

PIT OF POISON

Slumped in the stairwell, I prepared to die. Poison was in my blood. The antidote lay in my grasp – the vials from the Twisted Apothecary. Yet each choice – wolfsbane, hemlock or strychnine – could be deadly. Only one would save me.

How had I got here? Intrigued by the message at the temple, I had swapped the jungle of one continent for another. Three of the four places in the world with the map coordinates 13° 13° are in Africa. As I flew between them, it hit me. Could the final bad thing – ‘too tiny for any eye to see’ – be the secret Antarctic virus I had read about in Paris? Microscopic and deadly, it had emerged in 2010, between the dates predicted by the Almangeist: 2009 (when *Titanoboa cerrejonensis* was unearthed) and 2012 (the end of the Mayan calendar cycle). I texted Mirabelle countless times, begging her to use her

contacts to help me gain access to the Antarctic lab. Her delays astonished me. Did she not understand the urgency?

In Africa I hunted for the pit, hoping to find an Unwriting phrase. Instead of a hole in the baked earth, I came across a long-abandoned mine. Deep underground, on the 13th stairwell, sat a hellish collection.

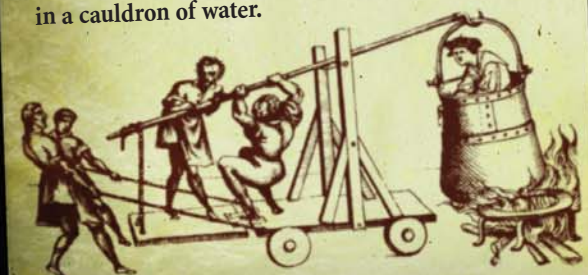
Near to the Unwriting phrase (just one to go!) sat a hoard of unwanted, unloved items buried deep in the past but since uncovered by luckless miners. I pored over them with an archaeologist's care. There was a nkisi nkondi curse doll and reams of papers, including a Mayan codex and – most terrible of all – a fragment of The Book of Bad Things...

Ways To Go

The Duke of Clarence, George Plantagenet, chose how he was to be executed in 1478. It is said that he opted to be drowned in a barrel of wine.

In 1794 the British ship *Jackal* fired a 13-gun salute in honour of American explorer John Kendrick, who was moored in his boat in the Hawaiian Islands. One cannon was accidentally loaded with real shot, which hit and killed Kendrick on the spot.

In 1542 the poisoner Margaret Davy was the last woman in Britain to be executed by being boiled in a cauldron of water.



In 1258 Mongol leader Hulagu Khan captured his enemy, Al-Musta'sim, after laying siege to Baghdad. Hulagu had him wrapped in a carpet and trampled to death by horses.

When a group of 15th-century Turkish diplomats did not remove their fez hats in the court of Prince Vlad III, he had the hats nailed to their heads. Vlad's infamy lives on, partly because of his surname – Dracula.



ALL EYES ON YOU

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS BELIEVED THAT THE EYE OF HORUS SYMBOL HAD GREAT POWERS OF PROTECTION AND HEALING.

THE NORTH AMERICAN HORNED TOAD CAN SQUIRT BLOOD FROM ITS EYES.

DOLPHINS OFTEN SLEEP WITH ONE EYE OPEN.

A BITE FROM A MANGO FLY CAN INFECT A HUMAN WITH A PARASITE CALLED THE AFRICAN EYE WORM. SOMETIMES THE WORM TRAVELS THROUGH THE PERSON'S EYEBALL.

WHEN ST BASIL'S CATHEDRAL IN RUSSIA WAS COMPLETED IN 1560, LEGEND SAYS THAT IVAN THE TERRIBLE HAD THE EYES OF ITS ARCHITECT POKED OUT SO THAT HE COULD NOT CREATE ANOTHER BUILDING AS BEAUTIFUL.

THE LARGEST EYEBALL BELONGS TO THE COLOSSAL SQUID – UP TO 40CM ACROSS.



Bad Burials

Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–81) was petrified of being buried alive. Each bedtime he would leave a note insisting that he was not dead, only sleeping.

In 1559 the lifeless body of Florence Wyndham was buried in the family vault at St Decuman's church in England. A church official broke into the vault to steal the rings from her hands.

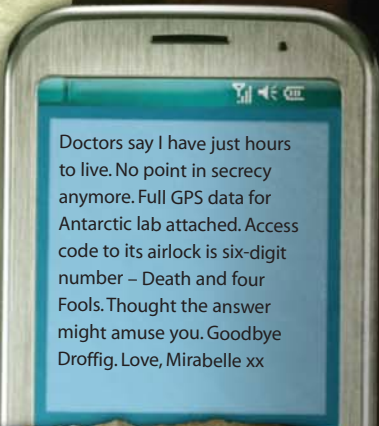
As he began to cut one of her fingers, blood flowed and Florence regained consciousness. She lived for another 37 years.

In Munich, Germany, in the 1880s, dead bodies were left in a room for two days with a wire attached from the corpse's fingers to a bell – to alert people should the deceased 'awaken'.

A report appeared in the New York Times in 1886 about a girl called Collins who died and was buried straight away. Several days later her body was dug up for burial elsewhere. But her wrappings were torn

and her limbs had moved – she had been buried alive.

In the 19th century, the Society for the Prevention of People Being Buried Alive recommended that shovels be buried with corpses so that they could dig themselves out if they woke up.



Doctors say I have just hours to live. No point in secrecy anymore. Full GPS data for Antarctic lab attached. Access code to its airlock is six-digit number – Death and four Fools. Thought the answer might amuse you. Goodbye Droffig. Love, Mirabelle xx

It crumbled to dust as I touched it. I soon felt queasy, my vision blurring, my heart pounding. The only words I had read on the scaly parchment before it disintegrated were 'Eyes' and 'I'm watching'.

Feverish and petrified ("Few live long enough to describe it," the Apothecarist had said), I picked a poison. As I gulped down the liquid, I felt euphoric... until my phone beeped. Poor Mirabelle! I had dragged her into this, and she had paid with her life. Had I also?

