

7: A Sneak Victorious

Peaceful, blithe, relaxing: not words you could use to describe the first week of Hubert Sneak's summer holidays. He was no longer secure in his plush office with his cosy leather seats and alphabetised filing trays. His desk lamp, perfectly arranged at a fifty-six degree angle, was absent also, as was his rich mahogany desk, specially imported from Peru. And he could still hear the clickety clack of his ancient ceiling fan turning away, these noises keeping a steady beat, like a metronome, so it could almost be used as a timepiece. Hubert would often end up writing his reports in sync with the clicks of his ceiling fan; he remembered it being rather therapeutic. But his office was locked away like the rest of the school, and he didn't have the key.

The fresh air tasted peculiar, the open spaces made him feel vulnerable and exposed. Plus, to add to his sense of exposure, these new clothes were garish, baggy and loose on his person. He would much rather be wearing his tight suit and bow tie; you could never go wrong with such an outfit, yet when in public one occasionally had to accept and succumb to the social convention, no matter how ludicrous it was.

Then there was the matter of all these strange people. He didn't know them, yet some seemed perfectly happy to encroach into his personal space, and others even felt obliged to converse in salutations. He'd only gone to the market to acquire some cheap provisions away from the technologically overwhelming modern boutiques. He wished to buy their merchandise, not waste precious time talking with the proprietors. Very soon the panicking would start, beads of sweat already nestled in his palms. Promptly he picked up his purchases and turned to leave this hellish gathering spot.

"Gideon!"

"Hubert, how many times must I tell you not to call me that?" moaned Gideon Lesser.

Mr Sneak's eyes darted about the crowd, looking around at all the other horrible people in the market, "Looking for a client, are we Gideon?"

Gideon sighed, "Don't call...no actually. Strangely enough, I'm here to buy what's for sale, as are most, if not all, in the area."

Mr Sneak tried to pull himself together, "Fair enough. Look, I'm glad I found you. There's a matter of great importance I wish to confide in you. I need your help."

“For the last time, I can’t get all of the parents whose children ran amok two weeks ago sued for violation of rules and disturbing the peace of the school. Nor,” he said quickly, before the headmaster could get a word in, “can I get them sued for general misconduct.”

Mr Sneak chuckled maniacally to himself, “No, no, it’s not about that incident, not this time.” Gideon was grateful for most of that statement, though became a little concerned at the ‘this time’ part, “this is something much more pressing. I fear I’m in danger.”

He rubbed his hands together over and over again. His head swung from side to side apparently searching the marketplace. He began to draw shallow fast breaths into his body, rapidly being overtaken by a panic attack.

“Hubert, dear boy, I’m a solicitor, not a psychiatrist, but anyone with eyes can see that you are suffering from paranoia. What has a headmaster got to fear? The third form can’t be that bad! Whatever this grave matter is, it is simply a delusion.”

“Please, Gideon, this is desperate. I can’t talk to anybody who’s not already involved, besides you of course. And I’m taking a big risk just doing that.”

“And what exactly do you expect someone of my profession to do in this situation?” Gideon was partly amused by the scenario unfolding before him, partly worried about the mental condition of the person jabbering in front of him.

Gideon was no expert on body language, but he’d been in a courtroom with enough violent criminals to recognise the actions of a man who was close to the edge. Hubert’s eyes couldn’t focus on any one thing. He was constantly scanning those around him. Flinching and twitching when someone walked close by. Hubert gulped like a fish out of water. His arms flailed wildly about as he spun round to stare at something that caught his attention out of the corner of his eye.

In a moment of calm both Gideon and Hubert noticed that people were staring in their direction, their attention drawn by Hubert’s frenetic behaviour. Hubert dragged a crumpled handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at his brow. There was an awkward silence.

Gideon finally broke it, “Let’s continue this conversation back at your house.”

Mr Sneak nodded shakily, breathing heavily, his body shuddering.

The front door slid back across the floor, closing silently. Gideon looked around at the assortment of antiques. He moved forwards down the hall, peeping his head through the open doors. He finally came to a room that looked as if it could be the living room.

“Is in here okay?”

Mr Sneak was a little slower, spending time double-checking all the new locks on his front door. He turned slightly at the question.

“Y...yes, that’s fine,” he stammered, still in the grip of his panic.

Suddenly the phone began to ring. Its awfully cheerful jingle bore into their heads, the vibration making the little tea table shake on its spindly legs. Neither went to pick it up, both just stared at the phone, waiting for the other to make a move. As nobody did, it went to the answering machine. Mrs Cage’s voice blurted out of the tiny speaker.

“Have you had any con...”

Mr Sneak had pulled the plug from the wall, the phone was dead. Gideon only pondered this action for a moment, and then put it down to another side effect of whatever mental illness the man was suffering from. He shook his head and led Mr Sneak into his own living room.

Though it was summer there was a fire burning in the hearth. Mr Sneak obviously didn’t get much company, or at least he wasn’t very well prepared for it. There were three chairs, technically. There was only one that you could sit on, it was the one nearest to the fire, its back turned to it. The other two were covered in piles of...something incomprehensible. It might have been reports or some other school-related thing, yet it might just as likely have been secret messages intercepted from MI5. Gideon proffered that seat to Mr Sneak. Hubert hurried over.

“No, no, that seat is for you.”

He dusted it off, not that there was any dust, and moved it under Gideon. Hubert then moved to shove the pile of whatever off one of the other seats. Gideon thought to himself that these chairs must only have a sentimental value, as he didn’t feel comfortable in his. It felt tighter than it had first appeared, like it didn’t want him sitting in it. He tried changing his position in the chair, but that didn’t work. Giving up on that, the lawyer took in a more detailed view of the room. Most of the walls were bare, save the wallpaper, which was a sludgy brown. There weren’t any windows in here; all of the light came from the fire and candle stubs placed here

and there, wherever there was a flat surface that wouldn't go up in flames. There was one painting, the only thing on the walls. Difficult to interpret, it was probably some abstract art form, Gideon rationalised. Seeing there was nothing left to unravel, by sight at least, Gideon turned his attention once again to the quaking man sitting before him.

"So what is it you wish to tell me, Mr Sneak?"

Hubert wouldn't keep his eyes on one thing, and they were never on Gideon.

"For a while now," Hubert began, "I have been having this feeling, like someone is always watching me."

His eyes drifted to the crackling fire behind Gideon. Gideon turned to see what the man was looking at. He of course saw nothing.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked with a hint of concern.

"No, no. Well, of course, somebody's watching me. And before you say anything, it's not just me; the others are feeling it as well."

Gideon looked directly into Mr Sneak's eyes, and for once Hubert looked back, "What others? If you have evidence, then I may be able to help you. Why haven't you brought me to them already, brought them in on this discussion? If they're feeling the same way, affected in the same manner, then..."

Hubert leapt to his feet, "Never! They can't know. They'll find out!"

Hubert then seemed to realise what he had done, looked around for an excuse, and then sat down again, rather sheepishly.

"I have got myself in way over my head," Hubert said, quieter, "I have become involved in something I should not have. I've been so very stupid."

"So this is illegal?" queried Gideon, trying to understand the full extent of the problem, and if after all he could present a case for Mr Sneak that wasn't one of insanity. "What is it you've got yourself involved with? Is it drug related, or fraud, or..."

Hubert began to chuckle maniacally, "You wouldn't be able to comprehend any of it. Not the magnitude, not the risk, and certainly not those behind it."

Gideon leant forward in his chair, which as it turns out made it even more uncomfortable to sit in, “Try me.”

Hubert’s head whipped to the side, staring at the fire, his eyes bulging. After seeing something, Gideon couldn’t tell what, Hubert began to make himself as small as possible, curling into a ball, which seemed impossible to Gideon, who still found his chair to be overly constricting. Gideon looked into the fire once more, and found the same result, nothing.

“What is it?”

There was a long silence, in which Hubert just rocked backwards and forwards, seemingly as often as he could. Through clenched teeth he muttered something too quiet to be comprehensible.

“What?”

“For God’s sake get out,” Hubert whispered.

It would have been better if he’d shouted. But his voice was calm, creepy. This was too much for the lawyer. Gideon took the invitation and rushed towards the front door. He might call 999, but what was the most that they could do? He might just drop this particular client; he had plenty of others to choose from.

Hubert couldn’t take his eyes off of that seat. There wasn’t a clock, but he knew it was almost time. It would come very soon. He just had to keep waiting. There was no point in trying to run. It never worked. Not for anyone. Not when you were dealing with these people. They would always find you in the end and they punished those who inconvenienced them.

In the background, the fire crackled, the firelight shining off the shadowy walls of his living room. He hadn’t moved a muscle. You would have thought that by now he’d have run out of sweat, yet still his pores dripped, in his state of mortal terror.

It wasn’t a sudden change. It started as part of the woodwork of the chair, an arrangement of the visible knots and lines. In the following minute or so the lines became more prominent, a clearer outline, until finally there was a blatant image of someone sitting in the seat, made up of the natural patterns in the wood. Following its transfiguration, the outline looked Hubert up and down, inspecting the timid man. Its fingers drummed on the arms of the seat. Eventually it spoke, which was in some ways a relief to Hubert. He had never been good at handling tension

or suspense. Yet the lines that were its mouth did not move. It was in fact the crackling of the gentle fire behind the chair that seemed to form the words.

“These chairs were provided for the select only. They won’t want others sitting in them.”

“Yes, I noticed that with Gideon,” Hubert managed to say.

Its voice filled the room. He should be used to it by now; it had been happening for long enough. But nobody could keep calm in the presence of this associate. Slowly, the figure rose from its chair with a symphony of cracks and creaks, the body tearing itself from the chair. Its face remained immobile and emotionless, swivelling upon its timber neck. The lifeless carvings of eyes took in his shabby abode.

“We will need to obtain you better accommodation for your efforts. You have done well over the course of your work with us,” the fire crackled in the grate.

Hubert bowed his head, “You are most kind.”

“Your approval is unnecessary and, as always, unwanted.”

“If I may be so bold,” Hubert’s voice trembled as he looked up at his superior, “the boy has his task, as you wished, so is not my part complete, can I not go back to my normal life?”

The fire flared, the sound of burning reverberated loudly, like cackling laughter.

The figure cocked its head and began to circle Hubert’s own seat, “You think that was your only duty to our cause?”

It stood behind the quivering man and ran its wooden fingers through his thinning hair.

“No, we have plenty more planned for your piteous group. But think yourself lucky. I’m not known for my benevolence. But then again, I’m not really known, am I?”

The feel of its fingers lingered on his scalp for a short time after it had disappeared, merging with the patchy wallpaper, where its pattern dispersed. It was a long time before Hubert Sneak got himself up from his chair and moved around once more. He wouldn’t contact Gideon, or anyone else for that matter. This was his other life, outside of the pristine workplace and ordered systems. This was his secret life; the private one, which no one else could share; the one that kept him within the grip of fear.

Gideon had proved that no one else could understand. Hubert may be a coward but he could not countenance putting anyone else at risk. He was alone, all alone.

The front door wouldn't move over the coming weeks. He had enough supplies to sustain him through this self-induced confinement. They may say he had done well, had won, been victorious in his mission, but it didn't feel like it. This was wrong, it all was. Real, well deserved, winning...it was different. He had the courage to lock himself up in this decaying prison, but not enough to confess his crimes to any judge and jury.

Gift Of The Mancynn (The Ragnarök Chronicles: 2016.1) by Dominic Hodgson

What if everything we thought we knew about the universe was wrong? What if there was something beyond our perception of space and time? And why do we feel the need to constantly strive towards the technological advances that have brought us from the wheel to the particle accelerator? Are we really motivated by our own curiosity and greed? Or is this the work of a higher power? Philip is a teenage boy, who goes to school, watches TV, and just so happens to be supernatural. He's never thought to question his abilities, and why should he? That's just who he is. Except that now he's being visited by mysterious figures, headed by the deathly Lord Gryal Repa, who insist that it's his duty to work with them, that he should do whatever bizarre tasks they ask of him. And the further Philip and his friends travel, the clearer it gets that he is not the only one aware of Gryal and his cohorts. They have infiltrated this world for their own insidious agenda, and they are preparing something far more dangerous. With plans thousands of years in the making already in motion, it's a race against time as Philip must decide what side of a conflict traversing the dimensions he's going to be on, before everything he's ever known is changed forever.

Available at –

Amazon: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Gift-Mancynn-1-Ragnar%C3%B6k-2016-1/dp/153050385X/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1503422656&sr=1-4&keywords=dominic+hodgson

Barnes & Noble: http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/gift-of-the-mancynn-dominic-hodgson/1123544160;jsessionid=6EC4723FA81500C2974ADCE1432A38DE.prodny_store02-atgap06?ean=2940152827590

Kobo: <https://store.kobobooks.com/en-us/ebook/gift-of-the-mancynn>

Google Play:

https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Dominic_Hodgson_Gift_of_the_Mancynn?id=hJ2-CwAAQBAJ&hl=en

iBooks: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/book/id1093814079>

3 out of 4 star review: <https://forums.onlinebookclub.org/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=38912>

Feel free to contact me or visit my blog –

Email: philipquint2158@outlook.com

Twitter: @DEJHodgson

Blog: dominichodgson.wordpress.com

The Sequel:

The Archk Of Angels (The Ragnarök Chronicles: 2016.2) by Dominic Hodgson

Few who live in the Alpha Realm truly appreciate the nature of time. Few realise that it's a current of energy flowing through the multiverse, originating from an ancient artefact: the Archk of Angels. Those that do know may now be threatening it all. Philip Quint's life was turned upside down when he learned the truth of what he was. As a Mancynn, a person who can manipulate reality thanks to artificially-enhanced genetics, his supposed destiny was to work as emissary for the Brethren Lords as they used the Earth in their plot against the godly Entities. However, after fellow Mancynn Noah Mason freed him from their influences, Philip and his companions took to uncovering Lord Gryal Repa's insidious operations. With events having gone downhill in Egypt, Philip must now find his mysteriously-disappeared friends, avoid the authorities across America and take part in an Entity mission traversing time to find the coveted Archk before the now rivalling Brethren Lords do. But other threats lurk in the shadows, and throughout their journey one detail remains uncertain: into whose hands should the Archk really be allowed to fall?

Available at –

Amazon: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Archk-Angels-Ragnar%C3%B6k-Chronicles/dp/1974034305/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1503422656&sr=1-3&keywords=dominic+hodgson

Barnes & Noble: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-archk-of-angels-dominic-hodgson/1126906302>

Please be sure to leave a review should you read and enjoy either of these novels. It would mean so much to me. Thank you.