

SEPULTURUM



• THE VAMPIRE GENEVIEVE •
by Kim Newman

DRACHENFELS
GENEVIEVE UNDEAD
BEASTS IN VELVET
SILVER NAILS

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A portmanteau novel by Josh Reynolds, Phil Kelly and David Annandale

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An anthology by various authors

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An anthology by various authors

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An anthology by various authors

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An audio drama by Alec Worley

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An audio drama by Rachel Harrison



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NICK KYME

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*This is for my editors, Kate Hamer and Hannah Hughes, for all your
enthusiasm, encouragement and belief in my work. You'll never truly
know what that means to me. Thank you.*



A dark bell tolls in the abyss.

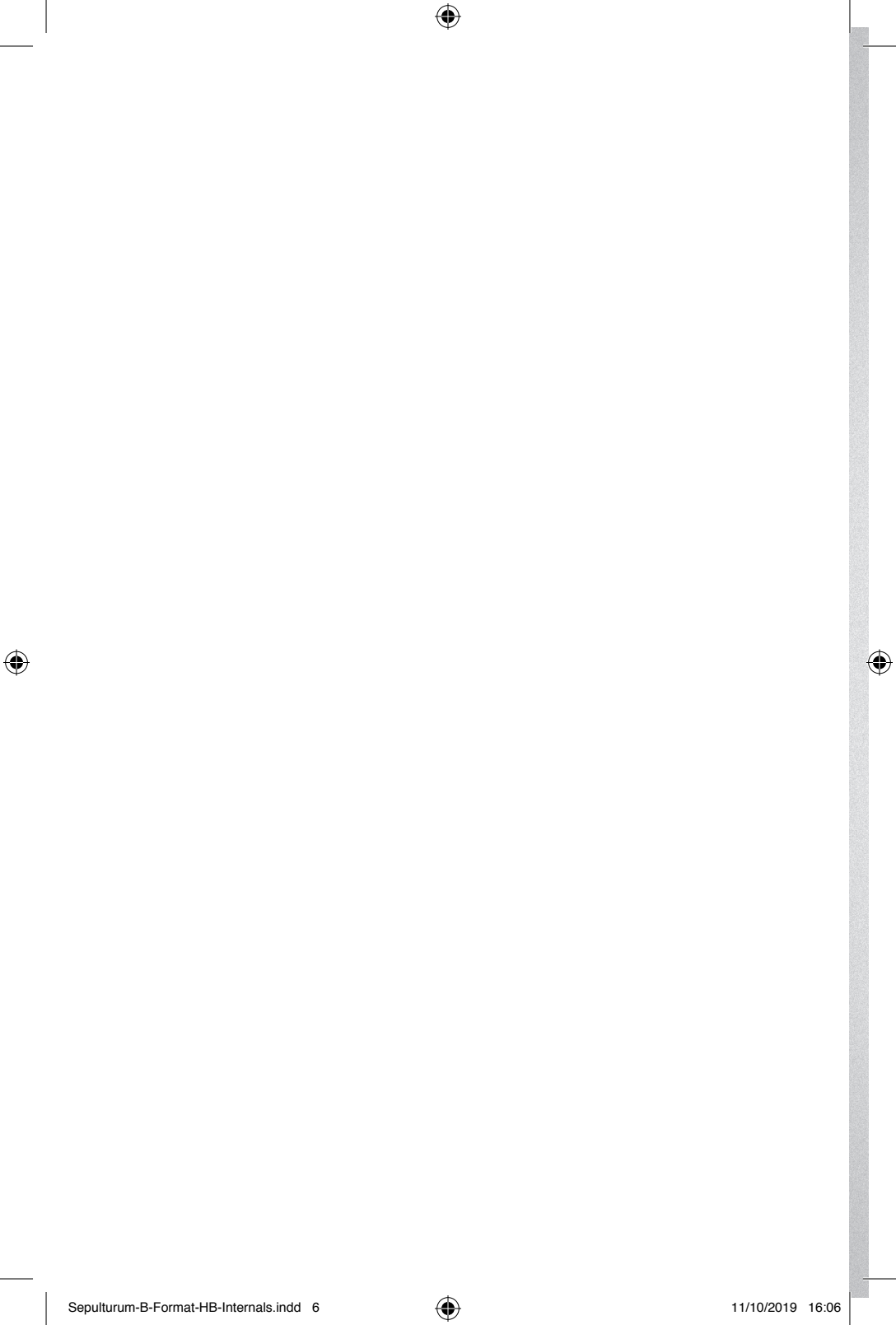
It echoes across cold and unforgiving worlds, mourning the fate of humanity. Terror has been unleashed, and every foul creature of the night haunts the shadows. There is naught but evil here. Alien monstrosities drift in tomblike vessels. Watching. Waiting. Ravenous. Baleful magicks whisper in gloom-shrouded forests, spectres scuttle across disquiet minds. From the depths of the void to the blood-soaked earth, diabolic horrors stalk the endless night to feast upon unworthy souls.

Abandon hope. Do not trust to faith. Sacrifices burn on pyres of madness, rotting corpses stir in unquiet graves. Daemoniac abominations leer with rictus grins and stare into the eyes of the accursed. And the Ruinous Gods, with indifference, look on.

This is a time of reckoning, where every mortal soul is at the mercy of the things that lurk in the dark.

This is the night eternal, the province of monsters and daemons. This is Warhammer Horror. None shall escape damnation.

And so, the bell tolls on.



Sepulchre

- n. A hole made in the earth to bury a corpse. A place where something is buried. A grave.
- v. The act of placing in a sepulchre or tomb; burial.

Sepulchrum

- n. Lesser order of the Holy Inquisition, classified 'Ordo Minoris'. Experts in the risen dead. Organisation formed specifically to investigate and neutralise the so-called 'plagues of unbelief', more commonly referred to as the zombie plagues.



CHAPTER I

Two bullets

The bloody streak down the wall told Morgravia the man did not have long to live. His mouth trembled, like a priest murmuring a sermon, but nothing intelligible came out. Just the passing of his last breaths. He had said his name was Oshanti and that he knew Morgravia, but his face was like a foreign country to her.

She glanced over to the opening in the tunnel, where Oshanti had told her they had blasted through to reach her, and found a gaping dark iris staring back. Screeches echoed in that darkness, something sharp scraping against stone, and there was the scent of the abattoir heady on the thick, underground air.

‘We can’t stay here,’ she said. Even with her fragmented memory, she knew that much.

She had been saved, she supposed. It certainly felt that way. She had awoken, her arms and legs bound and Oshanti frantically sawing at the bonds with his combat knife. Her strength had returned slowly, her senses slower still. They were halfway back down the

tunnel before Morgravia realised she was out, but she couldn't remember from where.

She had tried to get answers but only got Oshanti's name before the thing came out of the darkness at him. He fired his pistol, four heavy booms that echoed loudly off the smooth tunnel walls. The thing recoiled, injured fatally it seemed, though it all happened too fast, and it was too dark to tell anything about its nature.

Morgravia found out a little later that it had cut him, opened him like a burst tyre. And that was that.

'We can't stay,' she repeated, more urgently, when Oshanti did not respond.

He nodded then, slow and ponderous like an oil derrick tipping towards the ground. She'd begun to wonder if his head would rise again, when it did and he gripped her hand, the one already holding onto his. The lips moved, gummed up with the same gory matter that stained the wall, but he emitted no more than an agonised gurgle. A bundle of red loops sat in his lap, glistening in the stuttering lumen light overhead. He stared blankly, forlorn and disconsolate, at his partially eviscerated intestines.

The screeching from the tunnel came louder now, undercut by a breathy wheezing like a punctured bellows.

By the time she looked down again, Oshanti had pressed his hand and hers to Morgravia's chest. His eyes widened, conveying everything his voice could not. Another nod, one of resignation this time. He unclipped the clasp on his belt holster, tugging loose the heavy-gauge stub pistol that had sat snug, surrounded by dark leather. It took some effort, and as he pushed the weapon into Morgravia's outstretched hand, his face had paled to the colour of alabaster.

He held up two fingers on his right hand, the number of bullets left in the pistol.

One for him, then one for me.

It was only then, when faced with the inevitability of her own

imminent mortality, that Morgravia realised how fast her heart was beating. It thundered with a god's voice.

She took the pistol in a firm grip.

The scraping and wheezing neared the tunnel mouth and silhouettes began to form in the foggy black beyond.

Aiming at Oshanti's bloody face, she saw relief as the eyelids began to close and the breath he had been holding eked out of him, like a slowly deflating balloon.

Reacting, not thinking, Morgravia lifted her aim and fired off into the tunnel mouth. The pistol boomed, loud enough to subdue her thundering heart for a few seconds, and she hit something in the darkness. A lumbering thing, a heavy, hot, exhaling thing that brought with it the reek of copper and cold, dead meat. It fell back, or she thought it did; it was hard to tell, the light was so bad. Another screech tore into the shadows. Of pain. Of death? She hoped it was death.

Oshanti had opened his eyes, expecting the pistol's retort to signal his end and obviously wondering why when it did not. Morgravia only had one answer, and it was a poor one that she hated herself for giving.

'I'm sorry...' she said, absorbing every scrap of fear and anger in Oshanti's jaundice-yellow eyes, and ran.

The scraping followed, more numerous, more frantic than it had been before, pausing only long enough to make Oshanti scream.

Morgravia tried not to imagine the wet-meat tearing that would come after as she half ran, half stumbled down the sump pipe. The tunnel connected to it, the subterranean sewer works that served the factoria and hab-blocks of the greater hive. A foul-smelling swill of shit and industrial waste splashed underfoot as she ran. It made her sick to her stomach, but she couldn't stop. They were coming, whatever *they* were. Heaving, hulking shadows surging up in her wake, that scraping refrain like a never-ending scream.

Morgravia clung to the pistol. One shot left. She knew she wouldn't use it on herself. Either self-preservation or just rank cowardice wouldn't allow her to do that. She grasped it, a near-useless lump of metal, holding onto the grip like a thirsty man holds a cup of water in an endless desert. And then she felt something give beneath her, a low cracking of rusted sump pipes and shearing metal. It was like stepping onto a stairwell in the dark that she didn't realise was there, as a brief but stomach-lurching sense of vertigo seized her and she fell, fell screaming into darkness until she hit grimy water. She panicked as the cold struck her, punching the breath from her lungs, sending needles through her nerve endings.

Not like this not like this not like this.

But fate doesn't care much for desire, and Morgravia sank beneath the water, her body carried along by its violent current. It filled her mouth, her nose, made her blind and deaf as the searing heat of drowning crushed her with vice-like finality... and then... peace.

Morgravia awoke with the taste of sump filth in her mouth. She knew it was an illusion, a weird sense memory and her mind's *oh-so-humorous* way of remembering her past trauma.

'Lumis...'

Candles flared, their sodium generators buzzing noisily as they activated. The light revealed a small hab-unit. It was bare ferrum, a chair in one corner where Morgravia had draped her clothes and other meagre belongings, a deep metal wash sink in the other. A rough mattress served as her bed. Scowling at the fever sweat dampening her thin sheets and blankets, and shivering at the chill prickling her flesh like a haunting spirit, Morgravia hauled her weary body into a sitting position. Pain struck her with a legion of daggers. It was all she could do to stop herself from crying out.

A single hexagonal skylight let in the flame-lit predawn of the

low-hive. She stepped through its grainy shaft and over to the chair, where she rummaged around in her longcoat. Finding a handful of stimms, she bit down, wincing at the chalky non-taste, and went to stand before the room's full-length mirror. She looked upon her naked form, enacting a daily ritual.

She was lean-limbed, muscled but not grotesquely so. Pale, milky skin reflected the light. She was tall, around six foot. One ice-blue eye looked back at her, alive with more vitality than she felt; the other one, yellowed and bloodshot, was a truer reflection of her physical and mental state. Silver-grey hair, shaved at the temples, a short mohawk forming a raised channel running between them, framed a stern but not unkind face. Yet it was strange to her, a rogue identity staring back from the dirty glass. Only the scars made sense, and these she found mostly unchanged. They threaded her body like zippers, a cross-hatching of permanently discoloured flesh that forced a mildly disgusted frown onto her face. One pull and she would unravel. All the warm wet red inside would come tumbling out, her flesh left a flaccid and empty vessel in its wake.

Undone, she thought, tracing the frenzied lines of scarification with her fingers.

It had been thirty-one days since the tunnel.

'Emperor's mercy...' she whispered, and looked away, reaching for her tunic.

Morgravia froze, her hand poised in midair, her body half-turned.

A sinister figure stood before her, limned by the skylight, and for a moment she wondered if it were an actual spectre and not just the fever sweat washing her skin that had caused the chill in her bones. It smelled of blood and oil, and detached itself from the shadows with silky, yet syncopated movements. A blade flashed, its edge silvering in the light. A face with a rictus grin, two hollow sockets gaping around faintly glowing red eyes, regarded her.

Morgravia set down the pistol she had snatched from her gun belt, letting out a shuddering breath.

The rictus face crumpled into a frown.

‘You should put on some clothes, Mother. You will catch your death.’

Morgravia scowled and grabbed her tunic. ‘What do you want, Hel?’

Cristo had worked in the labour-pits of Meagre all his life. He was a bullet-maker, and a good one. His shells and munitions had a ninety-three per cent approval rate. Not many factorum labourers hit ninety-three per cent. He took pride in his work, though it was back-breaking and largely thankless. His proficiency at his job did yield some benefits. Slightly better food, his pick of the munition lines. Not much, but it left his belly fuller and his skin cooler, positioned as he was as far away as possible from the smelting furnaces under the labour floor.

It also attracted jealousy from some of his fellow workers. Toil in the pits was hard, relentless; it bred strong bodies but resentful minds. That resentment was usually reserved for the overseers, who tempered the slightest suggestion of unrest with the lash or the pain-maul, all the while sermonising on the purity of hard labour, the cleansing baptism of honest sweat given in the Emperor’s name. When offered the opportunity to direct his impotent fury somewhere other than the untouchable enforcers of the Emperor’s will and war machine, a man would take it. He would exercise that crushing sense of futility where it could be vented, where his suffering could be displaced onto another.

Cristo had heard the muttered threats, and caught the bitter glances directed his way; he had never believed they would be acted upon. Not at first. The labour-pit was a congested battery farm of human bodies, lurching in metronomic tandem. So numerous were the workers that maintaining vigilance over the

entire labour cadre at all times was impossible, and yet no one man would raise hands against another for fear of reprisal. Not in the labour-pits, at least.

There were antechambers that bled off from the main pit, however, and these were less frequented. Several refectoria allowed for the taking of meals and an ablutions block served doubly as a decontamination chamber.

They had come for him here, jagged metal shivs glinting in the grimy washroom light. Three men, none of whom Cristo knew by name, though he recognised their faces well enough. The encounter had been short, brutal. He had killed them all, naked and caked in the rough, powdery scrub that served as a cleansing agent. Cristo was not a small man. He had bulk and muscle that his attackers' strength in numbers failed to balance. It had happened quickly and almost silently. Cristo had been left with half a dozen lacerations, bleeding red into the grainy grey run-off gurgling down the drainage vent. Of his three attackers, one suffered a broken neck, another took a shiv through his jaw and up into his skull, and the third had his eyes gouged out so deeply it was possible to glimpse the inside of the back of his head through the grossly distended sockets.

Cristo had dressed quickly, sluiced the ablution cubicle down and dragged the dead men one by one to the furnace. Dull-eyed and indifferent servitors were the only witnesses to the deed.

He had never spoken of what had happened, for to do so would invite the strictest censure. The men would not be missed. Their loss, if it was noticed at all, attributed to the high attrition rate within the labour-pit. Punishment for murder would result in lobotomisation, and Cristo had no desire to join the pallid ranks of the half-alive automata that saw him immolate three corpses. To kill in the Emperor's name was one thing, to kill those indentured to His holy service was very much another.

Cristo considered this as he waited beneath the overhang, a knife strapped to his belt and a handful of spent bullet casings clenched in his fist, and knew he would have to kill again. He stood in the shadow of Wrecker's Curve. The old bridge between the ferro hives and the commercial district called Fallowhope had seen better days. It arched like a broken man's spine, dilapidated and only fit for demolition. Two-thirds of the way across, it ran to a sheared cliff edge that plunged into a deep gully where the detritus of its collapse still lay in heavy ferrocrete chunks and twists of metal rebar.

Moving out from under the lee of the bridge, Cristo descended into the gully towards a ring of distant torchlight. As he drew closer, he made out a dozen drum fires arranged in a loose circle, a crowd of jeering, catcalling figures in rough leather and scavenged factorum overalls leaning in around the cordon of flame light.

The crowd were animated to the point of fervour, amped up on narco and cheap still-alcohol. Most were armed. Cristo saw cudgels, freight-rail spikes, blades. No guns though. Gaps appeared as the crowd shifted to bay or shove or hustle. Each offered a fleeting glimpse of what lay beyond them, of what was in the circle. Two urban gladiators, hands wrapped in bandages for grip, armoured in warpaint and leather. One carried a length of broken chain, her hair a fiery red and sticking up in spikes. The other hunched behind a drum lid, using it as an improvised shield, one side of her head shaved, the other left to grow long so a violet swash of hair covered half her face. Both were cut, the one with the chain hungrier for the kill. As she raised her arm to lash out at her opponent, Cristo got a decent look at her.

That's when he started to run.