

THE SIRENS OF GALLIONS REACH

“This is a world of fools! A world of slaves!”

Strange singing coming from the River Thames? Check. Odd glowing lights coming from the water? Check. Weird creatures living underneath Cleopatra’s Needle on the Embankment? Check. Another dangerous and terrifying adventure await Joe Druitt and his friends Eddows and Flo as they uncover the terrible truth about the ancient stone monolith on the banks of the world’s most famous river, and the connection between it and the tragedy of the paddle steamer, The Princess Alice, over a hundred years ago. And if that wasn’t enough for them, the teens are pursued by a sinister stranger and his faceless wax men...

The wind whipped at Old Dan’s tattered coat and sent a pile of crisp packets and plastic drink cartons swirling and scratching off into the gathering gloom. It had been a hot, dry day with not a cloud in the sky and Dan had enjoyed the fact, that for once, he could remove the grubby old coat and socks that stuck to his feet like soggy cardboard and relax. But now that night was drawing in, the Royal Victoria Gardens, Newham, East London, didn’t feel such a lovely place for a tramp to rest anymore. It had been amusing whilst watching the small children running, screaming and shouting amongst the bushes and trees and seeing the vain attempts of their parents to catch them before ice cream and fizzy drinks went cascading down crisp white t-shirts and summer clothes; it had been fun listening to the students from the UEL as they made plans for their summer breaks and it had been more than fun to see the coach load of Japanese tourists wander off in the wrong direction away from their flustered tour guide, clicking cameras as they went.

But now that the sun had gone and twilight was stealing in, the Gardens had taken on a more sinister air. Shadows crept like wriggling snakes across the lawns and the islands of trees and bushes that before had been like little lost islands to the children, who played there during the day, now became hiding places for who-knew what. But Dan didn’t care. He’d been in worse worst places than this before and at least, he thought to himself, it wasn’t raining and there were still a few people that were lingering on the benches that were scattered around.

It was then that Dan heard the sound. Faintly at first it sounded, nothing more than a whisper on the wind. At first, Old Dan thought it was music from the various pubs and houses that lay beyond the Gardens. The sound grew stronger, and Dan realised that the sound was coming from the direction of the river. Old Father Thames, the river that ran through the great city of London, appeared to be singing.

Dan smiled to himself at the thought; must be one of the pleasure boats out on a jaunt he thought to himself; karaoke or something like that, good singer, whoever it was. The music and song itself was like nothing he had ever heard before and sung in no language he knew, although London was such a melting pot of different races and cultures, it wasn't exactly surprising. It was then he felt that he had to see who was singing. The music seemed to reach out to him, caressing him, filling his head with pictures and places he had no idea about. Drawing his coat around him, Old Dan set off in the direction of the river.

As he approached the steps that led down to the murky waters of the Thames, Dan stopped. The lights from the opposite bank of the river shone brightly and London looked beautiful and serene as night fell on the capital. The river, however, was empty of boats. Dan stared in confusion and strained his rheumy eyes into the darkness. The sound, the music, had stopped. The only sound now was that of the river lapping against the shore. Dan shook his head; he was sure he had heard the singing, hadn't he? Maybe he'd had too much sun, become confused. Yes, that was it. He leant out across the concrete wall and looked down on the river that swirled thickly below him, like some great living creature. The reflections of the buildings lit up the water and danced across his vision like rippling fireworks.

Dan looked harder and then swore that beneath the glittering reflections and dancing lamplight another light shone in the depths. A faint green glow that spread out across the river in patches that seemed to move with a life of their own. It was then Dan heard the singing again. It came from all sides at once, louder and more powerful than before, but still in the strange language that had so confused and intrigued him. The lights in the water seemed to converge and split at various points in the darkness, as if there was someone, or something dancing in the black depths..

Dan felt himself go cold and it had nothing to do with the wind that now seemed to tear across the black gulf of the Thames. Dan knew the legends and stories that had grown up in this part of London about the tragedy of the paddle-steamer, The Princess Alice, that had gone down at Galleons Reach in full view of the Royal Victoria Gardens and the spirits of the three hundred souls who were said to haunt the Gardens after dark. The lights continued to drift towards Dan through the water, he blinked rapidly trying to shake what must be the sunstroke he was now experiencing.

Taking in great gasps of cold air, Dan turned away from the river. A slight sound made him start and look towards the muck encrusted steps that led down to the bank of the Thames. A sickly glow lit the steps throwing shadows onto the grimy brick wall. Must be some rubbish blowing in the wind, thought Dan. The shadow on the wall moved, taking on a rough human shape and Dan noted that the music and singing had begun again. It was wilder this time and seemed to reverberate around his skull. He clasped his hands across his ears trying to blot out the sound, all the while staring at the shadow that moved and seemed to beckon to him at the top of the steps.

Without thinking, Dan began to walk towards the steps as if pulled on invisible strings. His feet and his legs were not his own and he felt as if he was under remote control. It was at this moment Dan rounded the edge of the river wall to *the top of the steps*. *Dan looked down and saw what had been making the glow and the singing and tears sprung to his eyes. He opened his mouth to speak but no sound came out. But no words would have been adequate. The singing stopped abruptly, and Dan blinked as if seeing properly for the first time. It was then he began to scream...*