

Devil's Needle

History, in fact, does give us the name of the person who first figured out how to zombify the San Pedro cactus. His name was Leopold Frederick Danvers-Greenly; and his dark fate for creating such a horrible thing was to peacefully die, in his bed, at the age of eighty-seven. They say that the wages of sin are death, but in Leopold's case the benefits package included a baronetcy, a rather nice townhouse in a respectable London neighborhood, and any number of grieving grandchildren.

In unlife the Devil's Needle looks much like a regular San Pedro cactus (which is to say, like a cucumber with cactus needles). Differences, however, include the fact that the needles are about a foot long, pop off of the cactus when pulled with a smell reminiscent of rotting blood, and are packed with enough unholy mescaline to turn a country vicar into the Terminator. Fortunately for humanity, a pure hit of the stuff is enough to explode the heart within fifteen minutes, tops; it was Leopold's horrific genius as a researcher that allowed him to come up with a way to dilute the unholy mescaline enough so that it *merely* allowed hysterical strength, indifference to pain, and a reliable instant addiction. By the time of Leopold's death

in 1912, the British military had a secret greenhouse dedicated to growing more Devil's Needle -- and they were ready to use it en masse by 1916.

The first combat tests were, thank God, an utter disaster. It wasn't just that using the Devil's Needle solution in the field led to widespread overuse and overdosing; it was that anyone who used Devil's Needle regularly for over a month (longer than Leopold's testing) who then died would come back as a zombie. In full eat-your-brains mode. The British did everything they could to mitigate this problem, because the idea of super-soldiers is a tantalizing one -- but eventually someone in charge finally gave up, and just ordered the whole greenhouse facility destroyed.

Alas, they didn't go get Leopold's notes. Which is a problem, because Leopold's great-great granddaughter Dr. Clarice Elizabeth Danvers is a major player in the field of biomedical research financing, and she's the first family member in a hundred years to actually be able to understand her ancestor's notes. Not that she believes in zombies or the occult, of course. No, that's all Victorian superstition.

Profitable Victorian superstition.

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