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About the Authors Also by Paul Stewart & Chris Riddell Copyright

## About the Book

The corpses swayed where they stood, their bony arms outstretched before them and tattered sleeves hanging limply in the foggy air. I smelled the sourness of the sewers about them; that, and the sweet whiff of death. Their sunked eyes bored into mine. I was surrounded ...

**Barnaby Grimes** is a tick-tock lad, delivering messages and running errands all over the city, day and night. Gangland funerals and diving expeditions are hazardous enough, but when the graveyards begin to give up their dead, this tick-tock lad is faced with his deadliest challenge yet ...

A blood-curdling tale of greed and betrayal. Will Barnaby be defeated by the Legion of the Dead?

From the creators of the bestselling EDGE CHRONICLES.



LEGION of the DEAD

Illustrated by Chris Riddell

RHCP DIGITAL

For Stephen - P.S. For Jack - C.R.



I HAVE HEARD people exclaim that they'd be better off dead – weary washerwomen on a midnight shift in the steam cellars, ragged beggars down by the Temple Bar, fine young ladies snubbed at a Hightown ball ... But if they had seen what I saw on that cold and foggy night, they would have realized the foolishness of their words.

It was a sight that will haunt me till my dying day - after which, I fervently hope and pray, I shall remain undisturbed.

This was not something that could be said for the ghastly apparitions that stumbled through the swirling mists towards me. Some lurched haltingly, their arms dangling at their sides; others had their hands outstretched before them, as though their bony fingertips rather than their sunken eyes were guiding their lurching bodies through the curdled fog.

There was a wizened hag with a hooked nose and rat'snest hair. A portly matron, the ague that had seen her off
still glistening on her furrowed brow ... A sly-eyed ragger
and a bare-knuckled wrestler, his left eyeball out of its
socket and dangling on a glistening thread. A corpulent
costermonger; a stooped scrivener, their clothes – one
satins and frill, the other threadbare serge – smeared alike
with black mud and sewer slime. A maid, a chimney-sweep,
a couple of stable-lads; one with the side of his skull stoved

in by a single blow from a horse's hoof, the other grey and glittery-eyed from the blood-flecked cough that had ended his life. And a burly river-tough – his fine waistcoat in tatters and his chin tattoo obscured by filth. Glistening at his neck was the deep wound that had taken him from this world to the next.

I shrank back in horror and pressed hard against the cool white marble of the de Vere family vault at my back. Beside me – his body quivering like a slab of jellied ham – Sir Alfred was breathing in stuttering, wheezy gasps. From three sides of the marble tomb in that fog-filled graveyard, the serried ranks of the undead were forming up in a grotesque parody of a parade-ground drill.

'They've found me,' the old doctor croaked, in a voice not much more than a whisper.

I followed his terrified gaze and found myself staring at four ragged figures in military uniform, red jackets with gold braid at the epaulettes and cuffs, who were standing on a flat-topped tomb above the massed ranks. Each of them bore the evidence of fatal injuries.

The terrible gash down the face of one, that had left his cheekbone exposed and a flap of leathery skin dangling. The blood-stained chest and jagged stump – all that remained of his left arm – of the second figure, splinters of yellow bone protruding through the wreaths of grimy bandages. The rusting axe, cleaving the battered bell-top shako, which was embedded in the skull of the third. And the bulging bloodshot eyes of the fourth, the frayed length of rough rope that had strangulated his last breath still hanging round his bruised and red-raw neck – and a flagpole clutched in his gnarled hands.



Each of them bore the evidence of fatal injuries.

As I watched, he raised the splintered flagpole high. Gripping my swordstick, I stared at the fluttering curtain of blood-stained cloth, tasselled brocade hanging in filthy matted strands along the four sides. At its centre was the embroidered regimental emblem – the Angel of Victory, her wings spread wide on a sky-blue field, and beneath, the words 33rd Regiment of Foot written in an angular italic script. The ghastly standard-bearer's tight lips parted to reveal a row of blackened teeth.

'Fighting Thirty-Third!' he cried out, his voice a rasping whisper.

The corpses swayed where they stood, their bony arms reaching forward, with tattered sleeves hanging limply in the foggy air. I smelled the sourness of the sewers about them; that, and the sweet whiff of death. Their sunken eyes bored into mine.

We were surrounded. There was nothing Sir Alfred or I could do. The standard-bearer's voice echoed hoarsely round the graveyard.

'Advance!'





IN MY LINE of work, I've encountered my fair share of restless spirits from beyond the grave. There was Madame Lavinia's poltergeist, who terrorized the thrill-seeking guests at her tea parties. And Pastor Shakemaple's Iroquois spirit guide, with a taste for cheap whiskey and expensive jewellery. And of course the late Mercy Hornby, queen of the phantasmal plane, who was on intimate terms with three Roman emperors and Alexander the Great extraordinary apparitions, each and every one of them ...

Unfortunately, Madame Lavinia's apparition was more piano wire than poltergeist, and Shakemaple's clerical robes concealed a magic lantern and a pair of sticky fingers. As for the ghost of Mercy Hornby; she was no more than a shop dummy in a shroud, operated by a music-hall ventriloquist in search of a new career.

I should know, because I played a part in unmasking them. Ha'penny fraudsters, the lot of them, out to fleece the gullible. But what I encountered in that graveyard on that moonlit night was no cheap illusion. No wires, no lanterns or cheap theatrical tricks had conjured up the legion of the dead.

The truth was far worse ...

It all began on a crisp autumn morning, the sky the colour of an Indian Runner duck egg. I'm a tick-tock lad by trade.

My job is to deliver things all over the city – anything, from a dusty writ or a document in need of a signature to the boxed consignment of giant African snails that I'd dropped off only the day before at the exclusive Culloden Club for their annual members-only mollusc race. I'm quick and efficient, highstacking over the rooftops of the city as fast as I can because – tick-tock! – time is money. Some jobs – like the snails – are one-offs, while others are more regular and, since it was the second Wednesday in the month, I had an appointment with one Cornelius Frimley of *Frimley's Funereal Supplies and Grave Chandlery*.

I was running late that morning and had to be quick, but I also had to be careful. Although the sun was shining, treacherous traces of frost still lingered in the shadows, threatening to turn my ankle or make me skid. At the Mansion House, a tricky Striding Edge manoeuvre and a moment of carelessness almost pitched me over the side of a crumbling parapet.

On such a glorious morning though, with the sun shining, a light breeze blowing and the city air as clear as it ever gets, nothing could dent my spirits. And, though you need a head for heights and a steady nerve, there is nothing as exhilarating as highstacking. Leaping, rolling and running across the rooftops – plinth to pediment, gargoyle to gable – the experienced highstacker can race across the city, while the streets below are snarled with slow-moving traffic.

I made quick progress, and at five to nine the imposing brown-brick building, with its white stone window arches and fluted pilasters, that housed *Frimley's Funereal Supplies and Grave Chandlery*, loomed up before me. At nine o'clock on the dot, I was standing outside Cornelius Frimley's office. I rapped on the door.

'Come in,' came a thin, wheezing voice, and I entered the room.

Cornelius Frimley was seated at the desk before me, his fingers buried in a drift of paperwork. He raised his head wearily, a frown on his pallid brow. 'Ah, Barnaby,' he said.

The steel-rimmed spectacles he wore were so strong, it looked as though his huge, magnified eyes had been lifted from his face and glued to the inside of the lenses. Bright red veins lined the glowing yellowed eyeballs. In contrast, his face in the flickering light was as pale as the wax candle that cast it, and made all the more ghostly by the deep dark circles under each eye.

From the look of him, the poor chap never saw sunlight from one end of the day to the other. Despite its outer appearance of grandeur, inside, the brown-brick building had been transformed into a warren of winding corridors and tiny offices. Cornelius Frimley's office was little more than a broom-cupboard. There wasn't even a window.

'Prompt as ever,' he wheezed, peering round the flickering candle that stood before him. He chuckled. 'I'd ask you to sit, but ...'

It was his little joke. The tiny room was furnished with a large varnished cabinet and a rolltop desk, behind which, Cornelius Frimley had managed to insert an ancient high-backed leather chair. In the remaining space, it was standing-room only, and we both knew it. I smiled.

'Something has just come in, Barnaby,' he said, those huge eyes of his staring at me unblinkingly. 'A matter of some urgency.'

He pushed back his chair and turned towards the cabinet behind him. As tall as it was broad, the yellowed oak cabinet took up half the office. It was comprised of dozens of small bone-handled drawers. Pausing for a moment, Cornelius Frimley stared at them, his narrow shoulders hunched forward. Then he crouched down, his knees clicking like snapped twigs as he did so, and unlocked one of the drawers.

'Here we are,' he said, turning and placing a box, about the size of a house-brick, on the table in front of me. It jangled slightly as he did so. 'Links,' he said.

'Links?'

'Links for a finger-chain.' He flapped his hands about airily. 'My best chainsmith is waiting for them - Ada Gussage, 17 Adelaide Mansions ...'

Finger-chains were the very latest in funeral fashion. No well-to-do deceased would be seen dead without one! They were attached to the forefinger of the corpse at one end and a bell at the other, so that anyone unfortunate enough to awaken in the coffin could summon help and be dug up.

'Adelaide Mansions,' I repeated and frowned. To my knowledge, there were two Adelaide Mansions in the city. One was situated on salubrious Gallup Row in the best part of town; the other ...'

'Gatling Quays,' said Cornelius Frimley, and my heart sank.

Gatling Quays. As a rule, it was a place I liked to avoid. Situated between riverside East Bank, with its scratting mudlarks and tattooed toughs, and the port of Riverhythe, where incoming ships would dock, Gatling Quays was worse than either. Its cobbled streets were lined with vast warehouses, where the cargo from foreign shores was stored before being distributed to the factories, mills and workshops of the city. The wealth of goods and materials piled up there attracted harbour-toughs and skimmerchants to the guays like lice to a workhouse blanket.

'As quickly as you can, Barnaby,' Cornelius Frimley urged me. 'Ada needs those links for an important client down there in the quays.'

He shook my hand - a cold, damp experience, like squeezing a raw fish - and slumped back onto his leather chair. I stepped to the door, slipping the heavy box into the inside pocket of my coat.