

# THE UNINVITED



DEL STONE JR.

JON FOSTER

DAVE DORMAN'S

the **UN**invited

by

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with illustrations by

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Summary: With the Doctor's latest designer plague spreading through Mortal City, Coronor M. d'Cease calls on Jack to save the day.

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For more information on the Wasted Lands and the characters in this book, please go to [www.wastedlands.com](http://www.wastedlands.com)

## INTRODUCTION



Nobody can remember when the towers began to appear.

But the people of Mortal City *can* remember when things fell apart.

The Rail Barons, who ruled the lands outside the city and controlled its every lifeline, installed a mayor of their choice who would do their bidding, a man who became known as The Doctor.

The Rail Barons' expansion into the Wasted Lands outside the city did not come without a price. The resources needed to fuel that growth — to build the huge trains and lay the track and fabricate the depots that housed and fed the workers necessary to keep the trains running — proved immense beyond description. Eventually, the Barons found themselves long on ambition and short on materials. So with their puppet in place, they contrived a

provocation with the territories to the north and manipulated a proclamation of war, all part of a scheme to gain resources without cost to themselves.

Mortal City geared up for war. Literally. The captains of industry moved into high gear, building the engines of destruction needed to wage such a campaign. Their profits soared as the quality of life in Mortal City deteriorated overnight, the laws regarding environmental protection, worker rights and even civil codes suspended for the duration of the war effort. Ordinary men — those who were left behind to run the factories — suffered horribly, while the elite few built refuges of glittering spires outside the city and escaped its looming economic and social collapse. And unbeknownst to anyone, the so-called puppet mayor of Mortal City quietly set about hatching a scheme of his own.

The “Iron War,” as it came to be known as, ended with a truce of sorts. The broken remnants of the “victorious” army returned to Mortal City. The Rail Barons took for themselves the mineral rights of the Northern Territories.

But to their dismay, the Barons discovered they had lost something else.

The Doctor had seized control of the city. He had brought in a hired militia, The Engine of Change, to enforce a declaration of martial law. The Engine would wait silently for his bidding, a menace by implication. The Doctor restructured the city’s law enforcement arm, the Force Police, to install his hierarchy of authority within the city and oversee its day-to-day operations. For special operations he created the Enigma Division, an elite group so secret it was only whispered about by others, even within the Force Police.

But The Doctor did nothing to address the city’s crumbling infrastructure, its worsening pollution, or the spasm of lawlessness that seized many of the boroughs. The air became toxic, the

rain acidic, and the rivers and port waters so poisonous that only mutated forms of life could live within their murky, stinking depths. The people of Mortal City, shocked by war and wracked with despair over the horror of their new lives, hid themselves and hoped somebody — anybody — would restore order.

The Rail Barons could have cared less about the people. But The Doctor troubled them. He had deceived them, and they had not foreseen his treachery. And now he'd seized control of Mortal City, which even in its diminished capacity could still serve as an obstacle — a *formidable* obstacle — to their future plans.

Then, to further complicate the interplay of power and politics, a mysterious group of workmen known only as the Drones had begun building towers around the city. They worked during the day. They worked during the night. They worked, stone on steel, every day of every week, every month of every year.

Nobody can remember when the towers began to appear. Nobody even knows *why* they are being built. And nobody, including The Doctor, to his rage, can stop the construction.

And the Drones continue to build...

# INTERNUNCIAL



Darkness.

A distant tick of dripping.

A cone of brilliant light, sharp against the gloom.

Figures, standing within.

Gathered around a table.

A body lies there.

A gasp. Then the *ting* of an industrial scalpel being returned to a stainless steel tray.

A whisper: "Hit the record switch, please. I think I've found something."

A grunt. A click.

A woman's voice, authoritative, dividing the eerie silence: "A kind of device is attached to the basal ganglia ... I've never seen anything like it —"

Another voice, a man's. It is shaky with fear: "Madame coroner, is he dead?"

She chuckles. "Yes, my sweet."

The man again: "But he's a zombie."

Her work boots scrape the bloody mosaic. "A reanimate. Yes. But he's been killed twice. First, by cancer. Did you know cancer is the leading cause of death among residents of Mortal City?"

The man nods solemnly.

"And then by a 12mm hole through the forehead, courtesy of our friend Iguana."

"Then why," the man asks, "is he moving?"

A moment of silence.

Then, "I'm surprised at you, Rowlyph. They all twitch. You know that. It's random discharge of neurons. Or rigor mortis. Or a hundred other things that go wrong when a body dies. It doesn't mean he's alive."

Rowlyph's heavy boots scuff the tile. He says uncertainly, "I don't think these was the twitches, M. d'Cease."

An abrupt silence. A tick of metal against metal.

M. d'Cease whispers, "Rowlyph, don't tell me you're afraid of this fellow. Not my fierce Rowlyph! Of all my Cadaver Dogs, you've been with me the longest, you've handled thousands of bodies, and many of them have been gruesome characters. This one is no different ..." her voice trails off. "Except for the odd device attached to his spinal cord—"

The corpse opens its eyes.

Rowlyph blurts, "See? I—"

It lunges against the restraining straps holding it to the stainless steel table and they snap with a gunshot crack and the thing lashes out with gray, hook-like fingers to grab M. d'Cease by her bloody smock and haul her closer, where it takes hold of her head with both hands and shoves her face into its abdominal cav-

ity, which has been laid open like a flensed flounder, its cancer-eaten intestines writhing and squirming like diseased snakes as M. d'Cease shoves with both arms against the table to raise her face out of the muck and breath. Rowlph grabs the thing's arms and breaks its grip on M. d'Cease and she staggers away, sucking in great, whistling chestsful of air, her face a caul of gore. The corpse scrabbles off the table and shakes off Rowlph's grip. It aims a bloody index finger at Rowlph's forehead and jams it through the bone. Rowlph's skull pops like an overinflated balloon and his eyes roll back and he topples, boneless, to the bloody tile.

The thing turns to M. d'Cease.

She unlimbers a bone cleaver and steps into the fighting stance of Skaag, the arcane discipline of edged weapons. She ignores the circling retinue of Cadaver Dogs, her gaze fixed on the bloody hulk as it withdraws its finger from Rowlph's skull with a *pop* and allows his twitching body to sag to the floor. It looks at her with uncomprehending eyes, the shreds of its consciousness giving it only a single command, to kill, and it begins striding purposefully toward her, its intestines dragging behind it like an embryonic sac.

M. d'Cease moves to a clear area, away from the rows of tables bearing the inanimate cadavers of Mortal City's recently dead. She never takes her eyes from the advancing monstrosity, not even to glance for a moment at the body of her dear servant Rowlph as its dying spasms slowly wind down on the gore-smeared tiles of the morgue. The thing coming toward her is not, she's decided, a normal zombie. Whatever it is, it seems to have gained a second afterlife, and more frightening, a purpose to that afterlife.

It raises its hands and croaks as it charges her. She feints to one side, steps to the other and swings a decapitating blow at its neck —

It grabs her wrist, faster than she ever would have believed a reanimate could move. Its marbled eyes rotate in the sockets, turning toward her.

She kicks it behind the knee and lashes with the cleaver, slicing through its fingers, which pop off at the knuckles like a stringer of greasy sausages snipped from a link. The thing grabs at her hair to keep itself from falling and she chops at it with the cleaver. Ichor from its finger stumps oozes down the side of her face. It threatens to pull her to the floor, but she uses the cleaver to slice through her hair and staggers away from the zombie, which is already scrabbling to raise itself from the tiles.

No sooner is she back in her stance than the thing is after her again. It hurtles itself at her, mindlessly, and she drives the cleaver blade deep into its arm, nearly to the bone. It ignores the wound, instead reaching for her throat with its opposite hand. She tries to pull away and the cleaver is so firmly seated in the thing's flesh she can't yank it out, so she leaves it and backs away, rolling tables bearing the dead into the zombie's path. It sends the tables crashing aside, the bodies spilling out, the morgue quickly becoming a horror show of mangled corpses at various stages of corruption hurled randomly here and there.

She bumps against a wall. She glances to her left, her right. Nothing but lockers, utility pipes ... the flaking, crumbling brick of the morgue walls.

She has nowhere to run.

She wraps her fingers around the butt of the pistol in her shoulder harness, but a secret dread rises from within, a certainty that no matter how many times she fires, the zombie will not go down. She sees herself being found, days later, her head buried ignominiously in the monstrosity's guts, a perversely sexual image she'd rather purge from her thoughts.

The thing is bearing down on her when a ululating howl erupts from through the morgue. Hunched figures emerge from the shadows and descend on the zombie... Cadaver Dogs.

M. d'Cease could kiss them. They surround the thing and



begin attacking it with sticks, knives, body parts ripped from the corpses lying about, or their bare hands. The monstrosity fights back savagely, ripping at throats, tearing at faces — a Cadaver Dog whimpers and staggers away from the fray, its throat torn out. Another falls and is stomped in the melee. Blood jets from a ruptured artery and yet another Cadaver Dog falls by the wayside.

M. d'Cease tries to find a way around the swirling, snarling mass of figures, but the path is blocked with bodies — those of the dead, and those of the dying. So she unlimbers the pistol and aims it at the zombie's head. Maybe another shot to the brain would stop it.

She fires and hears the thwack of impact as the bullet smashes into the zombie's skull and blows a cloud of tar-colored mist out the other side. The thing slashes at a Cadaver Dog and sends it howling in pain. It is not even slowed by the damage to its skull.

She fires again.

Half the creature's head dissolves in sudden flinders of bone and wet gore, as if somebody had planted a bomb inside a melon and set it off. It turns its remaining eye to her, snaps the neck of the last Cadaver Dog in the morgue, and shambles through the pile of corpses toward her.

"I'm running out of options here," she mutters as she fires again. The creature's remaining eye disappears in a wet *pop*.

Still, it comes for her.

She fires again, and again, and again, the bullets smashing into its body and causing the kind of mutilated ruin forensics experts more often associate with psychopaths.

She pulls the trigger and the hammer clicks against bare metal. No more cartridges in the clip.

She contemplates hurling the gun at the zombie, then simply drops it, remembering the futility of that gesture from a hundred different horror dramas as the creature advances toward the helpless man or woman and they cannot do anything to stop it.

The monstrosity stumbles through the heap of bodies, nearly headless, and raises its arms as it clears the jumbled heap. Its fingerstumps ooze like bleeding stones. M. d'Cease pats her smock for a weapon — anything — to use against it, and finds only a tiny, sharpened probe, a tool used for detail work, utterly useless in this situation, as she stares at the destroyed thing stomping toward her.

Too bad, she thinks, gripping the probe. A tiny point like this, driven into the occipital lobe, can do a lot of damage. ...

... To *her* brain.

A figure appears as a darker outline against the murk. It is moving. M. d'Cease hears air being displaced by an object being swung with tremendous force.

A sledge plows into the zombie's spine, just below the shoulders, crunching vertebrae and causing its arms to flail back so that its chest protrudes, bowing in an arch of ruined bone.

The thing topples and crashes to the floor.

It leaks cancer-eaten brain tissue at the toes of M. d'Cease's boots.

Sparks sputter and snap from the object implanted in the zombie's neck.

M. d'Cease gazes up at her benefactor, a question forming at the end of her tongue. She does not put it to words.

The figure moves forward.

Mr. Drone.

He hefts the sledge and props it on his shoulder. Some small piece of something unpeels from the business end of the hammer and dangles on a tacky string, then plops wetly to the tile.

Mr. Drone says, "We need you."

M. d'Cease has never heard a Mr. Drone speak.

"Come."

It turns and marches into the darkness.

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# DAVE DORMAN'S WASTEDLANDS

Something is waiting for the Mortal City medical examiner in her autopsy room... something that is not quite dead... and not quite alive. In one horrifying night it will lead her on a quest to discover the origins of a plague that is killing off the enigmatic Drones, a plague that threatens to wipe out every man, woman and child in Mortal City. She has only 24 hours to solve the riddle of the Ymir phage.

Because she is infected. ...

From a furious battle with sky pirates and a zeppelin to a mysterious woman who shuns light and a megalomaniac with a nuclear bomb, "The Uninvited" takes you on an explosive jaunt across an urban apocalypse in a race against time to defeat the most insidious weapon of mass destruction ever devised.



A bone-rattling Science Fiction adventure set in Dave Dorman's Wasted Lands. This is the first collaboration between award-winning talents, author Del Stone Jr., and illustrator Jon Foster.

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