

# **Mindgrinder**

**by Brendan Cox**

Smashwords Edition

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Suddenly the walls seemed to set themselves on fire. It wasn't a fire that spread along them, it was a simple process where the entire surface of all four walls spawned flames. My bed had turned into a smooth and very thick liquid that I slowly began sinking into. Although the flames on the walls were orange, there appeared to be a faint dark green smoke emerging from them and slowly building up a haze in the room. There was no point moving. At least I felt that way until I heard some kind of whimper coming from next to the bed. It was only one brief noise, but it was definitely one that came from someone or something's vocal chords. I rolled over to see what it was and as I did so, I sent high frequency ripples through the thick blue liquid I was lying on. The liquid was spreading across the floor, which I had noticed was now solid ice. I couldn't see anything that could've made the noise, perhaps it had been covered up by the liquid. Soon I became sleepy and as I rolled onto a thin part of the liquid, I fell asleep.

When I woke up, the room I was in was gone. The ice was still below me, but now I was amongst what you might say are pixellated trees. They had normal looking tree bark, but approaching the top were more and more leaves that had jagged edges, and little texture. They were very much like a digital representation of leaves. I peeled myself off the ice, which covered the ground way beyond what I could see. I was only wearing my boxer shorts, and my skin felt raw where it had been stuck to the ice. With each step I took, it seemed as though the ripping sound, coming from my feet lifting off the ice, got louder and louder. When I checked my soles, they looked red but no skin was peeling off. When I continued walking after that, they were quiet again, but still got louder with each new step. I heard the sound of a phone ringing. I looked to my left to see one attached to the side of the tree. I picked up the handset and put it up to my ear. All I heard was some kind of murmuring, perhaps from an old woman, but it was hard to hear: "When are you coming back? I'm not happy. Not happy at all." And it continued like that.

"What?" I said. "I don't..."

I didn't bother continuing. I just hung up. And I kept walking.

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They had invited some over-dressed hipster in his mid-thirties to their flat to observe the latest issue they had been having. That issue was the guy who was slowly pacing across the room in his boxers before bumping into a wall and then lying down on the floor. He clambered around in a mess of his own boney arms and legs before getting to his feet again. The flat consisted of five people, three guys and two girls, most of them students, who would find this guy randomly appearing in their flat, sometimes with a few more clothes, but never any more coherent.

"We've got the police over a couple of times now, and they've taken him away." Said Mark, one of the flatmates. "But he reappears. And we tell the police that he's back and they don't know what we're talking about. They have no record of the arrest. The second time, we even got the names of the two officers who came to get him. We called them after he appeared again, and one name matched an officer that worked up north, and the other didn't match the name of any officer in the force in the last five years."

"Wow, that is odd." Said their visitor, nudging the brim of his fedora upwards as if it might help him to see better. His name was Jack. He was an expert in the supernatural, referred to them by a co-worker of Stacey, who was another one of the flatmates. "How long has this been happening?"

"Since we moved in." Said Ben. Ben was tall, with short curly hair and he often had an arrogant smirk on his face, although that had not been present since he moved into the flat. He was the boyfriend of Patricia, they had just begun living together. Stacey, Mark, and the last flatmate, Mike, were all single. They had all moved in just a week before. "The rent here's cheap." Ben continued. "We didn't expect this though. And we're on the lease for the next year."

"You're supposed to be an expert, what are your ideas?" asked Mark. Mark looked a lot like Mike, blonde, medium build and a little short, people often got them mixed up.

“There's been a few stories like this around the city. I've seen at least one other instance first hand. They all link to one angry man, and his highly odd weapon.”

“What kind of weapon is it?” asked Mike.

“That's a tough question to answer. There could be several ways of describing it. Some would say it forces every atom in someones body halfway out of existence. It's like it opens up a tunnel between points in spacetime and closes it again before you come out the other side.”

“Hey, so is that the scientific-whatever behind ghosts?” Mark asked.

Jack laughed. “It could be. I suppose you could call him a ghost.”

“What's this weapon called?” Ben asked.

“Oh there's as much of an official name as there is an official explanation. There's a few nicknames out there though. I've heard of it being called the Buzzgun, the Deathblow, the Mindgrinder, and apparently Seth himself once just called it Confusion.”

“Seth? He's the angry guy?” Ben asked.

“Yep.”

“We need to talk to him.” Ben said.

“Oh no. He won't cooperate with anyone. He's the most antisocial bastard any of us will ever meet. And he's violent too. Don't get me wrong, he's the key to fixing this problem, but we've got to come up with a plan, and a careful one.”

“How far away does he live?” Ben asked.

“Not far at all. He has a place in some dirty concrete apartment block not far from here.”

“The one with the bent flagpole on top?”

“That's it.”

Ben walked towards the door. “Let's go there now.”

Jack rolled his eyes. “Dammit. Did you not pick up on the point I was just making? The guy's unbelievably cruel. Anyone who's done this to someone is not the slightest bit safe to be around.”

The 'ghost' squeezed past Ben and left the room, at which point he would disappear until later that evening. He would disappear when he was already out of sight of anyone else, that way the universe wasn't quite so out of harmony. Because of the state he existed in, just halfway towards oblivion, he would only appear part of the time, and other times, he would disappear completely, sometimes taking with him the existence of things that he had interacted with, such as the police officers.

“How can it hurt just to say a few very neutral words to the guy?” said Ben.

“Don't even argue...” Jack looked at his watch. “Look, I've got a lunch to get to. But don't fucking-” Jack had his eyes wide open as he pointed his finger at Ben. “Don't fucking even think about going there without a plan, alright? Or you'll wind up fucking like your... ghost. I'm going to come back this evening we'll talk some more. Bye.” And Jack left.

“You all know what building he was talking about, right?”

“He said we need to plan.” said Patricia “So let's not actually go there until he comes back. Don't try to be a hero for fuck's sake.”

“Oh come on. I've had enough of this weirdo ghost suddenly wandering into the shower while I'm already in the bathroom trying to shave. And how dangerous is this Seth person going to be? That wanker that's telling us to draw up little plans is just trying to justify what he does.”

“Well, he knows more than you, Ben! And this Seth person could do that thing to you. Is that what

you want, Ben?"

"I doubt he does that to everyone who just knocks on his door. I've seen door-knockers selling stuff around these streets, you'd think they would've learned. So I think this ghost of ours must have really pissed off this Seth guy. And all I want to do is chat, and try to arrange some kind of mutually beneficial kind of thing."

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Nick, who hangs out on the street and looks out for the local community:

I was hanging out at the bottom of the stairs, smoking a cigarette. A tourist asked me where he could find cheap accomodation nearby, I directed him to a place just around the corner, run by a couple that I have been friends with for many years. Then another guy, tall, curly hair, came along and asked if there was a guy called Seth who lived in the building. There sure was.

"Apartment 302, if you really want to know." I said. "But I hope you know what you're doing. He has a strong right hook."

The guy seemed confident. He went on up the stairs. I saw a young girl riding on some pink bicycle, one of those ones with the basket at the front, but she was riding it along the road. A car went by and it seemed to just go too close to that girl on her bicycle, so I called out to her and told she ought to ride it on the footpath, and that she was young enough that no one would mind. And then I heard something slowly sliding down the stairs behind me. There was the guy just dragging himself back down the stairs with his hands. I saw a drop of blood fall from his mouth and I decided to just mind my own business. I just kept looking around at the rest of the street, not wanting to get involved, as he carried on dragging himself along the footpath.

A few minutes passed, and then my alarm went off on my watch. I saw the little girl on the bike and I told her to go home to her parents now. I went across to the other side of the street. This time each week, old Seth goes out to the store to buy himself some whiskey, some cigarettes, and some potatoes. I always make sure everyone is out of harms way when he leaves. When Seth had disappeared around the corner, I saw that guy again from before. He was still crawling but it was like he had been hiding and watching, waiting for Seth to leave. He crawled back up those stairs. And he must be a masochistic lunatic for doing so. Again, I just wanted to stay out of it.

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"What the hell, Ben?" Patricia yelled.

"At least he didn't turn me into a ghost!"

Patricia grabbed some cotton buds and started trying to fix up Ben's mouth.

"What did he say?" Mark asked.

"Nothing." Ben said. "I just started to say hi when he opened the door and he just punched me in the face... like that's what he does when anyone knocks on his door."

"Well there you go, Ben." Patricia said.

"But you've brought back a whole bunch of weapons. What did you do afterwards?" asked Mike.

Ben had placed three weapons on the table, a gun, a silver softball bat, and a knife. "I saw that he was going to leave." Ben said. "He had his wallet out and all these hundred dollar notes on the table behind him. Either he was going to leave or someone was going to show up, so I hid and watched."

"Even after you had blood coming out of your mouth?" Mark asked.

"Of course. Anyway, he went out and I sneaked into his apartment."

They heard a knock on the door.

"That'll be Jack." Stacey said.

Jack had a pissed off look on his face.

“This is disappointing.” Jack said.

“Are any of those what we want or not?” Ben asked.

“I told you it was risky.” Jack said.

“Of course it was, and I got away with a little cut on my lip. But the important thing is: did I get the weapon?”

“No.” Jack said. Everyone looked down. “The thing you want looks just like a hairdryer, complete with power cord... Now that someones stolen from him, I imagine he's going to make it harder for anyone to do so again. Now it's not safe to even try to communicate with him. The outcome of this stupid little mission you went on is you made things a whole lot more difficult.”

Ben got up, kicked the coffee table and started pacing around the room.

The ghost walked in with paper in his hands. He scrunched them up and put them on the floor. Then he pulled a lighter out of his pocket and started to set fire to them. Patricia leaned forward.

“Oh my god, are those my drawings?” Patricia said, she went and stood behind the ghost to take a closer look. “He's taken my drawings, and now he's trying to light them on fire, the prick.”

“Alright.” Ben grabbed the ghost and threw him over his shoulder. “What about our first plan of just taking him to the police? Why did we just drop that?”

“It never worked.” Mark said.

“We weren't finished.” Ben kicked open the door to the hallway. “I'm going to take him down. And I'm going to tell them I need to watch the guy, and I'll just sit there and watch him for as long as I have to until he disappears again.”

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A day passed. The ghost returned. A week passed, and still no one had heard from Ben. Patricia tried calling him on his cell phone, but she got a message saying it was not a valid number. The flatmates went to the police, but they knew nothing about it.

“We may just have to wait.” Jack said. They were all in the lounge trying to think of ways to get Ben back, but without understanding the situation, they had come up with nothing.

“But I want him back now! I hate waiting!” cried Patricia. Stacey had her arm around Patricia's shoulder to comfort her.

“What about if we find this other guy again?” suggested Stacey.

“Seth?” Jack said. And he went to over to the stolen weapons to consider the idea. He picked up the knife. He was deep in thought for a moment before he realised that in the blade he was not staring at his own reflection, but that of an angry, ugly, scowling man. He threw the knife to the floor.

“Something's happening.” Jack said.

“What?” Mike asked.

“Is it that Ben's coming back?” Patricia asked.

There was a knock on the door.

“That's gotta be something to do with Ben.” Patricia said. “He probably lost his keys when he went missing. We need to open the door for him”

“Uh, I don't think so.” Said Jack.

“I'll go get it.” Mark said, and he rushed into the hallway.

“Wait!” Jack yelled.

They all huddled into the hallway. The front door had a frosted window on it, allowing you to see the figure of whoever was there. The figure in this circumstance was a little wider than Ben. The shoulders seemed a little more hunched, and it looked as though this figure was breathing rapidly. Mark had stopped just by the door.

“Careful, Mike. I don't think that's Ben.” said Jack.

“Mark.” He corrected him. “A good way to remember it is I have a-”

A chunky fist shot through the glass, cutting the arm the followed it, not that cut glass was enough to slow it down. That fist powered into Marks face, sending him crashing to the floor as shards of glass were sprayed across the front of the hallway.

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I was in my hut in the middle of the jungle. The jungle was hot, humid, and full of snakes. My hut was made of branches and vines, was about 6 metres in diameter, and sat amongst the trees where occasionally monkeys would swing down and try to steal my hard-earned food. But one thing that was completely out of place was the large walrus sitting right in the centre, making its odd grumbling sounds at me.

“Begone, walrus! You do not belong out here in the jungle!” I yelled at it. “Get! Walrus! Get out!”

I started to wave my hand at it, signalling for it to get moving. It started waddling away, while continuing to make all those strange noises that a walrus makes. As I went about my ways, flowers were quickly growing, flowering, and dying, leaving blackened remains along the ground. They did so in various patterns, forming circles, and then sharp edges, before drawing a circle again.

“Get back to the Arctic! Go!”

As I chased the walrus out of my hut, I looked ahead and recognised an old face. Amongst all my confusion, I recognised this man as the man who had killed me.

“Seth...” I said.

The flowers continued to draw patterns by quickly growing to full height and then dying within seconds. They were inching towards Seth. I noticed a gun had appeared in my hand. I saw the walrus waddle away into the trees, and I raised the gun toward my enemy.

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Everyone covered their heads and curled into a ball as they saw the ghost point his gun across the hallway. A shot was fired. Everyone looked up to see Seth still standing, and a bullethole just next to him, in the doorframe.

“Once again,” Seth said “your aim doesn't do you any good.”

Jack grabbed the ghost and threw him against the wall. “It's not going to help if our ghost avenges his death. We still need Seth to get rid of this guy somehow.”

Jack pulled the gun out of the ghosts hand and tried to put it in the back of his trousers, it didn't work and the gun fell to the ground.

“Was it you who stole my weapons, boy?” Seth said.

“Seth, I'm trying to help you. This guy is trying to kill you and I've stopped him.”

Jack opened up a nearby cupboard and threw the ghost in there before closing the door. He opened it again to reveal that the ghost had disappeared.

“So that worked.” Jack said. “So Seth, let us talk.”

“Did you think you could steal from me and not get the shit beaten out of ya?” Seth said.

“Okay, plan B.” said Jack. “We may need to overpower Seth, 'cause he really is just an angry bastard. If we all rush him, we can all do it.” Jack looked at Mark lying unconscious on the floor, he was down and Ben was still missing. “Ladies, we may need you to help out.”

Because they were in a narrow hallway, it was difficult for any more than two people to 'rush' Seth at once. So Stacey and Mike were mowed down, and Patricia had been tossed against the wall by Seth's fingertips, as he swung his arm out at all of them. Jack had hesitated and was still standing much further down the hallway, his knees shaking. He turned and ran into the lounge. Seth stomped after him, getting to him as he stood in the middle of the lounge panicking. Seth grabbed the back of his jacket and dumped him on the ground. He lowered his head to speak into Jack's ear.

“You'll see what happens when you steal from me.” Seth had a terrible odor, he never showered, he just drank, smoked, ate potatoes, and farted. Legend had it that he was once considered a wee bit of a pretty boy, but gradually over the course of several decades, he grew bigger, hairier, and angrier. Jack looked up at him to see his eyes widen as he continued to speak. “You'll see what happens, although you may not understand it.”

Seth kept one foot on Jack's back in order to keep him on the ground, and then he reached into an inside pocket of his torn jacket and produced what looked just like a hairdryer. He plugged it into a nearby power socket, and fired it at Jack.

An hour may or may not have passed for the group of them at the flat. Colours may have turned to black and white. Gravity may have been reversed. Every molecule floating around them began to vibrate wildly, each producing its own loud noise. One whole world existed inside that room and another whole world existed outside it. Numbers would add together to give colours. The distance between two objects could then only be described using the days of the week.

If you see someone being attacked, and you want to help, you would probably want to pick up a weapon that is superior to that of the assailant. But what if the assailant is trained in a complex martial art? If you're not armed with the knowledge that the attacker has, then you have no idea what use your interference would be. It's a more complex situation. For Patricia, the events occurring before her made no sense whatsoever. Somewhere between her and where Seth and Jack may or may not be, logic just didn't apply to everything the way it usually does. But to make things slightly easier, there were moments when some things seemed to become clear. Just briefly. And in those moments she thought she was able to work out how to creep up behind Seth. So she picked up the knife that was sitting on the table, and with the knife in her right hand, went to stab Seth in the back. As her right hand approached Seth, she noticed it suddenly no longer holding the knife, and at the same time she saw her right hand, another one, holding a screwdriver.

“Aarrgh!” Seth screamed. The room went silent.

When the confusion had cleared. Patricia saw that the knife had now pinned her right hand onto the torso of Seth.

“Oh no.” Patricia cried.

Seth growled, and turned to grab her. He had her by the shoulder, and was gearing up for a powerful headbutt into her face when he felt the presence of someone else behind him. There was the ghost, and in his hand was that hairdryer-like object, pointing straight at Seth.

“Oh shit.” Seth said.

Violins grew arms and played guitars. Cats sang karaoke. Mars became the furthest planet from the sun. Professional wrestlers had a tea party with the royal family. It became the norm to drive cars upside down, and the most popular mode of transport became riding on the back of a buffalo. Manakins paraded through the streets, celebrating for the sake of celebrating.

When all the confusion died down again. Jack, Seth, and the ghost had disappeared. Patricia looked at where her right hand should be to see only a stump. Without thinking, she hoisted herself up by

grabbing onto the table next to her with her right hand. Then she clicked, but looked back at her right arm to see it ending in a stump again. That didn't matter so much when she saw Ben come into the lounge holding shopping bags.

“Alright I got us a new working toaster. And a hammer and nails so I can fix up your desk. And look at this – you say how you'd love cooking a whole lot more if you could do more of it yourself – it's a one-handed can-opener, that's gotta help, right? And there's catalogues of this kind of stuff. So how about that?” And he smiled at her.

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Steam was rising from the gravel. Meteors were crashing down from the sky around us, but we couldn't see them hit the ground since we were in the middle of a large ring of high rise, elegant red curtains. By we I refer to that hipster chap, myself, and of course my old enemy.

“Revenge!” I called out to him.

“I was already living in hell.” He replied. “Bringing me here was just being a pain in the arse.”

I imagined those friends of that hipster guy will now feel a little safer without Seth chasing after them, meanwhile we'd all carry on living in a random chaotic mess of a world, halfway between existing and not existing. And occasionally we'd get to haunt their flat like a bunch of ghosts. Hilarious.

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