

## THE SEARCH: FINDING THE SURVIVORS

**January 8th 2013**

A wet Christmas was followed by a soaked New Year and on January 2nd I felt like one of the undead myself. But I now have work to do and the first items on the list are a couple of names that need checking out:

Is there an Arthur Harper?

Is there an Eric Mortimer?

Before I can check up on Arthur Harper I have to first realise that Presbyterians in England come under the United Reformed Church, so Harper senior may well have been a Presbyterian minister before 1972, but afterwards he'd be something else. The URC headquarters in London, Church House, confirms that there was an Arthur Harper (and why do I want to know that?) When I tell them I'm looking into the deaths of Toten Herzen they hang up after a hasty goodbye.

Which is fair enough because the Church, thanks to the Harper family, may have been inadvertently dragged into a controversy not of their making. Based on Calvinist ethics and a relatively down to earth approach to life, God, the universe and everything, having a member actively hunting vampires in broad daylight isn't something they want to talk about in their confessionals.

The FreeBMD website (the online births, marriages and deaths index) confirms an Arthur Harper dying in 1990 in Suffolk. So it's safe to assume for the moment that Lenny Harper Vampire Hunter, was the son of a Presbyterian minister. FreeBMD however does not have a date for Lenny's death in 2004, or any other year.

Maybe Eric Mortimer can shed some light on what really happened to Lenny Harper, whose presence seems to wander in and out of this story like a draught.

The Norwich phone book has two Eric Mortimers. One of them is a librarian (the other works in sustainable drainage systems) and is the man I'm looking for. He agrees to meet me, but only in secret, off the record and on my own.



*The city of Norwich, birthplace of Lenny Harper and in 2013, thirty five years after the event, still home to secrets surrounding Toten Herzen's disappearance. (photo Karen Roe)*

### **January 11th 2013**

Eric Mortimer's work rota in the library varies so he's able to meet me on a Friday in a very chintzy tea shop in Norwich. Perhaps in the right light this place would be a good setting for what he goes on to tell me, but for now I think he's chosen the place because of the soft furnishing's effect on the acoustics. Nothing echoes in here. It's unearthly quiet.

The following is a sort of transcript of the conversation.

Lenny was not a fan of the band. The press called him a crazed fan because at the time he was mixing with that group of people, but he was never a fan.

*How did he convince people to accept him?*

He learned everything there was to learn about them. He studied his enemy. He could talk about the music, each song, the band members. He said his favourite member was Dee Vincent because of her unpredictability and spark of life.

*Did he look like the band?*

No. A lot of the fans were into the music, but not the image. Some of them looked the part, but Lenny called them posers and I think there was a sort of elitism amongst the fans. Those who tried to look the part were seen as johnny-come-latelies just in it for the looks, and those with the look thought the musical purists were snobs who just didn't get it: that rock is about more than just the music, but also the lifestyle. Lenny enjoyed those discussions, but then had to sort of drag himself back to what he was supposed to be doing there.

*Stalking his victims?*

Well, yes. That makes him sound like a stalker though, some sort of weirdo who can't let go. I think he saw himself more like a tracker or a hunter.



*Eric Mortimer refused to be photographed, but did choose the most unassuming tea shop in Norwich to meet up with Rob Wallet. (photo Elliot Brown)*

*Excuse me for saying this about your friend, but he sounds as deranged as the band?*

The band attracted that sort of person, so I suppose he didn't really stand out in that respect. He was a devout Christian spurred on by his father who was outraged by Toten Herzen. Old Arthur wrote several letters to the Times, none of which were ever published. That bothered him a bit because he thought everyone saw Toten Herzen as a harmless joke, like some sort of freak show here today

gone tomorrow kind of thing. In 1976 I think it was, when the band announced a new tour and the thought of more horror being dished out, Lenny decided to act.

*How did you get involved?*

Well after a while Lenny had convinced himself they were vampires. He probably believed that right from the start because he and his dad believed in all sorts of things. I can't remember what day it was, but he asked me to drive him to Highgate. It was a long way from here to London and Lenny didn't want to carry his stakes and everything on British Rail. I think at one point he thought people were following him and watching him.

*The band knew what he was up to?*

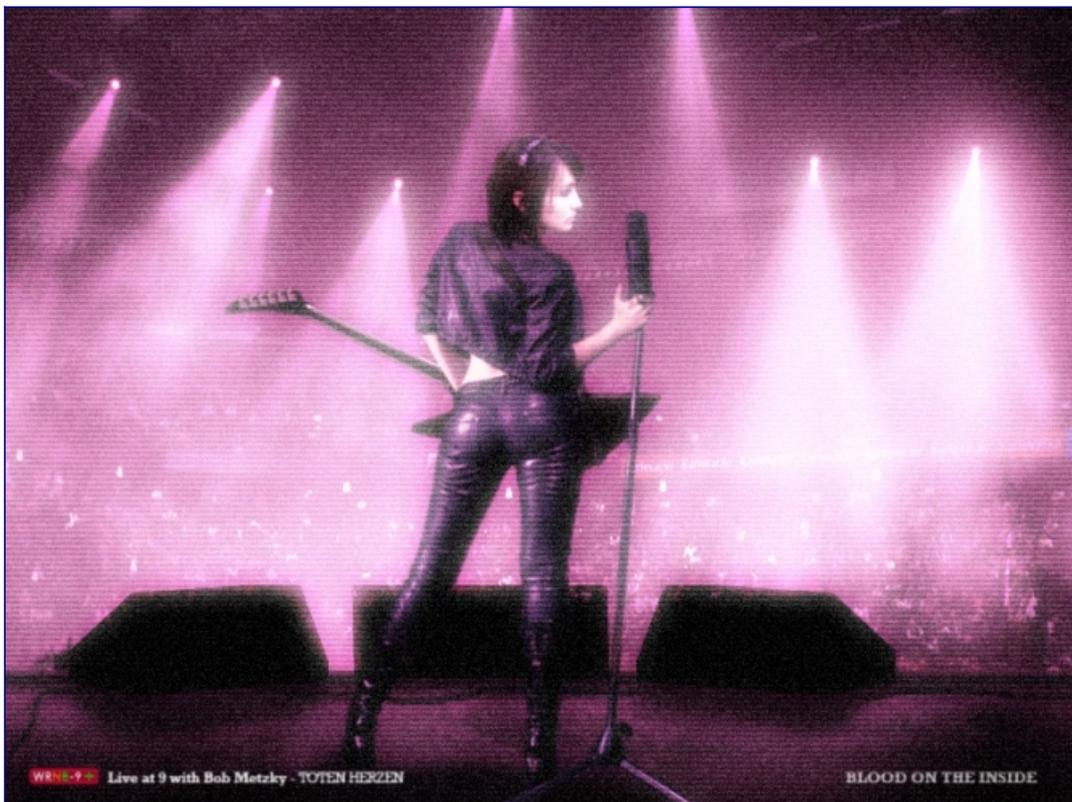
I think he thought so, yes. So being in public with all that paraphernalia was a bit risky.

*So he passed the risk on to you instead?*

I never really saw it like that. We were good mates at the time. He was a milkman, I was a farm labourer. We had our moments, you know, girls and boozing, not too much mind in case old Arthur found out. I thought it was a daft idea, but a bit of a day out in London so I said yes.

*How did he know he'd find them there?*

Well after getting into the fan circles, he got into what he called the 'inner circle;' fans who were also part of the gothic scene that the band were into. So he started seeing them in other places. He'd get the train to London at the weekends and come back in time for the milk rounds during the week. I'm not sure whether he ever spoke to any of them. He would have said so, but I can't remember him doing that. His mother was worried. Old Arthur let him get on with it, I think they kept a lot of it to themselves, but his mum didn't really know what was going on. It must have looked a bit suspicious at times.



*Lenny Harper's favourite member of the band Dee Vincent, on stage during a concert recorded by US tv channel WRNB-9 for the Bob Metzky 'Live at 9' concerts from New York, 1976. (photo Ballota)*

*Did Arthur Harper know about Lenny's final plan to kill them all?*

Yes, old Arthur thought they were vampires, so killing them wasn't murder. Old Arthur believed in all sorts of things: spiritualism, ghosts, vampires, werewolves, spooks. The whole nine yards.

*Zombies?*

I don't know about them. He saw a UFO one night.

*So what happened at Highgate?*

When we got to Highgate we climbed the perimeter fence and broke into the tomb. We were scared witless because it was going dark and we wanted to be there during the day. But there'd been an accident on the A131 just south of Braintree and the traffic was horrific. It was a lovely March day, so it stayed lighter than longer, but even so, once you're somewhere with no lighting and you can't see your hand in front of your face you don't know what's going to jump out at you. And you wouldn't see if it did.

Eventually I persuaded Lenny to use his torch. He brought one along to find our way out because he didn't know how long it took to kill vampires. He thought he might be in there all night. So he ended up using his torch not on the way out, but on the way in and I don't know if you've been in Highgate Cemetery in the pitch dark with a torch, but there's all sorts of things in there: angels, babies, men, women, crosses, tree branches and all this stuff is cracking and snapping, birds making a din.

He seemed to know what he was looking for. He had a hand drawn plan with a big V marking where the tomb was he was looking for. We found it after a while. I don't know how long we'd been in there by that time, but it seemed like hours. I held the torch while Lenny forced the door with a big spanner. Must have had a two and a quarter inch head on it. Enormous thing it was, but the door opened without too much pressure. That, for Lenny, was the tell tale sign that the door was opened regularly.

*Did it ever occur to either of you that you were breaking into a family mausoleum?*

I wasn't comfortable with it, to be honest. At first it seemed like an outlandish prank, but in the dark and Lenny's increasing anxiety I started to have second thoughts. The other thing of course was that if a real human being was in there we could have been attacked and it would have been our bodies being carried out of there by the police.

*What on earth did you think when you saw the bodies? Actually, let's just back track a minute. At that moment in time did you, Eric Mortimer, believe in vampires?*

I was prepared for anything jumping out at that moment in time. It was utterly utterly unearthly. Inside they were there. All of them. I thought is this Lenny winding me up. I actually wondered was it my birthday and this was some laddish birthday prank, but there were four coffins. Three on top of the big tomb and one on the floor. Lenny tripped over that one in the dark. His torch was flicking about and the light kept falling on these wooden boxes, the coffins, and I thought my god, he really has tracked them down. He's really going to do it.



*Lenny Harper's knowledge of anatomy and the precise location of the human heart was based on his religious upbringing. (The Sacred Heart of Jesus, Jose Maria Ibarra)*

Anyway, there was an argument about which side the heart was on. Lenny wasn't thick, but he wasn't a surgeon either. He'd always seen the heart in religious iconic images, paintings and things. The Sacred Heart in Christian iconography was always portrayed in the middle of Jesus's chest. Lenny knew it wasn't really in the middle, but wasn't sure which side it was on. I said to him, didn't you double check before doing all this, because it was a bit critical. But his mind was getting a bit foggy. You know you panic in situations like that and you can forget your own name. I thought it was my birthday five minutes earlier.

*When is it your birthday?*

September. So we both knew it was to one side, but wasn't sure which. Lenny only had four stakes with him so he had to get it right.

At this point Eric starts to look a bit distressed and lost, so we stop for five minutes while he goes to the toilet. I don't know how often he's spoken of this and it's the first time to my knowledge a second person has been associated with the stunt. That is, of course, if he's telling the truth. For all I know he could be a friend of Jonathan Knight here to add meat to Knight's crazy theory.

But for now, the only detail that confirms Eric Mortimer's involvement is the uncertainty over which side of the body the heart is on. Knight doesn't know about that, but obviously Eric's account tallies with what PC Barry Bush has told me. He comes back to the table. He looks like he's been sick.

*Do you know who was staked first?*

Lenny told me later it was the bass player. He hesitated for ages and I started to think if she really is a vampire she should have woken up by now.

*Do you know what time it was?*

Probably about half four, five o'clock. She was fast asleep.

*Hungover?*

Looking back she probably was well out of it, sleeping something off. But she was dead to the world. I thought he was going to stop and then bam, he did it. Boosh, one go. I was stood just behind him holding the torch and when he hammered it in there was blood everywhere, pouring out, like a fountain. There was so much we thought we'd guessed correctly. I don't know about going through the heart he must have gone through the bottom of the coffin as well, he hit that stake with so much force.

Then he turned to me and the torchlight hit him in the face, he scared me to death. He looked demonic; sweating, his eyes popping out of his head, struggling for breath. Then he calmed down after a while and said he had to finish the other three.



*Le Vampire, lithographie de R. de Moraine, tirée des Tribunaux secrets.*

*Another pair of vampire hunters from the illustration Le Vampire, by R de Moraine, 1864.*

*How long were you in there?*

Oh I don't know. Again it's hard to judge, but it could have been half an hour, it could have been ten minutes. The day after I saw my clothes in daylight and there was blood spattered all over them. I threw them all away. Can't imagine what Lenny's must have looked like. I think he had the day off sick. Afterwards he started to have doubts. Not about what he'd done, but whether he'd done it right. We had a first aid book at home and I checked which side the heart was on and I thought, oh my god, we got it wrong. He got it wrong. It was his decision ultimately.

*Is that why Lenny confessed to the killing?*

I think so. What happened after we left didn't help. On our way home I contacted the police anonymously from a phone box about a mile away from the cemetery, but they didn't take me seriously. There was a riot going on at a pub somewhere nearby and vampire killings at Highgate Cemetery must have been seen as a bit of a nuisance.

*Didn't a mob of vampire hunters attack the cemetery in 1970?*

Yes, that's right. Well it was different type of mob the night we were there and not the kind of spirits you find floating around Highgate Cemetery either. There were always reports of things going on and someone or other would get picked up with a stake or a load of garlic. I think after my phone call it was about four hours before the police turned up.

But everything went quiet. There was the news stories and the police had a press conference, but no one mentioned the tip off, my tip off, and then the police just went quiet. Nothing else was said. And then all these rumours started about the band still being alive and it was a publicity stunt, and Lenny got quite upset because it started to look like he'd done it all for nothing. I told him about the first aid book and where the heart was and he'd done some checking himself. He knew the game was up. Old Arthur had his doubts and Lenny got the train back down to London and gave himself up.

*What happened to him after that? There's no record of him being prosecuted or sanctioned.*

After his confession they said they'd be in touch then arrested him and charged him with wasting their time. I don't know if he got a fine or a caution. I don't think he went to gaol. But that convinced him there was a conspiracy, that the police and vampires were colluding. I started to think he was getting a bit obsessed and paranoid now so I started to keep a bit of distance between us. And after a few weeks I never saw him after that. And no one ever found out about my involvement.

*Until now! How did Jonathan Knight know about you?*

Maybe Lenny told him. Someone must have told him because he wrote a book about it, *The Dead Hearts Weep* I think it was called, and a lot of what happened in the book were quite accurate.

### **January 12th 2013**

I've had a chance to sleep on the testimony of Eric Mortimer. If we consider the two rumours: tragic publicity stunt or successful disappearing act, then it seems to be that Lenny was in on the act, but not Eric, which seems a bit risky and bizarre. The publicity stunt would explain the police's reaction to the whole thing and Lenny not being charged with multiple homicide. But I still don't get what Eric Mortimer was doing there. What the purpose was of having a witness who was not in on the joke or part of the act.



*John Polidori, author of the Vampyre published in 1819. Considered to be the first gothic vampire story it would inspire the likes of Jonathan Knight and the Toten Herzen myth. (portrait by FG Gainsford)*

I still can't help thinking he and Jonathan Knight are making this up between them to support Knight's theory, but an internet search doesn't put the two names together. There doesn't seem to be any relationship between them.

### **January 14th 2013**

I've decided to call Eric's bluff and go public with our meeting. I don't mean that in a dramatic way, but when I'm ready to write all this up I'm not going to hide his identity. In short I think he's lying.

But I do need to speak to Barry Bush once more. I've got his number and the Olympics have long since finished, so I'm not sure what he'll be watching on television this time.

### **January 15th 2013**

Rang Barry Bush. He's bored because there's nothing on the box. During our telephone conversation he confirmed that Lenny Harper wasn't taken seriously right from the off.

I asked him what happened to the bodies after he left the scene and forensics took over?

I've no idea. For all I know they might still be there waiting for someone to come and claim them. To this day I can't say if Lenny Harper had anything to do with it.

I asked him did he know the name Eric Mortimer, but he hadn't. When I told him what he told me and that he rang the police to tip them off he had something unusual to say?

Maybe he did it? Maybe he was the killer and Lenny was just a crank who confessed to get a bit of attention.

### **January 20th 2013**

I've finally managed to pin down Jonathan Knight. Contrary to my preconceptions, he doesn't wear a Dickensian suit or live in a black wallpapered house full of stuffed griffins. He has a Thameside apartment that shrieks of money. He has his own publishing business selling self-help books and paperbacks on how to make money writing novels. He also has a large portfolio of rental properties in the east end.

I'm going to come straight to the point.

*Does he think Lenny Harper really killed four vampires?*

Yes. Four bodies were found by the police. Four bodies were taken away for forensic examination. Four bodies evidently vanished. If Harper didn't do it, then someone else did.

*Eric Mortimer?*

Possible, but I doubt it. All the available evidence suggest Lenny Harper planned and carried out the attack. Eric Mortimer drove him to north London.

*If vampires aren't staked through the heart properly do they survive?*

Yes.

*Well, in that case, Jonathan, I've got some bad news for you!*



*That man again. Jonathan Knight: writer, scholar, gothic know-all and property developer.*

Jonathan Knight has gone as white as Susan Bekker was the day after Lenny Harper attacked her with a piece of sharpened three by two. He didn't know about PC Barry Bush's account of the tragedy and after a bit of pressure he admitted to not speaking to anyone from the Metropolitan Police. Everything he knew he had picked up from the gossip swimming around the goth scene in the days and weeks after the event. People remembered Lenny Harper and considered him a traitor; someone who had won their trust and then betrayed it. But Knight isn't going to give up without a fight and he wants to show me something.

He comes back with a computer printout. It's an image he says, taken from the banned artwork of the 1976 Dead Hearts Live album cover. Apparently it's quite famous on the internet.

The image is pixellated, but it quite clearly shows lots of photographs of the band offstage possibly taken during their tours of 75 and 76. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be looking at so Knight helps me. He points out a photograph of the band sitting on a settee. In the background there's a television turned off. The reflection in the screen appears to show the settee, but with no one sitting on it!

*It's a pixellated photo, I say.*

True, but you can see the settee so you should be able to see people sitting on it. It's such a small inconspicuous detail. If it isn't something that the band and their management have overlooked then they must have known it was there and left it like that so that people would discover it and realise the truth about the band.

*Or the internet image could have been faked?*

True, but I've never seen that image on the internet with the band sitting on the settee in the reflection. Surely someone by now would have uploaded the original to debunk this version. The only way to find out is to see the actual sleeve artwork, or the original photo?

*Do you have the original sleeve?*

No.

Brilliant!

Now that he knows about Lenny's stakes being stuck in the wrong side of four vampires, Knight agrees to ask some discreet questions around the 'vampire scene' and find out if there are any alternative rumours about the band and where they are now. In the meantime I have to find a photographic needle in a haystack or get my hands on one of the rarest album covers on earth.



*Sotheby's in New York. (photo Jim Henderson)*

### **January 24th 2013**

One avenue of exploration is quickly closed. Band photographer Lance Beaulieu didn't take any of the photos on the innersleeve of *Dead Hearts Live*. He'd fallen out with Micky Redwall and was told to put his photos in an art gallery and rot. They became friends again in late '76. (And it's just occurred to me that some younger people may not know what the hell an innersleeve is! Well, little boys and girls with your mp3s and nothing else, in the old days a vinyl record came inside a large cardboard envelope and inside that was another envelope. The one inside was called the innersleeve. It usually had the lyrics and other visual goodies that you, younger generation person, will never have the pleasure of when you buy your forty-nine pence download. You're missing out on images of headless bodies, dead fans, blood soaked mouths and other rock n roll niceties. You also won't have the pleasure of gatefold sleeves, pop-ups, coloured vinyl, shaped vinyl, white label presses and bags of fake vomit.)

Lance does have one bit of advice though. He thinks Sotheby's in New York were the auction house who sold the copy of the album artwork that went for \$75 000 in 2010. I only hope it wasn't an anonymous buyer.

### **January 25th 2013**

I've rung Sotheby's in New York and the conversation went something like this:

*I believe you sold an original album sleeve by the band Toten Herzen. Their 1976 live album Dead Hearts Live.*

I'll check that, sir... (puts me on hold for a few minutes) The item was sold in July 2010.

*Is it possible to give me the name of the person who bought it?*

I'm sorry sir, the item was bought by an anonymous bidder. I can't give you any details.

*Great. What was the final price it went for?*

It was \$75 000.

*Has anything by Toten Herzen come up for auction before?*

Not through us, no. I believe the Dead Hearts Live cover was the only item by that band.

*Was Sotheby's surprised when it sold for that price?*

I think most people were surprised, but it was a very rare item. It had a significant reserve price on it.

*What was the last big selling item, rock memorabilia item before the album sleeve, can you remember?*

A paperweight belonging to Eric Clapton sold for four thousand dollars in the month before. That may have been bought by the same person.

*Eric Clapton? The mind boggles. Bought by the same person, the same anonymous bidder?*

I believe so.

*Okay, thanks very much for your time. I don't suppose you can whisper the name of the person who bought the Toten Herzen artwork?*

I could, but you wouldn't hear me.

So, the same person who bought a hideously gruesome piece of rock memorabilia also bought the Toten Herzen album sleeve. Armed with two nuggets of information there's a chance of some research 'triangulation' that will help me pinpoint this anonymous buyer. Time to check the world's biggest gossip corner again: the internet.



*Washington D.C. Home of the US government and Alfonso D'Oliveira: very expensive attorney, former Toten Herzen roadie and owner of one of twelve record sleeves worth approximately \$75 000. (photo Roger Wollstadt)*

After searching for several hours and finding myself leapfrogging to and from various online forums that range from the nerdish to the downright sick I have a possible name. Alfonso D'Oliveira, a \$2000 an hour attorney at law in Washington DC. 'Dolly' is an ex-roadie who helped out on the Toten Herzen tours of the US in '75 and '76. It looks like he retired from the scene after his experience and went to law school to turn his life around.

So my next move is to call him or doorstep him. If I call him he'll probably deny everything and sue me for finding out who he is. One way or another I'll have to meet him face to face in order to win his trust. After all, I only want to see the photo of the band sitting on the settee. And I need to see it with my own eyes.

### **February 4th 2013**

The reception of Speekman Wise and Duff Attorneys at Law is a quiet place, so I approach the reception with caution. American lawyers are so litigious I am shit scared of being sued for the slightest thing. I ask if Mr D'Oliveira is in and I'm told he is. I give the receptionist my name and credentials and before you know it I'm speaking to Dolly.

Can you give me an example of some of your work, he asks?

I tell him about my article for the Observer: 'Nu is the New Old.' Not only is Dolly convinced (he's checked it out online), but agrees with most of what I wrote. That's an encouraging start. He suggests we meet in an hour's time and go grab a sandwich for lunch. One hour later I meet him at reception and we set off. His idea of a sandwich is a fish restaurant at \$80 a head! But our conversation is worth every cent.

I talk about the old bands and how cycles come and go in rock. He agrees and mentions the likes of Slipknot and Insane Clown Posse are recycled versions of Kiss and Toten Herzen for a generation brought up on first person shoot em ups. It feels strange talking to a wealthy American lawyer about Rammstein, Nightwish, Lacuna Coil and Within Temptation. But then he starts on about Lars Ulrich's art collection and Alice Cooper's golf handicap and things seem normal again!

'Funny you should mention Toten Herzen, he says. I was a roadie for them on their tours in 1975 and '76.



*He bought me lunch, but photographing his rare album sleeve was out of the question. Former Toten Herzen roadie and attorney at law, Alfonso D'Oliveira enjoys his food. (photo Phillip Capper)*

*What was that like? Armageddon presumably?*

They scared the hell out of me. I'd worked with a couple of other bands, local bands and some of them were pretty wild, but with Toten Herzen, you always felt like they meant it. Like it wasn't an act.

*Such as?*

The lifestyle. They never spoke about it. They never did interviews, but you'd come across the tour manager or the publicist and they were like drained out all the time, totally stressed. If anyone asked them a question about the band, where are they, how are they, the answer was always the same: I don't know. There was always something a bit sinister about them never being around. They'd show up and do a soundcheck and for half an hour or so the world would stop on its axis as these freaks would come to life and then, they were gone again. I used to think how can anyone who looks like that sound the way they did. They were ahead of their time. Mesmerising. Unreal.

*So you never met them face to face?*

Oh hell, yeah, one time I met the bass player face to face. I was coming down a corridor in the backstage area and she came out of a room and we almost crashed into each other. I said beg your pardon and she looked up at me and her eyes, they were the strangest colour. I don't mean her make up, mascara, anything like that. The pupils of her eyes were a sort of blackish red, and she just gazed right through me, never spoke, no expression, no acknowledgement that I was there, and I stepped aside, and she was off. Never came that close to one of them ever again.

*Did any of the road crew know them?*

No. We didn't mix. Nobody mixed with them. They were private. Some people came and went, but if you weren't part of that clique you never saw behind those dressing room doors. And they left you alone.

*So what about the fans who went backstage?*

Fans never went backstage while I was working with them. Security was front of house and no one got to go backstage. I think they wanted to maintain a distance to create an aura around them.

*They were never seen in daylight according to some tabloid newspapers. Did that seem strange to you? Did you see them in daylight?*

The only bands I saw in daylight were the ones who never made it. The successful ones would sleep 'til four, turn up for the soundcheck, play, up all night and then in their hotel room all the next day. It wasn't like today when pop stars actively go hunting for the press and photographers to get their publicity fix. They're terrified of being forgotten these days. The older acts had more self confidence.



*Dex Melley at the NME in 1976 described Daley and Bekker as the 'sonic core' of Toten Herzen.  
(photo Alexandre Prevot)*

*Were they vampires?*

No. Not unless living like a vampire makes you a vampire. Susan Bekker was sick on the first tour in '75, but I don't think anyone knew because she always looked like that. You know, white skin, black hair, black make up. When Kiss did their make up it was in patterns and shapes, Toten Herzen just looked 'natural' in an unnatural kind of way.

*As well as working for them were you a fan? Did you actually like them?*

The music was incredible. What you heard on record was good, but to see them live, to see them in the physical act of making that sound and the casual way they just played the role of monsters was awe inspiring. No one else at that time did it the way they did it. Alice was theatrical and Crazy Arthur Brown was too preoccupied with his burning hat falling off. I think maybe Toten Herzen were too convincing and that led to the tragedy. Some people couldn't make that separation between fantasy and the grand guignol of it all.

*Do you have an original sleeve of the 76 tour?*

Ha! There are only twelve copies left in the world. Twelve. And yes, I got one of them.

*Can I see it?*

No. Sorry. I'll never get another chance in my lifetime if anything happens to that sleeve. I'd love to show people, but until I really know who they are, I don't want to risk that. Sorry.

He says he's enjoyed talking rock and didn't think anyone would ever ask him about Toten Herzen. His days are made up of corporate neglect cases and there are times when he feels like one of the undead, but his career has given him a comfortable lifestyle. Boring but safe. He'd rather live a long safe rich life than a short dangerous one. He picks up the tab, which is decent of him and I go back to my hotel, count the cost of my trip and copper up for a drink at the bar.

That night I have a crazy idea. If I can trace this band, vampires or not, with Dolly's US wealth and possible connections maybe a lucrative reunion is possible. A chance for him to meet the bass player again and see if she still has bloodshot eyes and a vacuous gaze. But would they still have that magic he described?



*Susan Bekker, New York 1976, filmed by WRNB-9 for Bob Metzky's 'Live at 9' television show. (photo Ballota)*

### **February 5th 2013**

There's a message waiting for me at reception as I check out. Dolly has asked me to go over to his office.

When I get there he invites me in to the room where he works and on a low table there's a box about fourteen inches square and several inches thick. I already know what's inside. Dolly had second thoughts on the way home the previous evening and decided that a music journalist who writes about rock shouldn't go to the grave without seeing this album sleeve.

I reassure him that I won't switch boxes when he isn't looking.

That's okay. The real one has a tracker fitted to it. This is almost as expensive as a sports car, but more rare. Yeah, I suppose it is, I tell him.

And there they are. Toten Herzen. Photographed in 1975 and 1976, all over the innersleeve. Walking, standing, eating, drinking, playing their instruments, watching the technical crew... Nothing that would warrant the sleeve being banned.

Oh, that's the other side. Dolly flicks the sleeve over and there are photos of bodies, close ups, details, distant shots, the lot. So called fans with their throats slit, decapitated, drained of blood, chewed, bitten and gnawed, dumped and disposed at roadsides, waste bins, empty rooms, bathtubs, all in horrible muted desaturated colours. It's a feast of depravity, very realistic and convincing. I suppose back then, 1976, it may have been beyond the pale, but today it seems like just any other

gallery of gore. And I haven't travelled all this way to look at the controversial bit, It's the settee I'm interested in!

I suggest to Dolly it must have been the Obscene Publications Act that got the artwork banned. Maybe the staged murders were a way of embarrassing the police and the authorities for the censorship. Then I find the photo I'm looking for.

Dolly is one step ahead of me, which is what I would expect of someone who charges \$2000 for an hour of his time. The image on the internet is faked, he says.

There are the band, in their prime, bursting with potential energy, sitting on the floor of an abandoned building somewhere. Anywhere. Rene van Voors and Susan Bekker barefoot, Elaine Daley perched on top of a pile of car tyres, Dee Vincent looking like she's been dragged out of bed. Knight's photo has been cobbled together from this shot and an incriminating reflective television screen placed in the background.



*No tellies, no reflections, Toten Herzen the subject of fakery. Who would have believed it?*

Having gazed at the \$75 000 album sleeve I have to go. Dolly has meetings about meetings and he's anxious to get the sleeve home and back into it's safe where it lives during the day in a peculiar mirror of the band's own existence. Entombed during daylight hours! On the way out Dolly asks the real reason why I'm so interested in the photo.

I tell him that I'm trying to track the band down and find out what really happened to them and who they really are. But he's not comfortable with what I'm doing.

*To be honest with you, I'm convinced they're still alive. And part of me has this crazy notion that they might be ready to comeback. Maybe a one off appearance, a reunion concert, or finish and release their sixth album. If the Stones and Black Sabbath can do it, why not them? They're still not as old as the Stones!*

But you're overlooking something. The Stones are all men. What will Toten Herzen look like now. Three women in their late fifties early sixties. Maybe the drummer, Rene, can get away with it, but not the women. Old men can carry on rocking, old women? Equality in rock has a sell by date. Can you imagine what people would think and say if they tried to recreate the band that they were in the 70s? And without the image the music becomes gratuitous. I'd leave them alone.



*The truth about Susan Bekker's illness may never be known, but it was a constant cause of concern throughout Toten Herzen's later years. (photo Shaun Dunphy)*

It was an issue that had never occurred to me, probably because it has never happened and I've never had to write about it. Who was the last seventies all female rock band to get back together after forty years. Maybe it would be cruel to track them down. God knows what thoughts they must have had in the intervening years looking back on what might have been, the careers they could have had. All of them now crooning jazz songs or appearing in musicals; the old hellraisers reduced to bit parts in *Les Miserables* and *The Sound of Music*. Or ironic icons in some distant production of *Mamma Mia*, in a country where the Toten Herzen juggernaut never came crashing through.

Maybe they quit because they really were ill and by the time they were fit again they were too old to play the music they wanted and too clueless to jump on any passing bandwagon that had room for them. Alfonso D'Oliveira was spot on; women in rock are abandoned after a certain age. No one wants to hear them play anymore, but the grandfathers can carry on until their hearts can take it no more or the waiting hernia finally strikes them down.

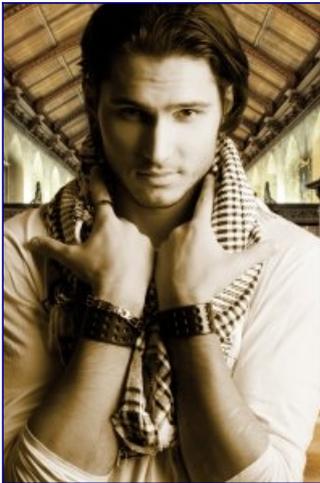
On the plane home the air stewardess sees me checking out a Toten Herzen cd. Who's that, she asks me. Toten Herzen. She's never heard of them. They were a rock band in the seventies, I tell her. People thought they were vampires. She smiles and says were they staked through the heart? No. They weren't that lucky.

### **March 12th 2013**

I've lost a lot of my appetite for finding Toten Herzen. Maybe it's the fear of tracking them down to several B&Bs in Southend or an old folks home in Great Yarmouth. (They're not actually that old yet!) But when I feel as if I can't be bothered anymore I end up catching a glimpse of some old bit of research or reference detail and the hunger returns:

Between 1977 and the present day the band went quiet.

The record label, Crass, folded in 1983 after bad choices and a string of belly up contracts during the punk era. No one from the label appears to still be alive. Mark Powder, the A&R man who signed the band, inexplicably threw himself off the top of Malham Cove in Yorkshire in the autumn of 1996 landing on a family from Leeds who were having a picnic below.



*Rene van Voors.*

Izzy Starling, the band's publicist, had to deal with a vacuum. She never heard from them or their manager after 1977 and became a translator for the British Council until retiring.

Manager, Micky Redwall, was a real wheeler dealer. He started in scrap metal, where he made a small fortune, before promoting bands and pub gigs around Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex. He was living in Essex in 1977. In April of that year, according to stories in the local press, he came home drunk one night and was killed by his own guard dogs. The coroner's report said that he was mauled to death by three or four very large dogs. But according to Redwall's gardener when interviewed by the police, the dogs were two border collies and a fierce jack russell, which were always chained up and only there to make a noise. And besides he had never heard of dogs, large or small, that were capable of tearing someone's heart out in order to eat it.

It does make you wonder!

### **March 15th 2013**

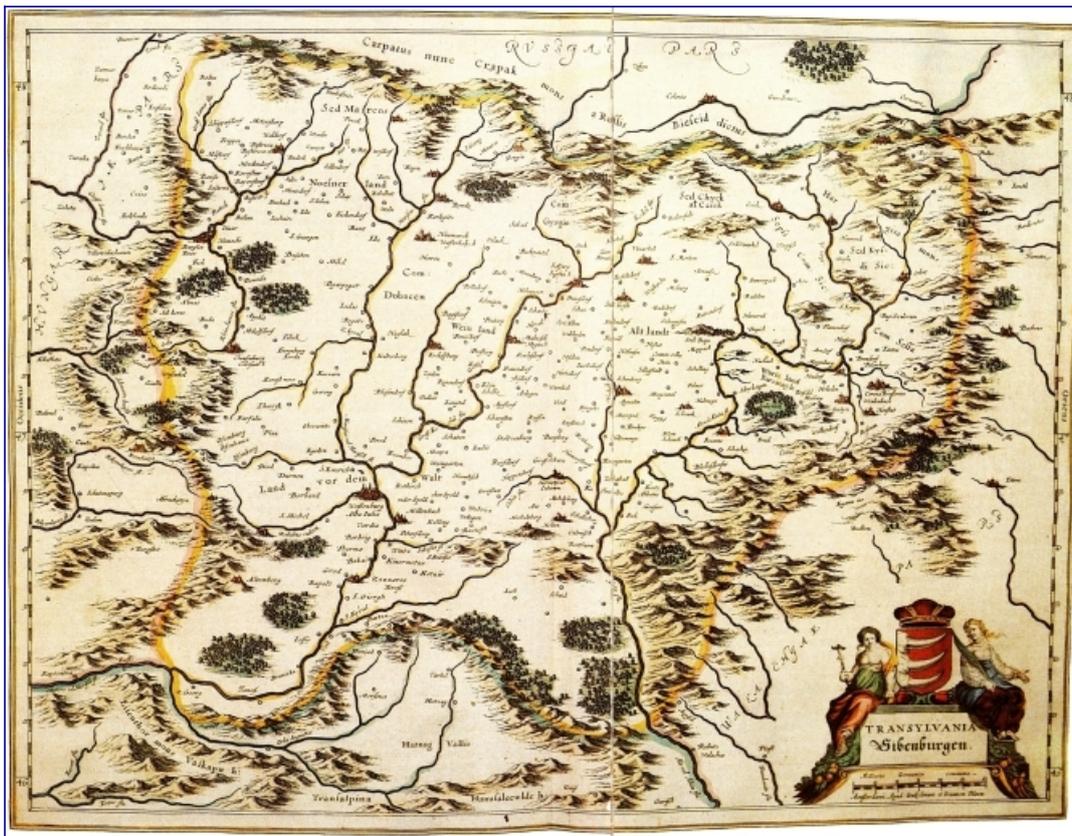
I get a text from Jonathan Knight. He doesn't want to speak on the phone, but meet in person. I'm starting to think this investigation might be dangerous.

Knight wants to meet at his home, but it's more expense for me and my enthusiasm is choking every time I get my debit card out. So Knight agrees to meet half way at a service station on the M1.

After several weeks of discreet prodding and probing he tells me the 'vampire scene' is confused on the issue: most people still think Toten Herzen are dead and that Lenny Harper is the killer. But one or two did hear unsubstantiated rumours (ie irresponsible gossip) that they are living in isolation somewhere. Names whispered included Goa, Calcun, the Maldives, Utter Pradesh and Berwick-upon-Tweed. But there was one name that was mentioned several times. A tiny village in southern Germany called Obergrau.

Knight isn't 100 per cent reliable and I really don't want to take any of this seriously any more. But Easyjet has cheap flights to Europe. Southern Germany; I could be there and back in two days. And

they are still younger than the Rolling Stones... Oh, what to do. What to do? I can hear a dog barking somewhere.



*Waller's journey would not be using this map of Transylvania. Source of the most famous vampire of them all, Dracula and his various manifestations has a lot to answer for.*

**March 16th 2013**

I'm on the phone all day. My question is: would a reunion tour be lucrative if they could be persuaded to do it?

The consensus amongst concert promoters is overwhelming: absolutely. If the marketing was right, the stylists spot on, the band played along with it, the media climbed on board, if you get the press outraged and maybe some other minor catastrophe, buy enough Twitter followers and Facebook friends, they could be this summer's hit or even the 2013 Christmas No. 1. It would have to be handled like a military campaign and if it fails it bombs big time and the myth is gone. But if it succeeds...

Other journalists think I'm mad, like a science writer who swears by Eric von Daneken, I'm being dazzled by the blinding effects of wearing rose tinted spectacles for too long. But if the promoters think they can do it then anything's possible. Kiss are wearing the make up again. There are still Toten Herzen fan sites. And don't forget, one journalist kindly reminds me, the original sleeve from Dead Hearts Live sold at auction two years ago for \$75 000. Imagine how much that person would pay for a ticket. I think I already know the answer to that, but I don't say.

The Christmas No. 1. I should be disembowelled for even thinking such a thing is plausible. (Then again, Rage Against the Machine didn't seem to mind too much.) What would they do to me if I suggested it to them?

If I can find it on a map Obergrau is my next destination.

### **March 19th 2013**

Excellent flight! Hire car to southern Germany and a welcome stop at a service station on the autobahn. The weather is very British; appalling rain and cloud like a single huge grey ex-army blanket. But it doesn't seem to stop Mercedes and Audi drivers who continue overtaking me at hundreds of miles per hour leaving an Atlantic scale sea mist in their wake.

Inside the service station shop I meet a middle aged man who looks like a metal fan. I do a straw poll of one. Yes, he likes metal: Scorpions, Doro Pesch, Accept, Kreator. All good wholesome German acts. Does he like non-German bands? Judas Priest, Motorhead then laughs as he says Girls Aloud! When I mention Toten Herzen he looks like he's just swallowed a bleached lemon. No, no, not Toten Herzen. I ask why and do you know he actually looks around before saying quietly too much make up.

The only other people in the shop are an elderly couple and a woman on her own with a young boy, probably her son. None of them look like they'd know anything about rock music circa 1977 so I grab some food and head for my motel in the mountains.

The weather is too bad to go straight to Obergrau which is high up in the Black Mountains. This rain is the sort that closes mountain roads and I feel like putting my feet up after being on the road for several hours.

In the bar of the motel that evening everyone I speak to says Obergrau is a dump. Small, untidy, the trash isn't collected very often, the roads don't get repaired and if you came down in a spaceship you'd think you'd landed in 1960s East Germany, not a united Germany in the 21st century. Tourists certainly don't go there. It's the kind of village that will never appear in the holiday brochures. Sounds like a good place to go if you want to disappear.

At one thirty in the morning there's a knock on my bedroom door. It's a woman who was in the bar and heard me asking about Obergrau. By the looks of things she's had far too much Liebfraumilch.

Don't go to Obergrau, it isn't safe, she says. There's all kinds of weird shit: vampires, werewolves, the lot. Are there zombies, I ask? Yes, zombies too! Great, that's all I need. German zombies.

### **March 20th 2013**

The weather has cleared a bit, but it's still overcast so there's a chance Obergrau will be covered in mist. I arrive there and it's not too bad. There's a strong wind keeping the cloud from settling and the village and surrounding wooded slopes playfully appear and disappear. The surrounding valleys occasionally show up in gaps in the cloud to reveal a world of normality. I can see traffic a long way down below, the drivers oblivious of me being up here on the side of this mountain.



*The view from the road up to Obergrau on a clear day. (photo Jannis Andrija Schnitzer)*

By German standards Obergrau is run down. Shabby I'd call it and colourless. There's no one around, but I can hear machinery somewhere, possibly farm machinery or a small workshop hidden in the cloud. There's a single through road with several houses on either side and a t-junction with a lane heading up the mountain. Next to it is a house with a small general store at ground level.

I park up and, phrasebook in hand, enter the store to interrogate the old man behind the counter.

*Guten Morgen.*

Guten Morgen.

*Ich bin aus England...*

Yes, I know.

*Sorry?*

The phrasebook. You wouldn't be using that if you were German, would you?

*Well no. Obviously. How do you know I'm English? He looks at me and there's a pause that's so disturbing I immediately sense there's something seriously wrong. And for the first time since I started this investigation I am genuinely scared.*

I knew you were coming. I wondered when you'd finally get here.

*How did you know?*

A friend of mine rang to tell me about someone investigating Toten Herzen. A music journalist.

*Jonathan Knight? He shakes his head.*

Eric. Eric Mortimer.

I panic and leave (without saying goodbye). I half expected the old man to follow me, but he didn't seem fit enough to stand up let alone chase me out of the shop. As soon as he said he knew I was coming I wanted to get out of there.

The drive back to the motel is a blur. I don't know how I make it without hitting something. I can't think straight. All that goes through my mind are the words: that was Lenny Harper.

The woman meets me in the bar again, but this time I'm the babbling wreck making no sense. In one long rambling sentence I tell her I went to Obergrau I think a British rock band called Toten Herzen live there and that a reunion concert or tour could make millions if I could persuade them to pick up their instruments again They're not dead which is what a lot of people think But maybe they are dead Maybe it was a publicity stunt that went wrong and I just met their killer...

The shock of meeting Lenny Harper is sinking in. Or rather it had sunk in so deep that only now as it rises back to the surface like a corpse dumped in water am I being confronted with the reality of Toten Herzen's history thirty six years after the event. This doesn't feel like a game anymore. Maybe I should forget everything. Maybe I'll just write a book instead, a fictionalised account. Everything I know up to now and let others draw their own conclusions.

Sleep is on and off and I dream of Lenny Harper still alive, filling my shopping bag with bottles of vinegar and a slice of boiled ham. How did he find Obergrau? What drew him here? Are the band also up there? Can they both be up there? Murderer and murdered? That's not possible. Or has the rumour got confused in the intervening years like a Chinese whisper. Lenny Harper escapes to the village to avoid prosecutions for murder? Band escape to the village to complete their disappearing act. It's possible that one anecdote led to the other. By morning I've convinced myself it's not the band up there, it's Lenny Harper and he probably doesn't want the world to know about it.



*A contemporary photo of Elaine Daley in Rotterdam. The four members of Toten Herzen sat either side of what Micky Redwall called an 'Anglo-Dutch faultline.' Fights and arguments would often*

*break out along the divide, but the band did eventually relocate to Bekker and van Voors' home city.  
(photo Luke Price)*

### **March 21st 2013**

After breakfast I feel a bit better. I think I've rationalised the situation; with a bit of caution I could go back up to Obergrau and meet Lenny again. He doesn't look fit enough to kill me for finding him. He and Eric Mortimer might have had the strength back in 1977, but not now. Maybe he's reconciled to the fact that he's too old to keep on running and that sooner or later someone was bound to find him. To be honest I'm surprised no one had found him before now.

When I see him again he looks concerned. I apologise for running out on him the day before, but after everything I had read about the band and Lenny's role in their disappearance it came as a shock to see a real member of the whole sorry saga. Up to now, I tell him, the nearest I had come to the band was seeing an original sleeve of the Dead Hearts Live album.

He patiently let's me talk and then I string a few questions together that are still bugging me. Why wasn't he prosecuted? Did the record label or management cover it up? (Sales went through the roof in the two years after their deaths.) How did he get here? Is there, or was there ever, a warrant out for his arrest?

Finally Lenny offers to go for a drive and he'll explain everything in the car.

#### **Lenny's explanation:**

When Toten Herzen hit the headlines in 1974 with all the vampire nonsense his father told him not to scoff. Vampires are real and seductive, very manipulative and above all dangerous. No one was taking the band seriously and that was a mistake.

In order to get close to the band Lenny did his homework: Susan Bekker claimed her illness was from being bitten by a dog in Germany in early 1974, January or February. At first she was treated for rabies, but her symptoms persisted. She developed an acute sensitivity to sunlight, lost her appetite without losing weight and at the same time became very creative and imaginative. She was the first vampire in the band and once she had adapted to her lifestyle infected the other three.

Peter Miles who played on the first album, but was never credited, wanted nothing to do with the band from 74 onwards and knew about Bekker's condition and how dangerous she was becoming, so they killed him. The headstone in the photograph on their second album is real. Miles wasn't buried there; only the band knew what had happened to his body.

Lenny followed the band for weeks without them knowing. He visited the clubs they regularly went to and got into a number of parties they'd been invited to. He soon recognised a pattern emerging. Nowhere to be seen all day, all their activity at night. He would recognise faces close to the band, but then after maybe a week or ten days you'd never see them again. Occasionally someone distraught would show up, throwing accusations around about disappearances and assaults, but they'd be shown the door and nobody knew what happened to them after that.



*Dee Vincent in a rare quiet moment.*

There was an inner circle with the band at the epicentre, and people outside that circle were terrified of working for them. Road crews kept their distance, record label people left Micky Redwall to get on with it. Photographers went in and out, staying around just long enough to get the necessary photos and then go. Izzy Starling, the publicist, would be drip fed enough information to deal with questions and the media.

Dee Vincent did one interview with Melody Maker, which was cut short because she was on the verge of attacking the journalist who had met her. Bekker and Redwall managed to get her away before she did anything that would have repercussions for the band. There were a number of so-called 'near misses' when the band would be so pumped up with bloodlust that no one was safe to be around them unless they were infected too.

Lenny eventually identified where the band were staying for a two week period in March 1977. He had been following them for five months and was ready to get the job done.

He and Eric Mortimer found them in Highgate Cemetery. They chose Highgate because the police were sensitive to thrill seekers and nutters who gravitated there and had regular patrols that kept the more serious and morbid night time visitors away.

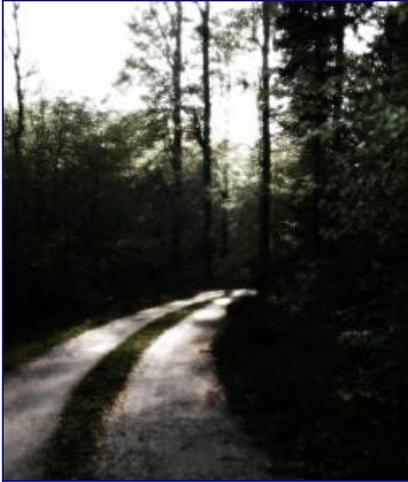
He thought he had killed them, but when he realised he hadn't staked them correctly he thought about going back, but knew they wouldn't be there any more. They must have got away from the morgue, prompting the Metropolitan Police to write it all off as a stunt. The only person they could pin anything on was Lenny and he knew no one would believe his story so accepted a caution for wasting police time.

In April 1977 they blamed Micky Redwall for not protecting them and murdered him at his home. They caught up with Lenny a few days later and took him to Holland in a container. From Rotterdam, where they had friends who could help, they took him first to Austria, close to the Hungarian border and then after German reunification he was brought here to Obergrau.

They kept him alive as a punishment. He's their early warning system. But he's not getting any younger and in spite of how they feed off him, he's not like them and will one day die. Once he's

gone there'll be no one left who knows the truth. Eric Mortimer was never told the truth in order to protect him and Jonathan Knight is considered to be nothing more than a hack who tells a good tale.

Problem is, now that I've met Lenny there's one more person who knows.



*The driveway leading to Chez Toten Herzen.*

We arrive at the entrance to a driveway that leads to a large house. This is where they live if I still want to meet them, Lenny tells me. There's plenty of time to decide whether I believe what he's telling me. He doesn't wear a scarf, makes no attempt to hide his neck. In fact he scoffs at the idea: the visual cliches of vampire behaviour. Then he tells me it's an hour's walk back to the village and there's still a few hours of sunlight left.

He leaves me there. I soon start to feel cold as the temperature on the mountain starts to drop. I pace around and surprise myself at how long it takes before I remind myself that there are no such things as vampires. But there's obviously something here; this could be lucrative whatever happens.

I've got a scoop on Lenny Harper, 'the man who killed the vampire band,' supposedly dead of liver failure in 2004. I have Jonathan Knight with his publishing contacts and networks. I have Alfonso D'Oliveira with all his American money and legal expertise. I have promoters who have already expressed an interest if I could drag this lot out of enforced retirement. I could be their agent or manager or publicist... Just one reunion concert with merchandising and rights could net millions. And if they stick with their 'we are real vampires act' who knows what else.

All they can do, if they're physically able to do anything, is say no.

I head for the house. The driveway is longer than I expected. The house is a concrete and timber building, modernist 70s style with no ornamentation and a lot of straight lines and large windows. It is slowly being surrounded by mature birch trees. There are no cars parked anywhere, no signs of activity.



The unassuming home of four retired vampires.

I ring the doorbell and a housekeeper is surprised to see me. She was almost ready to leave (she finishes at four). Do I have an appointment?

I lie. Yes.

She lets me in and takes me to a living room. Inside, the house is not as austere as the outside. The decor and furnishing is dark, a lot of wood, a lot of carvings, a lot of embellishments and bookcases. Wrought iron and brass. There is a deathly hush. At four o'clock the housekeeper sticks to her word and leaves me alone in the house.

I decide not to move from the room where I've been taken. At five o'clock the light outside is fading. The birch wood settling into the semi-darkness and the cloud moving more slowly now.

At six o'clock the sun has gone down and it's pitch dark and freezing cold. There is no light outside the window and no light inside the house. It is so dark I wouldn't be able to move even if I wanted to.

At seven o'clock I hear footsteps and a small glowing light somewhere behind me appears reflected in the window pane. I turn to see a woman enter the room holding a candle.

It is Susan Bekker. I know it's her because she hasn't aged a day!

At five minutes past seven all four members of Toten Herzen are standing in front of me.

Bekker asks me who I am and what I'm doing here?

I'm investigating the legend. I was trying to separate the facts from the myth.

And what have I discovered?

## **EPILOGUE**

Today I found out that Lenny Harper died two days after I left Obergrau. I'll be going back in a few days time.

Toten Herzen have agreed to a one off concert, a dvd release and reissue of their five albums and the unreleased material from the sixth.

And you're probably wondering why, if they are what they are, did they agree to all this and let me go?

Well, because no one will believe a word of it or how they do it and now, with my help, they can continue to spread the infection all over again. Now that they've 'let Lenny go' I am the only person

who knows the truth and, I have to admit, this really is the only way to live. You should try it someday.

It's very liberating.