



The House of Doors

By Brian Lumley

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Bent on taking over the Earth, the deadly Thone have planted a monstrous device on our planet's surface. Trapped inside is a group of scientists, spies, and innocent bystanders. Part maze, part torture chamber, part laboratory, the House of Doors is a test. If its captives survive, the Thone will withdraw from Earth and leave us in peace.

Survival seems impossible. At every turn of the labyrinth the prisoners encounter alien world and terrifying monsters ripped from their own subconscious fears. Only by defeating the demons within can these men and women escape the House of Doors and save the Earth.

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Editorial Review

Review

"I'm impressed with Lumley's talent. He's obviously one of the best writers in the field."--John Farris

"Lumley weaves horrors, mystery, occultism, science fiction, and mythology into wonderfully fascinating stories."--*Rapport*

About the Author

Brian Lumley is the author of the bestselling Necroscope series of vampire novels. The first *Necroscope*, Harry Keogh, also appears in a collection of Lumley's short fiction, *Harry Keogh and Other Weird Heroes*, along Titus Crow and Henri Laurent de Marigny, from *Titus Crow, Volumes One, Two, and Three*, and *David Hero and Eldin the Wanderer*, from the *Dreamlands* series.

An acknowledged master of Lovecraft-style horror, Brian Lumley has won the British Fantasy Award and been named a Grand Master of Horror. His works have been published in more than a dozen countries and have inspired comic books, role-playing games, and sculpture, and been adapted for television.

When not writing, Lumley can often be found spear-fishing in the Greek islands, gambling in Las Vegas, or attending a convention somewhere in the US. Lumley and his wife live in England.

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The House of Doors

CHAPTER ONE

Hamish Grieve, as his surname might suggest, had been a gillie for the Laird of Earn for forty-four years. Before that he'd been apprenticed as a joiner, receiving his signed indentures and freedom on the attainment of his twenty-first birthday; at which point he'd given up working *with* woods to work *in* them. And from then until he was sixty-five and pensionable, like many a good Scot before him, he'd cannily managed his affairs and silted away a percentage of his middling but not entirely insubstantial wages.

Biding his time, he'd kept his contempt for the Laird well hidden, until the evening of his sixty-fifty birthday (the 2nd May, 1984), when, leaving the stables and crossing the paddock for the last time, he'd walked up to the great granite house at the heart of its many acres of woods and entered his master's rooms. There Hamish had checked the contents of his wages envelope, laid down in a neat bundle his shotgun, notebook, dog whistle and certain lesser appointments of his profession, and resigned. It was his right, for he was sixty-five and there'd never been a written contract.

"But ... what'll I do?" The old laird had been flabbergasted. "And more's to the point, what'll you do, Hamish?" Hamish was head gillie; the others in the Laird's employ, for all their years of service, weren't nearly so experienced and much less trustworthy.

"Ah shid imagine," Hamish had grunted, "that ye'll do as ye've done for the last forty-four years--*verra* little! As for maself: there's a wee property come available in Lawers overlooking the water. Ah shall buy it and spen' ma time fishing and reading--what time's left to me." And he did just that.

For the next ten years he would get up each day, breakfast, open his windows over Loch Tay and do his deep-breathing exercises. At nine o'clock he'd get his bicycle from the lean-to and, weather permitting, peddle a fairly leisurely seven miles down to Killin at the eastern end of the loch, there to visit an old sickbed

friend who'd been dying for fifteen years and never got any closer to the actual box. Hamish's mongrel dog, Barney, would trot alongside; which in the main was how the two of them got their exercise.

But on this Sunday morning in mid-June of 1994, a few weeks after Hamish had clocked up seventy-five years, things were to work out just a little different.

The morning was bright if somewhat chilly for the time of year, and Hamish found the bike ride invigorating and even exhilarating--to a point. That point being reached when, in a moment, his emotions switched from exhilaration to astonishment. He saw it as he cycled round a gentle right-hand bend in the road: that which could not possibly be there to see. And his gnarled hands at once gripped the handlebars that much tighter, causing his front wheel to wobble. Barney, trotting alongside, yelped and narrowly avoided a trapped paw, by which time Hamish had brought his machine to a halt.

He sat there astride his bike, one foot on the ground, jaws agape and eyes staring their utter disbelief. The object of his amazement, what he could see of it, was a house, or even a mansion by its size; indeed, more a castle, with its turrets and battlements. It stood midway between twin spurs coming down from the lordly Ben Lawers, its base hidden by the ridge of a scree saddle and its back to a steep incline where granite outcrops came thrusting through the thin turf. A castle, yes, and not unlike many another of much the same size, period and general construction; in itself, hardly a matter for astonishment. Castles abound in Scotland, and to a native dour as Hamish Grieve one castle seemed much like any other; unless you were talking about the really grand jobs, like the one on the Mount of Edinburgh, for instance.

No, the building itself (in any other circumstance) would hardly take Hamish by surprise. But the fact that he'd found it here, now, would and did--for as recently as yesterday morning it had *not* been here! Neither then nor any other morning for the last ten years, and for all the long years of time gone before that!

Hamish shook his head, rubbed at his eyes, frankly couldn't accept the evidence that his senses were offering him. But the longer he stared, the more undeniably solid the castle looked to him. Could it be, he wondered, that the thing really had been there all of this time, and he simply hadn't looked that way before, hadn't noticed it? But that was to ignore the facts, indeed to ignore his own especially lucid memory. Last summer, on these very slopes, he'd seen French and English botanists examining Ben Lawers' rare alpine plants. Six months ago there'd been skiers up there, coming over the crest of that very scree-filled depression. Hamish had always hated these periodic incursions of tourists and foreign riffraff, but now he thanked the Lord for these memories of them. Without such memories his sanity itself must be suspect.

Or perhaps it wasn't so much his sanity but his sight. He'd heard of people damaging their eyes like that, but never thought it could happen to him. "Barney," he said, still gazing at the castle rising there over the scree less than three-quarters of a mile away, "have ah been hitting it too hard? Is a couple or three wee drams of a nicht too much, d'ye think? Could it be that an accumulation o' malt's addled ma brains, eh?" But Barney only wagged his stump of a tail and whined, as he always did when he was worried.

"Well, ma laddie," said Hamish, more to himself now than to the dog, "it seems we'll just have tae look into this, you an' me."

There was a track climbing from the road to a spot maybe halfway between Hamish and the object of his curiosity, climbing in fact along the sharp, narrow ridge of the eastern spur. Hamish left the road, cycled a little way up the track until the going got too heavy, then leaned his bicycle against a boulder and continued on foot. Barney stayed right to heel, uncomplaining, perhaps wondering at this rare break in the tradition of so many years.

Finally, climbing above the scree ridge, Hamish paused for a breather and studied more closely the mysterious castle. And despite the fact that there was a great deal wrong with that enigmatic structure, at least Hamish was no longer in doubt of his eyesight.

The place most definitely *was* there; its squat foundations going down into scree, its frontage like half a hexagon, forming a flat face with flanking walls angling sharply back; and the frowning granite walls themselves, going up maybe fifty feet to the turrets and crenellated battlements. And all grandly set against Ben Lawers, rising majestically to its cloud-piercing four-thousand-foot crest; all very impressive, solid and powerful seeming. And very, very wrong.

For there was no road to the place, not even a track, and no windows in it that Hamish could see. And perhaps most peculiar of all, no doors ...

Up here, with a breeze tugging at his light coat and the sun warming his neck, space seemed to open up for Hamish Grieve and time to stand still. Long moments passed while his breathing settled down and his heartbeat slowed. Barney sat at his feet, stump of a tail wagging a very little, small whines sounding now and then from deep in his chest.

Finally Hamish shivered. His neck might be warm but the rest of him felt unaccountably cold. Or perhaps not unaccountably. It wasn't every day that something like this happened.

Before he could begin shivering again he started forward, skirted the castle, began to climb the ridge of the spur towards its rear. Down there, sheep clambered in the rocks at the castle's base and chewed on the coarse grasses. Hamish paused and stared at them. If sheep weren't afraid of the place, whatever it was and however it came to be here, he didn't see why he should be.

Scrambling down from the spur onto the level, overgrown scree, he moved right up to the base of the inexplicable edifice. Hexagonal, yes; he followed the planes of its walls to the rear. And it was here, close up, that he first noticed the shimmer.

The walls shimmered--very faintly, almost unnoticeably--as though viewed through thin blue wood smoke, or the heat reflected from a tarmac road. It wasn't hot enough for that, to be sure, and there were no fires that Hamish could see, but still the castle shimmered. Like ... a mirage?

The base of each section of wall was perhaps thirty-five feet long; pacing to the rear, Hamish gazed along the entire length of the back wall where the stony hillside rose up and away from it. There were sheep back there, who lifted their heads to look at him curiously, before returning to their munching. But one of them stood half-in, half-out of the shimmer.

Hamish's jaw fell open. The sheep, a fat ewe, was browsing on the coarse grass at the foot of the wall, but its rear quarters disappeared *into* the granite! Which could only mean--

"It really *is* a mirage!" Hamish gasped. "Unsolid, unreal!"

He approached the castle's wall more closely yet, with Barney right behind him, whining ever more loudly and persistently. The shimmer was faint but quite definitely there; the wall, for all that it was opaque and seemed thoroughly dense, must be entirely matterless, a trick of the light and freakish Nature; that sheep there, not ten paces away, was surely all the evidence one required.

Hamish put out a slightly trembling hand until his four fingertips touched the shimmer. He felt something like the very mildest of mild electric shocks--but in the next moment the shimmer disappeared and the wall was suddenly real. Hamish knew it as surely as he knew that he stood here. What had been or might have been a mirage had suddenly stiffened into reality, becoming solid. In a single split second--occurring simultaneously with a shrill, terrified, and agonized bleat--the tingling in his fingertips had been replaced ... by pain!

He snatched back his hand, clutched it, gazed bug-eyed at his fingertips. They looked like he'd rested them for a moment on the surface of a rapidly revolving drum of sandpaper. Blood welled up from four flat discs of flesh at the tips of his fingers.

"What?" said Hamish to himself, scarcely able to accept what he couldn't hope to understand. "What?"

Along the now entirely solid wall something had happened. Something lay crumpled there, still twitching. Clutching his hand, Hamish stumbled to see what it was, went to confirm an awful suspicion. Barney went with him, sniffed at the freshly dead ewe and backed away from it stiff-legged. For the animal was only half a sheep now, the front half, lying there where its body had been sliced through like a worm by a straight-edged razor. Collapsing, its severed trunk had left a swath of blood like fresh red paint on the hard granite wall.

Hamish Grieve held his breath, took all of this in, felt his heart beginning to hammer in his chest. The "mirage" wasn't a mirage, and the castle wasn't a castle, and nothing here was even nearly right.

He backed away from the blank, looming wall and began to climb the side of the stony spur to its narrow ridge. But because he went backwards his progress was slow, and not for a single moment did he shift his

gaze from the castle that wasn't a castle.

Barney was right there with him, yipping and snapping a little to hasten him on. Then Hamish's heel came down on a loose stone and it threw him; flat on his back he tobogganed to the bottom again, numbing himself where hard projections banged his spine. Barney, very nearly frantic, came scrambling after, tugging at his master's sleeve to get him mobile.

Hamish sat up. In front of him--but *directly* in front of him--the wall's surface was shimmering again. And its base now came right up against the foot of the spur!

Breathing raggedly and feeling he was going to faint--for the very first time in a long and, until now, entirely mundane life *knowing* he was going to faint, but not daring to--Hamish began to climb again. He climbed like a youth, soaring up the side of the spur, and without pausing glanced fearfully back over his shoulder. The castle was expanding, its wall flowing forward to engulf boulders where they held back the sliding scree not six feet behind and below him.

At the top, burned out, Hamish heaved himself up over the rim and lay facedown, sucking at the air and gulping harshly in a throat dry as a granary. Sheep, likewise fleeing, stampeded past him and away, up and down the spur. A breeze blew on him and gradually cooled the heat of his exertions.

Down below, the castle was as he'd first seen it; solid seeming and ordinary enough at first glance, but now, to Hamish, totally alien.

Barney was nowhere to be seen

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Daniel Buch:

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