

RARE ANTIQUITIES

BY OLI JEFFERY

THE WITNESS

Roger Dabness, a reptilian old bachelor on an extended hiatus from his position as a History and Classics Professor at Edinburgh University. Ostensibly in Brighton to scatter his mother's ashes over the decrepit remains of the West Pier, where she met his father in the late thirties, Roger has found his plan scuppered by the partial collapse of the pier in a recent storm. He's still carrying around the ashes in a zip-locked plastic bag he keeps inside his briefcase at all times.

Roger is waiting out his time here by spending his days antiquing in the Lanes, and his nights working his way through a local brothel. He draws his strength from his *determination to fulfil his mother's wishes*, and he's a *fastidious lech with mummy issues that would make Freud blush*.

OTHER CHARACTERS

- ◉ *Mrs Finchley*, the overly friendly octogenarian landlady of the Bighthelmstone guest house. Frequently refers to her husband as though he were still alive, though he was hanged in the 1958 for the murder of a policeman in Birmingham.
- ◉ *Alan Hornsby*, only ever encountered over the phone. A man who claims to be a representative of the West Pier Foundation with whom Roger is trying to arrange his visit. His appointments diary was apparently drafted by Kafka.
- ◉ *Katya Volkov*, a Russian sex worker. She claims to be 19, though at varying times seems younger, or much, much older; she has a fantastic knowledge of the history of the British monarchy, including many obscure and vulgar secrets otherwise only known to a select few Royal insiders.
- ◉ *Marcus Pullman*, a spiv who runs an antiques shop in the Lanes. Will overcharge for anything he can sell, though there are

some apparently worthless water damaged books at the back of the store that he refuses to sell for any cash price.

LOCATION AND ERA

Brighton, December of 2002. With the tourists and the students both far away, the normally vibrant seaside city has taken on a grim, grey aspect and is battered by storms that have recently torn the abandoned Victorian West Pier in two. The still operational Palace Pier lies further to the east, a noisy and garish twin.

OTHER LOCATIONS

- *The Lanes.* This warren-like network of narrow streets might look charmingly old fashioned on a summer's day, but now the tightly packed shops loom oppressively over the few people scurrying between the area's antique stores. The labyrinthine cobbled streets are the oldest part of Brighton, and born and bred Brightonians still get lost in the twisting streets occasionally, which never seem to lead the same way twice.
- *The Brighthelmstone Guest House* is a migraine of faded chintz wallpaper and chipped porcelain dogs. The whole place smells faintly but distinctly of a particularly bitter brand of tobacco, though Mrs Finchley is never seen smoking. This being the off season, Roger is currently the only guest here, and there are many locked rooms throughout the house.
- *Unmarked brothel on Preston Road.* Situated between a sports bar and a kebab shop, this sad looking grey concrete building houses a dozen equally sad looking young women with a variety of European accents and fading dreams of a better life. The near constant stream of furtive men coming through the front door causes an inescapable draught throughout the house.
- *Pullman's Rare Antiquities*, an ill-lit and musty smelling bric-a-brac store with pretensions of being an antiques store. Piles of brassy junk piled on every surface promise that there might be something worthwhile underneath for a dedicated delver.

CARDS

- ⊙ Object D'Art
- ⊙ Spatiotemporal Distortions
- ⊙ Strange Writings
- ⊙ Anachronism

RARE ANTIQUITIES: SAMPLE CLUES

- ⊙ Static on a phone line seems to coalesce into words in an unknown language.
- ⊙ The sound of sordid grunting from elsewhere in the brothel builds until it resembles pigs being slaughtered.
- ⊙ Mrs Finchley carries on a full conversation downstairs, stopping as you get closer. She denies having said anything if questioned about it.
- ⊙ A burning, acrid tobacco smell that seems to follow you everywhere.
- ⊙ A woman who looks very much like your mother, always just turning the corner ahead of you in the Lanes.
- ⊙ A large trunk with a large brown stain covering the inside. An old torn sticker reads "Brighton Station Left Luggage".
- ⊙ A previous guest's diary left behind in the B&B reveals an identical itinerary to yours.
- ⊙ Seawater flows directly from every tap you turn on.
- ⊙ Lights and music drifting across from the West Pier, even though it's been closed for almost forty years.
- ⊙ The Gideon's Bible in your bedside draw is graffitied with blasphemous prayers and increasingly perverse pornographic doodles.
- ⊙ A scrapbook of old newspapers reporting on people confessing to murders you could have sworn were still unsolved.