What happens now?' asked David.

'We may have time. I don't know. Depends how quickly they feel compelled to top up.' He tapped his neck and gave an awkward smile.

Lyttle blanched. 'They drink blood?'

'They're vampires, Mr Lyttle. Keep up.'

'How do we know if they're thirsty?' asked David.

'They'll bare their fangs!' A pause. 'And right on cue!' he added as the six vampires gave sharp little smiles to reveal their dagger-like teeth.

'One last hope. They've not communicated yet. If they can't speak they may not be fully formed so we can try to gently herd them away. But the moment one of them speaks...'

'Sounds like we've got a half a chance, Doctor.'

'That's the spirit, David!'

By now the three of them were shoulder-to-shoulder in the corner of the room. Elevator door on one side, window on the other.

'Hey!' said Lyttle. 'I must be crazy! We can open the window! Get along the balcony and down the emergency exit.'

'Well, I hate to leave a party early,' replied the Doctor, 'but just this once I'll—'

As he turned to the window a flying vampire landed on the outside of the glass, sticking to pane with the tips of his fingers. He eyed his prey, paused then punched a hole through the window.

'If he talks we're all done for!' shouted the Doctor.

The little vampire thrust his head through the hole in the window. His blood red lips formed a macabre smile and then parted to speak. 'Merry Christmas!'

TO BE CONTINUED