

# Doctor Starkey's Monsters

Short story by Adam Maxwell

Garth slammed himself against the door to his laboratory, bracing it against the onslaught. His panting was underlined by the bubbling, dripping and whirring noises the laboratory churned out in front of him before the silence was abruptly broken by something ramming into the door and knocking him to his knees. He stumbled to his feet before beginning the thankless task of dragging and toppling furniture to block the only way into the lab and reflected on exactly how he had managed to transform all of his co-workers from the call centre into zombies.

Not metaphorical ones.

*Actual I'm-going-to-eat-your-brains zombies.*

The mad scientist job hadn't been going too well up to that point and he had been forced to take a job in a call centre. It paid the bills. Bought test tubes. The gas for the Bunsen burners. That sort of things.

By day he was Garth Starkey, *how may I help you?*

By night (and weekends, shift patterns permitting) he was Dr Garth Starkey, re-animator of the dead. Or should that be Dr Garth Starkey, re-animator of the dead mice he found lying around the place? Or even Dr Garth Starkey hasn't yet successfully re-animated anything mouse-based or otherwise and even failed spectacularly in trying to make a chicken twitch?

He was glad he wasn't in a club. If he had been they would have laughed. Everyone always laughed at him. At school when he would say he wanted to be a mad scientist the other children laughed at him. At university when he tried to submit his thesis 'Frankenstein: FACT' the professors laughed at him. When he bought the crumbling Victorian mansion on the hill on the opposite side of town his brother laughed at him. If the other phone-monkeys at the call centre knew that every day in his satchel was a conical flask containing a potion - the latest version of his masterwork. If they knew that he carried it in case it was stolen from the aforementioned rickety mansion then... Well, he would sooner give up his job than face their laughter.

He just couldn't let them be right. That was why he had taken such a mindless job. It afforded him time with his subconscious to work on his theories, his *real* work.

He just hadn't been ready for quite how mindless it would turn out to be. His mind had so much room to manoeuvre that within a week he had his first breakthrough, finally making a chicken twitch. A real dead chicken. Within a fortnight he had taken a mouse from cadaver to coughing. It was everything he had planned, everything he had dreamed of. And then, one morning in the call centre, the fire alarm sounded.

"Everybody out," shouted a team leader over the din. "Finish your calls where possible."

Garth hung up on the idiot woman he had been talking to, grabbed his bag from under his desk and started to stride towards the stairs.

"Oi, Starkey!" the team leader called after him. "What do we do in the case of a fire?"

Garth stopped and turned to face his small, wrinkled nemesis.

"What," he repeated. "Do we do?"

Garth had encountered Taylor Stricklan many times before and knew him to be someone who followed rules blindly, someone insane enough to let them both burn to death over this conversation. He did not hesitate and did not argue.

"We make our way to the fire exits in a quick and orderly fashion."

"And what," a smug little smile started to creep onto his face. "Do we not do?"

"Er, what? I..." Garth motioned to the fire door. "Shouldn't we go?"

They now stood alone, even those conscientious enough to finish their calls had made their quick, orderly way out of the building.

Taylor stared. Waiting.

"I don't know. Tell me and then we can go," Garth twitched, torn between just running down the stairs and waiting to see what this officious little shit was going to come up with.

"We do not," Taylor said with what appeared to be glee smeared across his face. "Take coats or bags with us. Those we leave behind."

"You're not serious? It was right next to me. It was..."

"It is to be left behind."

"It bloody well is not."

"To be left behind," and Taylor took a step forward and stabbed his bureaucratic index finger into the bag Garth clutched.

Which wasn't a good idea. The flask containing the potion shattered and poured instantly onto Taylor's hand, the flesh instantly beginning to blacken and bubble as the necrosis spread.

"You stupid shit," said Garth, hurling his bag at Taylor as the change overtook him. Garth took a step towards the stairs but then waited. He couldn't leave. He had to see what the effect would be on a live human subject.

"S-Starkey..." Taylor hissed, clutching at his throat, the green and black colouration cracking and peeling his skin as it spread inexorably over him. "Sh-sh-muh-muh..."

Garth stifled a giggle then realised this was the perfect opportunity and let out a loud *Muhahaha!*

It didn't quite work. Needed practise but nonetheless the occasion practically demanded it.

"Buh-mmmm-buh," continued the team leader.

Garth stared, fascinated at what he had created.

"Eee buh ray."

Garth took another step towards the stairs.

"EAT BRAIN!"

Garth ran for it.

It didn't take long for it to spread. Taylor was unaccounted for but there had been no fire, it was just a drill so staff started to return, started to get bitten, started to turn... Garth followed the progress on the news and was interested to find that when bitten the effect was much slower, sometimes taking days before the change was complete.

He followed it religiously for a full twenty four hours until it became apparent from the reports they were all making their way across town to and up the hill towards the mansion.

Garth turned from the television and watched them from the attic window as they dragged their re-animated arses up the hill relentlessly towards him. The house was falling apart, there was no way to escape, no point in calling for help, he just walked to his lab to try to conduct some tests. Perhaps a cure? Perhaps a vaccine? But it was futile, within minutes the chorus-chant of *BRAINS BRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAINS* had arrived outside the lab door.

He knew he had to do something, to stop them, to hold on to... his life. Garth scrambled at the benches, opening cupboards, tearing out the contents and scattering apparatus wildly around the room looking for a grate, a grill, anything that would offer him a way out.

The cupboards emptied, the test tubes smashed, the undead hoards hammering at the door Garth slumped against his barricade and slowly a smile skittered across his face.

*Muhahahah!*

*MUHAHAHAHAHA!!*

This time he got it right, his manic, mad laughter echoing around the wrecked room as he wrenched the door open a crack and punched out his arm. He screamed as the teeth out there tore at his flesh and dragged what was left back inside, repairing the barricade, waiting for the change to start. He had created a monster, in fact he had created hundreds of the ravenous bastards but if he was really going to cruise the annals of history he would need two things.

Firstly he needed to be consumed by his creation.

And that was in the past.

Secondly he needed to leave a legacy.

He pulled out his mobile phone, dialled his brother and, once connected to the answerphone started talking.

“Soon I shall die and what I feel be no longer felt,” he began, the words dancing with familiarity from his lips and the skin on his arm bubbling with necrotising joy before my eyes. He paused for a second, the tone of his voice changing, softening slightly. “Learn from me . . . how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.”

