

## Jimmy Dante's Cradle of Filth

By Lorraine Voss

Clare is looking down; she's not quite sure what at, and she's not utterly convinced that down isn't up. She is hoping for clarification. She closes her eyes, waits a few moments and then tries again. This time things look a little clearer. She scans the scene and in conclusion accepts that she is suspended by a device that is securely yet comfortably fixed to her feet and ankles. This device has her dangling some fifteen to twenty feet above what appears to be a large, rectangular, light blue, painter's canvas. A clear plastic tube roughly six centimetres in diameter had been inserted into her mouth and seems to be glued there. It has rendered her speechless. The opposite end of the tube is attached to an empty plastic bag. Both of her arms are fastened to her sides.

James Dante is by nature, a quiet man; artistic and 'free thinking' but addiction to a variety of stimulants has left him overly confident and firmly rooted to the notion that fame is only ever an epiphany away. His ultimate goal: To pluck one precious thought from his vivid imagination and transfer it, uninfluenced by the normal constraints of reality, into a tangible work of art worthy of professional praise and public adoration. He expects this exhibit to be titled 'verb: FUNK;' he intends to cause no harm and break no laws during its execution; he hopes to take The Turner Prize.

Mandy Stephens proprietor of a small and successful independent travel agent's is a thrill seeker; always after the buzz. This morning after three mugs of Rocket Fuel coffee and a rib cage full of palpitations she picked up the local weekly paper and began to scan the personal columns. Mandy's idea of fun is to set up a date with the guy that's placed the dodgiest looking lonely heart. She arranges to meet some 'sad case.' She tells no one where she's going or when she expects to be back and a very small part of her genuinely hopes to cross paths with a bona fide serial killer. So far she's come to no harm, unless you count the Listeria she contracted when some cheapskate skuzzball treated her to a very substandard chicken curry.

James would never submit a lonely hearts advertisement; he's not the type. This week however, he did purchase some advertising space in the newspaper. The purpose of this space was to promote a new venture. The heading was: An Adrenaline Junkie's Delight and the body of the text described how (for less than two hundred and fifty pounds!) a weekend of 'extreme excitement and probable media interest' might be purchased. Further details could be obtained by emailing: Jim at [mycradle@projectepiph.co.uk](mailto:mycradle@projectepiph.co.uk)

The first enquiry was from Clare.

Clare (in mid commute) was well on the way to her dead end job in the city. She was sitting in an aisle seat on the packed early-bird, trying hard to avoid the overly long and no doubt 'tedious' reports that she was meant to be proof reading when she spotted James's ad. Without a seconds hesitation she dipped into her oversize handbag, lifted out her Smartphone and emailed for details.

James Dante jumped excitedly when the laptop tone alerted him to new mail. He'd set up mycradle@ specifically for this project and knew that the correspondence could be nothing other than an interested party. He clicked to open and read:

Dear Jim, Curious re: Your 'Adrenaline Junkies' ad. in the Ippingford Gazette. I would like further details please.

Kind regards,  
Clare.

James fired off a pre-scripted response which briefly detailed the proposal; adding that 'vague' was necessary in order to build up excitement and maintain the element of surprise. An unawareness of the projects intended conclusion, he insisted, would be an essential component of the adrenaline charged experience. The attached form asked for the height and weight measurements of each person booking and included instructions for payment with a polite request that remuneration be made in full, at least one month before the commencement of the project. The email ended with a lengthy disclaimer which effectively admonished James of any and all legal responsibility in the event of accident or injury or metal distress.

Mandy, done with flicking through the classifieds and finding no-one remotely unappealing, was about to throw the whole stupid small-town rag into the recycling bin when James's boldly framed, block advert caught her eye. She read it through twice before picking up her mobile and dialling the office. Three rings later:

'Hi Kelv, it's me, Mandy, listen, I think I've just found our latest team building experience' she declared proudly: 'Adrenaline Junkie Delight. I'm just about to email for the specifics. Reckon you can talk the others into it?'

Kelvin Mitton, shop manager and head of telephone answering replied: 'Yep' in his usual succinct and

efficient tone.

‘Cool’ said Mandy, before hanging up her ancient mobile and booting the lap top.

Her email was much the same as Clare’s. The only exception being that her inquiry was with regard to a group of four rather than a single person booking.

James was cock-a-hoop. Five was the perfect number and here they all were! Assuming that there were no time wasters the next step would be to sit back and wait for the payments to roll in. As soon as the funds were secured he would purchase the required hardware; then he would be ready to begin the task of construction. The ideal site had already been chosen.

Mandy Stephens has just woken up. She thinks that she might be staring at the back of Kelvin Mitton but she’s not entirely sure. Firstly: The figure in her line of vision is suspended by what appears to be some sort of parachute harness and is facing away from her. Secondly: He is (with the obvious exception of a large metallic sphere which is encasing his mid-section) in a state of complete undress. Mandy is similarly ‘encased’ but in contrast hangs up-side-down and is dressed neck to toe in neoprene. Behind her hangs Clare and behind Clare, orientated in a logical follow on: ‘down; up; sequence are Mandy’s other two work-place colleagues. Those who are not gagged wear ear defenders. Specific orifices (for reasons which shall become apparent in due course) need to be obstructed while others remain capable of ‘free-flow’. Each participant is clad with the exact same spherical metal contraption, and from ground level these appear to be perfectly aligned. All items of clothing (where any exist) have been chosen and provided by James and are specific to each individual’s role in the execution of the finished exhibit.

It took less than two days for Clare’s cheque to arrive in the Royal Mail. Three days after that an envelope containing a company cheque from Stephens & Danby Travel Agent for the grand sum of £1,000 dropped through the letter box. James took both cheques straight to the bank and paid them into a ‘creativity account’ where three and a half grand of his own savings sat patiently waiting. Next job: finish the tech drawing. He’d spent nine weeks designing the ‘Cradle’ on paper and all that was needed to complete it was the height and weight of each of each participant. As soon as the final figures were entered into the equation he would be able to calculate the length/strength of the necessary suspension wires as well as the most appropriate position for each participant to take. As soon as the payments cleared he was on the phone ordering materials; two weeks later, the structure was complete!

Ippington aqueduct had, in its hay-day, been an impressive structure but unlike similar ‘Telford’ constructions it had failed to gain World Heritage Site status and now lay in state of partial ruin. It no longer held water and to say that it looked precarious would be understating. James was convinced

(despite any kind of professional evidence to support the theory) that the structure itself was sound enough to support the weight of his cradle and, after a certain amount of blaggin'; the flashing of some forged permission documents and the assistance of a well-known cowboy builder he managed to get the thing secured as per his original set of plans. The work took five days to complete and James's final instruction to the builder was not to bother too much about the clearing up. For the purposes of this project, the more loose rubble and mess left on site the better.

It's day zero of James's countdown and everything is in place. The apparatus is functioning perfectly, the weather is dry and clement; the wind speed is negligible. Five fully paid up participants arrive at 9.00am as instructed, one at a time, they are ushered into a portable site office where they are asked by an efficient looking young man in an orange boiler suit emblazoned with the word 'STAFF' to check that the regulator on a set of air tanks is working properly. The tanks contain chloroform and two or three breaths is sufficient to floor each person just long enough for James to administer a more long lasting anaesthetic by syringe. This elaborate set up, he reasons, is necessary in order to avoid premature stress. He wants any and all emotion to be saved for the 'moment.'

While Clare and the others sleep James applies the required clothing, accessories and paraphernalia. He then positions each unconscious participant into their specific harness within the cradle. He makes a point of double checking each lock and hinge on every metal globe before, fully confident that all is well, he clambers to the top right hand side of the aqueduct where a hand operated set of cogs and wheels awaits his input.

The drawback is flawless and James whispers 'yes' as the first two orbs are manually winched up and back by ninety degrees to what (on a clock-face) would be three. The remaining three orbs along with their unwitting innards hang motionless at six.

Kelvin Mitton was the first to re-gain consciousness and as you would expect of a typically middle class, British, stiff upper lip sort of a chap he didn't panic. To find himself strapped and dangling from a great height was he decided, hardly surprising considering the nature of the adventure that he had willingly paid up for. The large steel orb that he'd been inserted into afforded him no view of his lower portions and left him blissfully unaware of his naked state. He considered his surroundings and recognised the scene. He come across Ippington bridge once before. An ironic fact in view of what was to follow.

James, aware of the rousing state of his medium, initiates the creative process...

Cue: Music! ... Thrash Metal - 'Coffin Fodder'

Cue: Action! ... The winch chain is realised and two, opposite orientated office workers hurtle toward six o'clock. Clare feels the collision and transfers the energy to Mandy and Kelvin, who, in perfect keeping with Newton's theory, swing outwards and upward and back to centre, returning the motion and so on and so forth.

Cue: Rubble fall ... Some is pushed by James, deliberately; some falls unplanned; all of it causes alarm and stress and fear. Panic ensues. Thoughts of a bruised, broken crashing death at the hands of an incompetent engineer rush to the fore of each mind. Screaming starts. Tears begin to fall, then snot; then vomit, shit and piss. The final jerk that throws jizz to the air in a last ditch scramble for survival of the gene comes courtesy of Mr Mitton and all of this cascades upon the waiting canvas which is blue, and calm and Jimmy smiles, turns face on to the shot and says: 'If this doesn't knock Emin's Bed into a cocked hat I sure as fuck don't know what will.'

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