

DARK ADVENTURE RADIO THEATRE

"THE RATS IN THE WALLS"

by

Sean Branney and Andrew Leman

Adapted from "The Rats in the Walls"
By H.P. Lovecraft

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SFX: static, radio tuning, snippet of '30s song, more tuning, static dissolves to:

Dark Adventure Radio THEME MUSIC.

ANNOUNCER

Tales of intrigue, adventure, and the mysterious occult that will stir your imagination and make your very blood run cold.

MUSIC CRESCENDO.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

This is Dark Adventure Radio Theatre, featuring your host, Creighton Cobb. Today's episode: H.P. Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Walls".

THEME MUSIC DIMINISHES AND EPISODE MUSIC BEGINS.

CREIGHTON COBB

An American businessman undertakes the restoration of his ancient ancestral home in England. After moving in, he's haunted by strange phenomena, apparently coming from the very walls of the legend-haunted mansion. A team of experts joins him to dig into the centuried structure's shadowed past, and its shadowy cellars. Can the investigators solve the lingering mystery of the grim and rumor-shrouded priory, or are they merely ushering in the most horrific chapter of the house's monstrous history?

MUSIC punctuation.

CREIGHTON COBB (CONT'D)

But first, a word from our sponsor.

A few piano notes from the BILE BEANS JINGLE.

CREIGHTON COBB (CONT'D)

Some listeners simply cannot believe that Bile Beans taken at bed time can provide a miraculous, life changing cure.

(MORE)

CREIGHTON COBB (CONT'D)
But they can, and do! Let's meet
Mildred, an actual Bile Beans
customer.

MILDRED
Hello, Mr. Cobb.

CREIGHTON COBB
Our listeners would love to hear
the astonishing story of how Bile
Beans saved your life.

MILDRED
Well, I had a medical condition
which was very painful. I was
dropping weight and losing the
color in my cheeks. I saw ten
different doctors, and none of them
could cure my condition.

CREIGHTON COBB
That's dreadful. What did you do?

MILDRED
I was at my wits end until my
friendly neighborhood pharmacist
asked if I'd tried Bile Beans. I
hadn't, so I bought a tin that day.

CREIGHTON COBB
What happened?

MILDRED
Oh, Mr. Cobb, it was a miracle. As
soon as the next day the pain was
gone and my face resumed a healthy
glow. A week later, I was feeling
better than ever. I've been taking
Bile Beans at bed time ever since.

CREIGHTON COBB
(flirty)
And now Mildred, I must say you're
the very picture of good health!

MILDRED
(blushing)
Thank you, Mr. Cobb. And thank you
Bile Beans!

ANNOUNCER
Friendly family pharmacies favor
Bile Beans - ask your neighborhood
chemist for them today!

CREIGHTON COBB
 Stay healthy, bright eyed and slim
 with Bile Beans.

MUSIC TRANSITION.

CREIGHTON COBB (CONT'D)
 And now, Dark Adventure Radio
 Theatre presents H.P. Lovecraft's
 "The Rats in the Walls".

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CARFAX BURNS - 1865

2

Distant CANNON & MUSKET FIRE and SHOUTING/SCREAMING. The sounds of a plantation bracing itself for ATTACK. FOOTSTEPS RUN PAST on the wooden floor.

GRANDPA
 Hannah! Is that you? Get in here!
 Help me!

FOOTSTEPS of HANNAH, a slave woman, slow down and stop.

HANNAH
 The Yankee soldiers broke through
 the lines, Mister Delapore. Your
 men can't hold 'em off. They're
 coming here - I reckon they're
 planning to burn Carfax for sure!

GRANDPA
 (wheezy)
 What of Mr. Harper? Where is--

HANNAH
 He got himself shot, down at the
 front gate. Time for me to go.

FOOTSTEPS as she prepares to go.

GRANDPA
 You're not going anywhere! Fetch me
 my lock box.

HANNAH
 I'd say my days of fetching for you
 are done.

GRANDPA
 Why you ungrateful nig--

HANNAH

No, sir! Don't you use that word.
Don't you dare! Not ever again!
Times is changed.

MORE RUNNING FOOTSTEPS APPROACH as Lizzie runs in.

LIZZIE

Big Daddy, the Yankees are coming.
They have torches!

GRANDPA

I hear 'em, Lizzie. Where's
Matthew?

LIZZIE

I sent him to hide in the root
cellar.

GRANDPA

Bring him to me.

BREAKING GLASS OUTSIDE. The sound of APPROACHING TROOPS gets
louder. MUSKET FIRE.

LIZZIE

But Big Daddy, they're coming!

GRANDPA

I'm still the master of this
plantation. He's my only grandson!
Bring him to me now!

LIZZIE

Yes sir.

FOOTSTEPS as Lizzie runs out.

HANNAH

That woman's a fool.

GRANDPA

(wheezy)

There's something we can agree on.
Hannah, get me the lock box.

HANNAH

Look at you, squirming on that bed
like a bug on a pin. My, how the
mighty have fallen.

GRANDPA

It's important.

HANNAH

You're a crazy old man. Mr. Lincoln's troops at your door and you're worried about some old box. What's in it? Money?

GRANDPA

It's not that. It's... something for Matthew. That little boy has never done you any harm.

HANNAH

(after a pause)

No, I suppose he hasn't. Don't figure I could say the same for you.

GRANDPA

I suppose not. But my time's about up. What matters now is the boy. The future. The box. Please.

The RATTLE of a metal box and key.

HANNAH

Here you go then, god help me.

GRANDPA

You can go now. The soldiers will treat you kindly enough.

HANNAH

Goodbye, Mister Delapore.

(pause)

I hope the lord will forgive you and your family for the terrible things you done. I truly do.

GRANDPA

I smell smoke. Go on now--

CROSSING FOOTSTEPS as Hannah leaves and Lizzie brings Matthew. BATTLE SOUNDS INTENSIFY.

HANNAH

Goodbye, Miss Lizzie.

Hannah HURRIES DOWN THE STAIRS.

LIZZIE

Hannah, what--

GRANDPA

Let her go, Lizzie. Is that young Matthew? Bring him here. We don't have much time.

LIZZIE

Yes, sir. Go to your grand-daddy, Matthew.

GRANDPA

(kind but firm)

Matthew, you come here now. Closer. Now listen. What I'm going to tell you is important. I want you to remember every word, understand?

LITTLE MATTHEW

Yes, sir.

GRANDPA

You see what I have here?

LITTLE MATTHEW

Your lock-box.

GRANDPA

That's right. And see inside here is an envelope. You know what that is?

LITTLE MATTHEW

It holds letters.

GRANDPA

So it does. You're a clever little boy. How old are you now?

LITTLE MATTHEW

Seven and a half, sir.

GRANDPA

Well this here envelope holds very important papers. It was given to me by my father, and it was given to him by his father before him. I should give it to your father, but he's gone to Richmond.

LITTLE MATTHEW

Yes, sir. To shoot at Yankees!

GUNFIRE GETTING CLOSER.

GRANDPA

(amused)

That's right. He's shooting at them Yankees, and these here Yankees are shooting at us.

LIZZIE

Big Daddy, we--

GRANDPA

Matthew, the papers in here tell certain things about the past of our family. They're secrets, meant for your father. They're not for little boys. Even clever ones.

LITTLE MATTHEW

Secrets like about cousin Randolph?

LIZZIE

Matthew!

GRANDPA

What do you know about your cousin Randolph?

LITTLE MATTHEW

Papa said he went among the negroes and became a voodoo priest.

GRANDPA

He said that to you?

LITTLE MATTHEW

I heard him tell Mama.

GRANDPA

Lizzie, is this true?

LIZZIE

Big Daddy, the soldiers are here! We can't stay any longer! I had the men hitch the wagon--

GRANDPA

I'm not leaving Carfax, Lizzie. Matthew, the Delapores are a proud and noble family. Don't you talk about your cousin to anyone. This envelope. It's sealed, do you see? I'm going to trust you to keep it sealed, and give it to your father for me. Do you understand?

LITTLE MATTHEW
I will, sir.

GRANDPA
Some day, your father will give it
back to you, and then you will read
for yourself. But not until--

BOOM! An artillery shell blasts into the plantation house.
Pandemonium! The WHOOSH OF FLAME. BEGIN TRANSITION MUSIC.

LIZZIE
Daddy! Matthew, come to me!

PANICKED SHOUTS of "FIRE!" from off.

LITTLE MATTHEW
Mama!

LIZZIE
Get away from that window!

LITTLE MATTHEW
But Grand-dad!

Flames ROAR as the mansion burns!

GRANDPA
Take the boy - go!

LIZZIE
Come, Matthew!

They RUN as TIMBERS START TO FALL. MUSIC. CROSSFADE to the
sound of WWI AIRPLANES overhead:

3 R.A.F. AIRFIELD -- 1917

3

NORRYS is an affable air force pilot in his late 20s, from
somewhere right about Bolton, England. ALFRED DELAPORE is a
23-year-old American aviator raised in Boston.

NORRYS
Crikey, Alfred, what a tale! Did
your father ever see what was in
the envelope?

ALFRED
No, it burned with the plantation.

NORRYS
No!

APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS.

CAPTAIN HILL

Ten-hut.

NORRYS

Captain Hill, sir!

ALFRED

(simultaneously)

Sir, yes sir!

CAPTAIN HILL

At ease, Lieutenants. We just got word from the Wing Commander there'll be a briefing at 0900 hours. Appears the Hun may be making a move with their planes - our squadron will need to be ready with ours.

ALFRED

We'll be there, sir.

CAPTAIN HILL

Just what are you two gabbing about?

NORRYS

He's telling me stories from America, sir! Burning plantations, family secrets, great stuff!

CAPTAIN HILL

Ha, America! Carry on.

He MARCHES OFF.

NORRYS

You heard him, carry on.

ALFRED

My dad eventually made it through the lines to Richmond and was reunited with my grandpa. But great-granddad was killed that day at Carfax. I wonder what he'd think of me now, fighting in another war.

NORRYS

And a Yank in the bargain, eh what!

ALFRED

Ha! By god, Norrys, that's right!
Well with the old homestead
destroyed the family did move
north, where my grandmother was
from. That's when we finally lost
our last real link with the old de
la Poer line. I never imagined I'd
pick it up again here in England.

NORRYS

And I never imagined I'd meet an
American with a tie to Exham
Priory! And flying with my own
squadron, no less.

ALFRED

I'm writing a letter to my father -
he's going to love hearing about
the old family seat. I mean c'mon -
a ruined castle complete with all
the old legends you've told me
about. He'll think it's a gas!

NORRYS

Yes, they're right ripping, some of
them, although the people up the
valley take them pretty seriously.

ALFRED

Dad's always told me that we
Delapores fled from England under a
cloud of suspicion, but if he knew
anything about the murders
committed by... what did you say
his name was?

NORRYS

Walter de la Poer, eleventh Baron
Exham.

ALFRED

Yes, if he knew about them he's
never mentioned it. And you say no
one's lived in Exham Priory since
my family left it?

NORRYS

Not since the 17th century. I must
take you there. It's a fascinating
old ruin. Quite picturesque.

(MORE)

NORRYS (CONT'D)

The locals avoid it, but my uncle gets requests from architects and that lot to study it because it has Gothic towers resting on a Saxon or Romanesque substructure, they say. And the foundation in turn is of a still earlier order: Roman, and even Druidic or native Cymric, if legends speak truly. Built right into the side of a limestone cliff!

ALFRED

Amazing. And it's your uncle who owns it now?

NORRYS

It's part of his estates, but it's not much use to him. I'm sure he'd be glad to hand it back to the de la Poers. For a reasonable sum, of course.

They LAUGH.

ALFRED

Ha! Wouldn't that be great? My dad would love that! He's got the money. Since mother died he's not too attached to Massachusetts. I'll put that in my letter too.

AIRPLANES fly overhead and FOOTSTEPS of a band of men rush by.

CAPTAIN HILL

Look alive, chaps! Jerry **is** on the move. The Commander wants us on the double. We're to fly at dawn!

ALFRED

Right! Come on, Norrrys.

BEGIN MUSIC TRANSITION.

NORRYS

This beastly war. Good luck, Delapore. My best to your father when you write.

ALFRED

Thanks so much, Norrrys. Keep your nose up! I'll see you on the other side!

The ROAR of the AIRPLANES and the WHISTLE of a DROPPING BOMB crossfades into the WHISTLE of a STEAM TRAIN.

4

MANCHESTER -- 1923

4

Fade up the BUSY SOUND of the Manchester train station.

CONDUCTOR
(shouting off)
Windemere! All aboard for
Windermere!

TRAIN DOORS OPEN and the many FOOTSTEPS of passengers. The voice of SIR WILLIAM BRINTON is warm and wise and very British. He's in his 60s.

NORRYS
Sir William!

BRINTON
(shouting)
Captain Norrrys! I say!

NORRYS
(approaching)
Right this way. Good to see you again, sir. Welcome aboard. Mind the gap.

BRINTON
Yes, yes, thank you.

NORRYS
Porter, see to it that Sir William Brinton's bags are on the private car heading to Anchester.

PORTER
Right you are, governor.

The CLINK of some coins. The porter SHUFFLES the baggage. We follow the men as they ENTER the train car and WALK DOWN THE AISLE.

NORRYS
Thank you so very much for coming.

BRINTON
Thank you for the invitation. It will be a pleasure to see Exham Priory again. Such a curious place.

NORRYS

I think you'll find the changes remarkable. Mr. Delapore has poured his heart and soul into the restoration. And his considerable fortune.

BRINTON

So I've gathered. Typical.

NORRYS

Typical, sir?

BRINTON

Americans. Always overdoing it.

NORRYS

Oh, forgive me, Sir William, but no, it's not what you think. It's all to do with his son.

BRINTON

His son?

NORRYS

Yes, Lieutenant Alfred Delapore. A wonderful fellow. I flew with him in the war, you know.

BRINTON

Oh, bully.

NORRYS

Yes. Alfred was shot down over the Somme, and he was frightfully maimed. Richthofen.

BRINTON

The Red Baron! I say...

NORRYS

The nearest field hospital was at Saint Eloi, where he got some dodgy treatment. Alfred lived for two years an invalid. His father did all he could, of course. He was devoted. I tried to be of some assistance, but... well....

BRINTON

Yes, no, of course.

A BLAST OF STEAM announces the train's departure and we hear the SOUND OF ITS MOTION throughout.

NORRYS

After Alfred's death Mr. Delapore was utterly adrift, and he had so enjoyed Alfred's and my letters about the priory and the old family legends that he bought the place. Truth be told, my uncle practically gave it away.

BRINTON

I see.

NORRYS

With Alfred gone, you see, Mr. Delapore is now the last of his line. I think he restored the priory as a sort of monument to his son, re-creating the past in mourning for a future that is now lost. Keeping the memory of his son alive, in a way. Doing for the building what he couldn't do for his boy. Let's to the salon car...

BRINTON

I had no idea. I wonder...

NORRYS

What, Sir William?

BRINTON

Was that entirely wise?

NORRYS

Ah, well, as I mentioned in my telegrams, there have been some unexpected discoveries, some... complications, and... well, now here we all are.

BRINTON

We all?

NORRYS

Yes, you're the last to arrive. The others are awaiting us in the salon. It's just in here. Come, I'll introduce you.

The DOOR OPENS into a small room containing several people.
AD LIB MURMURS of recognition/relief/etc.

NORRYS (CONT'D)

Gentlemen, and Madame, Sir William made it in the nick of time! An old family friend, distinguished professor of archaeology at Cambridge, and fresh from the dusty fields of Anatolia.

POLITE APPLAUSE and AD LIB GREETINGS.

BRINTON

You're too kind, Edward.

LEEDS is substantially more introverted than Brinton. He's a quiet, studious man in his 50s.

LEEDS

Hello, Brinton. Good to see you again. How did you find the Troad?

BRINTON

With difficulty, Leeds.

POLITE CHUCKLES.

NORRYS

Professor Leeds is--

BRINTON

Yes, Leeds and I know each other well. The professor is quite the authority on Anglo-Saxon archaeology, here in Britain. He spearheaded the excavation of Sutton Courtenay. A Cambridge man!

LEEDS

Magdelene College, yes.

NORRYS

May I present Dr. Gilbert Trask, Kings College London.

Trask is professorial, though not quite as advanced in years or social standing as Sir William.

TRASK

How do you do, Sir William? It's an honor to meet you.

BRINTON

What's your field, Dr. Trask?

TRASK

Physical anthropology.

BRINTON

Ah, the study of human remains. An interesting speciality. What do you make of this Piltdown Man business?

TRASK

It would certainly be exciting if it proves to be genuine, but many of my colleagues have their doubts.

THORNTON is young, around 30, and has a delicate, sensitive nature. He is not, in any way, a deliberate fraud.

THORNTON

I'm sorry, Piltdown Man?

NORRYS

And this is Mr. Neville Thornton.

THORNTON

Hello. Who is this Piltdown Man?

TRASK

It's a fossilized anthropoid specimen discovered about ten years ago, fifty miles south of London, which purports to show human evolution.

BRINTON

Some have called it the "missing link".

THORNTON

Ah. And you think it's a fraud.

TRASK

Well... I'm convinced that mankind evolved, but not that it happened in East Sussex.

Mulvany, Brinton and Leeds might chuckle.

THORNTON

You're too circumspect to say it's a fake, but that's what you think. Every field has its fraudsters. It makes difficulties for those of us doing legitimate work.

BRINTON

And what work do you do, Mr. Thornton?

Slight pause.

NORRYS

Mr. Thornton is a highly esteemed psychic investigator. His references are impeccable.

BRINTON

(dubious all the same)

I see.

(pause)

Good to meet you, young man.

NORRYS

And here we have Mrs. Mary Mulvany. She teaches the history of ancient Britain at Trinity in Dublin.

BRINTON

Charmed.

Mrs. Mulvany is a widower. She's very well versed in her subject matter and is no wilting flower. She's also fond of a drink.

MULVANY

I've followed your work, Sir William. An honor to make your acquaintance.

NORRYS

Mrs. Mulvany has published a fascinating monograph connecting the mysterious fate of the Roman Ninth Legion to the origins of the creature Grendel in Beowulf.

BRINTON

That's the legion that vanished into Scotland?

MULVANY

Ah, that's a fine question. Don't believe everything you hear.

NORRYS

She's quite an expert on ancient Latin inscriptions.

BRINTON

Well I must say it's a motley crew
you've assembled here, Norrrys.

NORRYS

Yes, thank you all so much. Mr.
Delapore is hoping that your
diverse expertise will help him
resolve the current situation at
the priory.

BRINTON

And where is our host?

NORRYS

Mr. Delapore's at Exham Priory
making preparations for your
arrival. He's arranged for
motorcars to take us from the
station to the house, and he looks
forward to greeting you all at
dinner and giving you the full
story.

TRASK

It all sounds a bit like one of
those mystery novels by that young
woman from Devon--

MULVANY

Mrs. Christie, with her odd little
Belgian detective.

NORRYS

I assure it's nothing so thrilling
as that. We'll arrive at Anchester
in less than an hour and you'll be
able to see Exham Priory in all its
restored glory.

TRANSITION MUSIC.

5

THE DRIVE

5

The sounds of CARS DRIVING.

NORRYS

Well, Sir William, it'll be just
around this bend.

MUSIC RESOLVES in a note of AWE and possibly DANGER.

BRINTON

Good heavens!

NORRYS

Quite a change from the old days,
eh? Mr. Delapore spared no expense.

LEEDS

How much of it is new? It certainly
has the look of a Jacobean or
older...

NORRYS

The towers were the only bits
standing above ground, Professor
Leeds. All the rest of it's been
rebuilt as accurately as possible.
Mr. Delapore and I did exhaustive
research.

BRINTON

Extraordinary work, really. I know
he couldn't have done it without
you, Edward. You should be proud.

NORRYS

Thank you, sir. It was quite an
undertaking. And here we are.
That's Wakefield, the butler. It
seems he's got the others sorted
already.

The car ROLLS TO A STOP in front of Exham Priory. The CAR
DOORS OPEN.

WAKEFIELD

Gentlemen, welcome to Exham Priory.

CRUNCHY FOOTSTEPS as they get out.

NORRYS

Wakefield.

WAKEFIELD

Always a pleasure Captain Norrys.
You must be tired from your
journey. If you gentlemen will
allow me, my staff will show you to
your rooms, where refreshment
awaits you.

BRINTON

Good show.

LEEDS

Thank you.

WAKEFIELD

Carlton here will show you to your room, Professor Leeds, and Miller will escort you, Sir William. Your baggage will be brought up presently and Mr. Delapore has requested that you join him for supper in the dining room at eight. If you need anything whatsoever, please let your valet know and we'll attend to it immediately.

NORRYS

Don't mind me, Wakefield. I know my way.

WAKEFIELD

Indeed, sir.

FOOTSTEPS as the men go their ways.

6

ROOM SERVICE

6

MILLER

If you'd follow me, sir.

Brinton heads into the house, following Miller.

MILLER (CONT'D)

This way, sir. Up the stairs.

BRINTON

(pausing to admire details
of the restoration)
Marvelous. The stone work...

MILLER

What's that, sir?

BRINTON

The restoration, it's quite amazing. You can see here where the original stonework joins the more recent.

MILLER

Oh. Thank you, sir.

BRINTON
Magnificent. How does it feel
living in a place with such a
tremendous history?

MILLER
I'm sure it's quite an honor, sir.

BRINTON
You're not from the local area,
then?

MILLER
No, sir. Dungworth, sir.

BRINTON
I see.

MILLER
Your room's just down this
corridor, sir.

BRINTON
And what about Mr. Delapore? Has he
been good to work for?

MILLER
(uneasy)
I wouldn't know, sir. He keeps
mostly to himself.

BRINTON
I suppose it's difficult for an
American. And there's no other
family, it's just the staff?

MILLER
That's right, sir, the seven of us.
And the cats.

BRINTON
Cats, you say?

MILLER
Yes, sir. Mr. Delapore has nine of
them.

BRINTON
Oh my! Nine cats!

MILLER
And Captain Norrrys. He's been like
a son to Mr. Delapore these several
months.

BRINTON

Of course.

Miller OPENS THE DOOR to Brinton's room.

MILLER

Here we are, sir.

BRINTON

Oh, this is quite splendid. Hmm,
what lovely arras.

MILLER

(ominously)

They help keep the chill out, sir.
The W.C. is just through that door.
Will there be anything else, sir?

BRINTON

No, I can manage for myself, thank
you... Miller, isn't it?

MILLER

Kind of you to remember, sir.
Dinner is at eight.

MUSICAL transition. A GRANDFATHER CLOCK STRIKES 8.

7

THE GRAND BANQUET OF EXPOSITION

7

Fade in MURMUR of the gathered investigators and the
occasional CLINK of glassware.

BRINTON

(fading in)

...Five score and one, I said. One
to change the bulb, and the rest to
realign the stones!

Polite LAUGHTER. A LARGE WOODEN DOOR CREAKS OPEN and a light
BELL RINGS.

WAKEFIELD

Mrs. Mulvany, gentlemen, may I
present your host, Mr. Matthew
Delapore.

MATTHEW DELAPORE is 66 years of age. He's a warm and
enthusiastic host, if not quite by the book. He is more
casual in his manner than anyone else in the house, possibly
the county.

DELAPORE

(delighted)

That's all right, Wakefield. I'm not much for ceremony. My friends, thank you so much for coming to my home. I'm sorry if I've kept you waiting. I hope you found your rooms agreeable?

AD LIB ASSENT.

BRINTON

Splendid. Really, the restoration work is quite extraordinary. My congratulations.

MULVANY

I thought the same thing. It's like stepping back in time. Well done.

DELAPORE

Thank you. High praise from an historian! I'll admit there are a few cheats - you'll see above you: those flickering candles are really electric lights.

Polite LAUGHTER and OOHS and AAHS.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

But please, be seated. Let us begin our meal and I'll explain why I've brought you all here. Mrs. Mulvany, please, here at my right. Let's see, Mr. Thornton, you'll be here, next to Professor Leeds. Sir William, you're just opposite, that's right.

Everyone SHUFFLES AROUND to their appropriate seats.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

All right, Wakefield, what's cooking?

WAKEFIELD

Our soup this evening is a Consommé Olga, paired with a dry Madeira.
(to Mrs. Mulvany)
Madame?

MULVANY

Yes, thank you.

A MURMUR of approval as the servants begin to make their rounds.

DELAPORE

Now then, to what brings us here. I moved into Exham Priory on the 16th of July, after a restoration that took over two years.

Sounds of CUTLERY and EATING.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

It would have been difficult under the best of circumstances, but on top of that the foreman couldn't hire a worker who'd been born within fifty miles of the place. Laborers, materials, everything had to be brought in.

LEEDS

This was because of the superstitions and legends?

DELAPORE

Exactly.

NORRYS

This is a table full of educated people, but for the locals, having a Delapore restoring the priory, well, you might as well tell the Transylvanian villagers that Dracula was back and rebuilding his castle.

A RIPPLE of mirth.

DELAPORE

I couldn't have done it at all without Edward's help. The locals wouldn't even talk to me until he convinced them how little I knew of my heritage. And then I think they held my ignorance against me. They viewed Exham Priory as nothing less than a haunt of fiends and werewolves.

THORNTON

Fiends and werewolves? I'm sorry, Mr. Delapore, but what would make them think that? What happened here?

DELAPORE

The priory represents only the most recent building at this location. This site has been occupied for... well, you tell us, Sir William. You're one of the experts.

BRINTON

The priory stands on the site of a prehistoric temple; a Druidical or ante-Druidical thing which must have been contemporary with Stonehenge. Indescribable rites were celebrated here; and there are unpleasant tales of the transference of these rites into the Cybele-worship which the Romans introduced.

THORNTON

I'm sorry, what's that?

MULVANY

Cybele's the original earth-mother figure, worshipped even before the days of classical Greece.

THORNTON

Worshipped here? You mean... here?

TRASK

Has anyone done a proper excavation? It could be an important site archeologically.

BRINTON

Actually, this isn't my first visit to Exham. I participated in a survey here many years ago. In the sub-cellar we saw inscriptions referring to the Magna Mater whose dark worship was once vainly forbidden to Roman citizens. I assume they're still there?

DELAPORE

You bet they are.

MULVANY

Anchester had been the camp of the third Augustan legion - there's plenty of evidence for that - and it was said that the temple of Cybele was splendid, and thronged with worshippers who performed nameless ceremonies at the bidding of a Phrygian priest.

THORNTON

Phrygian?

LEEDS

That's where Turkey-in-Asia is now.

BRINTON

South of Bythinia.

LEEDS

West of Cappadocia.

NORRYS

Just think of the Trojan War.

MULVANY

Thank you. It's said that the fall of the old religion did not end the orgies at the temple, but that the priests carried on in the new faith without real change.

THORNTON

I'm sorry, orgies?

MULVANY

I don't mean to shock you, Mr. Thornton, but there are episodes in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles which suggest these rites did not vanish with the Romans.

LEEDS

Certain among the Saxons added to what remained of the temple, and gave it the essential outline it subsequently preserved, making it the centre of a cult feared through half the heptarchy.

BRINTON

About 1000 A.D. the place is mentioned in a chronicle as being a substantial stone priory housing a strange and powerful monastic order, and surrounded by extensive gardens which needed no walls to protect them.

THORNTON

No... people would have feared the place.

LEEDS

It was never destroyed by the Danes, though after the Norman Conquest it must have declined tremendously; since there was no impediment when Henry the Third granted the site to Gilbert de la Poer, First Baron Exham, in 1261.

Discreet FOOTSTEPS as the staff returns.

DELAPORE

(delighted)

Ah, my great-great-great whatever he was. My direct ancestor! Of course back then it was pronounced "de la Poer". We changed it after we came to America. Ah, Wakefield!

WAKEFIELD

Begging your pardon, sir. The fish course tonight is Poached Salmon with Mousseline Sauce, and Cucumbers. The wine is a moselle from Riesling.

TRASK

A moselle? Splendid!

SERVING. AD LIB APPRECIATION.

THORNTON

Well that's all... very... interesting, but is that what has the local populace so terrified now? It does seem rather a long time ago.

TRASK

Yes, one presumes there are legends about the family as well as the location.

DELAPORE

Oh, Dr. Trask, a great many. But neither my parents nor I knew much about the family history. It was my son Alfred who first learned about all of it from young Captain Norrrys here, during the war. It was they who told me!

NORRYS

The Norrrys family have been neighbors to Exham Priory for centuries, so I had heard quite a few of the tales. One chronicle gives a reference to a de la Poer as "cursed of God" in 1307.

BRINTON

Why's that?

NORRYS

Most accounts are vague. Fireside tales of a grisly and ghastly sort.

THORNTON

Such as?

NORRYS

Local lore held the de la Poer line as a race of hereditary demons, blamed for the disappearance of villagers over generations.

DELAPORE

I think some of the locals around here still believe it.

All LAUGH.

NORRYS

The worst characters, apparently, were the barons and their direct heirs. There seemed to be an inner cult in the family, presided over by the head of the house, and sometimes closed except to a few members.

(MORE)

NORRYS (CONT'D)

Temperament rather than ancestry was evidently the basis of this cult, for it was entered by several who married into the family. Lady Margaret Trevor from Cornwall, wife of Godfrey, the second son of the fifth baron, became a favorite bane of children all over the countryside.

DELAPORE

Yes! She was the heroine of this horrible old ballad - it came from Wales or somewhere, didn't it, Edward?

MULVANY

I know it!
 "At yon cliffside those wee bairns died,
 And knew their mothers never;
 That knew the house o'the warloch's spouse,
 The witch, old Maggie Trevor."

DELAPORE

Ha! That's it!

MULVANY

There's another ballad, the hideous tale of Lady Mary de la Poer, who shortly after her marriage to the Earl of Shrewsfield was killed by him and his mother, both of the slayers being absolved and blessed by the priest to whom they confessed what they dared not repeat to the world.

TRASK

Good lord, Delapore. One can see why the peasantry harbored trepidations about your family.

NORRYS

The ballads fueled this folklore about the priory and its inhabitants.

DELAPORE

The legends weren't just about the family. They were about the land too. They were intertwined.

TRASK

How so?

NORRYS

Of course there are tales of wails and howlings in the barren, windswept valley beneath the limestone cliff; of the graveyard stench after the spring rains; of the floundering, squealing white thing on which Sir John Clave's horse had trod one night in a lonely field...

DELAPORE

And of the servant who had gone mad at what he saw in the priory in the full light of day. A whole lot of ridiculous spooky tales. I never took any of it seriously, of course.

THORNTON

No?

MULVANY

Accounts of vanished peasants wouldn't seem especially significant in view of mediaeval custom. Prying curiosity meant death.

BRINTON

More than one severed head had been publicly shewn on the bastions of the priory - just outside.

NORRYS

Alfred was always amused by an exceedingly picturesque tale of a legion of bat-winged devils that were said to keep Witches' Sabbath each night at the priory - a legion whose sustenance might explain the abundance of coarse vegetables harvested in the vast gardens.

DELAPORE

Yes. But his favorite was the tale of the rats - a scampering army of them which burst forth from the castle three months after my family fled.

(MORE)

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

A monstrous rodent army which devoured all before it: fowl, cats, dogs, hogs, sheep, and even two hapless human beings.

TRASK

Good lord.

NORRYS

Around that unforgettable rodent army a whole separate cycle of myths revolves, for it scattered among the village homes and brought curses and horrors in its train.

DELAPORE

So, you can see what I was up against as I pushed to complete the restoration of my ancestral home. It was a constant impediment to the work - but not to me personally.

NORRYS

Quite to the contrary. You did an extraordinary job of marshalling the workers and the antiquarians who advised you through the process.

DELAPORE

You're too kind, my lad. When the task was finally done I viewed these great rooms, vaulted ceilings, mullioned windows, and broad staircases with a sense of satisfaction which made it all worthwhile.

LEEDS

I must say, every attribute of the Middle Ages has been ingeniously reproduced.

TRASK

And the new parts blend perfectly with the original walls and foundations.

BRINTON

It's a remarkable achievement.

THORNTON
 (correcting himself
 halfway through)
 Your son is-- would be quite proud.

An awkward pause.

DELAPORE
 Yes, well you're very kind. While
 it's been mediievally refitted, we
 made sure the place is free from
 old vermin and old ghosts alike.

All CHUCKLE.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)
 I decided I would reside here
 permanently. I even changed my name
 to the original spelling to prove
 that a de la Poer need not be a
 fiend.

9 RED MEAT.

9

NORRYS
 Ah, the trusty Wakefield returns.

WAKEFIELD
 If I might interrupt sir - the
 entree.

DELAPORE
 Ah!

WAKEFIELD
 Filets Mignon Lili and Vegetable
 Marrow Farci, with a Bordeaux
 claret, 1914. Madame?

MULVANY
 Good on you, Mr. Wakefield.

DELAPORE
 It looks wonderful. Compliments to
 the kitchen.

WAKEFIELD
 Yes, sir.

SERVING.

BRINTON

Mr. Delapore, it's an astonishing tale, and yet it seems it's not finished. Captain Norrrys mentioned a discovery? A... complication. Clearly something...

(grasping for polite words)

...of note must have led you to invite us all here. Archaeologists, historians, anthropologists, a psychic researcher...

DELAPORE

(with an embarrassed chuckle)

Ah, Sir William. Edward told me you'd see through to the heart of things. There is more I have to tell you, but it might seem a little strange. Shall I continue?

The guests all AD LIB their encouragement.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

So, as I said before I moved in on July 16th. It was just me, and my cats. You must like cats, Mrs. Mulvany, don't you?

MULVANY

They offer beauty, sufficiency, ease, and good manners – what more can civilisation require?

DELAPORE

What indeed? I'm very fond of cats. My eldest, Pluto, is seven years old and came with me from my home back in America, in Bolton, Massachusetts. I'm sure you'll see him about. He's a black cat but don't let that scare you. He's always been good luck to me!

MULVANY

I'm sure.

DELAPORE

The others I accumulated whilst living with Captain Norrrys' family during the restoration.

NORRYS

He's like a magnet for them!

DELAPORE

Anyway, for five days I spent my time pouring over some very old family data. I had obtained an account of the final tragedy and flight of Walter de la Poer. One of the greatest of the family secrets.

THORNTON

Did they confirm your fears?

DELAPORE

Worse, I suppose. My ancestor was accused, with much reason, it seems, of having killed all the other members of his household, except four servants. Killed them in their sleep.

AD LIB shocked murmurs.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

This happened about two weeks after he'd made a discovery of some kind which changed his whole demeanor. Apparently he disclosed the discovery to no one save the servants who assisted him then fled.

BRINTON

I say. Go on.

DELAPORE

This deliberate slaughter, which included a father, three brothers, and two sisters, was largely condoned by the villagers. And the law apparently allowed de la Poer to escape honored, unharmed, and undisguised to Virginia.

TRASK

Outrageous!

MULVANY

But why?

DELAPORE

The general whispered sentiment seemed to be that he had purged the land of an ancient curse.

TRASK

What was this "discovery" that set him off?

DELAPORE

I've no idea. Walter de la Poer must have already known the sinister tales about his family. He was described as a shy, gentle youth in England. People who knew him in Virginia described him as troubled and apprehensive.

THORNTON

Curious...

DELAPORE

(trying to get back on track)

But that's... on July 22 occurred... an incident which... which I dismissed at the time. It was so simple as to be almost negligible. I mean, I was in a building practically fresh and new...

BRINTON

Out with it, man.

DELAPORE

(overcoming hesitancy)

My old black cat, whose moods I know so well, was out of sorts: alert and anxious. He roved from room to room, restless and disturbed, and sniffed constantly about the walls in the old Gothic section.

There is an awkward pause. The GRANDFATHER CLOCK ticks.

BRINTON

I'm sorry, *that* was the--

DELAPORE

No, I realize how trite it sounds – like the inevitable dog in the ghost story, which always growls before his master sees the sheeted figure. I didn't even really notice it myself at the time, it was only later, after... other incidents... that it seemed significant.

BRINTON

Other incidents?

DELAPORE

The next day Wakefield came to me in my study, and told me that all the cats in the household were behaving very strangely. I told him that there must be some singular odor from the old stonework, imperceptible to us, but which the cats could detect.

THORNTON

Cats can be preternaturally perceptive.

LEEDS

Seems more likely that there were mice, or rats.

NORRYS

We didn't think so. There are field mice in the countryside but they've never strayed into the high walls of the Norrys manor. And don't forget, there had been no rats at the priory for three hundred years.

DELAPORE

In the end, I dismissed the whole thing. That night, I retired to my chamber in the west tower. This room is circular, very high, and hung with arras which I had myself chosen in London. Seeing that Pluto was with me, I shut the door and sank into bed with my furry friend in his standard place across my feet.

MUSIC and SOUNDSCAPE UNDERSCORE.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

I must have fallen asleep, for I recall waking from a strange dream when the cat started violently. I saw him, head strained forward, fore feet on my ankles, and hind feet stretched behind. He was looking intently at a point on the wall somewhat west of the window. And as I watched, I knew that Pluto was not vainly excited. Whether the arras actually moved I cannot say. I think it did, very slightly. But what I can swear to is that behind it I heard a low, distinct scurrying as of rats or mice.

A MURMUR passes through the rapt diners. We hear what follows.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

Suddenly the cat had jumped on the tapestry, bringing the whole section to the floor, and exposing a damp, ancient wall of stone; patched here and there by the restorers, and devoid of any trace of rats. Pluto raced up and down the floor by this part of the wall, clawing the fallen arras, trying at times to insert a paw between the wall and the oaken floor. He found nothing, and after a time returned to his place across my feet. I had not moved, but I did not sleep again that night.

TRASK

I should think not. Go on.

DELAPORE

In the morning I questioned all the staff, and found that the cook remembered the actions of a cat which had rested on her windowsill.

THORNTON

What did this cat do?

DELAPORE

Howled at some unknown hour of the night, awaking the cook in time for her to see him dart purposefully out of the open door down the stairs.

NORRYS

Mr. Delapore paid a call on me in the afternoon, and he told me about the strange behavior of the cats. I became exceedingly interested. The odd incidents appealed to my sense of the picturesque, and we reminisced about the local ghostly lore.

BRINTON

I see.

NORRYS

No, we recognized how silly it was, and I gave him some traps and Paris green to use, on the presumption that it really was mice.

DELAPORE

I had Wakefield place them in strategic locations. Now, that night I retired early, being very sleepy, and was harassed by dreams of the most horrible sort.

THORNTON

Dreams? What were they?

TRASK

What does it matter?

THORNTON

You'd be surprised how important dreams can be. Please, continue.

Eerie NIGHTMARE MUSIC.

DELAPORE

I seemed to be looking down from an immense height upon a twilit grotto, knee-deep with filth, where a monstrous white-bearded swineherd drove about with his staff a flock of fungous, flabby beasts - they were dreadful.

(MORE)

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

Then, he paused and a mighty swarm of rats rained down on the stinking abyss and fell to devouring beasts and man alike.

Pluto suddenly SNARLS and HISSES! Then we hear the RATS!

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

From this terrific vision I was abruptly awakened. On every side of the chamber the walls were alive with nauseous sound - the slithering of ravenous, gigantic rats. I switched on the light and saw a hideous shaking all over the tapestry.

Suddenly, the RATS depart, leaving only the MURMUR of the diners.

BRINTON

Great Scott!

DELAPORE

Springing out of bed, I poked at the arras with the long handle of a warming-pan, and lifted one section to see what lay beneath. There was nothing but the patched stone wall. Even the cat had lost his sense of anything abnormal. I examined the circular trap and found all of the openings sprung. They were all empty.

BRINTON

(under his breath)

Curiouser and curiouser...

Bed of eerie MUSIC with SFX rising underneath.

DELAPORE

Further sleep was out of the question, so I lit a candle, opened the door and went out toward the stairs. Before we had reached the stone steps, however, the cat darted ahead of me and vanished down the ancient flight. As I descended the stairs, I became aware of unmistakable sounds in the great room below.

We hear a cacophony of rats THUNDERING through the oak panelling.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

The oak-panelled walls were alive with rats. Pluto raced about with the fury of a baffled hunter. Reaching the bottom, I switched on the light, but the noise didn't stop. The rats continued their riot, stampeding with such force and distinctness that I could finally tell which way they were moving. These creatures were migrating from inconceivable heights to some depth conceivably, or inconceivably, below.

Wakefield CLEARS HIS THROAT.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

Ah, Wakefield, your timing is perfect, as always.

WAKEFIELD

The kitchen is pleased to offer a Lamb with Mint--

DELAPORE

Yes, yes, I was just telling them about the night of the rats. Wakefield was there. Tell them what you saw, Wakefield.

WAKEFIELD

Sir? I wouldn't presume to--

DELAPORE

It's all right. I have no secrets from my guests in this matter. Tell them what you heard.

WAKEFIELD

Well, all the cats of the household had been thrown into a some kind of snarling panic. Mr. Miller and I had followed them down the stairs, where we met you, sir.

THORNTON

Where did they go?

WAKEFIELD

The cats all converged in front of the closed door to the sub-cellar, Mr. Thornton. They made quite a racket, sir, with their yowling. They were most... insistent.

BRINTON

Did you hear the rats, Wakefield?

WAKEFIELD

I'm sorry, sir, but no, I didn't.

DELAPORE

That noise had ceased as mysteriously as it began. The three of us went down to the sub-cellar door, but by then the cats themselves had begun to disperse. But we checked all the traps, didn't we, Wakefield?

WAKEFIELD

Indeed we did, sir. They had all been sprung but all were empty. There was no trace of whatever had so vexed the cats.

BRINTON

Did you check the sub-cellar?

WAKEFIELD

Not at that time...

DELAPORE

(an inspiration)

By God, let's look at it now!

WAKEFIELD

I beg your pardon?

DELAPORE

Yes! Wakefield, my guests should see the sub-cellar for themselves. You all don't mind, do you?

A general MURMUR of surprise/assent.

LEEDS

After that story I don't know that I have much appetite left.

WAKEFIELD

But, sir--

DELAPORE

Wakefield, we'll skip the lamb and the rest of it and take our coffee and what-not down there. That's the place to continue this story.

WAKEFIELD

(stiffly)
As you wish, sir.

DELAPORE

Come on, everyone! Follow me!

MUSIC TRANSITION.

10

BURNT OFFERINGS.

10

FOOTSTEPS ECHO in the cavernous space. The investigators wander all over.

BRINTON

Ah yes, here they are. The inscriptions, just as I remember them. See here, Leeds.

LEEDS

"P.GETAE. PROP . . . TEMP . . .
DONA . . . L. PRAEC . . . VS . . .
PONTIFI . . . ATYS . . .

TRASK

Sorry, my Latin's rustier than I thought.

LEEDS

Well, they are partly effaced.

MULVANY

The markings denote it as a sacred location, "Pontifex" meaning "priest" and "Atys" being the male consort of Cybele.

THORNTON

That's the mother-goddess you mentioned?

MULVANY

Spot on, Mr. Thornton.

BRINTON

Catullus tells us that Atys was worshipped with some rather gruesome rites.

THORNTON

Oh? Like what?

BRINTON

Well, perhaps it will suffice to mention that his priests were all eunuchs.

THORNTON

But how did-- Oh. Oh!

MULVANY

Ah, Catullus. *Desine de quoquam quicquam bene velle mereri!* Cheers.

TRASK

So this vault is Roman?

LEEDS

Every arch and pillar of it. It's the severe and harmonious classicism of the age of the Caesars.

DELAPORE

You Brits may be used to such things, but I still feel a thrill when I think of it. See these altars here? Imagine what went on in this very chamber!

BRINTON

Leeds, look here. See this pattern, a sort of rayed sun. To me it implies a non-Roman origin.

LEEDS

Meaning what, exactly?

BRINTON

These altars were merely adopted by the Roman priests from some older and perhaps aboriginal temple on the same site.

TRASK

This one has some rather curious brown stains. Is that... blood?

APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS and CLINKING.

BRINTON

Almost certainly. And see here, these features on the upper surface indicate its connexion with fire – probably burnt offerings.

DELAPORE

Speaking of which, here's Wakefield with coffee and cigars.

THORNTON

Oh, I say.

DELAPORE

Just set up the tray over there please, Wakefield.

WAKEFIELD

Very good, sir. I've brought a decanter of brandy as well.

THORNTON

I'll take one of those. My nerves could use it.

MULVANY

Make mine a tall one.

WAKEFIELD

Very good, Madame.

DELAPORE

So... the cats had howled up at the top of these stairs. I called on Captain Norrrys the very next day and we both poked around down here and didn't see any trace of rats, but I was determined to pass the night down here and see if it happened again.

NORRYS

And I, for one, was not going to have him do it alone.

MULVANY

Good on you!

THORNTON

You're fortunate to be immune to psychic emanations.

NORRYS

Perhaps so.

DELAPORE

Couches were brought down by the servants, and I brought Pluto along as much for help as for companionship.

NORRYS

We decided to keep the great oak door closed, and we retired with lanterns to await whatever might occur.

Very OMINOUS MUSIC!

DELAPORE

I was certain this vault had been the goal of the scuffling and unexplainable rats.

MULVANY

But why?

DELAPORE

We're very deep in the priory's foundations, well down towards the cliff that abuts the valley. We kept vigil for... well, Edward, you should tell this part of the story. I'm embarrassed to say I was more than a little drowsy.

BRINTON

You tell us then, Captain.

MUSICAL TRANSITION.

NORRYS

(a bit of stage fright)
Ah, well, yes, I was just here, and Mr. Delapore was lying on a couch just over there....

CROSSFADE TO FLASHBACK

Delapore MUMBLES as he nods off in the sub-cellar.

NORRYS (CONT'D)

What's that?

(chuckling to himself)

Ah, Pluto, the old man has nodded off again. Just me and you now, eh?

NORRYS (CONT'D)
 (to the investigators)
 The setting had me on edge, and I
 watched with some fascination as my
 friend here appeared wracked by
 potent dreams.

Delapore MUMBLES in his sleep. Suddenly he SCREAMS! Pluto
 HISSES in fright.

NORRYS (CONT'D)
 (flashback)
 Easy there!

DELAPORE
 God, no! That hideous...

NORRYS
 (laughing)
 Matthew, wake up! You're dreaming.

DELAPORE
 What?

NORRYS
 It's only a dream. You were quite a
 sight - you scared Pluto here half
 to death.

DELAPORE
 (embarrassed)
 A dream, yes... sorry... It's just
 that it was so...

NORRYS
 Go on.

DELAPORE
 It was that same twilit grotto, and
 the swineherd with those fungous
 beasts wallowing in filth...they
 were nearer and more distinct...

NORRYS
 Well, you're all right now. Here,
 sir, have a nip from my flask.

Delapore DRINKS.

DELAPORE
 Oh, thank you.

NORRYS

Think nothing of it. Go back to sleep. Pluto and I will wake you if anything real happens.

DELAPORE

(nodding off)

Yes... yes...

NORRYS

(to Pluto)

Come here, you. What's a nice cat like you doing with a crazy old lout like him?

Pluto PURRS. DREAMY TRANSITION MUSIC.

NORRYS (CONT'D)

(to investigators)

It was less than an hour later when the phenomenon began.

(flashback, sotto voce)

Matthew. Matthew, wake up dammit!

DELAPORE

Hm? What--

NORRYS

Shh! Listen, man! The cats! Upstairs!

Atop the stairs and outside the door, all the household's cats YOWL and CLAW AT THE DOOR. PLUTO joins in.

DELAPORE

Something's got their blood up.

NORRYS

Look at Pluto.

DELAPORE

Scurrying around. He hears them! It's them, they're on the move again.

NORRYS

The cats?

DELAPORE

The rats!

NORRYS

What do you mean?

DELAPORE
Don't you hear them? Listen!

NORRYS
I just hear the cats, Matthew.

DELAPORE
But... no, they're there. Right there, like they're inside the stone. See, look, Pluto hears them.

NORRYS
Ah. He is on the prowl.

DELAPORE
What, you think I'm imagining it?

NORRYS
You're sweating. Here take another nip--

DELAPORE
No! I hear them, scurrying, moving... this way, they're going down.

NORRYS
I really don't--

DELAPORE
(sharp)
No, of course you don't.

NORRYS
I'm not having you on. All I hear are the cats upstairs.

DELAPORE
(frightened)
My god. What's going on here? I mean, you believe me, right? That I heard them, scurrying downward into the cliff?

NORRYS
The cats have stopped.

DELAPORE
Do you believe me?

NORRYS

I... don't know, Matthew. I didn't hear anything, but you seem to have. Something upset those cats. I don't know what to think.

DELAPORE

Look, look at Pluto! He's clawing at the base of the altar there.

NORRYS

So he is. What do you smell, boy?

Pluto SNIFFS quietly and SCRATCHES against the stone. He MEOWS.

DELAPORE

What is it, Pluto?

MEOW.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

Oh I know that look. He senses something.

NORRYS

Here, take the lantern.

A CLINK and BURNING WHOOSH.

NORRYS (CONT'D)

Hold it close, where the altar meets the floor.

DELAPORE

It's covered with... is that lichen?

NORRYS

Yes. I have a jackknife. I can scrape it away.

We hear the PURR of Pluto as Norrrys SCRAPES at the ancient stone for a tense moment.

NORRYS (CONT'D)

No, nothing.

Delapore GASPS.

DELAPORE

Look.

NORRYS

What?

DELAPORE

The flame of the lantern. It's flickering.

NORRYS

(excited)

There's a draft of air - coming up from below!

DELAPORE

It's coming up from near where you were scraping. Good god, man, there's something down there!

NORRYS

(disturbed)

You're right. Ah, perhaps there's no need for us to remain...

DELAPORE

A capital idea. Come on, Pluto, let's upstairs!

MUSIC transition out of flashback.

NORRYS

(to the investigators)

So now you know our discovery, and our complication.

DELAPORE

A vault deeper than the deepest of the Romans ruins - a vault unnoticed by curious scholars - a vault kept secret by a family known for strange murders. It thrilled and terrified us. And we faced a decision. Should we exercise caution and abandon the search and simply leave well enough alone?

NORRYS

Or should we gratify our sense of adventure and brave whatever horrors might await us in the unknown depths?

DELAPORE

By morning we had compromised, and decided to recruit a group of investigators fit to cope with the mystery. And that, at long last, is why you are here. I don't know what awaits us down there, and of course if any of you wishes not to continue I won't blame you a bit. But each of you possesses an expertise that may prove critical in further exploration, and I hope you'll join me.

BRINTON

I'll admit I had my doubts, Delapore, but I am quite intrigued.

THORNTON

There are undoubtedly powerful forces at work.

TRASK

I, for one, admire your pluck, Delapore.

MULVANY

But beyond the uncanny, this may prove quite an important find.

LEEDS

I should say so! Count me in.

BRINTON

You've demonstrated admirable prudence and caution in inviting us here. I'd say if Exham Priory has secrets to yield, this team shall uncover them.

DELAPORE

Thank you. Thank you all. Then for tonight, let us retire. Wakefield, thank you and the staff for a wonderful meal. I suspect our visitor's beds are turned down and ready?

WAKEFIELD

Indeed they are, sir.

TRASK

I propose a toast to our host, and the Captain, and to the extraordinary discoveries that lie ahead.

BRINTON

Hear, hear!

TRANSITION MUSIC. They TOAST and AD LIB. CLINKING GLASSES.

11

THE NIGHT BEFORE

11

ECHOING FOOTSTEPS as Mulvany, Thornton and Trask return to their rooms. Perhaps some SPOOKY OLD CASTLE room tone.

MULVANY

This is me, gentlemen. Thank you for the escort.

TRASK

Well, with a horde of phantom rats on the loose, we couldn't let you wander these halls alone.

Mulvany and Trask share a light CHUCKLE.

THORNTON

(serious)

Oh, I don't think there's anything left to fear on that score.

MULVANY

(a touch of sarcasm)

No?

THORNTON

No. You see, certain psychic manifestations have been trying to draw Mr. Delapore's attention. And now that these ethereal forces have shown him what they wanted him to see, they will no longer manifest themselves corporeally.

TRASK

Oh, of course. And they wanted him to see--

THORNTON

They brought him to the altar in the sub-cellar.

(MORE)

THORNTON (CONT'D)
Cats, you know, are highly
susceptible to psychic vibrations.

MULVANY
(thick with incredulity)
Are they?

THORNTON
(oblivious)
Oh yes! So are parakeets. Tomorrow
should be a very exciting day!

TRASK
Well, Thornton, I'm sure you're
right about that. Good night to you
both.
(under his breath)
...parakeets....

MUSIC. Polite KNOCKING at Brinton's door.

BRINTON
Who is it?

MILLER
(through door)
Miller, the valet, sir. Will you be
needing anything else this evening?

Brinton OPENS THE DOOR.

BRINTON
Ah, Miller. You were there, with
Wakefield, weren't you? On the
night of the cats, a week or two
ago, if I understand it correctly.
You and Wakefield met Mr. Delapore
on the stairs? The cats were...

MILLER
In an uproar. Yes, sir.

BRINTON
Did that kind of thing happen
often?

MILLER
No, sir. I mean now and again we'd
see Pluto or another one poking
about here and there from time to
time, but that particular evening
was a bit unusual, sir, I must say.

BRINTON

Did you hear anything other than the cats?

MILLER

Um, no sir. They were making quite a commotion. But otherwise it was just us talking, sir.

BRINTON

Hmm. And do you find Mr. Delapore to be a... sober gentleman?

MILLER

(a non-denial)

Mr. Delapore has been very kind to all of us, Sir William.

BRINTON

Yes, of course. He seems a splendid chap.

FOOTSTEPS as Leeds approaches.

MILLER

Ah, Professor Leeds. Is there anything I can do for you before you retire?

LEEDS

I would be grateful for a fresh carafe of water, if it's not too much trouble.

MILLER

I'll see to it at once. If there's nothing else, Sir William?

BRINTON

No thank you, Miller.

FOOTSTEPS as Miller departs.

LEEDS

Well, Brinton. What think you?

BRINTON

Our host spun quite a ghost story. M. R. James couldn't do better.

LEEDS

Yes. But... well, it would seem it's not yet reached its grand finale.

BRINTON

And before it does, we'll all be in it.

TRANSITION MUSIC crossfades into a SOOTHING PIECE PLAYING ON THE RADIO in Delapore's room in the background. Pluto PURRS.

NORRYS

I hope you can get some sleep, sir.

DELAPORE

Me too, Alfred. If I can just avoid another of those damned dreams.

An awkward pause.

NORRYS

I'm Edward, sir.

DELAPORE

(confused)

What? Of course you are. What did I say?

NORRYS

Never mind, sir. You did well tonight. Try to rest. Tomorrow is a big day. Shall I turn off your phonograph?

DELAPORE

It's the wireless, actually. Shortwave. This signal's coming all the way from New England. I miss the old US of--

The MUSIC CUTS OUT and WILFRED CRANE, a fraught amateur shortwave radio operator takes up the microphone.

WILFRED CRANE

Um hello. If you can hear me, this is Wilfred Crane, broadcasting on 180 meters from Providence, Rhode Island. A special edition of the newspaper's just been released. I'm afraid there's some... terrible news.

DELAPORE

What was that? Turn that up!

The RADIO LOUDER.

WILFRED CRANE

I'm reading here: "In the early hours of last evening, after a day which had brought renewed hope of recovery, death came suddenly and struck down Warren G. Harding with a stroke of cerebral apoplexy. The American people from coast to coast, and in the territories beyond the seas, bowed their heads in grief, for their President was dead...."

The news report CONTINUES softly in the background.

DELAPORE

My god! The president...

NORRYS

What a shock. I'm so sorry, Matthew.

DELAPORE

It's an omen.

NORRYS

Oh sir, you mustn't--

DELAPORE

Yes, we're poised on the brink of frightful revelations. Secrets that have eluded me since childhood. I feel very...

NORRYS

You have help, Matthew. You've assembled a wonderful team.

DELAPORE

You did that. Thank you, my boy. Now go get some sleep. We have a date with destiny.

NORRYS

Yes, sir. Good night.

TRANSITION MUSIC.

12

THE CELLAR

12

The team mills before the great oak door leading to the sub-cellar. Sir William approaches, his gear CLANKING.

DELAPORE

There, you are, Sir William. You look well prepared.

NORRYS

Here, let me take one of the search lights. Oh, they're heavy.

BRINTON

Batteries. This is just a preliminary survey expedition, but it's vital that we have good illumination if we're going to find what's under that altar.

DELAPORE

Everyone ready?

AD LIBS of ASSENT.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

(with humor)

Now, Wakefield, don't you lock this door.

WAKEFIELD

No, sir. We'll be standing by.

The DOOR OPENS. The cat MEOWS.

DELAPORE

Lead the way, Pluto.

The group CLANKS and BANGS their way down the steps into the sub-cellar.

BRINTON

Captain Norrrys, would you be so good as to set your light there? A bit to the right. Yes, right there.

LEEDS

I'll do my best to map out the room and document the positions of the various altars. I'll need to establish a datum point.

MULVANY

I'll take advantage of this light to get some rubbings of these inscriptions. I can correlate them with others I have back at Exeter.

The academics get to work with FOOTSTEPS, SCRIBBLING, SCRAPING, CLANKING ETC.

TRASK

Not much for an anthropologist to do at the moment. What about you, Thornton? Picking up any of your psychic residuum?

THORNTON

No, I'd say the spirits seem very much at peace here. Though there is... something I can't quite put my finger on.

TRASK

Extraordinary to think of the kinds of things that must have taken place here. Perhaps I'll try to get some samples of those bloodstains. Chemical analysis might yield something of interest.

THORNTON

I think I'll follow the cat.

BRINTON

(across the chamber)

When I tell you, Norrys, push. Delapore, have that prybar ready.

NORRYS

I feel it yielding!

BRINTON

And push --

GRUNTS of effort.

DELAPORE

(thrilled)

It's moving!

BRINTON

Slide it in. Good - and on three we lift up. One, two, three --

THE GRINDING OF HEAVY STONE. MUSIC!

LEEDS

By George, you've done it!

DELAPORE

The altar was balanced with some kind of counterweight. Well done, Sir William.

BRINTON

I thought it might be. I've seen such traps before. Professor Leeds, would you make note - passage opening square in shape, a bit less than a meter on each side.

Leeds WRITES in his notebook.

LEEDS

Fiendishly cunning mechanism, that.

MULVANY

I can't see, are those steps going down?

BRINTON

Norrrys, bring that torch closer. Let's see what we've got here.

MUSICAL STING. ALL REACT in shock and terror.

BRINTON (CONT'D)

(tense)

Dr. Trask. We need you.

TRASK

(across the room)

What is it? Remains? Are they human?

MULVANY

Dear God, so many...

TRASK

(moving up close)

Step aside, let me have a look.

Trask emits an UNPLEASANT SOUND.

BRINTON

What do you make of them, Trask?

TRASK

(fighting to hold it together)

Anthropoid skeletons as far down the steps as I can see... Maybe forty individuals, perhaps more...

(MORE)

TRASK (CONT'D)

Many articulated skeletons in attitudes of fear or panic...

NORRYS

What are those marks? - See there, on that skull. And there. My god, they're all over.

TRASK

The surfaces are highly lacerated.

NORRYS

What's that?

TRASK

Feeding traces. They've been... gnawed. Judging from the size, probably by rats.

AD LIB GROANS as the group audibly digests this.

THORNTON

The heads, they're not right.

DELAPORE

Well, surely that's just one--

TRASK

No. Look at the supraorbital torus, the prognathic jaws... some kind of biologic idiocy or cretinism.

MULVANY

Are they even fully human? Look at that one.

TRASK

I'd have to study them at length in a proper laboratory. Some are certainly ape like...

THORNTON

Like that Piltdown Man you mentioned.

TRASK

Except this is no fraud. My god.

BRINTON

Leeds, please note that the center of the stone steps shows extensive wearing - it's nearly just a ramp there in the middle.

LEEDS
 (scribbling furiously)
 Noted.

NORRYS
 Did you notice the air?

DELAPORE
 What of it?

NORRYS
 There was no gush as of a sealed
 passage being opened. Just a cool
 fresh breeze coming up.

LEEDS
 He's right.

NORRYS
 So where's it coming from?

BRINTON
 And please note... the passage
 isn't built of masonry, but appears
 to be hewn from solid rock.

The SCRIBBLING suddenly stops.

LEEDS
 (scared by this)
 Brinton, those tool marks.

BRINTON
 Yes, I know.

LEEDS
 They're going the wrong way.

BRINTON
 (nervous)
 Yes. This passageway was dug up
 from below.

DELAPORE
 But that would mean--

Pluto MEOWS and heads down the passage.

THORNTON
 Look out!

DELAPORE
 Pluto!

BRINTON

I see your cat's not afraid to lead
the way. Shall we?

Dramatic MUSICAL STING.

13

THE GROTTO OF THE DAMNED

13

A few bones CLATTER and CRUNCH as the group makes their way
down the steeply sloped passage.

NORRYS

Mind your step, Mrs. Mulvany.

MULVANY

Don't worry about me, young man. Do
try not to crush the evidence, if
you can.

THORNTON

It's a good thing Sir William was
prepared with these torches, eh?

TRASK

We couldn't be in better hands.

DELAPORE

All these skeletons, Sir William,
what do you think they were going
to...

BRINTON

I fear the salient question may be:
what were they trying to get away
from? Hmmmm. Looks like there's some
kind of light up ahead.

The group TROMPS on.

LEEDS

Some kind of phosphorescent
organisms?

BRINTON

No, I think it's... sunlight.

LEEDS

How could that be?

BRINTON

The priory is built into the side
of the cliff.

(MORE)

BRINTON (CONT'D)
 Leeds, Captain Norrrys, turn off
 your torches. Better to let our
 eyes adjust.

CLICKS as the electric torches go off. MUSICAL TENSION RISES.

NORRYS
 By god, there is a bit of light. It
 must be filtering in through
 fissures undetectable from the
 outside. To think I've lived in
 this valley all my life and never
 noticed--

BRINTON
 Look everyone, up ahead. We're
 entering a cavern.

HUGE MUSICAL HIT. AD LIB GASPS and HISSES! Thornton GROANS as
 he faints.

LEEDS
 My god!

MULVANY
 (trying to revive him)
 Mr. Thornton? Mr. Thornton? He's
 fainted.

DELAPORE
 Steady on.

TRASK
 Let's lay him down here.
 What on God's green earth -
 these... it's all bones!

NORRYS
 It's like a sea of them... insanely
 tangled everywhere - as far as the
 eye can see.

DELAPORE
 (for himself)
 The twilit grotto...

LEEDS
 Look out there, Brinton. Too
 regular for stalagmites. Are those
 some kind of buildings?

BRINTON
 I was thinking the same thing. A
 megalithic construction of sorts--

DELAPORE
 (lost in his own thought)
 Like Stonehenge or something...

LEEDS
 Yes, some Roman ruins there, and
 that - a Saxon pile. And that, it
 looks a bit like an early English
 structure...

BRINTON
 (softly)
 Well, I don't know about that...

Thornton GROANS as he comes around.

TRASK
 Mr. Thornton, are you all right?

THORNTON
 Yes, thank you. It's, well, the
 psychic residue here is so pungent--

MULVANY
 What?

THORNTON
 I fear it rather overwhelmed me.
 I'm sensitive to such things. I'll
 be all right.

MULVANY
 That's a relief.

DELAPORE
 We're here. This is the grotto I
 dreamed of. With the demon
 swineherd and his... flock.

BRINTON
 Look, this discovery clearly
 exceeds what any of us were
 expecting. It could take us years
 to discover just what this place is
 and just what happened here. I
 suggest we conduct a cursory
 reconnaissance of the site. We
 break into three groups:, Mrs.
 Mulvany and Dr. Trask if you'll
 look at those structures to the
 right; Mr. Thornton, Mr. Delapore
 and Captain Norrrys if you'll
 examine the area there, just up
 ahead.

THORNTON

May I go with Dr. Trask's group?

BRINTON

If you like. Professor Leeds and I will examine the region to the left. Now despite the ghoulisn nature of our surroundings, there doesn't seem to be any imminent threat to us.

NORRYS

They're all dead.

BRINTON

Quite so. And as such, they're unable to bring us any harm so long as we watch our step. But, should you discover anything of urgent concern, do cry out. We should be able to hear each other in this cavern. Each team take an electric torch, just in case. It's half-two now, let us reconvene here at four. Alright?

AD LIBS of agreement. MUSIC. Each of the groups goes its merry way.

14 TEAM TRASK

14

Trask's team tiptoes with their gear through the sea of bones.

TRASK

Mrs. Mulvany, Mr. Thornton, let's see if we can make our way to that stone structure out there.

MULVANY

Dr. Trask, take a look at these two skeletons. There's a pair for you.

TRASK

Yes, entwined together in some kind of final clinch. Perhaps protecting each other?

THORNTON

No, it was something more ghastly.

MULVANY

Look, down here, under the human bones. Tiny bones. These are rat skeletons?

TRASK

By the hundreds. Thousands.

MULVANY

Do you think all the rat bites were posthumous?

TRASK

Madame, I'm not even certain that they're all rat bites. The marks on this skull correspond to the teeth of this one. These people appear to have been eating each other.

THORNTON

(poetically)

'Tis the very antechamber of hell.

MULVANY

Not Hoffmann or Huysmans could conceive a scene more Gothically grotesque.

THORNTON

I simply can't fathom what happened here. The deformed bones, the skeletons grappling in some kind of mortal combat, the rats...

MULVANY

It's not only what happened, it's when. Was it hundreds of years ago, or a thousand, or two thousand, ten thousand...

TRASK

Oh, now see here. Oh that's disturbing.

THORNTON

What is it?

TRASK

There seem to be two evolutionary paths at work here. Look at the refinements of this skeleton: large brain, high forehead, the skull is sensitively developed. The lumbar curve, arched feet--

MULVANY

Yes?

TRASK

But look at these back here. See the pelvis is higher and flatter, and the spine is arched. The legs noticeably shorter. These creatures were knuckle walkers. They've evolved, or devolved, into a nearly quadrupedal form.

MULVANY

So they're apes of some kind?

TRASK

No, no the skulls show most of the basic features of homo sapiens. Although I dare say they were incapable of articulate speech.

MULVANY

How can you tell that from the skeleton?

TRASK

The height of the larynx. Despite developed intelligence, this poor devil could do little more than scream.

THORNTON

I don't know much about Darwin and all, but if they evolved, doesn't that take time?

TRASK

At least twenty generations or more.

THORNTON

You mean these things have been here--

Thornton GROANS again and collapses in a faint.

TRASK

There he goes again.

MULVANY

Ah, for the love of...

TRANSITION MUSIC.

15 THE PENS

15

Delapore and Norrys step through the bones working their way to an ancient ruin.

DELAPORE

Come on, Norrys, this way. That structure, it a low-Saxon compound.

NORRYS

How can you tell?

DELAPORE

I just know. Great god, look at this!

NORRYS

It's like a pen - for livestock.

DELAPORE

But not any kind we know. The skeletons, see how hunched over... they ARE the livestock. Can't you almost see them, fighting to break free in some kind of delirium of starvation or rat-fear?

NORRYS

It certainly looks like the "lower" types were penned up in there.

DELAPORE

(a little unhinged)

Yes. Yes. Fattened up on the legendary "coarse vegetables". No wonder my ancestors had such excessive gardens above.

NORRYS

But what was the purpose of keeping this slave class?

DELAPORE

You haven't guessed? Come on, let's go inside.

MUSIC.

16 ROMAN RUINS

16

Leeds and Brinton make their way toward what appears to be the ruins of an ancient temple.

LEEDS

These bones, Sir William, I've never heard of another site on earth like it. I mean, if it was a burial, that would be one thing...

BRINTON

No, this is quite something else. "Alas, poor Yorick." What do you make of this stone work?

LEEDS

Looks Roman. Like the vaulting from the sub-cellar. It's shaped like a temple. Look, Latin inscriptions there at the base of the altar!

BRINTON

It's all pristine. To think of the things that must have happened here. And here it remains, in perfect condition.

LEEDS

I wish Mrs. Mulvany were with us. My Latin's not good enough.

BRINTON

Let's see. I think it begins here:
Dea sancta Cybele, rerum naturae
parens - Goddess revered, Cybele,
of all nature Mother... it's a
pretty typical invocation...
(mumbles for a bit)
Oh, good god! Thank god Mrs.
Mulvany isn't here...

LEEDS

What?

BRINTON

The rite, the sacrifice...

LEEDS

Human, yes? Not surprising for a Phrygian--

BRINTON

Phrygian, maybe. But human? No wonder the Romans outlawed the cult. God knows how long before the Romans, or after, this kind of thing went on.

LEEDS

Surely you're not surprised by--

BRINTON

Whatever happened here is quite beyond the pale. It's far worse than the cult of Atys. The things that were eaten...

Transition MUSIC.

17

TRASK'S PRIZE

17

MULVANY

I really should go back and wait for Thornton. A man with his nerves, regaining consciousness around this.

TRASK

Just a moment - there's something back here. I can't quite reach it. Shine the torch.

MULVANY

Here.

CLICK. MUSICAL STING.

TRASK

(terrified)

It moved! It's alive!

MULVANY

Pull yourself together, man. It's Delapore's cat. Perched there like it's the most natural thing in the world.

TRASK

I'm sorry, I just... Um, I can't quite reach that skull there. If I lift up on this, can you reach under and grab it? One, two, three.

TOPPLING BONES. The cat MEOWS.

MULVANY

Thank you, Pluto. Oh, there he goes. Maybe he really was trying to show us something. Here you are, doctor.

(MORE)

MULVANY (CONT'D)
 (marveling at skull)
 Heavens, but this one is primitive.

TRASK
 Yes. Pithecanthropoid. Only
 slightly more human than a gorilla.
 Look, these look like ideograms
 carved on the cranium. What could--

A SQUEAK of fear comes from Thornton, off.

MULVANY
 Ah, he's up again.

THORNTON
 (scared - off)
 Mrs. Mulvany? Dr. Trask?

MULVANY
 Don't panic, we're on our way.

Transition MUSIC.

18 BREAKING POINT

18

DELAPORE
 Come, Norrrys, the door's fallen
 away, let us see what's within.

NORRYS
 (shaken)
 All right. Just for a moment. We
 should go back soon to see the
 others.

DELAPORE
 Cells! Look at the rusted bars.
 Oho, and these poor devils locked
 within. See now, these are the
 refined types.

NORRYS
 They're clearly not the "livestock"
 types. That one even has a ring.

Delapore KNOCKS the rusted iron bars aside.

DELAPORE
 So it does. Let's have a look.

MUSICAL STING BEGINS INCREASINGLY TENSE UNDERSCORE.

NORRYS

Are you all right? What is it?

DELAPORE

'Tis a seal ring.

(pause)

The seal is my family's coat of arms.

NORRYS

This it too much, let's go.

He BOLTS outside of the building, Delapore following.

DELAPORE

Should we take in yon building - looks like an English butcher shop - maybe from Tudor days.

NORRYS

No. No, I don't want to see it.

DELAPORE

You were in the trenches, man. You survived. I wouldn't expect you to be squeamish. Come, come, this way.

NORRYS

It's a cave. It just keeps going into the darkness.

DELAPORE

S'blood! Straight from my dream. A sightless stygian world! Such secret places are not for mankind.

NORRYS

Wait, move your torch there again, on the ground. My god, are those some kind of pits in the ground?

DELAPORE

The rats! It's where they feasted. Until Walter's cowardly dagger put an end to it. Cousin Randolph was right! And then a lack of replenishment drove the ravenous rodent army first to turn on the living herds of starving things, and then to burst forth from the priory in an orgy of devastation! You've heard the stories, eh?

NORRYS

You know I have. Matthew...

Delapore, fully bonkers now, STORMS ABOUT the pitted cavern floor. MUSIC RAMPS UP.

DELAPORE

God! These carrion black pits of sawed, picked bones and opened skulls! These nightmare chasms choked with the bones of centuries! Look here! No bottom! And there, what horrors skulk in such depths? What of the hapless rats that stumbled into such traps amidst the blackness of their quests in this grisly Tartarus?

NORRYS

Careful there!

THE CLATTER of bones and rocks falling into pits. The HISS and MEOW of the cat.

DELAPORE

Shhh! What is that? Listen? Look - 'tis my cat darting like a winged Egyptian god, straight into the illimitable gulf of the unknown. He heard them. Do you hear them?

NORRYS

Matthew, I don't hear anything. Let's go--

DELAPORE

(rising to full on nut job)

Don't tell me you can't hear them. It's the scurrying of those fiend-born rats, always questing for new horrors, and determined to lead me on even unto those grinning caverns of earth's centre where Nyarlathotep, the mad faceless god, howls blindly to the piping of two amorphous idiot flute-players.

NORRYS

Matthew, please step away from--

DELAPORE

Don't worry about me. D'ye know, you've grown plump, Norrrys. Soft.

MUSICAL CRESCENDO.

19 TEMPLE OF DOOM

19

Meanwhile, back in the Roman temple....

BRINTON

These steps probably lead down into
some kind of crypt.

LEEDS

Is there no end to these horrors?

An agonized SCREAM from far away echoes through the grotto.

BRINTON

Come, let's go!

They RUN OFF towards the cry.

20 OVER THE EDGE

20

CONVERGING HURRIED FOOTSTEPS CRUNCH AND ECHO as Brinton and
Leeds run from one side and Trask, Mulvany and Thornton
approach from the other side.

LEEDS

Look, there's one of the lights out
past those ruins.

BRINTON

Come on.

TRASK

(off)

Delapore? Is that you? Norrrys!
Answer me!

THORNTON

Follow the cat!

Delapore, now totally insane, rants as he eats Captain
Norrrys.

DELAPORE

Why shouldn't rats eat a de la Poer
as a de la Poer eats forbidden
things?... The war ate my boy, damn
them all... and the Yanks ate
Carfax with flames and burnt
Grandsire Delapore and the
secret...

(MORE)

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

No, no, I tell you, I am not that
daemon swineherd in the twilit
grotto!

Brinton and Leeds RUN CLOSER.

LEEDS

Good god, I think it's Delapore.
Norrrys is on the ground.

BRINTON

Delapore, are you all right? Can
you hear me?

DELAPORE

You flabby, fungous thing! Who says
I am a de la Poer? He lived, but my
boy died!... Shall a Norrrys hold
the lands of a de la Poer? ...It's
voodoo, I tell you ...that spotted
snake...

TRASK

There they are. It's Delapore!

MULVANY

And the Captain. He's bleeding!

THORNTON

(mind blown)

My god, he's... eating.

Thornton GROANS and faints again.

BRINTON

Delapore, stop!

DELAPORE

I'll teach you to faint at what my
family do! ...'Sblood, thou
stinkard, I'll learn ye how to gust
...wolde ye swynke me thilke wys?
...Magna Mater! Magna Mater!
...Atys!

Pluto YOWLS and leaps on Delapore, scratching frantically.
CRUNCHING CHAOS as the investigators scramble.

DELAPORE (CONT'D)

Begone, foul apparition!

TRASK

Stop him!

BRINTON

Distract him from the front. I'll
move around behind.

LEEDS

Delapore! Let him go! Do you hear
me?

DELAPORE

Dia ad aghaidh 's ad aodann . . .
agus bas dunach ort! Dhonas 's
dholas ort, agus leat-sa! . . .
Ungl . . . ungl . . . rrrlh . . .
chchch . . .

BRINTON

That's enough!

THUNK! GROAN! CLATTER! MEOW! Brinton strikes Delapore in the
head with his electric torch. Thornton JOLTS AWAKE.

THORNTON

(freaked)

Oh my god! He ate him! He ate him!

BRINTON

Mrs. Mulvany! Hold him back!

MULVANY

Hold on, Thornton. Hold on.

THORNTON

Oh my god!

TRASK

What happened? What has he done?

LEEDS

He's mad.

MULVANY

He's cursed.

BRINTON

Here, let's cover up Captain
Norrys. Dr. Trask, tie up Mr.
Delapore. Soundly.

TRASK

Right.

MULVANY

This place. What do we do? Who do
we tell? It simply should not be.

BRINTON

I think there's only one thing to be done. But first, let's get Mr. Thornton and leave this place.

Big sad MUSIC transition.

21

AFTERMATH

21

WATER DRIPS in the halls of Hanwell Asylum. Behind a locked door, Delapore SCREAMS and RAVES. Brinton's APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS echo. Wakefield is standing outside Delapore's door.

BRINTON

Wakefield? This is a surprise.

WAKEFIELD

Sir William. They asked me to bring a few of Mr. Delapore's things, and I thought I would pay a last visit.

BRINTON

Are you all right?

WAKEFIELD

I've never been inside an asylum.

BRINTON

Yes, Hanwell is... secure.

WAKEFIELD

I'm sorry to see him like this. He seemed a kind man.

BRINTON

It is quite a tragedy. I was just upstairs talking with the doctors. Poor Mr. Thornton is just down the hall, you know. But there's hope for his recovery.

WAKEFIELD

And Mr. Delapore?

BRINTON

He shall never be released, I'm afraid.

WAKEFIELD

Perhaps that's as well. Now that Exham Priory has been dynamited into oblivion, where would he go?

BRINTON

Where will you go, Wakefield? What will you do?

WAKEFIELD

With the death of Captain Norrrys, I shall be leaving Anchester, sir. I believe I shall leave service entirely. Being known as the butler of a madman, even an American one, makes retirement appealing.

BRINTON

You're a good man, Wakefield. Perhaps there's a place for you in my own household, if you change your mind.

WAKEFIELD

Thank you, sir. But perhaps we would both prefer to put the past weeks behind us forever.

BRINTON

You may be right. Good luck to you.

WAKEFIELD

God help us all, sir.

As FOOTSTEPS echo away, we can hear more clearly...

DELAPORE

(through the door)

Pluto! Where are you? It wasn't me!
I loved him like he was my own boy!
It was the rats! Please! Listen to me!
The demon rats that race behind the padding!
Pluto! I forgive you!
Why don't you help me! Don't you hear them?
They're calling to me!
Damn you all! It's the rats! The rats!
The rats in the walls!

MUSICAL DENOUEMENT.

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CONCLUSION

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CREIGHTON COBB

You too have been listening to "The Rats in the Walls", brought to you by our sponsor, Bile Beans. Stay healthy, bright-eyed and slim - take Bile Beans every night!

(MORE)

CREIGHTON COBB (CONT'D)

I'm Creighton Cobb. Until next week, this is Dark Adventure Radio Theatre reminding you to never go anywhere alone; if it looks bad, don't look; and save the last bullet for yourself.

ANNOUNCER

"The Rats in the Walls" was adapted for radio and produced by Sean Branney and Andrew Leman. Based on the story by H.P. Lovecraft. Original music by Troy Sterling Nies. The Dark Adventure Ensemble featured: Leslie Baldwin, Sean Branney, Kacey Camp, Matt Foyer, Andrew Leman, Jacob Lyle, Barry Lynch, Grinnell Morris, David Pavao, Kevin Stidham, and Time Winters. Tune in next week for "Strange Fruit", a diabolic tale of reckless botany.

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Radio STATIC and fade out.