

THE MEDUSA DEEP



DAVID NEIL LEE

**THE
MEDUSA
DEEP**

ALSO BY DAVID NEIL LEE

Young Adult

The Midnight Games

Fiction

Commander Zero

Non-fiction

The Battle of the Five Spot: Ornette Coleman and the New York

Jazz Field

Chainsaws: A History

Four-Wheeling on Southern Vancouver Island

Stopping Time: Paul Bley and the Transformation of Jazz

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DAVID NEIL LEE

– a sequel to *The Midnight Games* –



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To Cal and Ian

It's an incredible world out there.

You never know what's going to happen.

PROLOGUE

THE PRIME MINISTER

OF EVERYTHING

Even if you just glimpse it for a second, it stays with you forever. That's what it's like for people who witness an act of war, a violent crime, a natural disaster, a fatal car crash. The same can be said, I guess, if you've seen a sasquatch, lake monster, angel, UFO, et cetera. You've got an idea about how the world works, and in the space of a few seconds something chews up that idea and spits it out, and you never see things the same way again. It's been true for me since the night I saw *Sorcerer*.

It was at the last of the nighttime ceremonies, the “midnight games,” in Ivor Wynne Stadium. The Resurrection Church of the Ancient Gods had conjured up a continuum threshold strong enough to bring through Yog-Sothoth, the giant extraterrestrial being they worshipped; the alien they called a god. Yog-Sothoth, in fact, was halfway through already, its tentacled bulk billowing up like a thunderhead in the night sky, and if that wasn't bad enough, all hell was breaking loose in the stadium itself. Creatures called the Hounds of Tindalos had been summoned – to kill my father – and they swarmed the playing field, tearing through anyone who got in their way. Giant centipedes called *dritchies*, attracted by the energy field generated by the expanding threshold, were digging their way up through the Astroturf.

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Then something appeared against the boiling clouds and expanding void of the threshold. A blast of blue flame drove Yog-Sothoth back from the brink, and something else, just as huge and alien, emerged in the sky above the stadium as the continuum threshold shimmered and shredded and faded out of existence.

That “something” was an enormous airship – not one of the new shiny ones I’ve been checking out online, but one as old as the *Hindenburg*. Everything about it looked ancient – the flaking rubber of its mountain-sized gasbag, the yellow incandescence that glowed from the windows of the gondola, the official ID numbers – R102 G-FAAX – painted on its side along with the vessel’s name: SORCERER.

Like I said, this took a matter of seconds. Then *Sorcerer* flickered into translucency, and vanished altogether into the stormy sky north of the stadium. I remember a few other details – there seemed to be some kind of shiny hood covering the nose and spine of the bag – but a lot of things were happening at once. One of the Hounds had slashed me across the right side, its talons ripping through my shoulder and down my chest, and I was losing blood. In fact, if Mr. Shirazi hadn’t happened along, the Hound’s next blow would have torn me to bits. But Mr. Shirazi, with that device he called a Delphic scythe, sent that Hound back to the pound. What I took away that night is mainly scars.

There have been changes, mind you, in day-to-day life. My dad is still alive, though he squeaked through by an even narrower margin than me. We are still in our house on Somerset Avenue, though it has been invaded by dad’s brother, Don, and his family. (I’ve stopped complaining to Dad about them because I’m sick of him saying, “We’re lucky they’re here.”) Even with

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these upsets, my life has excellent prospects if not to remain unchanged, then at least to settle into some kind of stable, boring routine. That is, if it weren't for the scars.

At night the scars come alive, tingling and throbbing from my right shoulder blade to my chest, and I rise from my bed and sulk around the house, reading books, shuffling through the rows of videotapes I know by heart, watching old movies online or on late-night TV, or checking for messages (there are usually none) on my new smartphone.

I have to tiptoe not to wake up the new family that I am – yes, I know – lucky, so lucky to have. Not just Dad, but Don and Melanie, and their kids, Brittany and Austin. I thought we were doing just fine without them, but if Dad says . . .

Anyway, one night nothing seemed to help, so I got dressed and went out.

Sulking, skulking, lurking – I was better off out on the street. It was a couple of weeks before Christmas. There was still no snow, but the leaves were off the trees, and gusts of wind spattered me with drizzle. Tuesday night, before garbage pickup, so everyone's green bags and blue boxes were out on the curb.

I stood for a moment in our front yard and then went left, toward the construction site that would become the new Prince of Wales Elementary School (we all called it “PoW”). Beyond that was Ivor Wynne Stadium, now fenced off and dark, where the “games” had made a hell of a mess: at least one light tower knocked over by Yog-Sothoth; sinkholes in the field and foundations dug up by excited ditches; blood and bullet holes all over the bleachers.

There had already been a movement underway to tear down the old stadium and build a new one, so after the scandal of

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that final midnight game, things moved pretty fast. Ivor Wynne was quickly being reduced to mountains of fractured concrete, elephant-sized chunks with twists of rebar jutting out like fossils of Paleozoic worms. But I thought I'd head straight up Lottridge to Barton. Maybe if I had any money on me, grab something at McDonald's or Timmies.

The corner house on Lottridge and Somerset has a willow tree with a canopy of leafy branches that hangs over the sidewalk. If you're tall you have to stoop when you pass by. I don't have any problem with it, but tonight I slowed cautiously; something was different.

Someone was under there, hunched over in the shadows next to the parked cars. I heard the rattle of plastic blue boxes and thought of Dana. He had made his living any way he could – hourly manual labour, sidewalk retail, scavenging garbage for scrap metal or blue boxes for returnables – until one night, in the basement of the derelict, old PoW, he'd been ripped apart by the Hounds of Tindalos, summoned by the Resurrection Church of the Ancient Gods to punish Dana for sneaking into their late-night ceremony – and for bringing me with him.

In the shadow of the willow tree, someone dropped a beer can onto the sidewalk. It banged like a cowbell and rolled toward me. Steely Dan Magnum. I scooped it up, and saw a hand extended out of the shadow into the light. The figure looked like a woman, tall and broad at the hips and shoulders.

“Here ya go, ma'am.” As I handed it back, I saw that there was someone with her, a figure in a wheelchair. The yard wasn't fenced, and I went up onto the grass to go around the couple.

“Thankya, sir.” Something familiar in her voice.

“Betrayed,” said the man in the wheelchair. “Stolen from me.”

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Something in his voice crept me out, but I didn't recognize this pair as any of the local street people I knew.

"Hey, you are welcome to that can," I said, "and have yourself a good night."

They weren't the baseball-capped couple who roamed the east end throwing reusable garbage, scrap metal and, if no one was looking, garden tools and lawn furniture into the baby trailers behind their bikes. The woman wasn't the European lady who came by on Wednesday mornings, so grateful to be handed a beer can or a wine bottle (I don't know where she came from, but I always wondered if this place was better). This man wasn't Dana, or any of the other street people who disappeared when it got dark, and reappeared at dawn, stumping wearily through empty parking lots or along the train tracks from wherever they'd spent the night.

"I had it all," the man said.

Something in his voice. I turned around and backed toward the street corner, keeping my eyes on the pair. Now I remembered – the woman was Clare, the personal aide (one might say henchperson) to Raphe Therpens, the head of the Resurrection Church of the Ancient Gods, the cult behind the midnight games. And the man in the wheelchair – it was the Proprietor, Therpens himself.

Was this an ambush?

The Proprietor rolled closer, painfully inching forward in his manual chair, squinting at me from the shadows of the willow.

"This poverty and pain we live in now" – slumped in his seat, he gestured with a gloved hand – "the Great Old Ones – they'd take care of that . . . with me as their minister . . . their prime minister . . ."

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Tssking and swearing under her breath, Clare came trotting after the wheelchair. She looked at me apologetically. I twigged that neither of them recognized me.

“Prime minister of Canada?” I said.

“Prime minister of *everything*.” He coughed, and the cough grew and shook him, and Clare leaned over to straighten him in his chair. I fidgeted, wanting to get out of there before either of them recognized me from last fall, when for several days we were pitted against each other, pretty much in a kill-or-be-killed situation.

“You hafta excuse him,” Clare said. “He was in a real bad accident.”

That’s for sure. I’d seen him get blown right off the edge of Ivor Wynne Stadium, and it was a long way to the ground. I had been certain that he was dead or at best, strapped to the ceiling in some hospital ICU. But here he was, still rattling around these tired old streets like the Energizer Bunny in an empty bathtub.

I waved a hasty good night and started to turn up Lottridge.

“I’ll be back,” Therpens said. “The stars are turning in my favour. Even as we speak.”

“That’s great,” I said. “Have a good –”

“Even as we speak,” Therpens said, “the Great Old Ones are mustering their powers” – I tried to turn and keep walking, reminding myself he was sick and in pain, telling myself that what he said couldn’t be true – “to rise again. But don’t listen to me, you idiot.”

Now Clare was shushing him, but his voice grew steadily louder. “It’s not just the devils or the exanimators. Much more – the likes of you won’t stop them.”

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I whirled around. “Actually,” I said, “we did stop . . .” Nate, shut up, I told myself.

“The Church can’t do it on its own. But the cavalry’s coming. The Four Horsemen of the Resurrection. You just have to look.”

The Proprietor squirmed in his chair. I cringed, ready for him to miraculously regain the use of his legs and throw himself at me, drag me to his followers to berate and torture and kill. But I knew that whether or not he still possessed that power, I had to practise not being afraid.

“Even as we speak . . .” His head drooped, then he took a deep breath, rallied the remains of his energy. “. . . the stars –”

“You mean, even as *you* speak,” I said. “You’re full of crap as usual.” Nate, shut up.

“. . . the stars are turning in our favour, and the seas will part. Look to the west –”

“No, they’re not,” I barked at him. Nate, shut up. “The stars *aren’t* turning in your favour. The waters *won’t* part. You guys are dead in the water, and you’re going to stay that way.” Nate, shut up.

Clare bent down, squinting to recognize me. “The Silva kid.”

“I got the scars to prove it too.”

Dana dead in an abandoned school basement, the horrors in the stadium, the dritch, the Hounds, the buzz in my head as Yog-Sothoth, the Great Old One second only to Cthulhu himself, seeped like a bloodstain out of the night sky, calling to those assembled to go down on their knees, to obey. I didn’t need to shake up these memories. There was something in the air – something that Therpens’s rant had summoned. I could feel my scars itching and throbbing. Now a light went on in the

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Proprietor's brain. He leaned forward and squinted at me.

"You're just another pawn, you – a pawn of the old ways of thinking"

"Old ways, old man," I mocked. The Proprietor, I figured, was at least forty. "Yer still a flunky for some tentacled alien slimebag that doesn't give a damn for you or anyone or anything else on this planet."

"It's already happening. The Great Old Ones will triumph. Cthulhu will rise again, from his ancient city at the heart of the world. And so will I. I will rise again."

"Gotta go," I said to Clare. "It's been a slice."

I turned and kept walking, determined not to run, as behind me, despite Clare's efforts, the man who had been the Proprietor began to shout.

"Go ahead, you moron – strut and boast, and think that this planet is yours to own. The stars are turning and turning and turning in our favour. Something in the west is rising – something is coming out of the west. It will be here before you know it. Everything we lost will be gained again when our saviour comes from the west, when our salvation comes from the west. You can defy us now, go ahead, but look to the west!"

His voice echoed off the wall of the new PoW. Last fall, not thirty metres from where we stood, the Hounds of Tindalos had found my friend Dana and decapitated him. Killed him at the bidding of this man, the Proprietor. But I was putting all that behind me, I had to. I kept walking.

"LOOK TO THE WEST!" he shouted. "SOMETHING IS COMING."

PART 1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF AIRSHIPS

In some places they was
little stones strewed about
– like charms –
with somethin’ on ’em like what
ye call a swastika naowadays.
Prob’ly them was the Old Ones’ signs.

– H. P. Lovecraft, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*

CHAPTER 1

THE HAUNTED CHURCH

“Nate Silva, you are full of it. Never been good at nothin’. Ya go to school up on the Mountain with all those faggots. Not man enough to stay down here with the real people, down here where it’s like . . . real.”

“Ya know, Cody,” I said. “It doesn’t make much difference what you think.”

Actually, whenever he was around, it was worthwhile to pay attention to what Cody was thinking. He had always been a loose cannon, liable not only to collide with you when you were least expecting it, but also to shoot off his mouth, and his boots and his fists too, at the least provocation.

When I was five he had tackled me off a teeter-totter so that my head smashed on the asphalt; when I was eight he had beat me up for missing a fly ball in a baseball game; when I was eleven he had sucker-punched me in the hall and when I punched him back, he’d hit me so hard my head rang and blood spurted from my nose and ruined my shirt. Cody was the same size as me, but I couldn’t match his need to hurt.

When I had the chance to go to high school up the Mountain at Westmount, the prospect of furthering my education in a Cody-free environment was a point in its favour. But we still shared a neighbourhood and sure enough, stopping at the Big Bee to provision myself (one chocolate nut bar) for my latest

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experiment in interplanetary relations, I had run into him.

“And what is *that?*” Cody rattled on. “You gonna pull some kinda martial arts crap if I get in your face?”

I sighed. This was early in the new year, just a few weeks after I’d run into Clare and the Proprietor. I still chuckled sometimes over Raphe Therpens’s raving. “Look to the west!” What a loser.

No way. No way I was looking to the west! I had enough to deal with right here. As I pocketed my chocolate bar, I was thinking of cancelling this expedition and heading home. The scars still itched and burned. I got tired way more easily than I used to. Early this morning though, before sun-up, I’d sprung awake with a plan. Now I was carrying a length of bamboo from our garden, a shaft almost two metres long, thick at the bottom and tapering at the top to the width of a finger.

“You wanna know what this is for, Cody, I’ll show you. But here’s the thing: it’s dangerous.”

I don’t know if this was the right thing to say. I just knew that once Cody came at you, you could only run away, stand your ground and risk getting beat up, or do something to impress him – and Cody was hard to impress. I thought to myself, This project might just win his respect, or get him killed, maybe me too. Either way, Cody would be off my back once and for all.

“I don’t want to get into anything that might freak you out,” I said.

Cody swore. We went out to the parking lot of the Big Bee and, between his reminders of what a loser I was, I told him my plan.

“You gotta be kidding me.” But he didn’t back down.

We headed east along Barton, and I tried to get a word in edgewise while Cody told me I was full of it.

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“I got homies who were in the Church – I know it’s all lies what yer saying – monsters and aliens and stuff.”

“Monsters,” I said, “are the least of our problems. The big problem is . . . was . . . these creatures called the Great Old Ones.”

“Not what I hear. The Old Ones were on our side. We’d be better off with them, if you hadn’t screwed everything up.”

I wondered sometimes if the worst thing about the Great Old One Yog-Sothoth wasn’t that it was a kaiju-sized tentacled alien, but its terrible power to inspire loyalty, to make people obey. I had seen this and felt it. Close up, it was like an electrical shock buzzing through your nervous system, a voice inside: “Worship me – and your troubles will all be over. Worship me – and anyone who stands in your way, we’ll get them. Every one of them.” A buzz that was hard to resist.

At the railway tracks we paused for the traffic. As I scanned the situation, Cody found a break and went for it, making a cab squeal its brakes. He turned and gave me the finger from across Barton. “Chicken.”

I sighed and wondered if there was some way, any way, this would end well. I looked both ways and caught the next break in the flow. “Almost there,” I told him.

This old track was a strip of the wild, slashed through the middle of this built up and broken down old city. Early January, the winter snows still holding off, and the leaves were off the dense bush that bordered the tracks, turning it into a gauntlet of lifeless grey branches, brittle winter vines and naked thorns.

Three months ago, I’d been to the old chain factory that had housed the Resurrection Church. Now as we approached, I

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thought the place looked more busted up than ever. Of course, the chain-link gate over the spur line to the factory's old loading dock was rusting in the weeds; I'd been there the night the black freight car had smashed it down, in its failed attempt to rescue the dying being called the Interlocutor.

“What the hell we doin’ *here*?”

“Going in.”

The front doors of the Church were also busted off; bits of them were scattered to each side of the steps, as if the entrance had been rammed open from the inside. I thought of the dritch that my friends and I had barely escaped from in that desperate hour before the last midnight game. A couple of plywood sheets had been nailed over the door; now they hung like tattered flags, the work of either vandals, or the dritch.

I was betting that the dritch was still around. I knew there was a tunnel in the basement that could lead anywhere: up into the city, or out into the lake. Ditches are good at digging, and they can grow as long as a school bus.

Inside was the usual mess that piles up wherever people have been and gone: flattened water bottles, scrunched beer cans, coffee cups, Timbits boxes. There was no sign of the electric scooter that I'd seen the last time I was there. Like the Interlocutor herself, it had been kicked, bashed and beaten into a near-death condition. But there had still been a spark of life. When I'd pushed the panic button the Interlocutor had described to me, I'd heard a voice in her native language: “Ensse . . . n’hraggi akh menganah . . . srrrubi . . . ?” That was all I could make out. I followed her instructions, and soon a black freight car had blasted down the track to the rescue – too late to save the Interlocutor, as it happened.

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In a corner was a tattered sleeping bag, as if someone had figured this would be a good place to camp out. But the bag was slashed and tattered, and dark smears led from it across the pitted hardwood toward the basement door.

“This place is gross,” Cody said. “Let’s *go*.”

“We just got here.”

I saw something at the edge of the stage where the Proprietor had made his rousing speech, where I had cleverly slipped him the parchment that (if it hadn’t been a fake! – I still got mad thinking about it) would have led the Hounds of Tindalos to him, instead of to my father. A bit of turquoise fabric peeked out of the rubble on the floor. I slipped it into my pocket, then pulled out a flashlight.

“N’hraggi akh menganah,” I said to myself.

“What’s that mean?”

“I dunno, but let’s check out the basement.”

OVER THE course of a long night and day, I’d gotten pretty familiar with this basement, but I’d spent that whole time mostly in pitch darkness, so this was my first good look. There was the wall where the Interlocutor had leaned, slowly dying from her beating at the hands of the mob, the glow of her fishy flesh growing steadily fainter. There were still a few scattered bones . . . and a hole in the floor, wider than I was tall, like the mouth of a deep well. I shone my light down it, but the mouth of this abyss was plugged with dirt and debris. Around its lip the soil was moist, as if freshly dug.

“What kind of craphole is this? What’re all these bones here?” Cody kicked at something in the dirt.

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“Human bones. Some of them.” I found a section of rib cage and pinned it with my foot to the dirt floor. I began rattling the ribs with my bamboo staff.

“The hell you doin’?”

“If something comes up through that hole,” I said, “if you see anything move or even hear anything coming, take off. Up the stairs, fast. Get out of here.”

“What makes you so bad, Silva, that you can stay and I can’t?”

“I *think* I’ll be okay. It’s an experiment.” I raised my voice over the rattling of the bamboo. “But I’m not so sure about you. You see, to get the Great Old Ones through to this world, the Church has these ceremonies where they open up something called a continuum threshold. So far, Yog-Sothoth hasn’t been able to get through – as far as I can tell, he’s just too big, and the threshold is too weak – but other things get through. Little things called ditches, that grow to be huge. And the last time, the night I got hurt, something else came through, a whole flock of them – they had wings.”

“Yeah, sure.” For the first time, Cody was listening as if I was credible. “The Devils. Those things are real.”

“I saw them that night – coming at me out of the threshold. Just shapes in the dark, bat-winged, along with –”

“They’re here for real. They mostly go for animals – cats, birds, squirrels, little dogs. Sometimes they attack people.”

This was interesting to me – the media called them Stipley Devils. They treated it like a hoax, “mass hysteria,” like the supposedly crazy things people said about the midnight games themselves. Even newscasters on Y108 and CHCH made smart-ass cracks about the Stipley Devils. To me, beneath the sarcasm, they sounded just a little bit nervous.

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“What was that?”

Speaking of nervous, Cody’s general nastiness was cracking a little. Under our feet, we’d felt a shudder, as if something big had awakened, rolled over sleepily and was coming our way. I kept rattling the bones.

“Like I said,” I repeated to Cody, “as soon as you see or hear *anything*, take off.”

Last night, I woke up with the memory of the stadium. The turf opening up, and the ditches emerging en masse. Enormous centipedes with long bony feelers, they had milled through the frightened crowd, not in a feeding frenzy (lucky for the crowd) but to make a rush for the continuum threshold before it closed again. I remembered that whenever one ditch came close to another, over the general hubbub I could hear a buzzing sound. Finally, I figured out what that sound was.

“Screw you, ya dork.” Cody pushed me and I felt the staff pulled from my hand.

“Don’t . . .” I raised my arm and felt the fabric of my hoodie rip as Cody flailed at me. My baseball cap flew off my head and I dropped my flashlight. “What the hell you doing?”

“You’ve always been *lame*, Silva. What are you bringin’ me here for, ya perv?” He whacked me with the staff again, but I’d made a dive for the flashlight, so he hit my back and not my head. Now I crouched on the dirt floor of the basement, littered with bones and debris. I felt that floor throb under my knees.

“Stop. Listen.” As I pushed myself up, I held out my hand to ward off another blow, and the staff really stung. I guess Cody was right in seeing it as a weapon – slender as it was, it could really hurt. “Gimme it back.”

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Cody turned and headed for the stairs. He took the staff with him.

“Give it back,” I yelled and, unconsciously echoing what the Proprietor had yelled at me the week before, “Something’s coming!”

Cody reached the wooden steps.

Beside me in the dirt, the earth heaved and parted like rapids around rocks and I lost my footing. Like a tree trunk erupting roots—first out of a flood, a dritch reared up out of the hole in the floor. I heard Cody swear, and I groped around for something, anything that would help me. The dritch’s bony feelers rattled the air, centimetres from my face. I rolled away, and it lunged toward the stairs where Cody stood petrified, staring. The staff dropped from his fingers.

“RUN,” I shouted, but I was too late. The dritch had seized Cody and pulled him into the air. Suddenly my fingers felt something long and narrow. I picked it up. It was an old garden hoe. I turned it backwards and rushed at the dritch, striking its rear feelers with the hoe’s long handle. I rattled them just as I’d rattled the bones with the bamboo staff.

Cody screamed, and I smelled something in the air that stung my nostrils, something acrid and burning. I kept at the dritch, and then, without thinking, using its long feelers like tree branches, I pulled myself up onto its back. My only chance – the only chance for Cody and me – was if my dream last night turned out to be true.