



MEETING IN ELYSIUM

Sometimes the afterlife isn't what you thought it was
going to be.

James Branch Lindsay had too much to drink. He was weaving all over the road. He found the hollow sounds and blasts of noise confusing. White eyes gleamed at him like evil creatures peering into the night. And the last one. The one with the extraordinarily large eyes and the deep, bellowing sound...

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James woke up in a ramshackle bed in some strange English cottage. He was groggy, but the house appeared to be one of those people can rent to get a real feel for what living in the Saxon period was like. He did hope they put in some real plumbing. Time to jot down a note not to drink so much at the next party. His head felt like someone had been using it as a drumhead.

The sun was streaming in the windows, the searchlight strength beams illuminating the floor. James struggled to his feet. He felt odd. There was a knock at the door. James shuffled his feet over to the door and opened it. At first, he didn't see anything, but then he glanced down. It had red scales, a crocodile snout, and was only about three feet tall. "The author wants you down on the set to lead the big orc battle scene," the creature announced.

"You're kidding, right? Do I look like an Orc to you?"

"Well, yeah, kinda." The creature ran off without another word.

James glanced down at himself only to find the creature knew what he was talking about. The skin on his hands was a deep green and based on the structure of the muscles in his forearm he could easily have become a wrestler. Searching frantically about the cottage, he couldn't find a mirror. As best as he could determine, he was an orc. Wearing a leather shirt and boots with a sort of open fur vest. His chest had enough definition to allow him to pose for Mr. Universe.

He wandered outside in the sunlight. The exterior of the cottage didn't look at all like England. There was a small lake surrounded by tall pine trees, majestic cypress, and hanging willow trees. The place looked like the typical mistake made by the first-year fantasy writers James had always railed against. Mixing ecosystems without any consideration of climate.

His mind raced to try to determine what had happened. Closing his eyes, he struggled to recall the last memories he had right before he woke up. Grunting his displeasure, he practically stamped his feet like a small child having a tantrum. *What's the matter with you, it was only a few minutes ago.* The last thing he could recall was a large silver grate. The was a single word written across it in silver, Mack.

"Excuse me, are you alright?"

James had almost forgotten he was outside with his eyes closed. Opening them, he looked around. Standing before him was a tall creature, at least seven feet in stature. Dressed in almost nothing, it had a very rough, green hide, speckled like the surface of a rock. It had a considerable set of claws at the end of its hands and a pair of tusks displaying a serious overbite. Using an upper-class English accent, he repeated his last question. "Are you alright?"

Stumbling over the words, James only managed to get out a single astonished phrase. "You're a..."

"A troll. Yes, I know. You must be new here. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Terry Arnold."

Dropping his shoulders, James cocked his head. "Terry Arnold? The author? The one who *wrote The Cloud Castles of Argos.*"

The troll let out a massive smile, displaying several rows of teeth. He was practically ecstatic to be recognized. "The very same."

"You'll pardon me for staring, you don't resemble your book jacket photos at all."

Terry looked dejected. “No, I dare say, you probably don’t look like yourself either.”

Glancing again at his arms, he couldn’t do anything else but agree with the large troll. “Sorry. Sorry. Where are my manners? I haven’t introduced myself. The name’s James Branch Lindsay.”

“Author of *The Shadows Above Us*?”

Now it was James’ turn to grin pleasantly. “You’ve read it?”

“Oh, absolutely. A masterwork. I particularly like how you took...”

James held up both his hands. “I hate to bring this mutual admiration party to a close. Believe me, I have a real soft spot in my heart for the fans, but could you be so kind as to tell me WHAT THE DEVIL IS GOING ON AROUND HERE?”

Appearing as embarrassed as he was disheveled, the troll tried to calm the orc down. “It’s a little difficult to explain, even to a fellow fantasy writer. Best as we can figure out, we become part of the collective subconscious of living fantasy authors. We’re... well, I guess you call us their imagination. if you will.

The orc’s skin turned a bit gray. “What do you mean living... What a minute. Terry Arnold... didn’t you die...”

“Of a heart attack, yes. And you?”

“Automotive accident, I think... maybe... are you trying to tell me I’m dead?”

“Afraid so, old chap.”

“You mean this is the...”

“Afterlife? Yes, well, I suppose you could call it an afterlife, of a sort. As a description, I suppose it will have to do for now.”

James visibly slumped. “What do we... I do now?”

The troll seemed sympathetic. At least as much as a giant green creature with oversize teeth can manage to look sympathetic at any rate. “Yes, well, as best we can figure it, we still get to write. We do it by inspiring other writers. We act out scenes, help them create dialog, plots, character direction. We do our best to help them get past their writer’s block.”

Opening his eyes as wide as you might imagine for an orc, James stared at the troll. “You mean there are others?”

Again, the troll smiled. “Oh, yes. Let me take you on a little tour.”

The landscape was a ridiculous mixture of post-roman, pre-modern dwellings, castles, and farms. For the most part, they walked in silence. James was still taking it all in and Terry had decided it was best to let the shock of the whole thing wear off. They continued along until they ran into a single railroad track running along a quite embankment. James Linsey stopped dead, eyes locked on the steel and ties.

Terry looked a little self-conscious. “Yes, well this is the work of Garth Nicolson. He’s fond of putting different elements in his stories. Things from different periods.” Overhead they could hear the engine drone of a Mitchell B-25 bomber. “Sometimes more than a few things.”

James was disappointed. It was as if the entire universe had imploded in on itself. It was his worst fear. People didn’t care about plot or characters or stories anymore. It was simply a mix mash of settings and experiences. What if Spiderman when back in time to the stone age. The Black Death meets Batman. Everything was a one-line remark to a movie studio head. They arrived at a cemetery and Terry led them directly to a small mausoleum and knocked on the door. When it opened, an alluring, raven-haired beauty stood in the doorway. To James, she appeared stunningly normal... except for the long fangs and the eyes with reds rather than whites.

The troll introduced them. “James Branch Lindsay meet Alison McAvoy, author of *Vampire Spawn* and *the Red Fang* series.”

“You look...”

She shook him off. “Yes, I know. Ironic isn’t it. I spend my whole life writing about vampires, and I end up here... as this. There’s some nominal chance it’s a vaguely plausible purgatory.”

“Mr. Lindsey is a new arrival. came in this morning,” Terry remarked.

She came out of the doorway, her long black diaphanous dress trailing on the ground. “Well, welcome to our little village.”

James glanced up at the sun and back down at Alison. “Well, I guess we’re not following the standard rules restricting creatures of the night.”

“Thankfully, no.” she demurred at the very thought. “I never liked those rules myself. Put too many limits on character interactions.”

Their conversation was distracted by the arrival of a fully armored knight on horseback. He was a preposterous folly of a cartoon knight ready for a joust. He was wearing a fully-visored slit helmet with a cockade at the top. “What ho, foul varlets. Prepare to meet thy doom.” Finished expressing himself, he kicked the horse’s flanks and changed for the trio. Terry loped off to the right and Alison glided off to the left, but James crossed his arms held his ground. The knight lowered his lance and pointed it right at the center of the orc’s chest. At the last minute, James stepped aside and let the armored knight crash directly into the mausoleum.

Picking the knight up off the ground, James easily held him up in the air by his throat. The knight’s feet dangled freely in the air. “What’s the matter with you? Are you moronically stupid? You can’t charge someone standing in front of a building. No to mention the fact your dialog is pathetic. Are you try to alienate your readers? They’ll get bored after the first paragraph. What kind of imbecile...” Before he could finish his harangue, the knight dissolved in a shower of dust particles, raining out of his hand and dropping onto the ground.

In a moment both the knight and the horse were gone. “What the... ?”

“He’s a construct,” Terry tried to explain. “Something created by the author. Alison here has a theory. The author might be an amateur.”

James gave Alison a one-eyed stare. “So, how do we talk directly to this aspiring author? We have much to teach them.”

Alison gave the orc a pleasant smile, filled with bedroom eyes. “The village.”

“What?”

Terry brightened up and immediately began to support Alison’s claim. “Yes, yes. There is a village at the head of the valley. There’s a place there. A place where you can talk to the dreamer.”

“The dreamer?”

“Oh, yeah,” Terry elucidated, “we only operate when the author is sleeping. Once they wake up, we all fall into a deep sleep.”

“Well, then,” James commented, “we’d better get going then. How far is this village?”



The trip down from the hills into the valley was a journey. The trail was overshadowed by trees, their crowns permitting only the occasional shimmer of light through the heavy canopy. There was a variety of wild noises blew on the winds, it was if someone was playing a recording on zoo sounds through a series of loudspeakers. Not only did they sound like they didn’t belong in the same ecosystem together, but they also didn’t even sound like they belonged on the same continent. James held out his hands to stop everyone. He could smell them approach. It was an odd feeling, making him feel a little bit like a bloodhound.

They popped out of the woods, the human was dressed in a rough burlap shirt and wool trousers. His hat sat on his head at a jaunty angle, a long white feather sprung from his hatband. But the most unusual part of the occurrence was the several hundred rats following him. From the time to time the man played a merry tune on a primitive flute. It was quite the earworm. James watched as they crossed the trail and disappeared again into the woods... until only the sound of the flute remained.

James shook his head. “Okay, we really have to talk to his amateur.”

They were only a few leagues down the trail before James picked up another scent. This one had a familiar tang to it. Even the birds thought whatever it was represented danger. They stop singing. Except for the crows who were busy screaming warnings to the other crows. James put his hand on the hilt of his dagger. It was a pitiful weapon, hardly worth the name. But it would have to do. The image of James’ torn and shredded body littering the trail filled his mind. James looked up at the troll.

“Do trolls carry weapons?”

“Not really. We’re kinda big. Weapons aren’t usually necessary.”

Glancing up at the seven-foot-tall, green-skin creature, James grinned. “I can see that. I guess bare hands will have to do it.”

It threw itself out at them from the undergrowth. James breathed a sigh of relief. It wasn't what he was expecting at all. I was just a wolf. To an orc, meeting a wolf was the same as a human running into a cute, fuzzy bunny. The wolf glared at them, showed its teeth, and then wandered off back into the woods.

The next set of smells James ran into had the odor of old coffee beans and someone who hadn't bathed in about six weeks. Signaling everyone with his hands, James directed them back the way they had come. But it was too late. A large group of men in peasant garb and holding quarterstaves blocked their way. Turning around there was an equally large group present in the opposite direction.

Giving them as wide a grin as was possible for an orc, James greeted the groups. "I so glad we found you." He sounded pleased to see them. Walking directly up to them, he stood only a few inches away. "Do anyone of you know Robin Hood?"

"Shut your face," he replied in a barely adequate cockney accent. "We'll be relieving you of all your valuables."

"You know," James turned to his companions, "I don't think they know Robin Hood. And if they don't know the dark marauder of Sherwood Forest, then they probably don't know this move either." James put a knee up the groin of the man he was standing next too, catching the man's staff as he fell to the ground, doubled over in pain. Reaching down to help him up, he used the newly acquired staff to slap down another man standing less than a meter away.

At this point, the entire forest erupted into a brawl. Terry, the troll, picked one up and held him over his head. He spun the man around as if he was a television wrestler and they threw the dizzy man into two of his companions. Alison moved light lighting, draining the lifeblood of one and then another before either of them could hardly react.

Two of the others decided to jump James. The first one deftly slapped him across the face with his staff, while the second one swept him to his knees. He landed with a hard thud on the ground, his face bleeding. Fortunately, James wasn't worried about getting a scar. It would have been an improvement to the Orc face he found himself wearing. Forced to drop his staff and grit in pain, James was breathing hard as the two circled in for the kill. As soon as they moved in, James swung out one leg and tripped his first opponent. Then drawing his dagger, James thrust the blade toward the belly of the second man.

The thief stepped back to avoid the thrust, but it was too late. The knife sliced right through whatever rope he was using to hold up his pants. In an instant, his trousers were down around his knees. Jumping to his feet, James grabbed the staff he had dropped and smacked both of them over their heads in rapid succession. "I'd get a leather belt if I were you. Ropes aren't working for you as a fashion accessory."

He noticed Terry was knocking back several of his opponents using the body of a third as a club. Alison had already moved on to her next victim, even before the body of the second had slowly slumped and fell over on the ground, face first. Her dress was covered in bright red blood. It now clung tightly to her slim body. James steadied himself to face his next two attackers. He flipped the staff from one hand to the next, spinning it around impressively.

At this sight, and the bodies of some of their comrades on the ground, the robbers did a quick cost/benefit analysis. As a group, the remainder turned tail and made a beeline for their hiding places in

the trees. Doubling over, James held on to his knees. He spent a full minute getting his breathing back to normal before he straightened up. “Well,” he said, wiping his lips with his sleeve, “that was exhilarating. Shall we continue?”

Terry shrugged his shoulders and Alison simply headed off down the path. James grinned. “We might be able to do something with this author after all.”



The village at the end of the valley looked ordinary. It was a collection of small, single-story buildings with clapboard rooftops, plaster veneer walls, and badly tended gardens. There was no rhyme or reason to its layout. None of the deeply rutted roads were straight, as if the village was assembled by accident and not by design. In the center was the tall, Temple of the Unconscious, where one could speak directly with the dreamer. When viewed from a distance though, the place had a spine-chilling appearance. In most towns, something was going on. Peddlers, craftsmen, non-descript people scurrying about doing various tasks. Even at night, there was always a dog or two outside, barking at whatever there was to bark at. Some of the doors of the houses stood open. As if the owners were too rushed exiting to be bothered with closing them. But this town looked more than empty. It looked dead.

The three looked at each other and then glanced back at the town. It was about as inviting as a black castle with a sign out front reading, ‘beware monsters.’ James didn’t like the look of the place, but he was determined to enter and talk to whoever was creating this world. Someone needed to teach this one a lesson.

The streets of the town weren’t just quiet, they were silent. All three of the travelers jumped when the wind pushed a window shutter and made it creak. It slowly slammed against the wall of the house. The whole scene made them feel uneasy. Each of the houses seemed undamaged. One could have moved in without any care about leaking roofs or broken plaster. Although the structure of the houses was intact, the inside looked like the place had been hit by a tornado. Tables and chairs were thrown everywhere. Some of the light furniture existed only as broken pieces of wood and splinters. There were no dogs, cats, or pigs to be seen. But oddly enough there was not a single body to be found anywhere.

James squinted. “What do you think happened here?”

Terry furrowed his dark green brow. “What about our friends we met out there with the quarterstaves?”

“I don’t think so,” Alison demurred, “why would they smash things when they could just as easily steal them?”

“The lady has a point,” James muttered. “This doesn’t look like their handy work.”

“So, who then?” Terry asked.

“I don’t know,” James replied, “and I find it troublesome.”

They wandered out back into the streets. One of the buildings seemed to be a leatherworking shop. Like the other houses, the tools and materials were intact, but they were strewn all over the interior. Terry picked up a leather belt from the floor. “Your right,” Terry held the belt to show James, “this rules out or friends from the forest.”

James thought he saw something out of the corner of his eye. It was only a fleeting glimpse and he could make out what it was. "Did you see that?"

"Something passed by the window," Alison agreed.

The three carefully worked their way out into the street. At the northern end of town, there was a column of dark smoke rising in the air. "Do you smell fire?" James asked.

The troll sniffed the air through two nostrils. Each nostril could have easily doubled as a water pipe. "No, I don't think anything is burning."

"So, where did the smoke come from?"

Alison crouched. "Good question."

Cautiously, the group headed up the street toward the smoke. It swirled and churned but didn't seem to dissipate. As they drew closer, some parts of the smoke plume even looked as if they might be hairs. They reminded James of his friend Todd Franklin, who without his shirt on, looked like a bear had escaped from its cage.

As they approached, James got the strongest impression it was turning around. They were still at least twenty feet away, but in the next instant, it was on top of them. It radiated, not heat, but pure malevolence. The next moment was one of sheer instinct. James took a swing at it with the quarterstaff. Of course, it passed right through it... since it was little more than a column of smoke. James felt a sudden wave of embarrassing stupidity wash over him.

At first, the smoke cloud appeared nothing more than some bad movie effect, that is... until it grew arms. They appeared out of the side of its form, thin but substantial. They ended in six aggressively long fingers, which looked more like nails with mechanical joints than actual fingers. With one hand it made a direct assault on James. Although he fended off one blow with the staff, blocking with the staff allowed the second swipe to reach its mark. The leather shirt James was wearing now had six parallel rends in it as if they were cut with an X-Acto knife. Blood gradually leaked out of the tears.

The next blow was dealt with the back of the creature's hand. James could hear the bones in his jaw crack as the thing slapped him across the face. He staggered backward, unsteady on his feet. Whatever this thing was, it had the strength of an ogre. Drawing his dagger, James sliced right through the thing's wrist, but with no effect. The blade passed through the arm as if it was made of... well, smoke.

Alison and Terry rushed in to help. They each grabbed one of the creature's arms, trying to stem its assaults. With a single arm, the creature tossed Terry into the side of a building. Plaster flew in all directions as the troll impacted the wall. It had tossed a troll as if it were a flea. James stared at it with awe and a little bit of astonishment. Frightened, Alison let go of the other arm and took a step back.

The creature towered over her for a moment, as if deciding her fate. In this instant, the three took off at a run, heading for the outskirts of town. Alison led the way followed by James with Terry bringing up the rear. Nobody bothered to look behind them. James had this terrible feeling they were being pursued. It took a moment of contemplation, but he decided on his next course of action. He would turn and face the creature, whatever it was, allowing his companions to escape.

Locking his feet into the ground, James spun on his heels, turning back towards the town in the distance. But the road was empty. "It's alright," James yelled to the other two, "it's not coming after us."

Breathing heavily, the three took a moment to rest. "Okay," James muttered, attempting to catch his breath, "I didn't like that much at all."

Terry wheezed. "Running away made you feel like a coward?"

"Not exactly," James complained, "it made me feel winded."

"What was that thing?" Terry asked.

"It's a Dream Eater," Alison replied.

"What?"

"A Dream Eater. A shadow monster. They live off the energy of a person's imagination. The Victorian's believed they were the reason for writer's block."

"Whatever it is," Terry grumbled, "it's a nasty little thing, I can tell you." He attempted to wipe some of the plaster dust off his arms. But with the sweat of running, all he managed to do was to turn it into a white gooey paste.

Alison cringed. "What do we do now?"

James raised one eyebrow. "Didn't you people do any historical research before you write your stories? We need a Janissary Bottle."

"Okay, you're going to have to explain that one," Terry snorted. He'd done plenty of research before each one of his novels, but he'd never heard of a Janissary Bottle.

"Alchemists made them. They were used for trapping spirits and for collecting gasses, like hydrogen." James explained.

"Or smoke," Terry added.

"Brilliant," Alison chimed in.

"So," Terry chortled, "Do you happen to have one of these Janissary Bottle's up your sleeve?"

James' mouth drooped. "No. I suppose getting one of those is going to be a bit tricky."

Alison smiled. It was one of those smiles that could beat out the sun. Only in her case, it involved a lot of fangs. "I know where we can get one."



The hut looked more like a pile of pine tree branches than a building. If one wasn't looking carefully, you might have assumed it was just a pile of cuttings. The place was well off the beaten track, located in the middle of a trackless wood. James was going to have to spend a week getting the burrs out of his fur vest. As they watched, a small creature emerged from the pine-branch hut. It had a bit of a hunchback, what with all the equipment it was carrying. Wearing an outrageously bright colored outfit, he looked

like some insane steampunk version of one of Santa's elves. Complete with bat-like ears and thick, rounded goggles.

The little creature caught sight of Alison first. James couldn't blame him; she was divinely shaped to draw the eyes... at least if you were male. "Alison," he hollered.

She ran up to him and practically hugged the stuffing out of him. Which was no small feat, considering he was the height of your average eight-year-old. James cleared his throat. "Oh, yes," she said, "Introductions are in order." She introduced the troll and the orc and then smiled broadly. "This is Jean Ray."

It would not have been an exaggeration to say the two of them started chatting away at each other like hungry voles. It was a mutual admiration society gone wild. They launched into an animated discussion of characters, world-building, and the difficulty of finding just the right word. James did feel a little ignored. Alison noticed his distress and started explaining who Jean was. In the end, he freely admitted feeling a bit of remorse for the writer of so many fine stories to end up relegated into the body of a gnome. And a rather unimpressive looking one at that.

James cleared his throat again, but this time it had little effect. "While you two are busy chatting, would you mind asking him if he has a Janissary Bottle?"

The conversation came to an abrupt halt. "A what?" the gnome asked.

"A Janissary Bottle," James repeated.

"No," Jean replied, "I heard you the first time. I mean, what do you intend to do with a Janissary Bottle?"

Alison explained the situation to him. Detailing their encounter with the Dream Eater and explained how it was inhabiting the author's village.

"Well, Jean exclaimed, "That does seem serious. What have you got in exchange?"

The orc crossed his arms. "In exchange?"

"Yeah, you know, for trade. You don't expect me to simply give you a Janissary Bottle, do you?"

"Well," James pulled open his fur vest. "These things don't have a lot of pockets in them for loose change. What do you want for it?"

The gnome buried his chin in a hand and pondered the question. After a moment he looked up. "How about two Varagian Spheres."

James dropped his arms to his side. "Two you say? Two Varagian Spheres for one measly bottle?" His face was turned a little black. Which for an orc, wasn't a good sign.

"I know where you can get one," the gnome chattered on, "It's being held by an undead lich deep inside the Castle of Eternal Night. He's been trying to collect the second one for years. I bet if you interrogated him, he could be made to tell you where the second one is located."

Trying to keep the rage in, everyone could see James boiling just below the surface. “Let me get this straight. You want me to acquire two... not one, but two... extremely magical items for you in exchange for a bottle you could hold a fart in?”

“Yes.”

Terry had to hold James back. The troll had his hand on James’ collar. The orc was running at full speed, hands outstretched to strangle the gnome, but he wasn’t going anywhere. “Oh, that’s good. I like the air running bit. Highly entertaining.” The gnome jumped up and down with glee. “I was only kidding. I wanted to see how you would react. Delightful, perfectly delightful.” Reaching into a sack, the gnome took out a small, highly decorated bottle. “Here.” he tossed it to James... who barely managed to catch it without the glass bottle dropping. The orc fumbled the bottle with his hands until he finally managed to get a good grip on it. Jean looked pleased. “There’s one condition though...”

Alison was intrigued. “What’s that?”

The gnome grinned. “I get to come along.”

There was a palpable amount of concern in Alison’s tone. “Why would you want to come along? It’s dangerous. We’re going after a Dream Eater. You could be destroyed forever.”

“For the adventure, of course,” the gnome shouted back eagerly. “A writer must live the life of adventure. How else can one write a good story?”

Terry nodded his head in agreement. “Okay, but if I were you... I stay away from the orc.”



The village didn’t look any different than it had looked before. It remained ominously empty. The group laid on their bellies, atop a nearby hill, carefully peering down over the rooftops. Jean took out a pair of ornately decorated binoculars and scanned the interior of the streets. “I don’t see it. Maybe it’s hiding in one of the houses.”

James grabbed the binoculars out of the gnome’s hands. “Give me that.”

The orc scanned the horizon with the device. “Do you think it might be gone?” Terry asked.

James handed the binoculars back to the gnome. “With our luck? No.” He looked over at Alison. “Can you change into a bat, fly down there and try to find out where it is?”

“I’m afraid not,” Alison muttered.

James clicked his tongue. “You managed to write out all the useful parts of vampire lore.”

Alison snorted defensively. “Well, I’d go down there and drink its blood...”

“But a creature of smoke doesn’t have any,” James finished for her. “I guess we’ll have to go down there and find it ourselves.”

Somehow the town seemed creepier now that they knew what was inside it. The group slowly crept around corners, ducking into alleyways, and hiding as best one could with a seven-foot-tall troll in tow.

What they needed to do was sneak up on the creature. Get it within range of the bottle before it noticed. Unfortunately, smoke monsters don't make a lot of noise. It was impossible to tell with one's ears where it was. Both the orc and the troll were relying on smell... not to mention pure luck.

"Do you smell that?" James whispered.

"Yeah," the troll replied, "something's burning."

"It's our little monster friend."

"How far away do you think he is?" Terry asked quietly.

"How should I know?" James gave the troll an evil look. "Do you think my nose acts as radar?" James' mouth went dry with anxiety. He wet his lips with his tongue. There was something nearby. He could feel its presence. A terrible foreboding filled him with distress about turning this particular corner.

They skulked around the corner, expecting to find it waiting for them. It was expecting them. Only it wasn't around the corner, it was behind them. The creature grabbed the gnome before anyone had any time to react. Holding an arm in either hand, the creature pulled Jean apart like warm bread. He didn't even have enough time to scream. In less than a second, he went from having a surprised look on his face to being nothing more than blood, gore, and small bits of sticky flesh.

Terry was the first one to react. With a deep growl, he charged the creature, thundering down the dirt road with brute force. The Dream Eater spread its arms to receive the troll's charge... and then let Terry run right through him. The troll crashed into a fence, practically knocking himself out. Alison was next. She flitted around the creature with unholy speed. But none of her attacks caused any damage. Becoming bored with the vampire's annoyances, the thing grew a tail. It used the long appendage to trip Alison as she passed behind it.

She fell hard on the ground and found the creature looming over her. It was moving in for the kill. As it was reaching down for the final blow, the wind suddenly picked up. What started as a swift breeze quickly evolved into the early parts of a gale. Turning around, the creature's eyes laid on James who was holding a stoppered bottle in his hand. James thought he could hear the Dream Eater snarl. Dust, leaves, and debris started swirling in a maelstrom of twisting winds and violent airstreams. The creature tried to pull away as if attempting an escape. The smoke which made up his form elongated and stretched. The arms, with their nail-like fingers, started rending the ground. It was desperately trying to crawl its way to a safe distance. Only it wasn't having much success. Long furrows of fingernail scratchings marked up the road.

At last, the creature gave a horrifying scream. Its sound tore at everyone's eardrums in the same way its claws ripped apart flesh. With a gasp... it was gone. James quickly put the cap back in the bottle and the wind died down to the gentle waft of springtime.

Terry got up and moved to give Alison a hand. They approached James who was still holding the bottle in a state of shock. "I wouldn't throw the bottle you're holding in the sea," Alison offered.

"Yeah," Terry echoed. "Otherwise some kid will find it on the beach a few hundred years from now and open it, thinking there's a Djinn inside."

Alison washed her face with her hands. At least she made the motions, there was no water. Her face was a tragic expression of endless sorrow. "I'm sorry about Jean," James tried to comfort her.

"He was a writer," Terry piped up. "It means he can never be silenced." The troll reached down and started to brush the dust off himself.

"So," James remarked, putting the Janissary Bottle in his vest, "Where can we talk to this writer? They have much to learn. There is a Flemish writer named Ray I like to acquaint him with."