



## THE TUMP



“Alright, Butt?” called Dai the Bus<sup>1</sup> as he entered the public bar of the Cwmcarn Hotel and saw his pal, Alan Dyson, perched on a high stool, nursing a light amber pint. “Had any luck lately?”

“Alright, Dai?” nodded Alan in response. “Not much, I’m sorry to say. Newkie Brown is it? Come and sit by yer and I’ll get them in.”

“Cheers, Butty.”

“Bottle of Newcastle Brown Ale and a jug please, Bri,” said Alan, turning to the barman. “And another pint of Skull Attack<sup>2</sup> for me when you’re ready.”

Dai pulled another high stool up to the bar as Alan counted out £1.74 and handed it over to the barman. In the background someone had put 50p in the jukebox causing T’Pau to start belting out *China in your Hand*.

“Bloody ‘ell. Killing the art of conversation, that is,” Dai commented wryly.

“Huh. Nothin’ could ever do that in Wales, boy.”

“Fair play. You know, I don’t particularly like the song, but

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<sup>1</sup> In the time-honoured Welsh fashion, Dafydd Jones had been known as Dai the Bus ever since he left school and went to work as a mechanic at Newport Bus Station.

<sup>2</sup> Brains SA, a light-coloured bitter known all over Wales as ‘Skull Attack’. Local legend has it that, when the wind was in the right direction, people had been known to pass out in the street from the smell of caramelising malt and hops coming from the old Brains Brewery in Cardiff.





I'm not going to lie to you, that Carol Decker's a bit of all right, isn't she?"

"I would, definitely."

"That's not saying much though, is it?" laughed Dai. "The same goes for half the girls in the Valley."

"And you wouldn't, I suppose?"

"Fair play, Butt. Fair play. So, well anyway, how have you been getting on with that mine detector thingy of yours then?"

"It's not a mine detector, mun, it's a *metal* detector. And its state of the art – a 19kHz Gold Bug made by Fisher over in America – cost me a bloody fortune it did."

"But have you actually *found* anything with it yet?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I've been up in Evans' field, you know, where he keeps his sheep, like?"

"Hope you remembered to take your wellies<sup>3</sup>."

"Ha, bloody ha. As I was saying, I've been up the field a couple of times, but all I found were a few rusty nails and the bell off a cat's collar."

"Don't think you'll be retiring just yet then."

"Maybe not, But its early days. Old Evans nearly caught me the other night so I was thinking of going up the Scenic Drive to see what I can find there. Right up to the top of Twmbarlwm, where the Tump is. I remember my da taking me there years ago. He said that the old Druids used to sacrifice people by throwing them off the top and that there was supposed to be a load of buried treasure somewhere around there as well."

"I don't know about that," said Dai, draining his pot. "But I do know that 'Noddy' Jenkins and his mates have been going up there a lot lately, so that they can ride their dirt bikes. Been causing a lot of damage they have by all accounts – I saw something about it in the *South Wales Argus*. Apparently, a lot of people in the Gwent County Council are up in arms, like. Christ, Alan, Noddy and his boyos are a bloody nasty lot. I wouldn't want to go anywhere near them if I could help it. Same again, is it?"

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<sup>3</sup> A very old, and very politically incorrect, Welsh joke. 'Why do Welsh farmers wear big wellies? So that the sheep can't get away.'





“Aye, why not? Thanks, Dai.”

Alan had known Gwyn ‘Noddy’ Jenkins<sup>4</sup> since Primary, and Dai was right, he was a thoroughly nasty piece of work. Mostly, he and his mates would hang around in Feeder Row Park on their 125cc two-strokes pretending to be a motorcycle gang, but occasionally Alan would see Noddy in the street when Noddy was out walking Dog<sup>5</sup>. Dog, a white American pit bull terrier with reddish-brown markings over one eye and both ears, was as unpleasant as his owner and would growl and strain at his leash whenever he saw Alan coming.

“*Dum*, that’s a bad pint. I don’t know how they get away with it,” said Alan, taking a sip of the fresh beer that had been set before him and grimacing theatrically. “I’ll admit you’ve got a point there, Dai. But I’m sure I can keep out of their way if I go at the right time. Sunday afternoon, perhaps. I know that Noddy goes round to his auntie Brenda’s for dinner on a Sunday. I’ve heard him banging on a few times about how much meat and gravy she gives him.”

“Oh well, it’s your funeral, I suppose – I swear your moonspending<sup>6</sup> will be the death of you one day. You coming to Pandy Park on Saturday for Crosskeys against Neath? Should be a good game – Crosskeys will mullah them, I reckon.”



That Sunday Alan loaded his detector, his spade, and his trowel into the boot of his red Ford Fiesta, along with some other bits and pieces, and set off up the road that led to the Scenic Drive.

Everyone in the village was proud of the Scenic Drive, a stunning land reclamation project that had started when Cwmcarn Colliery was closed, back when Alan was a kid, and which now provided a tourist route for cars and bikes that snaked through the dark hills and dense forests covering the side of the mountain of Twmbarlwm. Alan’s father had worked

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<sup>4</sup> No-one really knew why Gwyn Jenkins was called ‘Noddy’. It was generally supposed to have had something to do with the bright red bobble hat he had worn as a child.

<sup>5</sup> A man of limited imagination, Noddy had simply named his dog, ‘Dog’.

<sup>6</sup> The term ‘moonspending’ referred to using metal detectors to search for ancient artefacts at night without permission. This practice is now generally known as ‘nighthawking’.





at the colliery and would often take him for walks through the forest to the old pit head where the last few dilapidated colliery buildings still stood, and where the Pit Wheel monument had been erected on the site of the No. 2 up-shaft. During these walks Alan's da would tell him of his days working the Big Vien, of the last remaining ponies that were used in the dismantling of districts, and of his Butties, John Bourne, killed by a falling stone, and poor Harry Sims, who was crushed between two trams.

But the old man would also tell other stories, tales of the old ones who built the hill fort on the mountain's summit, and of the Druidic sacrifices that were supposed to have taken place on the site in an attempt to persuade the gods to halt the relentless advance of the Roman invaders. But the story Alan remembered most was that of the giant, Brân, a great hero who died in battle against the Irish king, Matholwch, and whose body<sup>7</sup> was buried under the Tump together with a magnificent hoard of gold and silver. A hoard that was supposedly guarded by thousands of wild bees that would attack anyone who tried to interfere with it.

As Alan drove along the winding lanes, images of Brân's treasure danced in his mind. Why shouldn't he be the one to find it? Hadn't that load of silver altar pieces been discovered by a metal detectorist in Ireland only a few years ago? They said that lot had all been buried to keep it safe from the Vikings, so it stood to reason that there might well be something similar on the mountain. The bees were a bit of a worry, though. Especially since he'd read somewhere that a couple of council workers sent to repair some erosion on the Tump had been chased back to their van by a swarm of bees that flew around their heads and ended up covering half the van. But then, the workers had probably disturbed a nest somehow – nothing supernatural about that, was there?

After a few miles, Alan pulled into the small car park that nestled into the foot of the hill and unloaded his gear. Looking up, he could see the steep but well-worn forest track that eventually led to the castle mound, protruding upwards from

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<sup>7</sup> But not his head. Alan's father said that you could be sure that Brân was a Welshman because when his head was cut off it continued to talk for seven years, until it was finally buried on the White Hill in England.





the hill to give the impression of a woman's nipple<sup>8</sup>.

OK, thought Alan. *It's all good. There doesn't seem to be anyone about so let's do it. Who dares wins, like that cockney bloke says on telly. This time tomorrow I could be a millionaire.*

A stiff breeze was beginning to get up when Alan passed through the metal kissing gate at the back of the car park and began to climb the trail. By the time he had reached the fort and crossed the plateau to the castle mound, the wind was whistling round his ears causing him to be very grateful for the headphones he had brought along to plug into the Gold Bug's jack socket.

"Bloody 'ell, it's nobblin' up here," Alan gasped, fumbling with the Gold Bug's control functions to switch the machine to auto-tune mode for wide searching.

Slowly, Alan began sweeping the detector's search coil over the ground below the mound in a side-to-side motion, listening carefully for any beeps or clicks on his headphones, and he continued like this for some while, overlapping his sweeps to ensure that he was covering the entire area. However, to his utter disappointment he drew a complete blank. Not even one of those little tabs off the top of a tin of pop. After a couple of hours, Alan was very near to giving up. The wind had dropped but it was still cold, and the light was fading.

*Just one last sweep, he thought. And then I'll pack up and go home.*

Some way away, on the western side of the mound, was a pile of quarried stones, about thirty feet across and a foot high. Hopping up onto these stones, Alan swung the Gold Bug in a wide arc above them. And then he heard it. It was exceptionally faint, but it was there. A low beep every time he moved the detector over the centre of the stones. Alan felt a frisson of excitement course through him as he continued sweeping in an ever-decreasing pattern until the signal strengthened. When he was sure of the location he moved the coil gingerly from side to side, finally stopping when the response was loudest and marking the stone that lay directly below the coil's bullseye shaped hot spot with a thick, black felt-tip pen.

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<sup>8</sup> Twmbarlwm was sometimes known locally as 'The Nipple' because of this little mound, which was in fact the remains of a mediaeval motte and baily castle.





“Fuck me,” he breathed. “I’ve only bloody got something.”

Laying the detector down as close to the target as possible, Alan took his spade and levered up the stone, dragging it away to expose the soil. Then, he held the detector over the bare earth and listened. This time the signal came through loud and clear – no doubt about it, there was definitely some sort of metal object buried there. Alan gripped his trowel and, his heart now firmly in his mouth, scratched at the ground to excavate the area as carefully as he could. The first few inches yielded nothing but pebbles and a couple of sorry looking worms, but the further he dug the stronger the signal became. It was at perhaps eight or nine inches down that Alan’s trowel scraped across something that had the dull gleam of metal about it. Resorting to his fingers, Alan poked around the tiny object and lifted it from the dirt to examine it more closely. Spitting on his find, he rubbed it clean with the sleeve of his coat, and then sat down heavily, not daring at first to believe what it was that he had uncovered.

“Christ! It’s gold,” he whispered.

Alan stared at the thing in his hand for some time, turning it this way and that to be completely sure of what he had. It was a small coppery pink gold, dish-shaped coin, on the face of which was something that appeared to be the sun shining above a peculiar horse with three tails, and some other little animal that Alan couldn’t quite make out. On the reverse, the coin bore the letters ‘COR’. And, if there was one, then there surely must be more. Slipping the coin into his pocket, Alan returned to the hole and scrabbled around in the earth. It was getting darker now and he was forced to resort to using his torch so that he could see what he was doing, but nevertheless he brought up first one coin, and then another, and another. But, while he worked, Alan found that he was becoming gradually aware of a low reverberation that seemed to be coming from the other side of the hill. His stomach gave an involuntary lurch, and his eyes widened in fear at the thought that the story about the bees might be true after all, and that they were coming for him because he had disturbed the hidden treasure. Then, he heard laughter and raised voices, and realised that, far from being angry bees, the noise was actually the abrasive whirr of a two-stroke engine. Shit! It could only be Noddy Jenkins and his pals. They mustn’t find him here. Not now!







Thrusting a couple more coins into his pocket, Alan scooped the earth back into the hole and quickly pulled the displaced stone over it. He couldn't quite restore the area to its original condition, but it would do. There was no sign of Noddy yet, so he shut off his torch, bundled up his tools, and legged it, taking care to keep low like he had seen Sylvester Stallone do in the *Rambo* films. It seemed to take an age, but eventually he reached the car park, threw his stuff into the boot of the Fiesta, and roared off, tyres kicking up the gravel in his wake, not daring to stop until he reached the relative safety of the ginnel that ran behind his mam's house.



"I'll meet you down the 'Stute<sup>9</sup> tonight, Dai," said Alan. "Like I say, I've got something important to tell you. See you around eight. Bye."

Alan replaced the telephone receiver and sighed deeply. He had to tell someone about what he had found on the Tump, and Dai was his best and oldest friend. He had reservations, of course. After all, it was he that had found the gold and he wasn't sure if he wanted to share it. But Alan and Dai had always stuck together. They were inseparable, and Alan knew that his conscience wouldn't let him keep this unbelievable stroke of good fortune to himself. Besides, he needed Dai. There could be hundreds of coins under those stones, and it might take ages to dig them all up. He needed someone to keep watch in case Noddy Jenkins was to come and catch him in the act, and Dai was just the man for the job.

So, that night found Alan and Dai hunched over one of the simple wooden tables that lined the walls of the 'Stute, looking into two pints of Courage Best. With there being no bingo on a Monday, there weren't many other people in the club, only a couple of lads sitting up at the bar and a small group of old boys playing doms over on the other side.

"What's it all about then, Alan?" asked Dai. "We can't sit here in silence all night, and I know you didn't drag me along to this dead an' alive hole solely for the pleasure of my company."

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<sup>9</sup> The Blackwood Working Men's Club & Institute, rightly famed throughout the Valley for its cheap beer, bingo, pool tables, and live bands.





In answer, Alan reached into his pocket, pulled out the handful of coins he had brought down from the Tump and laid them on the table.

“These,” he said simply.

Dai picked up one of the, now very shiny, gold coins and peered at it in disbelief.

“*Dum!*”

“They’re gold. I found them on the Tump yesterday afternoon. And there’s plenty more where they came from.”

“You found them? What are they, Roman or something?”

“No, not Roman. I looked them up in my back issues of *Treasure Hunting Magazine* and I reckon they’re Celtic. They’re called ‘staters’ and the Dobunni tribe, who used to live round here thousands of years ago, minted them using gold that they mined in the hills... You know? I think I might have found Brân’s treasure, Dai.”

“But you can’t just keep it, can you? Isn’t it treasure trove, or something?”

“I don’t think so. Gold and silver can only be treasure trove if it was deliberately hidden by someone who intended to come back to get it later. If I really have found Brân’s grave, then the people who buried the treasure in it *can’t* have been meaning to come back for it later. Like all that stuff they found at Sutton Hoo before the war.”

“You must have to report it though – to the Council or someone – whoever it is who owns the Tump? And there’s a sign saying it’s an ancient monument, isn’t there? Can’t you get done for mucking about with places like that?”

“I dunno, maybe. I think it’s always been public land, open to everyone. But we can worry about that later. What do you say, Butt? Will you come and help me get the rest of it?”

“What? Er... I’m not sure... Christ! What am I saying, of course I bloody will. You know I will. When do you want to go?”

“Keep your voice down then,” Alan cautioned. “We don’t want everybody to hear. I was thinking of going up there again on Wednesday night. We probably shouldn’t wait that long, really, but I’ve got my City & Guilds class tomorrow.”







“Always good to have a trade to fall back on, Al. There will always be a demand for good electricians. Wednesday it is. Shall I come by Telephone House<sup>10</sup> at about half six?”

“Sounds good. Bring a torch with you. I’ll sort out all the other stuff we need. Another pint, is it?”

“Aye. If you’re twisting my arm, like?”

Several pints later Alan and Dai weaved their way out into the dimly lit club car park, where the fresh air hit them.

“Whoa!” said Dai, leaning drunkenly on Alan’s arm. “Must have had a bad pint somewhere there, I can’t stand up straight. I was fine while I was indoors, mind.”

“Had a few too many, have we boys?” came a voice from out of the gloom.

Alan and Dai turned to see Noddy Jenkins standing by the low wall that bounded the car park, holding Dog on a short lead so that his front legs were being lifted off the ground in his frantic efforts to get at them. Behind Noddy were three of his henchmen, all glaring menacingly at the two friends.

“Alright, Gwyn?” said Alan, forcing a smile.

“We’ve been waiting for you, Dyson.”

“Hello Noddy, mun,” grinned Dai, “Haven’t seen you in ages. What’s occurin’?”

“Shut y’gob, Jones, I’m not talking to you,” spat Noddy. “I said, I’ve been waiting for you, Dyson.”

“Have you, Gwyn? Why’s that?”

“You were up Twmbarlwm yesterday, weren’t you?”

“I might have been.”

“Don’t get chopsy with me, boy. I seen you, and your shitty little car. What were you doin’?”

“Nothing,” said Alan, his stomach now in more knots than a Scoubidou string. “Taking a walk before dinner, that’s all.”

“Well, you stay away from there in future. That’s our place, see, and we don’t want you up there. Gareth, show Dyson how

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<sup>10</sup> Although he was attending night school to train as an electrician, during the day Alan worked as a salesman for BT. Because his work involved him keeping so many samples at home, Dai would always refer to going round to Alan’s mam’s as ‘visiting Telephone House’.





much we don't want him anywhere near the Tump."

At Noddy's command, one of his henchmen, a big, broad-shouldered ape of a man, stepped forward, grabbed Alan by the shoulders and drove his bony knee into Alan's groin causing him to double over in pain. At the same time, the thug chopped down hard with both fists on the back of Alan's head, sending him sprawling onto the tarmac. He then drew back his foot, intending to slam it hard into Alan's ribs, but was frustrated in his attempt by another peremptory order from Noddy.

"That's enough, Gareth. He'll have learned his lesson now."

As Alan lay on the ground, pain coursing through his body, he heard Noddy's parting shot.

"Make sure you stay away, Dyson. Do you hear me? If we find you on the mountain again, we'll break both your legs. Or maybe worse... Come on boys, the bus will be along in a minute."

Once Noddy and his cronies had walked away in the direction of the bus stop, Dai knelt beside his friend to find out how badly he had been hurt. Luckily the damage wasn't too severe, and Dai was able to prop Alan up so that he was sitting with his back against the wall of the 'Stute.

"Well, that's that I s'pose," Dai sighed.

"What do you mean?" croaked Alan.

"We won't be able to get at the rest of the treasure now, will we? You heard what he said. If we as much as set foot on the Tump they'll have our guts for garters."

"Bollocks to that. Noddy fuckin' Jenkins and his neanderthals can't stop us, Dai."

"Can't they?"

"No, they can't. There's a fortune on that hill and it's ours for the taking. Now help me up and let's get home. Make sure you get some rest tomorrow and I'll see you on Wednesday night as arranged."

"Oh Christ!" said Dai. "I need a piss."





The next day, Alan went to work as usual but found himself completely unable to concentrate. And it was the same after work, when he went off to his class at the Gwent College of Higher Education. Images of gold coins, chalices, jewellery, and heavens knew what else danced through his mind. But, despite his previous bravado, Alan couldn't prevent these thoughts becoming associated with the fear of Noddy Jenkins and the likely consequences should he and Dai run into Noddy and his gang again the next night. They would have to be careful, that's all – and be ready to cover their tracks and run if there was any sign of trouble. Surely, Noddy didn't ride around the Tump every night? He had to have a night off sometime. Perhaps he might stay in to watch *Taggart* on HTV, or something?

Alan called in sick on Wednesday. His boss, Dai Twice<sup>11</sup>, wasn't surprised. He said that he had noticed that Alan hadn't been himself yesterday and, being a sympathetic sort of person, was quite happy for Alan to stay off work until he felt better. So, after spending a fretful day on his mam's settee flicking through his metal detecting magazines, Alan at last went out the back to load up the car at about five in the afternoon. Not that there was much to load, that is. He already knew where to dig and reckoned that they didn't need the detector anymore. One spade should do them, a couple of trowels, and two of his old school satchels to carry all the treasure.

Dai turned up at six-thirty, on the dot.

"Ready then, Dai?" Alan greeted his friend with a solemn nod. "Got your torch, have you?"

"Aye," replied Dai, hefting a big chrome-plated metal and red plastic flashlight "I've got my old Ever Ready and I've put new batteries in so there should be no danger of it packing up on us."

"Bangin'. Let's go"

This time, Alan avoided the car park at the foot of the hill, choosing instead to park the Fiesta a bit further on, amongst some trees at the side of the road, so there was less chance of it being spotted. It was already dark, but the sky was clear and the light of the full moon above provided illumination enough for Alan and Dai to see where they were going. Even so, they still

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<sup>11</sup> Real name David Davies, obviously.





needed to switch their torches on and off every now and then so that they could safely find their way along the winding forest track.

“Try not to use your torch too often,” whispered Alan. “We don’t want anyone to see us.”

“That’s all very well,” moaned Dai. “But if I go arse over tit and break my leg, they’ll hear me from here to Pontywaun.”

On reaching the plateau, the pair ducked down beneath the mossy ramparts of the old hill fort and peeped over to stare across at the castle mound silhouetted against the sky.

“See anything?” Dai asked.

“Nope. Do you hear anything?”

“Nope.”

“Looks like the coast is clear then. We’ll wait a bit longer though – just to make sure.”

After a few tense minutes had passed, Alan gave the word to press on and, like commandos attacking an enemy pillbox, they crept forward to the cairn of stones that lay between them and the mound.

“This is the place,” said Alan. “This is where I found them. Give me a hand shifting this middle stone.”

Alan slung his satchel over his shoulder, inserted the tip of his spade under the edge of the stone and tipped it up so that Dai could push it aside.

“We’ll start with this one and lift the others later if we need to.”

Alan dropped to his knees and dug into the loose earth with his trowel while Dai acted as watchman. It wasn’t long before he reached the level of the hoard.

“Christ, this is unbelievable,” Alan muttered as he brought out handfuls of muddy coins and stuffed them into his satchel.

“What is it? What have you got?” said Dai, unable to resist kneeling down at the side of the hole himself.

“Gold coins – hundreds of them, Dai *bach*. We’re fucking rich! Shine your torch down by yer so we can see what we’re dealing with.”

An hour or so of frantic digging unearthed not only more





coins, but also several heavy gold torques, and an assortment of coloured glass beads. Both men were sweating profusely by the time they stopped to take stock of their haul.

“We’ll leave the beads,” declared Alan. “No sense in disturbing everything, eh?”

“I think you’ve disturbed enough, Dyson.”

Alan’s heart sank as he turned to see Noddy bloody Jenkins and Dog standing a few paces behind him. And Noddy’s boys were all there at his back, their bikes laid on the grass by the mound. But this time there was something strange about them.

Noddy himself was dressed in what looked like leather riding breeches, long black boots, and a black leather waistcoat covered in metal studs and spikes, worn without a shirt. Around his neck were half a dozen or so thick silver chains and a macabre pendant depicting the angel of death. On his head was a bizarre leather skullcap adorned with two black sheep’s horns, and he appeared to have blackened his face with burnt cork, or maybe shoe polish. Gareth and the other lads were similarly attired; a few of them carrying torches and others holding on to pit bull terriers that were the spitting image of Dog. There were even a couple of girls with them, one of whom Alan recognised as Catrin Cadwalader who worked at Williams the Butchers in Risca. At least he thought it was Catrin, but he couldn’t remember ever seeing her in a leather grunge punk corset and skintight trousers before. *Nefi Bhi*, but she was a big girl though, norks like footballs she had, and that corset was thrusting them up for all to see.

“Bloody ‘ell, Noddy, what have you come as?” said Dai.

“Shut the fuck up, Jones!” yelled Noddy. “You don’t know who you’re dealing with do you? I am Gwyn ap Nudd, Lord of the Dead and I lead this band of night-wanderers, the spirits of those slain on Twmbarlwm!”

“Don’t be daft, mun, that’s Gareth from the video shop, that is, and there’s Tommy the Milk, and Linda from the hairdressers.”

“Come on Gwyn, stop sodding about,” said Alan desperately. “If you want in on what we’ve found, just say so.”

“That which you have found cannot be owned by the likes of you, and nor can it belong to me!” roared Noddy, his voice taking on a very strange tone indeed. “Long ago, I gathered the





soul of the fallen warrior, Brân the Blessed, and interred his mortal remains here on this hill, placing with them such gold and jewels necessary to sustain his greatness in his journey to the afterlife. And now, Lord Arawn, you think you can claim Brân's treasure as your own. Oh yes, don't think I don't know who you really are, Alan Dyson. You are Arawn ap Dys, pretender to the throne of Annwn, the Otherworld."

"The what? Don't be a bloody idiot, Noddy. Look, we're going now. There's loads of stuff left down that hole and you're welcome to it. So back off, alright?"

"You are going nowhere, Arawn ap Dys. Gareth... I mean... Iorwerth ap Huw... and the rest of you... take them."

"Fuck you. Run, Dai!"

With that, Alan and Dai turned and ran Hell for leather along the plateau, leaving their tools and their torches; not daring to look behind. But, surprisingly, Noddy and his gang did not immediately follow. After a few seconds however, the hill was brightly lit by the glare of headlights and the air was full of the buzzing sound of two-stroke engines and the barking of dogs as the night-wanderers fired up their bikes and set off in pursuit.

Clambering over the ramparts, Alan and Dai hit the descent at breakneck speed, heads down and unbalanced by their momentum. Alan felt himself falling and, arms flailing wildly, he hit the track hard, turning over and over until he came to a stop, laid flat out on his back. He looked up in terror, fully expecting to see headlights coming straight at him as Noddy and the rest of them sought to run him down. But there were no lights. Instead, what he saw was an unbelievable cavalcade of fur-clad demons on dark horses streaming across the moonlit sky, accompanied by a pack of pure white hounds in full cry, their red eyes and ears glowing brightly like hot coals.

Alan felt two hands grabbing at him and pulling him up.

"G... Get up, mun. Jesus... Get up!" Dai was almost incoherent with fear as he dragged Alan to his feet. "Get off the track!"

Dai pulled his friend into the thicket at the side of the path, and they plunged on, deep into the forest. At first, they could still hear the hounds above them, along with what sounded like the braying notes of a horn similar to those used by the toffs







who rode with the Tredegar Farmers, but eventually all was quiet once more.

“Do you think they’ve gone?” said Dai.

“Fuck knows.”

“Please tell me what’s going on, Butt.”

“I dunno what’s going on, Dai. I thought it was only Gwyn Jenkins and his mates pissing about, but now... I’ve read stories of what they used to call the ‘Wild Hunt’, you know? In the olden days they were supposed to hunt souls at night with a pack of white-bodied, red-eared hounds called the ‘dogs of Hell’. And, if I remember rightly, the leader of the Wild Hunt was the Celtic god, Gwyn ap Nudd<sup>12</sup>.”

“But you don’t believe all that bollocks, do you?”

“Like I say, I don’t know. But I know what I saw. And I think you saw it too.”

“I think I did, aye...”

“It’s quiet now, at least. Let’s see if we can get back to the car.”

Without their torches Alan and Dai made slow progress through the trees and bracken. It was therefore some time before they emerged from the forest into the car park at the foot of the hill, where they stopped to take stock of their situation.

“Got your satchel?” asked Alan, taking his own from off his shoulder and holding it in front of him.

“Yeah.”

“Then we did it. We’ll make a fortune out of this. You see if we don’t.”

“Yeah, but...”

But there was no time for ‘buts’. Without warning, a headlamp blinked on, and then a half dozen more, bathing the car park in their harsh light; and the cough and whirr of a dirt bike engine being started cut sharply through the overarching silence. Slowly, Noddy inched his bike forward to confront his quarry.

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<sup>12</sup> Gwyn ap Nudd, the ‘White son of Mist’, was supposedly a warrior/hunter god of the wilderness and ruler of Annwn.





“You cannot escape me, Arawn ap Dys. I have you. And now you die.”

Noddy revved his engine, and the front wheel of his bike lifted as he rode straight at Alan. But Alan was ready. Neatly sidestepping so that Noddy shot past him, he swung his satchel full of gold and smacked Noddy right in the face. The blow knocked Noddy clean out of his saddle, and with a shower of sparks, the bike skidded into the iron kissing gate. Sparing barely a glance for the pile of tangled metal behind them, Alan and Dai rushed over to where Noddy lay. He was out cold. Alan slapped him round the face in an effort to revive the fallen biker, but as he did so he became dreadfully aware that the other members of the gang had closed in around them, engines buzzing like a swarm of angry bees.



The public bar of the Cwmcarn Hotel was quiet when Dai the Bus next came in. Alan Dyson was sitting at one of the tables. He was wearing an Avirex bomber jacket and a pair of black Levi jeans. On the table was a black Simpson motorcycle helmet and on the seat beside him sat Catrin Cadwalader. Catrin looked dazzling in black fishnets and a low-cut black leather Ambira mini dress, a silver chain belt draped around her waist.

“Alright Butt?” called Dai. “Pint, is it?”

“Aye, thanks.”

“What you having, *cariad*?”

“I’ll have a Pony, please,” replied Catrin, snuggling up closer to Alan and crossing her legs seductively.

“So that’s a Newkie Brown, a pint of SA, and a Pony then please, Bri.”

“The little drink with the big kick, eh? No worries. Coming right up, gentlemen... and lady,” replied the barman, reaching for a jug from the rack above his head. “Here, Catrin. You seen anything of that Gwyn Jenkins lately?”

“Not since he went off to stay with his nan in Barry, Bri. You know, after the accident? Good riddance to him, I say,” replied Catrin.





“Aye, you’re right there, love. Him and that bloody dog of his.”

Alan and Dai said nothing for quite a while.

“How’s the beast then, Al?” said Dai eventually.

“Running OK at the moment Dai, since you’re asking.”

“Can’t beat a big bike, can you? Especially over rough terrain.”

“You’re dead right there, Butty.”

When Alan and Dai returned from Twmbarlwm they had thought long and hard about what they should do with their gold. In due course, common sense won out and they decided to come clean, reporting the find to the South Wales Central Coroner’s Office. An inquest was held and, following some initial, inconclusive wrangling over whether Alan and Dai had been trespassing on private land, the finds were sent to the British Museum, with the two friends being awarded the full antiquarian value amounting to several thousand pounds each<sup>13</sup>. With his share, Alan had bought himself a Yamaha YZ465, a big-bore motocross bike known for its brutal power and awesome handling. At the same time, Dai had purchased a Kawasaki KX500<sup>14</sup>.

“What are you up to tonight then, boy?” asked Dai cheerily, sipping his pint. “Up the ‘Stute, is it? I heard they’ve got a band on.”

“I don’t fancy the ‘Stute tonight. The band’s only some alternative rubbish anyway – be different if it was ‘Lostprophets’ or some other Welsh Metal<sup>15</sup> outfit. No, I think Catrin and I will be joining the others up at the Tump again tonight, Dai. You coming?”

“Don’t mind if I do, Arawn ap Dys. Oh, and... Er... All hail the Lord of Annwn, Butty.”

“Aye, with knobs on,” said Arawn.

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<sup>13</sup> By rights, Alan and Dai should have been prosecuted under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 for metal detecting on an ancient monument, but strangely, no charges were ever laid. It was almost as if, for some reason, the pair had been granted a kind of tacit immunity.

<sup>14</sup> An impressive looking bike, though its overall impact was somewhat lessened by Dai’s ‘L’ plates.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Welsh Metal’ was a deafening subgenre of heavy metal music that often drew lyrical inspiration from Welsh mythology and history.





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**John Pitman** is the author of several historical/paranormal novels full of bodice-ripping pleasures, murder, intrigue and a dash of the briny deep.

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