

# The Laboratory of Doctor James

No one denied that Dr. Aiden James ran a tight lab, but neither did anyone suspect that he ran two labs, one of which held a deep, dark secret that would vindicate his great-great-granduncle's name.

Friday afternoon. The lab was nearly empty. Only Dr. Aiden James, his annoying intern, Brenda, and the fabulous Dr. Bonnie Finch were left. He caught himself staring at Bonnie when he noticed Brenda rolling her eyes. "I'm leaving. Goodnight Bonnie. Goodnight Dr. James. Have a good weekend." she said. "Same to you, Brenda. See you on Monday." He replied.

"I'm heading off too." Said Bonnie as she slung her bag over her shoulder. "Remember the unresponsive and dead specimens." She stopped at his desk on the way out. "How's my request for a promotion and enhanced security clearance coming along, Dr. James?" She asked.

He looked up from his notes and into her eyes, perhaps for a little too long. He cleared his throat, and then looked away again. "Well, you know, these things take time. It is the government, you realize. You'll have to be patient." He smiled at her.

"Alrighty then. Patience. Good night." Exasperated, Bonnie headed out the door.

Bonnie met up with the rest of her Dark Siders Pod later that night. Leave it to the internet to come up with a stupid name for orienteering, more or less, in the dark, more or less. She picked up a wine from the bar and sat down. Rahul, Susan and Mannie were already a drink ahead of her. Susan turned to Bonnie. "Change of plans. We're not doing the asylum tonight. Rahul has a better idea. Something about a cave. Tell her Rahul."

"I think it's an old mineshaft. I stumbled on this cave-in out on the old highway. I was going to set it up for next week but maybe we could check it out tonight instead."

Dr. James locked up and went across the yard to the shelter. He grabbed a cart and went to pick up the unresponsive specimens, and then over to the morgue to pickup the dead specimen.

With his cart fully loaded, he grabbed a flashlight and headed to the end corridor, and up to the double wide door that was marked, RESTRICTED, AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY, DO NOT ENTER. He keyed his way in and reset the alarms. Inside was the elevator and stairway down to the underground lab, a cold war relic that he'd made his own.

It was a long way down. Every descent he thought the same thing, and smiled. "No elevator music." The doors opened to complete blackness. The light spilled out from the elevator. Aiden grabbed the pair of night vision goggles hanging next to the doors. He heard some faint whimpering and the familiar scraping of paws against the cold concrete. "Patience, Charlie, I'll shut the doors soon enough. Patience."

With the doors closed, darkness enveloped everything. Aiden flicked several switches to turn on the low level infrared lighting. Charlie came scampering up, happy to see his master. "I'm happy to see you too, Charlie." Said Aiden. "Come here. Give papa a hug."

Together they pushed the cart down to the shelter door. Aiden lifted the dead animal off the cart and handed it to Charlie. "Here Charlie. A present. All yours." He quickly offloaded the other three animals into separate pens and injected them with the antidote to the agents they were

given in the topside lab. "They'll be fine, Charlie. They should come around in several hours. Their regime is the same as the others. Keep an eye on them like a good boy."

Aiden smiled as he left the underground lab. Not much longer, he thought. As he left the compound he stuck his head into the guardhouse. "Goodnight, Ari. See you tomorrow."

They took two cars, Rahul and Mannie leading the way and Bonnie and Susan following close behind. Rahul pulled off the highway onto a trail at a stake that marked the turnoff. They parked in a clearing and put their gear together.

There wasn't much to the opening. "Not to worry." Said Rahul. "I crawled in and looked around last week. It goes on for a ways."

"Crawled?" the rest chorused.

They made their way on their bellies, hands and knees for about thirty meters. The debris soon enough gave way to a mine shaft. They were now in total darkness except for their flashlights.

It was a steady downhill over boulders and gravel, and the air was getting colder, but it was relatively easy going. "Water!" Bonnie shouted over her shoulder as her foot found a puddle. "Looks like we're going to be wading from here on." The water went on for as far as their lights would shone. Rahul took the lead, followed by Bonnie, Susan and then Mannie.

They waded in, and the water got, by turns, deeper and then shallower, but it looked like the cave had leveled out. The deepest parts were only up to their knees.

Suddenly, with a yelp, Susan disappeared from in front of Mannie with a big splash. Gone. Within seconds she bobbed up out of the water gasping and clawing at the air. Mannie rushed over the help, but Bonnie yelled "Stop. It's a hole. Check for the edges or you'll go in too." Susan continued to flail, gasping for air, her head rising and falling below the water. Mannie and Bonnie were able to grab her hands and pull her up.

Susan was pawing at her arms and legs, yelling "Get them off of me! Get them off of me! They're all over me! Get them off!" Bonnie couldn't find anything on her, and Susan was too frightened to be of any help. "I'm leaving." Said Susan. "This isn't fun anymore. I freezing, I'm soaking wet, I've lost my flashlight, and I'm tired of things bumping into my face and my ankles."

"I'll go back with her." Mannie volunteered. "Are you sure?" Asked Rahul. "Yeah." Said Mannie, "This was your baby. We'll see you on the outside." Bonnie and Rahul watched their partners make their way back to the entrance. "Onward. Sound with your pole, though." Cautioned Rahul.

No more than twenty meters further on they came across their first decision - a fork in the tunnel. "Right or left?" Asked Rahul. "We've always had better luck going left." Said Bonnie.

They turned left and walked on, poling the dirty water with every step. At the sound of splashing far in front of them, Rahul and Bonnie stopped. "What do you think that was?" Whispered Bonnie. She waggled the beam of her light down the tunnel. Suddenly, "There!" She yelled. "See it! On the right side."

Rahul shone his light in the same direction. "I don't see anything. What did you see?" He said. "Someone running. I only caught a glimpse. They looked our way and then moved on."

"Damn. Someone made it down here before us." said Rahul.

"I don't think so. I didn't see any lights. Whoever it was went to the right."

"Want to go on?" asked Rahul. Bonnie replied, "I'm game to at least get down to the turn first. You?" Rahul nodded his head.

As they got closer to the turn the water was slowly getting deeper. They also started to hear the sounds of running water. They stuck close to the far edge which seemed to be shallower, so they didn't notice that the turn was a tee intersection until they were almost on it.

"What now?" Asked Rahul. "Lucky left again, or do we head back?"

"I don't know." Said Bonnie as she shone her flashlight down both tunnels. "Whoever I saw went that way. I want to follow. You in?"

"I'm in."

Rahul was sounding with his pole when he stopped. "Shhh. Hear that?" He started tapping his pole. Bonnie soon realized what Rahul was doing. "It's hollow."

Without warning, the floor underneath them gave way with a deafening crack. Rahul disappeared from sight. Bonnie was swept off her feet and landed on her back, hitting her head on the rocks. The water that was escaping into the chasm was carrying her down with it. Before she lost consciousness someone reached out from the darkness and grabbed her by the arm.

Charlie had been patrolling his tunnels, looking for new and interesting specimens when he spotted the interlopers. They made a lot of noise and they carried their own light. Two good specimens. The master would be so pleased, he thought. So unlike other specimens, these ones kept on coming even after they spotted him. He hid and when they fell into the hole, he grabbed at least one of them to take back home.

He carried the unconscious specimen into the shelter and put it in one of the cages. The other specimens started their caterwauling. Charlie snapped at them, and then locked up the cage and left to see if he could find more specimens.

Dr. James drove into the labs parking lot early on Saturday morning. He picked up the drug kits he prepared earlier, packed what he needed onto a cart and headed downstairs. Charlie was

waiting for him when the elevator doors opened, jumping up and down, excited to show his master something.

Charlie couldn't contain himself. He was so proud of the specimen he brought for his master. He's pulling at the cart to hurry Dr. James along. Bonnie, awake now, hears the door opening when Charlie and the Doctor come in. It's pitch black in the room. She's already worn herself out shouting to get anyone's attention.

Charlie's pulling along the Doctor. "Now, now, Charlie. What's got you so excited that you can hardly wait to show me?"

Bonnie recognizes Dr. James' voice. She starts shaking the cage and shouting hysterically, "Help. Help me. Dr. James. Aiden. Help". The other specimens take up the challenge and the room soon filled with snarling and howling. Charlie dances up to the cage, pointing and grunting excitedly. Dr. James stops, stunned.

"Oh Charlie. What have you done?" he says, not sure whether he should be upset or mad, or filled with despair. Now mad, "What have you done you stupid beast. Come away. Out!" He grabs a chastened Charlie by his arm and walks him out of the room. Bonnie is terrified. She continues to shout after the Doctor.

Dr. James chastises Charlie. "This is very bad, Charlie. Very bad. What about the others?" Charlie can't tell him about the others. "Sorry Charlie. Stay here. DO NOT go back into the shelter. Understand." Charlie sulks and holds onto his master's hand, looking to be comforted. He thought he was doing a good thing, but his master is not pleased. Dr. James goes topside. He has to think.

Bonnie continues shouting and shaking the cage. The cage had to have a latch somewhere. Thanks to Dr. James and his crony, Charlie, she knew which was front and which way was out. She started a bar-by-bar search for the latch finally finding the button that popped the catch. She opened the door and made her way out. She was sure there was a wall, or something right across from her that she could follow to the exit.

She banged her knee on a cart, but the wall was there. Carefully and slowly, like in the tunnels, she felt her way along the wall, avoiding pails, carts, tools and boxes as she went. Finally, the door. She turned the handle only to be flung backwards as Charlie came into the room. He knew he wasn't supposed to go into the room, but he had to see his prize specimen again.

Charlie grabbed for Bonnie but she kicked away at him with her hard boots, catching him on his knees and groin. He caught her arm and yanked her off the floor. He wrapped his hairy arms around her while she kicked and screamed as loud as she could. Pushing at his head she realized that it was small and scaly. Something thin and slimy kept flicking at her face. Frantic with fear she seemed to get superhuman strength and, with an extra hard push, she managed to slip out of his arms. Grabbing at whatever was close by, she smashed the creature over its head repeatedly. As they fought, and she was pushed back further into the room anything she could pick up she hit him with, until he wasn't next to her anymore.

Where was he? There was so much noise in the room that she couldn't tell if he was in front of her or circling around behind. She waited. At the ready, "weapons" in both hands. A minute passed. Nothing. She checked her bearings and started slowly towards the door again. She felt the open door and went out, closing it behind her. No lock, though. What now? Everything was black. Which way out?

"Suck it up, girl." She thought. "We can do this." She reasoned that this was an underground complex. With Dr. James down here, she also reasoned that this was under the lab where they worked. "That's no bloody help." Out loud, she said "It's 50-50 and left has always been lucky for me." She turned to the left and, with one hand on the wall, made her way along the tunnel.

She passed two doors, both locked. Without warning, she smashed her nose into a wall. She turned right and followed the wall a few steps when she heard shuffling feet coming towards her down the hallway. "Door. Door. Where are you door?" She started to think. Frantic again. She started patting at the wall when she accidentally pushed the elevator door button.

Nothing. She pushed repeatedly. Thinking quickly, she remembered that there was always a stairway next to each elevator. The shuffling slowed but was getting closer. Frantic, she kept patting the wall until she found the exit stairway door. She yanked it open and started running up the stairs, taking them two at a time. Round and round each landing until she finally burst through to the anteroom. She hit the breaker bar on the exit door, setting off the alarm. Looking around, she exclaimed, "The shelter!"

She let herself out the main doors and ran into Ari coming to check out the alarm. Out of breath, "Ari! Ari! Help me. Something's after me. Dr. James. Creatures." Surprised, Ari took hold of her shoulders and looked her over from head to foot. "Dr. Finch. Try to calm down. What are you doing here? I didn't see you check in." Gulping air, Bonnie managed to get out, "Creature. Chasing. Underground lab. Dr. James' creatures."

Ari steered her back to the guard house and tried to calm her down. He brought her a coffee and put a blanket around her. Bonnie saw him go to the front desk to call someone. She couldn't hear what he was saying, but he kept looking back at her with a worried expression.

"Yes. Dr. Finch? This is Ari at the lab. We have a problem, Sir."