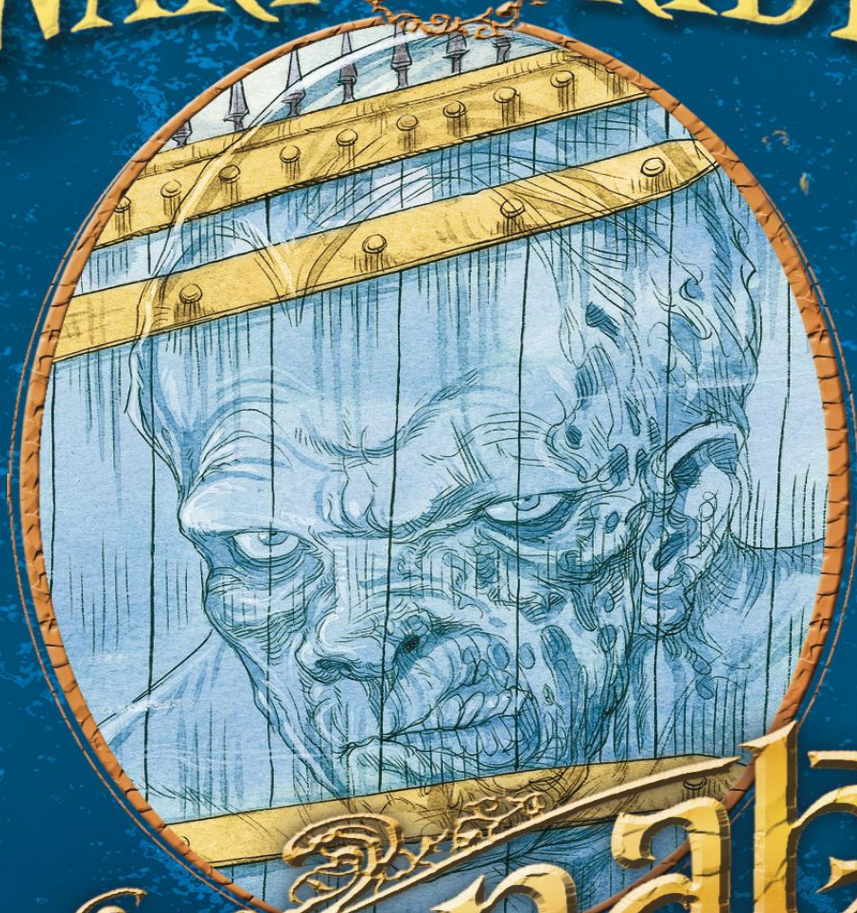


PAUL  
STEWART & CHRIS  
RIDDELL



# Barnaby Rimees

PHANTOM of  
BLOOD ALLEY





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About the Authors  
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## About the Book

*'I have suffered the torments of hell,' whispered the phantom. 'Now it is your turn, Barnaby Grimes.'*

Barnaby Grimes is a tick-tock lad, the best in the business, delivering anything and everything all over town. But when Clarissa Oliphant, duelling governess, gives him an assignment, Barnaby is pitched into a world of double-dealing, thwarted dreams and twisted ambition. There is a phantom at large with murder on his mind and, tick-tock, Barnaby is running out of time.

*A blood-chilling tale of death and deception. Who is the Phantom of Blood Alley?*

From the creators of the bestselling ***Edge Chronicles***.

PAUL  
STEWART & CHRIS  
RIDDELL



# Barnaby Grimes

PHANTOM of  
BLOOD ALLEY

Illustrated by Chris Riddell

**RHCP DIGITAL**

For Clare



## CHAPTER 1

'I HAVE SUFFERED the torments of hell,' whispered the phantom. 'Now it is your turn, Barnaby Grimes.'

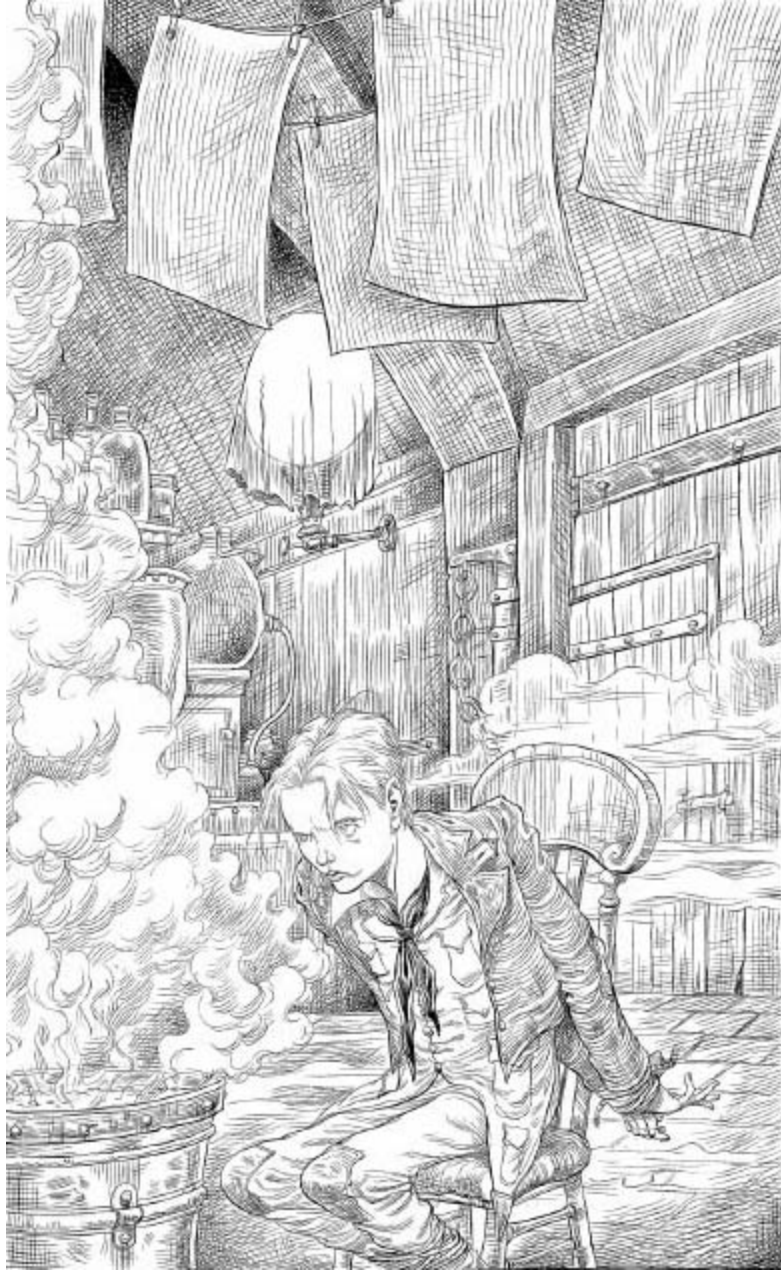
The pungent stench of sea-coal smoke and scorched chemicals made my eyes water and caught in my throat. There were splashes of a thick, viscous liquid on the floor at my feet, and the ornate brass gas lamp which jutted from the wall was ablaze.

A length of crimson silk had been wrapped round the lamp's mantle and glass cowl. It dulled the glare of the gaslight, its muted light casting the whole room in a hellish red glow. It shone on the low, flaking ceiling, on the planks of wood nailed across the single window, and on rows of portraits pinned to the walls and hanging from the clothes line above my head.

There were men and women. Old and young. A scrivener with a long quill and inky fingers. A butcher in a spattered apron with a dead rabbit raised in one hand. A milkmaid, a river-tough, a chimney-sweep's young lad ... They all gazed down at me in that crimson light, like the lost souls of the damned.

To my left, a splintered bench ran the length of the room, a sink at its centre and three large zinc trays beside it. Shelves, bowing under the weight of glass bottles of dark chemicals and glittering powders, lined the wall above

it. To my right were two worm-eaten cupboards and a rickety table, its warped top overflowing with equipment. Scalpels, shears and a paper guillotine; bottles of ink and goosefeather quills; a magnifying glass, a cracked clay pipe, and a towering stack of paper that leaned against a box-shaped contraption with brass hinges and a glass top ...



*They all gazed down at me in that crimson light, like the lost souls of the damned.*



Directly in front of me was the huge vat, set upon a tripod, its pungent contents bubbling furiously over a white-hot furnace. Thick clouds of crimson steam poured over the side of the cauldron and spilled out across the floor, writhing and squirming as they snaked towards me.

The toxic red steam coalesced and began to wind itself around my ankles, my calves, my knees. It burned my nostrils and stung my eyes. My head swam; my lungs were on fire. The heat made my skin prickle, and the noxious fumes left me gasping for breath as I fought desperately to free myself from the ropes that bound my hands and feet.

Just then, I felt a hand grasping my throat, pulling me out of the chair and forward onto my knees. A second hand grabbed the back of my head and thrust it forward until my face was inches above the bubbling liquid in the vat.

'Oh, how it burns, Barnaby Grimes,' the phantom's sinister voice hissed, before rising to a high-pitched crescendo. 'How it burns ...'





## CHAPTER 2



IT WAS RALPH Booth-Prendegast, gentleman jockey and champion steeplechaser, who introduced me to Clarissa Oliphant. I'd helped him to solve the Hightown Derby doping scandal by catching the organ-grinder's monkey and its hypodermic needle, and 'Raffy' owed me a favour.

Clarissa Oliphant had been his governess when he was a lad and, when she came to him for help, Raffy passed the work my way. Of course, if I'd known then what I know now, I would have politely declined. Instead, that first meeting with Clarissa Oliphant proved to be the beginning of one of the strangest and darkest episodes of my life; one that, like the new fashion for photogravure portraiture that was starting to spread through the city, was to be etched indelibly into my memory.

It all started on one of those crisp autumn mornings, all too rare in the city, when the fallen leaves crunch underfoot, yellow and fringed with frost, and the sky is as blue as a morpho butterfly's wings - a Friday, as I recall. I highstacked across town, leaping from rooftop to gable, to the outskirts of Hightown.

I'm a tick-tock lad by trade, paid to deliver anything and everything anywhere in this great city of ours and as fast as I can because, tick-tock, time is money. For yours truly, that means climbing up the nearest drainpipe and running

across the city's rooftops – or highstacking – as we tick-tock lads call it.

Taking care as I clambered over a jutting cornice, slippery with frost, I came down from the rooftops at the corner of Aspen Row. According to Raffy, Clarissa Oliphant, together with her brother Laurence, lived at number 12, and was expecting me.

The house was set in the middle of a terrace of smart town houses, with ornate black railings and white bow-windows. I climbed the marble steps, raised my swordstick and rapped smartly on the shiny black door.

Moments later, it was opened by a pretty parlourmaid, a strand of curly, blond hair escaping from her laced mobcap, and eyes of deep cornflower blue gazing directly into mine.

'Barnaby Grimes,' I announced with a smile, noticing the band of freckles that crossed the bridge of her dainty nose, 'to see Miss Oliphant. I believe she's expecting me ...'

'Show him in, Tilly,' boomed a voice from down the hall behind the maid, who returned my smile shyly and beckoned me to follow her.

She showed me into a small drawing room, where I was confronted by a tall, imposing woman with small, twinkling eyes and steel-grey hair, pulled back in a tight bun. The tailored navy-blue jacket she was wearing, with its three rows of mother-of-pearl buttons down the front, gave her a somewhat military air, while the long crisply pleated black skirt lent her the appearance of a half-opened umbrella. On her feet was a pair of surprisingly elegant-looking dancing pumps of black patent leather.

She folded her arms across her ample bosom, so broad and level you could have rested a laden tea tray upon it, and tilted back her head. 'Take a seat, Mr Grimes,' she said. 'Raffy spoke very highly of you, though I must admit I was expecting someone a little older ...'

I sat down in one of the two worn leather armchairs by the gently smouldering fire, while Clarissa Oliphant took

the other. There were glazed porcelain dogs at either end of the mantelpiece, and a large, loudly ticking clock fashioned from ebony, copper and glass at its centre. It was five to ten, I noticed. I was early. Looking up, my gaze rested upon a magnificent sword, fixed to the wall. Clarissa followed my gaze.

‘An original Dalmatian sabre,’ she said, her deep voice as severe as the expression on her face. Her gaze rested briefly yet knowingly, I thought, on the swordstick attached to my belt. ‘The finest fencing sword money can buy,’ she added, ‘and the tool of my former profession. Before I retired, Mr Grimes, I was a duelling governess.’

‘A duelling governess,’ I repeated, impressed.

I’d heard of these legendary Amazons, but hadn’t actually met one before. A hundred years ago, they’d been all the rage, employed to settle the disputes of their charges, the pampered sons of the nobility, too young to fight duels themselves. These duelling governesses would defend the honour of their charges while they were young, and include in their education the fine art of fencing, so that by the time the little darlings reached maturity, they were able to fight – and win – their own duels.





*'An original Dalmatian sabre,' she said, her deep voice as severe as the expression on her face.*