

Clearly what he was seeing couldn't be possible. Spray painted across the rear of the cubicle was the same staring eye symbol that was tattooed on the severed thumb. But somehow this version appeared twisted and distorted, as if he were seeing it through rippled glass.

Tate staggered backwards, and would've probably continued all the way outside the carriage had it not been for the wall behind him. His breath was coming in ragged gasps.

The eye was painted in such a manner that the orb appeared crimson in the pale, sickly light of the overhead bulb. Tate continued to stare at the image. Suddenly, the eye winked at him. It wasn't fast, nor was it a trick of the light, Tate was sure of that. The eye closed almost lazily, before snapping back open like a roller blind.

He lurched back up the carriage, passing the now cooling cups of coffee, towards his original compartment. On passing the half eaten sandwiches Tate could see worms squirming among them. On closer inspection Tate realised that these worms had small, miniaturised human heads. As he bent to look, one of the worms reared up on its slimy segmented body and grinned at him. The face was his own.

Feeling extremely dizzy and disoriented Tate bumped into tables and seats, tripping over neglected bags and briefcases. As he drew closer to his own carriage he could once again hear the musical ringing of the mobile phone.

Glancing at the half completed crossword Tate now noticed how all the spaces had been filled with the caption: 'You'll die if you try.'

After banging his way through the automatic door, Tate was relieved to find himself once again back in his own carriage. The mobile was still ringing, but all this was just background noise compared to what he was seeing on the computer screen. The crimson eye was now on the laptop, blinking. Underneath this was the caption:

*(Terribilis est locus iste)*

' You'll die if you try . . .' It was only the mobile's constant wailing that brought him back to the present.

The incessant melody of the mobile's musical ring tone was becoming too much for Tate to bear. With shaking hands he reached out for the small Nokia phone and pressed the green handset button. Cautiously he raised the phone to his ear. Expectation settled on him like a coat.

Suddenly a chill swept over him, his neck broke out in goose bumps as if someone were lightly caressing the back of his neck with cool, damp fingers. Then a voice as dry as old leaves whispered in his ear: 'You'll die if you try; you'll die if you try Frankie!' The malevolent tone caused Tate to drop the mobile.

The perspiration beaded on Tate's forehead and stung his eyes. His chest ached from the exertion of breathing so harshly. *This is it, Frank, face up to*

*it* he thought. *You're going have a heart attack. You're going to die right here.* This had been whirling around inside his head ever since he saw the eye painted on the rear of the toilet cubicle.

Tate backed up against one of the seats and fell into it. He wiped the sweat off his forehead. His fear was tangible. He could taste its coppery flavour like he'd been sucking on old pennies. He closed his eyes for a moment, but that only made the dizziness worse.

Slowly opening his eyes he noticed movement up towards the end of the carriage. Standing there was the woman who owned the laptop. But her features were completely obscured. Instead of two eyes, a nose and a mouth, all she had was one giant crimson eye. The eye covered her entire face. Tate screamed. It seemed his mind was on the verge of snapping.

He felt a sharp prodding in his ribs. He thought it may very well be his heart trying to burst out from his chest. Quickly realising what it was he reached into his jacket pocket and took out the bag and reached inside. The thumb was still swathed in its clear-wrap, only now it was twitching. Tate took the thumb out of its wrap and noticed the flesh had begun to decay.

Disgusted, he threw the thumb away onto the floor.

The woman walked across and picked it up, the crimson eye fixing Tate to his seat as firmly as a rabbit caught in a car's headlights. Without hesitation

she pressed the thumb into the centre of the eye, popping it, and bathing the carriage in a deathly crimson light.

Tate's senses went into overdrive and welcoming darkness engulfed him.

When consciousness returned, all Tate could hear was a steady beeping sound. When his eyes adjusted to the gloom he could see an array of wires connected to him.

'Ah, glad to see you're back in the land of the living,' said a disembodied voice. 'For a moment you gave us quite a scare. We had to perform an emergency cardiovascular massage on the train. After all, we didn't want to lose you too soon.'

Tate must've dozed off and experienced a heart attack, no doubt caused by the sudden exertion of catching the train; it would explain the digging sensation in his ribs and his difficulty in breathing. But what about the thumb! What had happened to it? And what did the doctor mean by "didn't want to lose you too soon?" Everything had seemed too real for it to have been just a dream.

The doctor was still droning on. 'I'd only just got on at the previous station before you and was trying to listen to a CD. If it wasn't for my young student colleague here you'd have been a goner for sure.'

'Tell you what though,' said another voice which Tate quickly realised belonged to the young man who'd been reading the magazine when he'd first boarded the train. 'We'd sure like to discuss this with you.' Held between his thumb and forefinger was the severed digit.

Tate couldn't think what to say, until he noticed that on the lower knuckle of the student's own thumb appeared to be a small tattoo similar to that which he'd cut off his target. Tate tried to raise himself off the bed and free himself of the wires.

The doctor placed his hand gently, but firmly, on Tate's chest. 'I really wouldn't bother you know,' the doctor said calmly. 'You'll die if you try.'

'What'd you say?' Tate replied dryly.

'He said "you'll die if you try",' repeated the student. 'You took something that didn't belong to you. And you took it from a servant of Mephistopheles.'

'Oh,' said the ginning doctor. 'Did you think you were dreaming?'

Tate looked helplessly on as the doctor injected him with enough sodium amytal to prevent him putting up a fight. Then the student removed the bed covers from the lower portion of his body.

Tate screamed when he saw what was under the sheet. The beeps on the machine changing into a high shrill

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as the student approached him. The tattooed eye winked conspiratorially.