



THE ENGINE EATER

By Jay Creepy

1.

All the noises they make. Was there a way of knowing what each one meant? How? What does it mean? He could not understand it. Deep inside he imagined it, he wished to know. On the outside, however, he only cared for survival and food.

Carefully he pushed his gnarled fingers into the dead flesh and, watching the intruders, quietly tore a strip. It was so dark. And the noise seemed to rip through the night air. He paused for a moment, then continued.

The two intruders were still making their noises, unaware of him. He pushed the food into his mouth and chewed, wincing as his teeth clenched together. The pain always caught him, then it would slowly ease to a regular dull throb.

His whole body hurt, but it was something that would be forever his companion. He stared from yellow eyes, bloodshot, watery, but extremely alert. They constantly glanced at each shadow, every shape, ready for change.

His ears, waxed and caked in dry mud, were surprisingly functional, able to pick up a sound and in a second juggle the cause. A usual nightly creature? Or those monsters who sometimes passed through?

He had seen so many. All different sizes, all different colours. The times he recalled nearly becoming seen. Then in a split moment, he becomes one with the grass, blending into the shadows, or hiding behind the headstones.

If they left him alone, he had no fear, just interest in his food. They moved along, dropping the things from which they drank from.

He dashed silently, circling and weaving the graves and trees to clutch the fallen bottle. Yes! There was some left. Drinking fast, he welcomed the rush of warmth and dizzy headed foolishness.

"Gaah! Gaah!" he raised his arms, so weathered – skin leather and wrinkled. He bounced on his haunches. So good. *"Gaah!"*

The other bottle appeared to be empty. In fury he threw it aside and ducked down as it smashed. He scurried into cover just in case the monsters heard him.

Time passed, he listened, then grew bored, so straightened. The feeling had gone too soon. It used to last longer, and used to generate deeper warmth. Never mind. He returned to the feast which awaited him.

"Owa!" he yelped in shock as the tree beside him shook violently.

Looking up, his brother had claimed a portion of his feed. Catch him! Quick! Climbing fast to the main branches, he looked around, fear and rage twisting his vision.

The snarling teeth suddenly bit deep into his arm. Lashing out, he found himself falling and his brother's shadow was seen for a moment leaping to the next tree, briefly illuminated before the moon.

His brother lived above the world. In all his life he had never been able to get close enough to confront his hated brother. He had never seen his brother on the ground. Perhaps he did, secretly and away from him. Was it possible to sleep in a tree? He had not tried it

personally, but he supposed the years of living within the loving embrace of the leaves and branches his brother had adapted.

His brother was faster than him, and much more adapted to hunting, catching the small things in the trees which ran about swiftly with their funny tails.

He fell after the attack and stayed on the ground for a moment hoping to see his nemesis. As much as the hate gorged itself inside, he did long for a companion, and his brother was like him.

He shook his head and turned over, crawling over to his meal. Not much had been taken. Raking at the legs, he ate undisturbed and finished quietly.

No time to ease the food down, he had to bury the remains of the carcass. He dragged it into the hole he had spent so long and so painfully creating, and then he pushed it through the shattered wood shards and soft fabrics which lined the box, to sleep once again.

Jumping clear he brandished his digging tool, taken from a grave and emptied of flowers. With incredible skill honed by years of practice, he replaced the earth and sods, and arranged the cards and decorations.

Not long before, he had observed as the monsters stood in a circle whilst his food was lowered deep underground.

As a child, his father had showed him how to look out for the empty holes, covered and waiting the delivery. To take from one of these holes meant he was safe and never discovered. To take from a hole where the soil had settled spelled trouble.

Time to go back. He ran through the maze and when he saw his destination he cawed aloud. It had always been the one place he knew he was safe and could never be found. He was able to rest and shut off all of his senses. Moving aside the branches he used for cover, he exposed the small narrow opening, just wide enough for his small body to fall into.

Sometimes, whilst inside his hole, he would spend time digging to widen his home underground, using wood from the boxes to prop up the gap. Back and forth with handfuls of soil, stashing all evidence.

His home was far beyond the regular paths which the monsters took. Quiet and still. His bed was a mass of grave clothes which he stole to curl up inside. Similar to what he wore. A filth coated jacket and ill-fitting trousers kept the cold at bay, plus for some reason he enjoyed pretending to be like the monsters.

Waiting for sleep to come, he thought back to a time when in broad daylight a monster nearly found him.

“Andy,” the creature had shouted over its shoulder.

“An- n- dy.” He croaked as he lay in his bed.

A flash of his brother jerked him awake. Had it been a dream or real? He gritted his teeth. Rage. Blind rage. But the longing washed those feelings away. He needed another, and his brother had never wanted to approach him.

Forget him, let him be. The chances of them both existing together was impossible.

Andy. He liked the word so much that he loved to think about it and say it from time to time. Those noises they made, his father used a handful and made him understand as much as possible in his own way. But he struggled so much repeating the sounds.

The word Andy seemed to explain the presence of another, because when the monster shouted, he heard another nearby.

But now he was Andy. Perfect. It was him.

He balled himself up contently and closed his eyes. Sleep took a while to fight the endless pain in his arms. And his mouth. And his head. In fact, all over.

2.

Too much in his dreams, he had to wake up. The face of his dead father at the front of the parade of memories. The cold lifeless face as he ate into the still flesh.

Every night, more or less, he remembered.

The bright sky gleamed through the branches. It was not time to move just yet. He did not feel hungry, so he returned again and hoped not to see his father once more.

For some reason, he listened to the noises beyond his hole. To the distant sound of the monsters and their savage little companions who made sharp noises. "Awf! Awf!" There was one nearby. Then the monster called out and the little one was heard no more.

His father once gave them a name; "*People*." So, Andy was a people. But now he was also Andy, so did that make him a people too?

They were not the same as he and his brother. But Andy was his name whether he was a people or not.

Andy turned over and shut his ears to the sounds of outside. Not his kind. He cared only for the ones in the soil because they helped him to exist.

Sometimes, though, the living ones left things that he could eat and he did so. They discarded drink. Oh, it felt as if the pain ended for a short time after sampling some of it. So much he could not understand, but a few good things.

After his rest, he eased from the hole and prowled, sniffing the air. Those small four legged things had an odour unique to themselves.

"Watch it, Paul. I haven't forgiven you for bein' born yet!"

"Shut up, you punk."

"Whatever."

So close. Andy's heart missed a beat. Those meaningless words sounded rather hostile.

Had they seen him? Had they decided to kill him?

He froze, then gently lowered himself into cover, ears ringing with the volume of their conversation.

"My ear's hurtin'. Stupid ring. Shit!"

"You're a sandbaggin' lil' bitch, jus' hold still will you? It's swollen."

Andy felt more comfortable, he now wore a coat of wet leaves. Sit and observe.

Two monsters, one touching the other's ear. He was so hungry. Why wouldn't they go? He needed to eat, and fast.

Andy bared his teeth as one of the creatures cried out in pain. What were they doing? Were they starting to fight each other? No, because suddenly they laughed together as the supposed attacker held something in his fingers. It was tiny, he could not see it properly from his hiding place.

"Throw it, man. You need a bigger ring."

"Cost me eight quid."

"So? Either that or you put up with the shit."

He tossed it in Andy's direction, then they vacated silently. The hunger delayed, Andy explored the undergrowth for the discarded object.

"*Huh?*" it seemed so strange. A metal ring.

He held it to his ear, imitating what he had witnessed. No pain. Nothing.

"*Wha? Wha?*" Andy twisted his mouth, trying to contort and control his lips to form the word he knew was this thing, "*Rin.... Ran.... Rrrrr.... Gaah!*"

He closed his eyes, breathed deeply, then tried again. "*Rinnnnn.... ggggghhhh. Ra... Riinn...gggg.*" The word was so empty, so false.

Speckles of rain hit his body, he glared up and shuddered, remembering his hunger. He would toy with it another time.

It was too bright to take a fresh one. Take from the pile instead. The trees rustled and the drips of rain increased in weight. The clouds were darkening.

Andy crouched low, then ran from trunk to trunk, stone to stone, until he reached his destination.

It took his gnarled and weather beaten body a long time to rake the earth deeper and deeper as the rain lashed and the wind caught his ill-fitting clothes. Then the first chunk of decayed flesh became exposed. He wasted no time biting. The effort in doing so sparked white pain throughout his mouth and he cried for a moment.

Far away from the muddy paths where the monsters walk, hidden beyond in the overgrown aged cemetery, Andy gnashed his teeth together and he chewed. It tasted right. Whilst swallowing his first mouthful, he brushed twigs and stones from the food.

It belonged to the leg of a fresh one, taken nine days ago. It paid to store food. He had learned the trick from the little grey furry creatures which scurried up the trees and jumped from branch to branch – like his brother.

Andy gazed around and then sat, relaxing. Whilst outside he rarely left his feet or haunches. For a change, however, he felt safe because the store was so far into the overgrown section of his world – further in than his hole. So many times he had set traps, sticks positioned in various ways. Nobody ever approached, not even the four legged ones. This was truly his safest place.

Nearby resided another stash. Andy felt the urge to check on it, as he did practically daily out of habit.

He crawled six metres to a hollow tree and reached inside. From time to time they dropped objects other than drink and food. He collected whatever he could. So hard to understand, but as he flicked the pages he saw colours, and beautiful things. One such thing he recognised as the loud friends of the monsters, those who were so noisy with their “Arf Arf” s.

However, in front of him, they were so quiet and still, their mouths posed making those horrible sounds. It made him wonder. These images were like when he peered into water, but then the face looking back was his and was not so still. How do they do this?

It was meaningless and totally pointless, but for some reason, Andy kept everything his muddy fingers could find. Comforting, and sending messages to various parts of his body. Igniting feelings. Some good, others bad.

He always stopped and frowned when seeing the creatures with long hair and lumps on the front of their bodies. Why those ones? What was so different?

He regularly noticed a few passing by his domain and he always watched, ever cautious but aware of the change in his temperature. Heat, and movements down below. The movements which caused such a rush of emotions.

Andy had known for some time the touch of that part and how he needed to stroke it from time to time. Mainly this ritual was triggered by *them*.

His father had never shown him anything like that, only how to hunt, hide, and survive. Sometimes he wished his father had taken the time to show him more, but mainly his concern was strictly survival.

His greatest joy was when the creatures with the giant digging thing appeared for he knew he would soon have fresh food. It dug deeper and deeper, further than he had to reach his store. After the giant completed its work, the hole was covered by thin wood.

Father had educated him upon the importance of wood, how when the sky darkened in the day and the air became painful to touch, wood becomes fire. Andy suffered failure every time he attempted to recall the lessons and afterwards huddled miserable in his clothes to hide against the biting air.

Darkness came, and Andy reluctantly slept most of the night away. He enjoyed spying in the light hours as hoards of people gathered around the hole carrying his food. Some made dreadful noises which, if listened to long enough, became tuneful and quite soothing. Andy would sit in a tree or in the dead centre of a bush closing his eyes for a moment, ears tuned to the incredible show.

That part of his domain was more open, more exposed than his usual ground. The stones were smaller and cleaner. He had to be more careful.

He knew of death, and the end of breathing. Unlike his wayward brother, Andy had watched his father slow down and stop.

The terrifying shock that all was lost and it had been his turn to shine, overwhelmed him on that day. He could still remember the empty sickening feeling.

For many days and nights afterwards he had called to his brother, but it had deemed useless for the calls were never answered. His brother only made an appearance when it suited him and perhaps he could steal.

So far, he had never been seen or heard this deep. Andy embraced his collection, then, with care and love, put each one of the ragged items back inside the tree trunk.

Was he the weakest of the brothers? Impossible to tell for his hated other was so fast and never paused long enough to fight. This bothered Andy, for he felt intimidated by the swift attacks.

The onslaughts were by no means a regular thing, for if they were then Andy could probably ready himself. The attacks were few and far between, yet extremely effective and he was always left the loser.

Andy clutched his last item tightly, then headed back to the feast, tearing another handful of rotted flesh to gorge whilst thinking. His mind settled on forbidden thoughts.

For instance, what lay beyond the trees? Those terrifying fast and huge things that he had only dared himself to watch once or twice. If he strayed too close, he would dash back to safety.

The people appeared to be inside. One or two usually, all staring out seemingly in a dream. Sometimes, even larger ones passed by and there were crowds of monsters all in a line on top of one another. Too much to handle, Andy hurried back into hiding.

Others simply walked. These were easier to digest for he saw this regular down the many gravel paths.

Andy chewed and wondered how many of the people there actually were. He imagined so many around him in a circle, all their horrific faces staring, mouths open. Andy froze, suddenly very scared.

He breathed steadily to relax himself. That could never happen. Nothing would make that happen because he was way too clever. Why venture out further than the trees? No reason at all as far as he could see.

3.

As the crowd of dark monsters gradually dispersed from the hole, Andy shuddered at the task ahead when the blackness of night fell. Digging was so easy, but it was the painful time using his fingers and the sharp items he collected to gain entry to his food.

Each time did it end in his own blood spilling from his hands and arms as the sharp edges of the box pierced him. Those he selected when fresh food was unavailable he found so much easier to get to, but they did not taste as nice as the fresh.

His father had revealed to him how the recent were better and far simpler to hide since the soil was already disturbed. Andy tried to keep to this rule, yet sometimes he found himself prone to the less painful option.

Crouched upon a grave, he smelled the air and noticed one of the tiny little grey things near his hand.

"Gaah?" he whispered.

So many things his father had tried to drill into his head, for his father could speak like the people. Andy knew of the dark, the light, the grey creatures, the leaves..... but others could be recognised only by sight, sound, touch and smell.

It came closer. Many times they simply ran away at the slightest movement. Andy remained motionless. The wind breezed across both of them and the tiny grey thing bristled. It sniffed the air, then touched his hand.

Andy tensed, the pain in his body was willing him to move, yet this lovely trusting creature had its eyes on him and it showed no fear. The eyes were filled with sorrow. A lonely hunted animal who spent most of its life hiding. He felt its sadness. A connection for the first time ever with something other than his father.

Minutes passed, though both weren't aware of it. Neither had a concept of time, yet they both knew of their lives and this moment which had blocked out the world.

The wretched pain was too much, Andy to alter his position. The tiny grey thing only backed off for a second, then returned to sniff his hand again. He did not understand why it did, for he had no food. Perhaps it smelt the cemetery on his skin and could picture various places.

Finally, it headed on a journey unknown to Andy, dashing up a tree and throughout the maze of branches. He straightened to watch it depart and felt himself torn with loss. Loss for his father, his abusive brother, and that simple little thing which had mirrored his emotions perfectly.

Andy hoped they would meet again. He decided he would carry food with him at all times just in case.

Dropping his lower garments, he held himself and urinated whilst looking out for any movement, listening for any noises which did not belong to the normal series of patterns he had grown used to.

“Agh!” he hissed and ducked, ignoring the warm jet soaking his inner thighs.

What was that?

A shuffle. A noise. He gritted his teeth.

Something speaking. A people... a monster. Maybe only one for nobody answered.

“Sodding bushes. This is shit. Hey, whatever can go wrong.... “

Andy suddenly felt very exposed. He gently eased himself silently into cover and watched the monster with its hairy face and long hair sit upon a crumbled gravestone only a few feet away.

It took a small box from its coat and opened it. “I know there’s some little shit near here, watching like a fucking coward.”

His words meant absolutely nothing to Andy who amused himself by studying this strange slow speaking people as he held a strip of paper and placed a fingertip of what looked like black grass into it.

“Ah, to hell whi’ tcha. I don’t care who the hell you are, just don’t fucking touch me.”

It licked the paper and Andy recognised the shape. The times he had claimed a discarded one only to hate the taste and the ripping sensation in his throat.

“Fucking bums. Hey, I’m the bum king. The ultimate, I’ll have you know. So don’t ya try to fuck with me!”

Andy soothed to his voice. He remembered he had seen this one once or twice, but never as close. This monster regularly drank from the bottles and tins. It usually slept afterwards whether it be light or dark.

“Come on out an’ have a smoke. My name’s Pedro.”

Andy allowed himself to relax. This strange monster who spoke to no one and burned his white paper stick seemed harmless. Perhaps they were all like this one. Maybe he had become so lost in his own world that he did not realise this.

No. That was only hope. Seeing his face in the water revealed the truth. He was so different to them and they would either fear him or they would hate him. Not a great choice for both may result in pain.

The monster near him, however, had skin similar to his own. Dirty and old. His food looked the same when exposed too long to the soil.

The thought made his stomach cramp. When the people fell asleep, Andy would have to seek food.

Soon enough, the smoking stick was flicked from his fingers and he crawled from the stone to bed down in the leaves. Its eyes closed. Andy waited patiently, then pulled his clothes into place, ready to move on.

Suddenly the eyes opened and fixed on him. “Jesus! You’re an ugly lil’ bastard aren’t you?”

Andy did not know what to do. This had never happened. One of them had finally seen him fully exposed. Andy wasted priceless seconds frozen to the spot. The monster only stared, without fear of him, or anger.

“I’m Pedro, nice to finally see you. Heard you before, like, once or twice....”

Andy broke his invisible shackles to bare his teeth as a warning. The monster only smiled, yet this terrified Andy more. None of this was right!

He ran fast, imagining the people giving chase. He smashed his way through bushes and skirted around trees, on and on until stopping to peer around. Nothing.

As he breathed hard to steady his panic, he understood why he had made such a mistake. The monster actually smelled just like him. Maybe he was one of his kind.

Surely he would have known for certain when he saw the people. It hadn’t tried to approach him though, and it hadn’t been scared. Andy realised that the creature had been speaking to him all along.

It was quite small, long hair hanging from under a hat. It wore long clothes, dark in colour. Andy liked the hairy face, a toothless mouth buried in a mass of hairs.

Andy wondered what might have happened had he stayed longer. No! It was like all of the others and he sometimes experienced them in his dreams attacking him with jagged things which made him bleed.

It was easier never to find out. Stay away and not think about it anymore.

Andy crouched against a tree to gain his composure. The events had shook him deeply. What would his father have done in the same situation? Kill. He could not do that. The monster had not made a move to strike him.

Andy continued onwards with his business and tried to forget the encounter.

4.

Sure enough, the usual blood was produced as he tore at the coffin lid. He bit his withered dry lip as a thin shard caught his palm, easing itself inside almost to the bone. He moved his hand and decided to ignore the pain.

Anger took over, combined with the sheer desperation to conclude the long task. Andy used all of his strength to tear the remaining pieces away.

The corpse lay in its dress, heavy make-up covering what appeared to be an accident which had deformed the flesh of her face. His blood poured over her mouth, smudging the workmanship.

He took a knife from his filthy jacket and cut open the garment from neck to knees. He then laboured to slice the underwear and placed them aside.

Her naked cold flesh smelt, and the accident had taken part of her chest and stomach. The monsters had done their best at repairing the damage, but the vision repelled him. He hated to see these ones. They reminded him of his collection and when they were hurt in such a way, it stunned him.

Cruelty in all forms existed beyond the trees, for as he stared closer he could see the handy work of a blade. This one had been butchered.

Butchered. A word used by his father many times. He described every salvaged corpse as a “*butchered banquet*”, failing to explain the full meaning.

For a moment he pictured his father, tall and long body scarred through many years fighting other animals and, he claimed, the monsters.

Andy plunged his knife into her leg and circled around to rip a chunk of flesh and skin. He gently placed the large amount into a bag he had found blowing around the bushes. There was never a shortage of these.

Next, he used his hands to grab more by clutching the sides of the open wound and pulling outwards. The loud sucking noise made him drool, hunger washing through his guts. He also placed these prizes into the bag.

Leaning over the corpse, he took a bite from her arm and munched contently whilst carving at her chest.

As much as the look of the corpse had repelled him at first, his crippling hunger assured he forgot quickly. It took him a long time to strip the food from the bones, all of it would be stored since he had broken into his supply.

Placing the bag outside of the hole, he balanced the broken coffin lid in place and then jumped high so he landed by the mound of earth. He tirelessly pushed and heaved the soil back in, then rolled around for a moment to squash the earth into place. That was the fun part, he felt it was a symbol of victory.

Nobody would ever know what had occurred. Andy collected his bag and headed back into the depth of his world. Then it suddenly hit him.

The terrifying panic, the feeling of helplessness and it all combined together into a whirlwind that threatened to swallow him if he didn't stop.

Andy sensed his brother watching. He felt the small grey thing beside him baring its teeth. The hairy man approached in the darkness with a weapon, intent on hurting him. Andy curled up in a ball, shaking. When these moments erupted, running would achieve nothing, hiding was pointless for the visions he saw followed wherever he went.

The moment his father died replayed before his eyes, but instead of the quiet slipping away, his hands grabbed Andy's throat and crushed.

He could plainly see the corpse he had just helped himself to staggering towards him in a jerking motion that threatened to loosen her head and arms – what was left of them.

Andy looked towards the bag and it was moving from the inside as if all her pieces were driving themselves to be free and join with their host. The corpse was stood above him, he closed his eyes and dared not to look up.

As suddenly as the fit had struck, it departed in a wave and left him dazed and confused. They were happening more regularly and he had no way to stop them. One day he knew it would happen at a bad time and something would be waiting on the other side when he shook his head free.

He eyed the bag with revulsion, but regardless of his visions, it was his food. He slung it over his shoulder and continued on his journey.

Andy did not run or scurry, he walked, body low to the ground and eyes alert. After what he had just experienced his body and mind felt weakened and ready to snap. They had happened for so many years, but as he grew older, they crowded in and became worse.

His father used to hold him tight until the moment went, cradle him and stroke his head. Of course, there was no one around to perform that task anymore. Andy was alone and to be truthful, he did not mind. At least he himself as company meant he could trust himself, and himself would not suddenly die and leave him.

When he reached the patch where he stored his food, he first claimed a handsome portion for the night's meal, and then dug far enough to hide the rest.

Afterwards he wandered, aimless and thoughtful until he heard voices. He crouched between two headstones and listened. Three different monsters. Their voices were all higher than the usual ones.

Andy dared himself to slide along the leaves and soil and stopped when he had a better view.

Yes. Three of them. Each had those bumps on the front and long hair. They sat together on an old wooden bench which had long passed its best years.

"I hate it in here. Somebody's near us, I just know it. Kayley, hurry up."

"I have to roll it first. There's nobody here but us. Chill out."