

## ***A sleeping feast***

### ***Synopsis***

Stories of a skinned-alive phantom haunting a village in rural Northumberland are ridiculous, even to journalist ALEX REED working for strange phenomena magazine. But when a decayed body is uncovered by receding flood waters, rumour suggests a link with the nearby research enclosure, and Alex smells scandal and a chance to prove he's more than a sensationalist hack.

Alex pursues the Doctor in charge of the research, and even though she studies insect colonisation of dead humans, her intelligence and good looks arouse his sexual appetite,

DR SARAH WALLACE is amused by his cynicism and reveals that the body – in life, called Robert Cahill – had been stolen from the enclosure along with two others. The setback could signal the end for her failing research.

While the police look for the perpetrators, Alex discovers Cahill had been treated at a world-famous hospital run by MENDEL PHARMACEUTICALS. Under orders from director, GERARD DEBONFORT, nobody will speak, so Alex poses as an orderly, enters the hospital and photographs the staff list. His intrusion is discovered.

That night Alex escapes a beating by running into a crowded pub and realises Mendel plays a tough game. With greater resolve, he tracks Mendel staff and is told of a possible whistle blower in DOCTOR NEIL BRANDON. Unable to contact him, Alex breaks into the Doctor's house and steals a laptop; the Doctor's kept a weblog.

The writings reveal horrific maltreatment during drug trials; patients held at the point of death, half decaying and half living. Sarah thinks it is science fiction, but is suspicious when biopsies taken from Cahill's corpse reveal a virus used for Genetic Modification. It could be why her research is failing but would mean Cahill was still alive when dumped at the enclosure and the other bodies were infected via feeding insects. Sarah can't entertain the idea, but Alex's bent for the sensational lets him believe the bodies have awakened.

Meanwhile Brandon's body is discovered floating in the Mersey, and Alex's finger prints litter the doctor's house.

But Alex has traced another of the missing corpses. Alf Barnes' living flesh drips from his insect-riddled body. Before Alex can take photographs, Mendel henchmen firebomb the house and he narrowly escapes. Barnes is incinerated.

Unable to involve the police, and with Sarah determined to discover the reason for the compromised research, Sarah and Alex join forces.

In the warm, honey-scented environment of the Mendel treatment room, vein-marbled patients slowly liquefy into glass jars as the genetic treatment rebuilds their decayed flesh. Alex and Sarah watch as still-alive bodies are wheeled out to the incinerator. Playing cat-and-mouse with security, they gather documents and photographs.

Back at Sarah's house, believing they have prevailed, the excitement pushes them into each other's arms, but the door is smashed down and they are dragged to the enclosure to be burned with the remaining corpses. In a violent struggle Alex disables the henchmen and finally faces DeBonfort. But warming flames stir the dead. A creature emerges from the fire and hauls DeBonfort, screaming, into the blaze.

Reports of Mendel's new treatment creates a wild climate of investment and company shares escalate. That rotting corpses came alive is never proved, but the publicity encourages funding for Sarah's research. Alex is finished with sensation. He now has the taste for campaigning journalism.

But one body remains hidden. In a leafy hedgerow, the victim watches maggots gorge on his flesh, pupate and take flight.