

VERMIN

by David Orr

Sample Pages 1-5

FADE IN:

Soaring through dense winter woodland on the wings of snowflakes. Dipping and dancing through snow-burdened branches like a hawk on the hunt.

EXT. FOREST OF ARDENNES - DAY

We drift through the cool morning mist then settle on a

FOXHOLE

TWO BRITISH SOLDIERS huddle over their rifles. NICKY, youthful glow with bright, wondrous eyes, shivers and shakes.

SOLDIER

Cold?

NICKY

Need to pump ship.

SOLDIER

Go on.

Nicky leaves the frozen furrow, rifle in hand. The trees around him fade as an OMINOUS FOG floats in. After a few paces, Nicky places his gun against a tree and turns the snow yellow.

Somewhere off in the haze -- a TWIG SNAPS.

Nicky's head spins round, trying to place the sound. SOMETHING RUSTLES again. Nicky finishes quickly and grabs his gun.

The air thins, revealing a noble buck foraging for food. The deer ambles along, disappearing in the brume. Nicky follows, weaving through the woods.

The deer glances back at Nicky and goes still.

Nicky stops, careful not to spook it. He gazes at the magnificent animal, held by its beauty.

DEER POV

Behind Nicky -- FIVE NAZI SOLDIERS emerge from the mist. One of the Germans charges with his bayonet.

NICKY. He hears him coming, but can't break the spell. At the last second, he spins around and takes the blade in the stomach. He gives the Nazi a sympathetic smile then drops into the snow.

The deer darts off into the forest.

DISSOLVE TO:

HITLER: a grotesque rendering of the madman, squatting on human skulls, munching the meat off a leg bone, underneath the caption: Maneater. PULLING BACK we see that it's an enormous WWII propaganda poster plastered to the side of a brick building --

EXT. LONDON - ALLEY - DAY

-- restless YOUNG BOYS dawdle next to the mural, some shooting marbles at cigarette cards, some smoking and cheering them on, some swapping shrapnel and shell casings. Two rowdy boys play punch arm, frogging the red cross visible on their arm bands.

A large metal door slides up and the boys react -- reaching for their satchels, adjusting their arm bands, donning their caps, forming a disheveled queue in front of a withered WELSHMAN who steps out onto the landing, toting a trundle.

WELSHMAN

Let's go. Line up, line up.

Anxious arms shoot up, hungry hands, frantic fingers.

WELSHMAN

There's plenty enough. Let's not get greedy now like the bloody Germans. Bastards will choke on it in the end. Take a handful and be gone. You get your shillings when you return.

The old codger passes out small envelopes by the bundle, royal telegrams in baleful black. The boys promptly stuff them into their satchels and mount their bikes as snowflakes fall.

EXT. LONDON - STREETS - DAY

A TELEGRAPH BOY whizzes through wartime traffic, biking hard around vehicles without fear. A FIRE ENGINE roars up from behind, SIRENS BLARING, clearing a swathe. The boy pumps harder, reaches and grabs the truck's back bumper for a free tow.

EXT. LONDON - COBBLED ROAD - DAY

The boy bounces up the stony street, passing the terraced houses of the garden district.

EXT. JUPP HOUSE - DAY

MRS. JUPP, late 50s, a sweet, cherubic woman, steps out onto the porch. She rubs her bare arms to shake off the cold as she stares out at the dreary winter sky.

MRS. JUPP

Come inside, love. You'll catch your death.

Across the lawn, under an old woolly hat we find JUPP, a soft dumpling in his 60s, on his hands and knees vigorously digging at the frozen turf with a small spade.

Mrs. Jupp steps up to him.

MRS. JUPP
Always digging. One day, I fancy a
Chinaman popping up out of our begonias.

JUPP chuckles to himself.

JUPP
Dig on for victory, pet. Dig on.

MRS. JUPP
I've put on some tea. Come on now.

Mrs. Jupp sees something that leaves her breathless --

-- at the front gate. The telegraph boy parks his bike and reaches into his satchel.

Mrs. Jupp goes into instant shock.

MRS. JUPP
Fred . . .

The FRONT GATE CREAKS as it opens --

Jupp looks up to see the boy approaching them. He sits back on his heels, bracing with a deep, wounded breath. Eyes stoic.

Respectfully mum, the boy offers them a black telegram.

MRS. JUPP
I'll see to the tea. Inside.

Mrs. Jupp staggers back to the house.

SIRENS sound. The horrible, shrilling air raid warnings. The kid gazes up at the heavens. Jupp tosses the spade aside, snatches the envelope from his hand.

DISSOLVE TO:

A SINISTER FIGURE looms before us, peering through gas mask, clad in protective garments: long black rubber gloves, thick coveralls, soiled apron. The SIRENS IN THE AIR BECOME THE SIRENS OF THE POLICE as he waddles toward us then --

-- stoops to maneuver a large drum barrel against a short wall.

EXT. CRAWLEY FACTORY - DAY

Dozens of POLICEMEN surround the two-story brick storefront. Behind his squad car, HUMPHREY, a brash, young Detective Sergeant, commands through his bullhorn:

HUMPHREY
Got your soup kitchen surrounded, Haigh.
Be a good yob and step out.

Nothing stirs at the building. A few cops glance back at Humphrey from their positions, awaiting orders. A COPPER signals to storm.

Humphrey thinks it over, unsure. Finally, he gives the go ahead.

Copper sends hand signals to others and up they go to the factory gate. Just before reaching it --

-- there's movement on the rooftop, our man in the chemical suit comes into view, tilting the barrel over the ledge -- POURING 40 GALLONS OF SULFURIC ACID DOWN -- scattering the approaching officers, scorching the sidewalk and hedges with a DEADLY HISS.

Humphrey reddens, veins bulging. He hollars into the bullhorn:

HUMPHREY
Goddammit, Haigh! Come down now so I can
beat seven shades of shit out of you!

The man up top disappears. The cops below fidget. The DISTINCT PUTTER of a Triumph motorbike breaks the tension, arriving on the scene. The DRIVER parks and hops off, rushing around to give a hand to the man riding in the sporty sidecar. Off go the goggles and helmet -- it's JUPP.

HUMPHREY
It's raining sulfuric acid. Dangerous
work. Best get back in your sidecar and
let the young bills handle this.

Jupp doesn't pay him any mind, his attention on the building.

JUPP
John George Haigh. Swindler turned
monster. Evidence, Sgt. Humphrey.

HUMPHREY
What's that, old boy?

Jupp takes his bullhorn.

JUPP
It's not assault with acid. He's
disposing of the evidence.

HUMPHREY

Well, I'm going to pan that git's head
when I get hold of him.

JUPP

That's no way to treat a gentleman.
(into bullhorn)
Mr. Haigh. Chief Inspector Jupp here,
Scotland Yard. Would you be so kind as
to meet me at the front door?

Humphrey and Copper trade a derisive look as several constables
snicker. Jupp hears none of it, eyes on --

-- the front door. Suddenly, it unlocks and cracks slightly.

Humphrey can't believe it. Jupp casually moves past the blockade
and strides up to the entrance. The door swings wide and standing
before Jupp is HAIGH, 40, a handsome, dapper Englishman.

JUPP

Good day, sir. I'll need you to come
along with me to the station.

HAIGH

Certainly. I will do anything to help
you, as you know.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

TAP TAP TAP

Humphrey paces about, agitated. Haigh crosses his legs as he
smokes, relaxed. Jupp sits across from him, mindlessly TAPPING
the tabletop with a sphere-shaped pebble.

HAIGH

Mrs. Durand-Deacon no longer exists. I
have destroyed her with acid.

Jupp plays it cool, rolls the pebble from one hand to the other.

JUPP

The three McSwanns. The two Hendersons.

HAIGH

Same. There were others as well.

HUMPHREY

You're going to hang, Haigh.

HAIGH

Sgt. Humphrey, are you familiar with
corpus delicti?

Humphrey has no answer. Jupp rolls the pebble across the table.