

# The End of the World

By Dante Harker

The end of the world as we know it, well, as they knew it  
'What's taking them so long?' King Barkus asked Dent.

He didn't shout his words, he couldn't be bothered.

They fell from his mouth.

It was the fifth time he had asked, and the question had  
been shouted twice, sighed once, whined and now the  
question fell almost, rhetorically, onto the war room table  
where the king had positioned himself at its head.

Dent looked at his young master; he was nothing more than  
a petulant boy really and yet in charge of a mighty kingdom.

Still, he'd been strong enough to defeat his father – though  
that wasn't much of a feat given his father's advanced years  
or that it's ever very courageous to stab someone in the  
back.

'But he hasn't killed me yet', thought Dent, which has to be a blessing – kings did have a bad habit of murdering their advisors.

'They'll be here shortly my lord, I'm sure if of it.' Dent offered the king by means of placation.

Sadly, he'd offered the same servile assurance one too many times, forcing Barkus to snarl, 'they'd better be, because I'm bored, and I hate being bored.

And there're only two things I like doing that are guaranteed to deal with my boredom and that's either let Boy here entertain me – but it's far too hot for that...' Barkus looked up at Boy, who had followed him from his side at the throne to the head of the table.

He'd been fanning the king for well over two hours now and his arms, though toned and used to the rigors of a stiff workout, were aching and screaming their anguish deep into his pain receptors.

Boy wanted to stop, but knew that would mean his death.

Still, after what the Kking said about it being too hot, at least he wouldn't need to muster any extra energy to satiate the king's passions, a new-found knowledge, that for the

moment at least, gave him the strength to keep heaving the huge fan backwards and forwards.

The king smiled up at Boy, a smile so bright that Boy's knees weakened for a second, and a breeze of light-headedness swept over him.

The king lost track of his threat.

He was going to tell Dent that the other sure fire way of alleviating his boredom was by feeding a slave to his dogs.

But any hateful thoughts had passed; Boy's deep, wilful eyes held him.

He could gaze into their beauty for all eternity.

Grateful of the king's lapse, Dent offered a bow, and then backed away towards the war room's door.

From there he signalled a servant and whispered for him to find out if there was any news.

When the king had asked him for his solution to the problem Dent spent ten minutes outlining, he had faltered.

Not that he'd let the king see his predicament.

He liked the job of advisor; at least he liked it while he stayed in favour with the king.

If he managed to do that, then he was the king's number one servant.

This had its perks, like plenty of food, nice living quarters and first dibs on any new young servants that started work in the palace.

Unlike the king, Dent wanted children, lots of them and yet they seemed to elude him.

His deceased wife had said there was something wrong with him.

She had told him he was broken inside and that was why he'd been unable to get her pregnant.

She'd said it one too many times and the last time she'd said it Dent had punched her so hard in the face that fragments of her skull had pierced into her brain – he'd told everyone she had fallen down the stairs.

Killing your wife was actually quite common – so much easier than getting a divorce – but Dent thought that it would reflect badly on his character so had chosen to lie.

Dent wasn't proud of what he'd done but his wife wouldn't shut up, he wanted a baby too, and he was sure everything inside him was working fine.

Since his wife's death, he had made it his mission to prove himself right.

He decided that if it wasn't him who was broken then it had to be his wife, she was too old – 24 was a little old in those days for women.

What he needed was a nice fresh young thing.

And he found them; cleaners, kitchen staff, maids, yet no matter how hard he tried none ever fell pregnant.

'All spoiled!' he'd insisted to a friend one drunken night.

The friend had completely agreed and told him he must find himself a virgin, a girl pure of flesh, whose eggs were strong and waiting for his seed.

‘But how do I ensure they’re a virgin?’ Dent asked, to which his friend replied, ‘you just have to get one who’s very young and make sure she bleeds when you take her.’ For the last couple of days, Dent had been eyeing up the new dishwasher.

She didn’t look much older than nine, her parents had been killed when the king’s army had taken her village and she’d been sent back to serve her life out as a slave.

He was looking forward to seeing if she bled; she would be his treat when the current situation was over.

Dent knew if he wanted to carry on enjoying his privileged life; he had to keep the king happy.

And he’d been thrilled when his master had bought into his ideas.

And he was even more thrilled when he’d thought to say, ‘great King, I can only outline the problems and guide you towards a solution.

And as the problems in front of you are so great, I suggest you call your generals, a seer and a holy man – use their vast knowledge to solve your dilemma.’ When the king had wholeheartedly agreed, Dent had set his plans in motion.

He sent messages out for the king's generals.

Well, not all of his generals; in reality he had only called for the three smartest.

The king had seven generals in total, but two were just puppets worked by two of the generals he'd called.

And the final two had vocabularies which only contained the words 'Kill!', 'Smash!' and 'Maim!' Dent was hoping for a solution that was a little more sophisticated than that.

Of course the three general's he'd called weren't just waiting outside the palace, all geared up to do the king's beckoning.

They were off doing what general's do – raping and pillaging – or at least winning battles and then instructing their men on the best ways to rape and pillage.

They needed time to put things in order before setting off to see their king.

Much to Dent's relief, the generals eventually arrived.

'Is there no time to rest? I've been riding for hours.' General Durian demanded on arrival.

Dent heard the question while still a hundred yards from the main entrance and he feared for the servant who told Durian, a giant of a man, that there wasn't.

'General Durian, sir, come with me if you would.

'I'm sure after a quick audience with the king, you'll be able to go off and wash up.' The general, relaxing at the sight of Dent, whom he viewed as an old and, if not trusted, certainly dear friend, threw down the servant he'd questioned and strode to meet his greeter.

'What's going on, Dent? What's this all about?' The long ride had taken its toll on the general, forcing the advisor to hold his distance, for fear that the noxious smell Durian was omitting may also carry with it disease.

'I'm sure the king will tell you – he's waiting.' The general had been following Dent down the corridor towards the war room when Dent's answer stopped him in his tracks.

'I asked you what this is all about.

'I want to know now!' The general was tired and not used to his friend dodging questions.

Before Dent had chance to answer, a voice roared, 'did you not hear him general? I am waiting!' Before the echo of his words had finished the king retreated back into the war room, leaving Durian startled and hesitant.

Physically he had no fear of the king, he was fifteen years the king's senior, that was fifteen years of battle training and hardening.

Plus, he was taller than the king and as broad as an oak.

But the king had his royal guard, who would rip the general to pieces for nothing more than making the king angry and at the moment, the king seemed far from jovial.

Durian rushed into the war room, dropped to one knee and said, 'I'm sorry, my lord; I'm road weary and in need of a clean-up.

I didn't mean to keep you waiting.' The king, at 21, still suffered the hormonal upheaval caused by his youth.

This meant that his anger, that had glowed so bright only a second before, had now passed.

He leapt from his chair and after helping the general to his feet (which at least meant that Durian could stand at his full

height, the act having given him implicit permission); the king shook the general's hand and offered him a seat at the table.

King Barkus, seeming unaware of the general's smell proceeded to make small talk.

He didn't mention why he'd dragged Durian here, he wanted to wait for the other generals first as he hated repeating himself.

So, as far as the general could make out, Barkus had brought him to the palace on a whim – which he sadly had no option but to indulge.

Neither man had to wait long before Dent announced the arrival of the other two generals, Lekk and Score.

They had met up on the road five miles out of town and travelled in together.

After a round of pleasantries, Barkus invited the three generals and his advisor to take a seat.

At this point Dent ushered in the seer and the holy man – they had been waiting in the wings.

He knew the king wouldn't want to sit with either of these two servants while he waited for his generals, so he had kept them out of sight.

They had both been easy to find.

The seer was easy.

She was one the palace used regularly.

Dent didn't believe a word that (usually) was bellowed from the old crone's mouth, but she always seemed to put on a good show.

Plus, she wasn't quite as hideous as some of the other fortune tellers who set up stalls around the palace gates.

He really didn't want to spend several hours sat across from a woman with a beard or one covered in grotesque hairy warts! The holy man had been easy, too; the hard part had been choosing which religion the man should represent – so he just chose one who said he could speak for them all - ideal.

Once everyone was seated, the king stood up at the head of the huge, marble table, and repeated the impassioned speech Dent had given earlier.

Of course, he gave the speech as if it were his own, no credit going to his advisor.

'Well, my lord, I'm glad you thought of us to help you with this matter,' General Lekk offered when the king had finished.

'Kiss ass', thought Dent.

He wasn't a fan of Lekk; the general was average height, thin and slimy.

'Not literally slimy,' he acknowledged to himself, though Dent would hate to ever have to touch general Lekk as he could never be sure.

Lekk won his battles through back-handed methods – killing squads in the night, torture and blackmail.

Lekk was not a man to be trusted as his every action served only to further himself.

In this case he was out to ingratiate himself with the king.

'I don't think there is one answer that will deal with all you require, sadly my Lord,' General Score, held the king's eye

for a second as he spoke, a privilege that came from having been the king's sword instructor back when he was in his late teens.

The brutishly handsome general, now in his late thirties had taught the king more than just the sword, and it was this once shared intimacy that allowed him to look at the king for this extended moment without losing his head.

'Oh, come now, General Score, that's not what the king's looking for, he wants solutions not negativity!' said Lekk.

Again Dent's thoughts screamed 'kiss ass' as General Lekk spoke.

The king hated anyone attacking his old instructor and his thoughts screamed for the death of General Lekk.

If Lekk hadn't been right, more than his thoughts would have screamed.

'Ok, Lekk,' General Score didn't offer the courtesy of calling Lekk by his title.

In his mind, you had to earn the title through acts of valour, not those of treachery and deceit.

‘Why don’t you offer the king a solution?’ Whether he had earned his stripes through valour or by darker means, General Lekk was still a general.

It was a title earned through winning more battles than the other two generals put together.

He was sly and self-serving, but still very smart.

General Lekk thought for a minute, the faces of everyone in the room posed for his answer.

Everyone, that is, except the seer, she was staring off into the distance, clearly looking at something no one else in the room could see.

‘As you said, my lord, you need a way of controlling the masses.

Something that gives you the right to judge others, say what they are doing is wrong and then have no one stand in your way when you have that person or army, or even kingdom destroyed.

Well, the only way to do that would be to make yourself into a god; it’s worked in the past.

Wasn't there a kingdom that ruled for 5,000 years? Remember, the one who built all those pyramids?' 'I find it hard to say this, but I like your idea!' admitted General Score, 'the problem is that it stopped working in the past.

The kings of the time were living gods, but the people also worshiped a multitude of other gods, which meant that control was diluted.

We need something just a bit different.' 'Perhaps just the one god then?' said the King.

He'd thought he best say something, if nothing else than to stop himself getting too bored.

With three of his generals in the one room, he'd kind of hoped for a big punch up, but as that didn't seem to be happening he thought it best to participate.

'Yes, my lord, you, the One True God,' the holy man hissed.

Like most holy men of the day he was very old, so old in fact that he'd had at least one stroke and part of his face had frozen, causing his words to fall from his mouth as a hiss.

'No!' Lekk snapped, then realising how his words must have sounded he qualified 'as much as you could be the One

True God, I don't think that's the answer.

'Why not?' the king demanded, he quite liked the idea of being turned into a God.

'Well, my king, if you just declared yourself a god, there would be no reason for anyone outside our kingdom to accept you as such.

The idea of a god is a good one and it has to be a god we can control.

But it can't be a person; it has to be something on high, something powerful that people, all people will fear.' 'But you can't just create a god,' the holy man hissed, a small gob of spit shooting from his mouth as he spoke.

He was ok with the idea of having yet another king declare himself a god, but the idea of trying to create an ethereal being felt very wrong.

'Why not?' Lekk asked, his eyes were wide, it was clear he'd been caught up by his idea and didn't want anyone pissing on his parade.

'Well,' the holy man started but then seemed to stumble, looking for a definitive reason why a god couldn't just be

created.

‘Well,’ he tried again, but before he had chance to offer anything else General Score interrupted, ‘actually I think you could create a god.

But it wouldn’t be a god, it would be The God.

The One True God! It wouldn’t be the leader of other god’s either, it would be the only god – all other gods, from all other religions would have to be put aside.

This god wouldn’t have a fancy name, he wouldn’t be the God of War or God of Love, he would be God of everything.

In fact he wouldn’t even need a name.

He could just be God! And anyone found not worshipping this God could be put to death.’ ‘Oh, I like it,’ Lekk said, ‘the magical thing would be that you, my lord, would control God.

You could control what God liked and disliked, you could say what was good and what was bad.’ ‘But, to do that wouldn’t this information have to come from somewhere else? If people realised that we had created God surely no one would believe it.’ Durian could see the potential of having only one god; he was just looking for clarity.

And like the king had the urge to participate.

General Score took up Durian's point and expanded, 'you're right, General, if God were seen as a creation of the king, no one would believe it.

But, I'm sure there's a way around it.

We could make God older, spin the propaganda, and make it seem that God has been here since forever.' 'Better than that,' Lekk interrupted, 'we could make God our creator, so not only has he been here since the dawn of time; he was the cause of the dawn of time!' 'I love it!' the king yelled, he got up to his feet, turned to a servant waiting in the wings and screamed for him to bring scribes.

'I want to start straight away; I want to get this down on paper so we don't forget anything.' 'That's it, my lord, scribes, brilliant,' Dent yelled, the mention of scribes had given him an idea, 'we create a book, a Good Book, the book that tells the world about God – we set down laws and rules, we find traits in our enemies and make them somehow against God – genius!' Although excited, Dent said his words in such a way that they seemed like they came from the king.

The room filled with energy, the king, his generals, Dent, the holy man and even the seer could all see that the future of the world was about to be changed forever.

And all but the seer felt this to be a truly good thing..