

The Town Drunk

Presents

Lampreyhead Meets the Vampire Slaughterers

Tim W. Burke

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A yellow cloud of brimstone drifted up from the parking lot into the clammy night mist. Finally—I'd been waiting for an hour outside that building with the garish signs advertising beers. I quickly checked my look in the side mirror of the nearest automobile. The streetlights gleamed on my silver scales, making them look quite spiffy. My corduroy blazer with the leather patches on the elbows looked smashing, and a quick tug straightened my black bowtie.

The Demon Prince Wroth coalesced from the brimstone. On the shoulders of his great ape body sprouted the heads of a raven, a mandrill, and a Fine Arts graduate student.

“Where’s the assistant?” yelled the student head.

“Right here, my prince!” I splashed through the puddles to meet him. “You’re looking swell this evening—”

“Quiet, Lampreyhead.”

“Yes, my prince.”

“The Stinking Number isn’t entirely sure how you succeeded in your last mission against the Orgasmael Angels, but he’s decided to give you this job, too. Now, I’m a great admirer of your work myself, such as it is...”

He tugged at his sparse goatee. “...but I wanted to bring in my new creations to vivisect everyone. The Number told me ‘no,’ because He wants us to mind the truce with the Opposition.”

Wroth had lost out on being a major demon because Wrath was already on the list of Deadly Sins. I believe it’s caused him to overcompensate.

“It is best to avoid war,” I said.

“Sure!” cawed the raven head a little too loudly. The other heads added: “But unfair! It interferes with my right to free expression.”

“Why,” I said, steering him back to the subject, “are we at this noisy dancehall?”

“This place is called a ‘club,’ Lampreyhead. Somehow, two of the world’s most notorious vampire slaughterers have ended up here in Montreal at the same time. The Number wants you to go in and find out what’s going on. I say kill ‘em, and the vampires too. They’re overdone and represent an outdated, bourgeois value system.”

I raised a finger. “If I may, there seems to be a... slight flaw in the Number’s plan. Am I supposed to interrogate the two foremost vampire slaughterers in the world while maintaining my whole thing with the teeth and the blood-drinking?”

Wroth’s lips curled. “You are a mere bloodsucking fiend.”

That smarted. “Though that is technically true, I wonder if the ladies will take that distinction into account.”

“Lampreyhead,” said the Prince, “if you are caught or killed, no one will care.”

“Certainly. Yes. Of course.” I swallowed. “I’ll find out why those two are here and report back. Please inform The Stinking Number that I am proud to—”

Brimstone blasted into my face. Wroth was gone.

With another glance in the mirror, I tested out my most convincing smile. My sucker mouth stretched and showed barbed teeth receding down my throat. I sighed.

The entrance to the club was under a marquee reading *Smiles*. Two helpful gents took an admission fee, then stamped my hand with a smiley face for some reason.

The club was hung with gray drapes and sputtering neon lights. Scattered patrons sat at the bar and tables. People on the dance floor bobbed to harsh, thumping music played by a DJ in a sealed booth. The crowd was made up of salt-of-the-earth young folk. Except for two:

Drinking something dark at the bar was an ebon-tressed woman of wiry build. That was Bonita Poole. She could speak with the dead. Being a vampire slaughterer, she also made the undead deader. It was said that Miss Poole killed the undead just so she could brag to them about having killed them.

Across the dance floor, sizing up the room, was a caramel-skinned blonde in a kelly-green skirt, white knee socks, and a leather duster. Jonquil Holliday: Supernatural Marshal for the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts.

They seemed out of place among the rough-looking regulars. A hefty blond man at the bar wore leather pants and a gaudy shirt, which didn't quite work for his waistline. Beside me, a bearded man in an oily mechanic's shirt sipped a beer.

The barmaid grimaced at me. "That is one nasty mask you got. You promoting a horror movie?"

"Correct on the first guess," I said.

"It's so real-looking, I wasn't sure. But nobody could really be *that* messed up."

"I like to believe that a being's... appeal lies in more than just his appearance."

She laughed loud and sincere.

"Ha," I said. "Glad you liked that. I'll have a burger, rare, and an empty glass."

Now standing beside me was an attractive woman with her black hair pulled into a ponytail. She picked at the motor grease under her fingernails. There was no sign of the mechanic.

A zaftig, tough-looking blonde woman was scoping the dance floor from the bar. She wore huge hoop earrings and leather pants that were a bit outré even in this scene. Her blouse looked like the blond man's from a moment ago. He was gone.

The club was suddenly filling with attractive and stylish women. Bustiers and leather jackets seemed to be the fashion.

Was there some supernatural entity at work? Time to test and verify!

I interlaced my fingers into the Voorish Sign. Peering through the gaps in the fingers allowed me to see into the Spirit World.

The Spirit World is a great perception slushee. Every soul that has ever lived and died is swirling around us. These minds follow us around if they like us, and they shape what they see to a great extent. Usually in a room this size, maybe a few motes of soul would be swirling. I peeked.

The room was awash to the rafters with millions of tiny spirits, rosy-pink with happiness. Turning toward the puzzled waitress, I saw tiny faces gawking and nodding and grinning throughout the bar, watching the patrons eye each other warily.

Billions of intangible perceivers packed this rather noisy "club" dancehall. But within arm's reach, the spirits turned gray and flowed away from me, creating a sort of "bubble of indifference." When the spirits neared the barmaid, they turned pink again.

She clutched her temple, running fingers through her now lush golden mane.

“I gotta go,” she said, her accent turned Cajun. “I sense evil.”

It was a terrible risk, but I had to confirm my suspicion.

“Ladies!” I called to the mass of solitary drinkers. “Could I speak with you?”

They gathered around.

Straightening my bowtie, I coughed. “I represent, um, a motion picture production company promoting a horror movie, which explains my rather unusual appearance. I was wondering... how many of you know vampires personally?”

“I’m half-weretiger and half-vampire,” said a redhead.

“I’m the alpha female of the city’s werewolf pack, and I’m involved with a vampire,” said Bonita Poole, stepping from the shadows.

“I’m involved,” waved a brunette, “with a vampire *and* a werewolf.”

Shouted from the back: “I’m half-fey and I hunt vampires.”

“I’m a witch.”

“So’s my friend.”

Oh dear.

It seemed it was in vogue in the Spirit World to admire buxom, leather-clad maidens with striking hair color. Maidens who are on intimate terms with handsome were-creatures, vampires, and such. Two of these popular lasses had met in one place. The spirits liked what they saw, and new spirits joined in to watch. This had warped reality and created more maidens to watch, which was bringing in more spirits, creating a reality cascade. So many minds in one place, seeing what they wanted to see, started seeing killer maidens everywhere and made that real.

Except around me. The bubble of indifference was keeping me safe.

“Listen, ladies,” I interjected, “only two of you actually started out as vampire slaughterers. The rest of you are people who have become trapped and tailored to be what the spirits prefer. Really, you have to disperse before the entire population of metropolitan Montreal is turned into hard-hitting paranormal heroines with complicated personal lives. ”

A man called, “*Bon soir*, you! You with the face of the sucking eel-fish!”

Behind the crowd of ladies stood a pack of leather-clad, sharp-featured men with lots of body hair. One stepped forward, black vest over a bare chest, long-fingered and long-toothed.

“Why is it that you the gruesome one must bother these beautiful *cheres*?”

The crowd of women parted with sneers: “What business is it of yours?” “Thanks, but I can take care of myself.” “My hero.” “And you are?”

He strutted into the middle of the group. “My name is Malfique. I am alpha male of the Toronto werewolves. And this is a most interesting predicament, no?”

“Yes,” I said, “and worthy of study, if it weren’t so dangerous to—”

“Ah-ah!” said Malfique. He strolled around the circle, fondling curls, gazing deeply into eyes, sniffing necks. All the women glared defiantly, yet they flushed with excitement.

The werewolf smiled. “There is always danger with certain *femmes*. They are beautiful and deadly like knives. To have so many, it is the giant Cuisinart of love set on ‘grind’.”

“Now Mister Malfique,” I said, “you may have *started out* as a werewolf, seeing as these are your stomping grounds. But the spirits have transformed you from a feral, snarling beast to some sort of lycanthropic gigolo.”

“This development is suiting my taste. If the spirits prefer this, Mister Suckerfishface, who are we to judge?”

I quickly made the Voorish Sign. Purpling spirits thrust middle fingers, backward “v” gestures, thumbed their noses at me. Death doesn’t make people wise, honest, or even polite.

Someone pulled down my hands. Jonquil Holliday looked up at me. Her jaw tightened.

“Awful interesting teeth,” she said. “Use ‘em much?” Her gum snap was like a crack of lightning.

All the women looked at me. Fingers slipped into pockets and coats.

My voice quavered. “Ha! They are miracles of special effects gimmickry, aren’t they? And they are very, very costly, so breaking them would be no mean expense—”

“But,” Jonquil’s whisper was Bubblelicious death, “I got a phone call from somebody who promised a vampire killing spree. That wouldn’t be you, would it?”

The waitress returned. “Hamburger rare and an empty glass.”

“Check, please,” I said.

I bolted out the door past the newly-Amazonian bouncers. The feet of a dozen killers pounded after me. A quick duck into the shadows, a roll under a semi, and a leap behind a dumpster and I was alone.

I communed with Hindquarters and informed them of the situation. They were rightly upset. I suggested a course of action and requisitioned some teleportation vouchers. It was a great vote of confidence to see the first part of my plan implemented: a cloud of brimstone bloomed. From it stepped an olive-skinned man in stylish black garb. He approached the entrance, and the bouncers let him in. As I tried to sneak in behind him, though, one of those caryatids seized me by my blazer.

Nudging the bouncer's hip, I shouted, "Say, isn't that Pharaoh Ankhmohotep from the Unspeakable Dynasty of Ancient Egypt? He's been searching all of eternity for his queen."

"Is that right?" she muttered.

A stir went through the crowd as he entered.

"It is said," I added, "that his passion transcends life itself. That's what they say, anyway."

Ankhmohotep was soon surrounded by hard-bitten chippees. Then another choking cloud brought forth another strapping, regal figure.

"Ah! The Gill-King is here! Misunderstood ruler of Atlantis. They say every part of his body is textured for hydrodynamics."

The other bouncer considered. "I'll bet he can hold his breath for days."

They let go of my blazer and fought their way into the throng. "My king!"

One last stinking cloud, and up strode a square-shouldered gent in khakis.

"Hold on!" I called. "Here comes Lord Bruce of the Sydney Werewombats. They rule down-under, and by that I mean Australia."

"Ooh! An Ozzie!" everyone exclaimed, and there was much shoving.

The three nobles were mobbed by women twirling their hair, laughing loudly, leaning coquettishly, touching any part of an arm they could reach. Those who were squeezed out ordered drinks and sulked. The werewolves moved in for the rebounds.

Drat—I had hoped for rioting. But vampire hunters take defeat and rejection with such civility. Is it the nature of romantics to sulk unless physically threatened?

I made my way back out to the parking lot. A few women sobbed dramatically in the rain. A puny vampire ran by screaming, chased by three red-eyed beauties with stakes.

A shadow blotted out the stars. Prince Wroth's voice echoed, "Lampreyhead! They are spilling out into the streets. The incorporeal from all over the continent are gathering!"

“My apologies! I had thought they would fight each other, but—”

“I’m getting flack about this from Downstairs.” Wroth cackled. “I’m going to have to send in my new creations after all. They’re not scary, but they’re sick, and I love them.”

From outside the parking lot shambled several doughy, pale teenage boys, gleaming with spindly chrome arms, blades, and drills. Their spiky hair was topped with white baseball caps turned backwards. Half surgical supply house, half drunken frat party.

“No!” I yelled. “They’ll just kill innocent people, which will stir the hunters up more. Spirits will join in droves to watch the action. Greater Quebec will be up to its armpits in velvet valkyries by morning.” Of course, I knew some guys who wouldn’t mind that so much...

Inspiration struck. “Wait a moment! Give me an hour and some teleportation vouchers. It’s a long shot, but it’s the only chance we’ve got.”

Wroth’s shadow looked over its shoulder at me. “What? But... all right, Lampreyhead, I’ve been told to give you one more chance. Then I get to create some *art!*”

The club entrance was unguarded due to the competitive flirting over the guests, so getting back inside was easy. Easy until Jonquil caught sight of me.

Her braces gleamed in the flashing lights above the dance floor. “You stiffed the waitress. Do you wanna wash dishes, or should I just kill you now?”

I heard a stir in the crowd behind me.

The dancers parted and turned their heads away, or sneered, or cast unsettled glances.

“Creature of the Black Lagoon!” I called. “Over here!”

A tall green amphibian walked in, dance lights shining on his scales, his gills fluttering. Jonquil gaped.

Behind him came the others I had invited.

Three men with short white hair walked in lockstep. They wore silk shirts open to the chest and relaxed-fit jeans.

“Divorcés of the Damned! Glad you could come.”

“Hello, Lampreyhead,” they said, their expressions flat. “We accept your invitation to boogie.”

I explained to Jonquil. “They were the boys from *Children of the Damned* forty years ago, but they grew up and had to re-evaluate their lives.”

A shaggy, seven-foot-tall man-ape loped through the now-cringing crowd.

“Legend of Boggy Creek! I saved you a seat.”

My guests and I settled into a suddenly available table close to the bar and got comfortable. When the waitress arrived, I pointed in turn to each of my companions. “The Legend’ll have Jack Daniels and cedar water. The Divorcés will all have Harvey Wallbangers with reduced-calorie orange juice. Creature’ll have an anchovy daquiri.”

The barmaid gave my merry crew an uneasy once-over. “Um... we don’t have...”

“Then two pitchers of your finest light beer, and keep ‘em coming!”

She retreated.

“Boggy, I think she digs you,” I said.

The shaggy mass snorted and ducked against the upholstered wall. From the darkness, he stared desperately at a nearby table of raven-haired beauties. When the women noticed the creature mooning at them, they got up and left.

I said to the Divorcés, “Boys, could you fix the jukebox? It’s difficult to have a conversation.”

“We agree.”

The irises of their eyes glowed white. Inside his booth, the disc jockey suddenly froze stiff. Then he locked the door to the booth. The thumping goth-techno screeched to silence. Phil Collins started to sing “Sussudio.”

Dancers pounded on the door. Others gathered their leathers and walked out.

I just shrugged and tried to look puzzled.

Jonquil jabbed a stake under my chin. “What’s up with the new guys?”

I eased the point away. “They are all friends of mine. They leave people in peace unless they are disturbed. The only thing they want is a meaningful relationship. I thought you ladies would be interested in meeting them and and maybe even dating them.”

The Creature waved jauntily at a table of dismayed damsels.

Meanwhile, the Divorcés were making their play at another nearby table. “Our exes did not understand us, despite inclusion in our hivemind.”

Everyone at the table whipped out their timepieces, said something unintelligible, and made for the exit.

“Suckerfishface!” Malfique stalked through the thinning crowd. “You and your unsightly friends are ruining the mood of everyone!”

The Divorcés turned to Malfique. “We had a repressed childhood. We would like to explore our sexuality.”

“What?” Malfique scratched his head and smiled. “With three of you? Certainly, that is tempting with three of—You, suckerfishface! Why don’t you—how you say?—go blow!”

I was thrilled. “Now, see? ‘Go blow!’ That is a idiom from the 1950’s, when some of my friends got their start.”

“What is that you are saying, daddy-o?”

“These boys brought their own spectating spirits. Those spirits are gathering and are creating, you could say, a counter-cascade. Look!”

Malfique looked down. His leather vest had been replaced by a high school letterman’s sweater. Varsity football, if that gold footballish emblem was correct.

“What... is... happening?”

Lush, well-groomed fur sprouted from his hands and face. Fangs protruded from his mouth in a wicked overbite. He was now the Teenaged Werewolf. Malfique howled and loped out the door. The creases on his chinos were sharp.

The rest of the pack scrambled *tout-suite*.

I made the Voorish Sign. Spirits red with frustration were shoving each other and pulling their noncorporeal hair and stamping their intangible feet and flying away in a huff.

It had cleared so much, I could see a woman walking up to me.

The tall brunette pulled a stake from her jacket. “Vampire or demon or whatever you are, why shouldn’t we kill all of you?”

“These are simple, kind-hearted beings, Miss Poole, and we’re just having a beer and seeking companionship,” I said.

She stared into my right eye (my good side, I might say). She, Jonquil, and the rest were too decent to do any rough stuff unless attacked first, even if we were overstepping our bounds by monopolizing the jukebox.

I lowered my voice and rasped my tongue along my lips. “I’ve been told that my bite lasts three days. Resulting in a three-day sexual climax.”

“On that note...” Jonquil departed.

“Well, Miss Poole, no one has actually taken the Lampreyhead challenge, but I have that on good authority.”

“I’m washing my hair forever and ever. Sorry.” And she walked away.

All over the dancehall, people were heading for the exits. The thinning crowd revealed men and women transforming back to their original states now that the spirits too were taking their leave.

The boys were a little down in the mouth, so I ordered another round.

Theory swirled in my head: If this is what the spirits want, who am I to interfere? The spirits would soon tire of all this and move on to other things anyway, wouldn’t they?

I muttered to myself, “If the landscape is scoured of vampires and other creatures, the world will be open for new creations. Why do I now think Wroth is behind all this?”

I had no proof. Even if I did, how could I say that what Wroth had done was illegal? Illegal in Hell?

I took one last peek through the Voorish Sign. Purpling spirits had surrounded me and were hammering intangibly on my head. Then they drifted back, laughing inaudibly.

Puzzled, I brought down my hands.

Alone on the dancefloor, the waitress shuffled with the Creature to “Home By The Sea.” I waved... and noticed my new slender, manicured hand.

“Now this is interesting,” I said. “My bubble of indifference seems to have collapsed, and the remaining spirits are influencing me.” A look in the mirror revealed a face with full lips, a button nose, and a no-nonsense look in the eye. I tossed my luxurious red tresses.

A quick look through the Voorish Sign showed pink spirits swirling and laughing at my predicament.

“This isn’t even powerful enough to have changed my personality,” I told them. “This state will be a temporary if stylish inconven—”

“G’day, luv!”

A roguish man in khakis sat beside me. He was stout and tan with brown hair and slightly pronounced front teeth.

“M’ name’s Bruce. Care for a Eucalypatini?”

I followed his gaze and looked down. I now had bosoms—rather substantial ones encased in a black velvet bustier. The sensation of the reapportioned flesh and the constriction of the fabric were surprisingly pleasant stimuli.

So what is the appeal of being a vengeful vixen for vexing vampires?

Time to test and verify!

Tim W. Burke was raised within a mile of some of the most secure U.S. penitentiaries. He has been published in *Weird Tales*, *Gothic.Net*, and *A Fly In Amber* magazine. He will be seen soon in *Fantasy Online*, *Aoife's Kiss*, and *Bewildering Stories*. Read more about him at his blog, <http://timwb.livejournal.com>.