

THE  
EREBUS  
EQUILIBRIUM

NEIL C. CLADINGBOEL

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# THE EREBUS EQUILIBRIUM

NEIL C. CLADINGBOEL

BOOK 1: REFLECTIONS

BOOK 2: THE ANVIL AMULET

BOOK 3: WRAITH TIDE

*"DESTINY LIES BEHIND DOORS THAT STARE..."*

*Titles by Neil C. Cladingboel*

**The Erebus Equilibrium**

*Reflections*  
*The Anvil Amulet*  
*Wraith Tide*  
*Beloved Sons\**

*Bortag's Curse*

**Short Fiction**

*Tale Spin*  
*Weatherwood*  
*Anomaly*  
*Ghost of Elysium*

**Poetry**

*Visions of Transition*

*\*Forthcoming*

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Suffering a devastating childhood loss, Jonathan Edward Malone becomes withdrawn and despaired, blaming himself for the tragedies that have befallen his family.

Twenty years later, the discovery of a hidden message on the back of an antique looking-glass plummets Jonathan into a subconscious adventure of mystery, betrayal, revelation and intrigue as he desperately searches for a solution to the riddle of the glass.

But, as Jonathan soon discovers, the secrets of *The Erebus Equilibrium* are only the beginning of an extraordinary and spectacular journey!

This one volume paperback edition includes the complete and revised texts of *Reflections*, *The Anvil Amulet* and *Wraith Tide*.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in the United Kingdom in 1959, Neil Charles Cladingboel moved to Australia with his family in 1961, spending his early years in Woomera, the heart of the Australian Outback, before settling in Melbourne where he completed his schooling.

After an extensive background in Catering and Hospitality, which took him around the country, Neil embarked on a new career in Real Estate and Land Marketing. Having dabbled with creative writing for many years, Neil has previously published *Reflections*, *The Anvil Amulet* and *Wraith Tide*, books one, two and three of *The Erebus Equilibrium* fantasy trilogy, *Tale Spin and Visions of Transition*, a collection of short fiction, and the short stories, *Weatherwood*, *Anomaly* and *Ghost of Elysium*.

Neil currently resides in Mandurah, Western Australia with his wife, Thea. His latest work is *Bortag's Curse*, a sequel to *The Erebus Equilibrium* series.

For news and updates please visit [www.erebus.com.au](http://www.erebus.com.au)

## FROM THE AUTHOR

Twenty-seven years ago I set about writing what I hoped would be a unique Science Fiction/Fantasy series. The project was shelved many times, for a variety of reasons, until in 1999 I dusted off the cobwebs and set about completing book one. The result was *Reflections*, finally published in November 2000.

Since then, I have completed and published all three books of *The Erebus Equilibrium* and present them here again, reprinted in one complete volume.

As always, I dedicate this work to the many relatives and friends who have helped nurture this amazing creation, and of course, to my loving wife, Thea.

Neil Cladingboel  
Mandurah, September 2005.



BOOK ONE:  
REFLECTIONS



## PROLOGUE

The Watcher had learned to be patient. Centuries of exile roaming from one stolen life to another, waiting for opportunities so often missed that still, after all these eons, he had not fulfilled his all-consuming desire.

He had been cast out for so long now, he often wondered if his gods would ever return him to Erebus and the throne that he hungered to regain. Banishment and perdition had only served to feed his wrath; determined always to defeat his usurpers and regain control of all that was once his.

Undeniably, he had fallen to the dark side, but he believed his reasons had been pure of heart, and his expulsion was a constant reminder of the losses he had suffered. Perhaps then it was only fate, divine or otherwise, that had allowed him to escape his incarceration in Tartarus? It had been the beginning of a quest through countless lifetimes in search of vengeance and retribution.

He could remember the sequence of events as if it were only yesterday, when in fact, numerous centuries had passed. There had been rumours of fire demons falling from the sky for some time. Stories told of huge, anvil-like rocks with flaming tails streaking across the upper worlds causing phenomenal changes to climate and weather. Deluges of rain usually preceded the coming of these anvils. Ferocious storms, floods, and then massive earthquakes when the flaming monoliths finally crashed to the earth itself.

History told of the strange events that followed the coming of the anvils. Although the Watcher could only guess that divine powers were at work, he was patient to wait out the firestorms, safe in the prescient knowledge that no harm would come to himself or his fellow Titans, so cruelly banished to the Underworld. He believed it then to be a time of change, it certainly had been from that time on, though by now of course he knew the anvils by their modern names: Comets and Meteors. Nothing more than discarded rocks from the gardens of the gods, yet able to wreak havoc on humanity with devastating aftermath of global disaster.

And so he watched then, as he does now, the stolen glass he had secreted from Erebus before his confinement, waiting for a sign from these gods. And when at last the heavens became silent, the gods had come to him in the form of white light and searing flame leaping forth from the surface of his mirrored glass. The flames had engulfed him totally yet he remained unharmed, curious that he had not been instantly incinerated.

Instead, he found himself staring at the disappearing vision of blinding light and fire, not from the bowels of Tartarus, but back on Earth, in an overcrowded market place flooded with crowds of panicked villagers, fleeing the torrents of water from the torrential rain that had preceded the latest falling of the anvils.

Freedom from perdition yet still exiled from his kingdom. Doomed to suffer an eternity of immortality among the living until the gods showed him a way to regain his rightful place in Erebus, as guardian of the dead.

Century after century he had watched and waited for the signs. Long ago he had mastered the secret of the light in his glass. From then on, the glass always foretold the

coming of the anvils, feeding him with its unearthly power of fire and light. Showing him the faces of the Chosen Ones, the mortal keys that could one day unlock his passage back to Erebus.

Countless times he had tried and countless times he had failed. Other forces were afoot and so newer tactics were always required. Lately, he was fearful his immortality was waning. The gods had not yet decided to renew his weary human host and perhaps the next chance would be his last. Soon though, he knew the One would come. The undisputed key to his immortal destiny.

And so he watched, as he always had for centuries. Watched and waited for the signs; for the catastrophic floods and earthquakes that nearly always preceded or accompanied the falling of the anvils. For the storms and deluges that promised the coming of a chosen one, he watched. After all, the Watcher had learned patience and believed he had all the time in the world.

## FATE AND DESTINY

### 1. HALL OF MIRRORS

The rain had been falling hard for most of the day. The roads in Waimerie were glazed with a thin, constant coat of running water. The wind was gusting violently, blowing the now finer rain onto the already soaked, canvas marquees erected on the show grounds. Loose galvanised sheeting of the ground's only billboard flapped monotonously in the persistent gusts. The metal was decorated with numerous remnants of faded posters, the most recent, advertising the forthcoming event:

*'Don't Miss The Greatest Show On Earth!  
Limited Season for One Month Only  
Commencing here, January 5th 1975'*

Only the top halves of the posters were still readable. The rest had already weathered badly in the spate of recent storms. The carnival was due to start tomorrow.

Nearby, a solitary figure was silhouetted in the window of a large farmhouse, quietly watching the passing storm. The occasional flashes of distant lightning, followed by equally distant rumbles of thunder, were diminishing slowly as the last rays of crepuscular light receded into darkness.

Jonathan Edward Malone was unhappy! A ten-year-old on vacation in the highlands would normally be beside himself with curious adventure, exploring and enjoying the mysterious wonders that were typical of the Waimerie environs. Local legends told of mythical, magic beings that supposedly dwelt in a hidden cave deep within the forests. Although there had been no fresh reports of these so-called *fairies* in over sixty years, the belief lived on in the minds of curious children, desperate to prove the stories true. The searching was a favourite pastime of all the local and visiting children of Waimerie, but only in their fertile, over imaginative minds had they succeeded in their quests.

But not Jonny Malone. It had been raining from the moment he and his younger sister, Sarah, had stepped from the train at Waimerie station, greeted enthusiastically by their doting aunt and uncle, Dorothy and William Malone.

The children hadn't been outside for three days and were both understandably, frustrated and bored. Neither had they been able to partake of the classic, local pastime of searching for fairies in the so-called *Enchanted Forests*, so named to ensure commercial popularity and sales of suitable souvenirs. Not that Jonny really minded, he had long ago given up any belief in fairies and magic, along with Santa Claus and the Abominable Snowman!

Instead, Jonny was determined to spend as much of his holiday as possible at the soon to open Carnival—rain or no rain. A maturing Jonny had reasoned to himself that any activity, even chasing fairies, would have to be better than staying inside the old, gloomy farmhouse for another day.

But in spite of his increasing maturity, he found that tears of frustration came as easily to his eyes as did the rain to Waimerie. Looking up at the fast moving clouds in the darkening sky, he casually wiped the tears from his reddening eyes, wishing the clouds would disappear into the approaching night.

Behind him, a door opened as his Aunt Dorothy entered the gloomy bedroom. When Jonathan turned from the window to face her she could see at once that he was upset, his red, puffy eyes confirming her suspicions.

“Jonathan, why are you sitting up here in the dark all alone? Wouldn’t you rather be downstairs sitting by the fire with your sister?”

“No, it’s okay really, I was just watching the storm,” came the reply.

“Well, you don’t look all right, Jonathan. You must be frozen? Are you coming down with something perhaps?” Dorothy frowned then, enhancing her middle-aged facial wrinkles, hoping that her concerned look would persuade Jonathan to open up to her. She didn’t just want to come right out and ask if he’d been crying. He was always trying to pretend he was mature beyond his years and she could see no point in causing him further embarrassment.

“Perhaps you’d prefer to talk to your Uncle then if—”

“No, really, I’m not sick or anything,” he interrupted. “I just really want to go to the carnival tomorrow. I hate having to be shut up in this old place all the time, and you won’t let us do anything, Aunt Dorothy!” He almost shouted this and turned back to face the window.

“Well, Jonathan, I thought you enjoyed your visits with us and besides, the weather has been truly awful. I’m sure your Mother wouldn’t want you playing outside to catch your death, now would she? And as for going to the Carnival, you know full well that you have to ask your Uncle about that.” Dorothy Malone already knew that her husband would not allow the children to go.

“Anyway, looking at those clouds, I’m sure it will still be raining for a few days yet and they’ll probably have to postpone the Carnival altogether. Now let’s have no more of this nonsense, come downstairs and wait with Sarah while I finish the dinner.” Dorothy waited at the door until Jonathan reluctantly pulled himself away from the window then followed him down the stairs into the kitchen.

\* \* \*

The next day, it was still raining and Jonathan was just as miserable. The night before, William Malone had told the children that Carnivals and the like were a waste of money and had refused his permission for either of them to attend.

The rain continued for most of the morning. Yet in spite of the inclement conditions, the carnival opened as scheduled; organisers hopeful that the reports of clearing weather would turn out to be correct, ignoring the warnings that more storms were likely to return later in the afternoon or evening. So, with light drizzle still soaking the already muddy showgrounds, the carnival began with all of its usual fanfare.

\* \* \*

When at last there was a break in the deluge, the children finally managed to leave the dreary farmhouse. Jonathan had given in to his sister’s pleas to explore the forest, so together they set off down the cobbled path that led across a rain-swollen stream and into the forest. When they reached the bridge, Jonathan stopped to skip stones across the fast flowing water. With little success, he soon tired of this and continued along the path whilst Sarah remained on the bridge, staring down into the water.

“Jonny, come quick! I’ve found one—I’ve found one!”

“Found what?” Jonathan yelled back at her.

“A fairy, Jonny; I’ve found a fairy. Look, here in the water!”

“What?” he shouted, running back to the bridge where Sarah was jumping up and down with childish excitement.

“Look, here!” She pointed towards the water. “I’ve found a fairy, here in the stream. I’ve really found one!”

Jonathan joined her on the bridge just as light rain began to fall once again. He looked down to the water where Sarah was pointing, the surface of which was becoming even more disturbed with the increasing rainfall.

“Can’t you see it, Jonny?” she pleaded as Jonathan looked closer into the water. Ready to dismiss this as a childish prank, he suddenly noticed something out of the corner of his eye, or at least thought for a moment that he had. But as he stared down at the surface of the gushing stream, the rain came down even heavier and the image in the water disappeared into bubbles.

He started laughing then and moved closer to Sarah who was already starting to feel disappointed that he had not confirmed her sighting.

“Oh Sarah, you silly girl, it was only your own reflection in the ripply water that you saw.” He looked again into the stream and just for a split second, thought that he saw three reflections in the distorted surface of the water. Rubbing his eyes, he turned away from the stream and said nothing of his suspicion to Sarah. They both left the bridge and started running back towards the farmhouse, already quite soaked from the continuing rain that had spoiled yet another day.

\* \* \*

That night, stars were visible in parts of the blackened sky, and Jonathan had a plan. He had been awake on his bed for hours; a succession of peculiar visions of the image he had thought he had seen in the turbulent waters of the stream earlier in the day, flooding through his mind. Finally, he decided that he really couldn’t have seen anything except his and Sarah’s reflections and dismissed the incident, for the time being at least.

Instead, he returned to mulling over an idea that he had hatched the previous day that would enable him to get into the carnival, in spite of his Uncle’s wishes. Not being overconfident that his plan would succeed, he decided to wait longer than was really necessary, to guarantee that his guardians were well asleep.

When he had decided that the time was right, he lifted himself carefully out of the pre-war bed (that always creaked like a cellar door from a Hammer horror movie at the slightest movement) as quietly as he possibly could.

He thought back to the time when he was seven years old; the cold night when he tried to run away from home after being punished quite severely for hiding a live frog in his teacher’s lunch box. In his mind’s eye he could see the events as clear as day: his mother standing above him with a cane stick, striking him each time she believed he lied about the frog incident. And no, he didn’t know that Mrs. Sunderland had a heart complaint; and yes, of course he was sorry that she was in hospital.

Remembering also, how Billy Robinson had said he would get him. Billy, walking out of the Headmasters office with that evil smirk on his face and Jonathan knowing that he had been blamed for the incident; knowing too, that he would have to carry the blame in spite of his innocence. After all, Billy was Billy and there were still too many years of school to come. What else could he have done?

He subconsciously rubbed the scars on his buttocks as he tried to put all the unsavoury memories to the back of his mind. This time it would be his idea and he was prepared to suffer the consequences. Jonathan reasoned that if his parents thought he was bad, then why not balance the books?

In the daggers of occasional moonlight that penetrated the clouds, Jonathan quickly dressed, steeling himself for what he had decided to do.

He was still zipping his parka when he left his room and crept into the next to awaken his sister. Sarah, being two years younger than her brother, didn't appreciate being woken up in the middle of the night.

"Leave me alone, Jonny," she protested. "What do you think you're doing so late at night?"

"I'm gonna go to the carnival," he replied.

"But there's no one there in the middle of the night. It won't be open, will it?"

"No, of course there's no one there. I'm going to sneak in now and hide until opening time, then I can get lost in the crowd and no one will know how I got in."

"What about Uncle Bill? He'll strap you when he finds out!"

"I don't care about Uncle Bill. He's been really mean this holiday and anyway, Dad won't let him do anything to us. Do you want to come with me? It will be fun, Sarah."

"No, Jonny; don't be stupid. Anyway, I'm too scared!"

"Keep your voice down or you'll wake up Aunt Dorothy," he warned. "There's nothing to be scared of and no one's going to catch us. Even if they do, I'll tell them that it was all my idea. You won't get into trouble, I promise."

"I don't care about getting into trouble, Jonny, but we haven't got any money and it's so dark—"

"Look, it will be all right, I took some of Uncle Bill's card money from on top of the fridge." Sarah was horrified, feeling sure that Jonathan must have lost his mind to steal money from their Uncle. William Malone liked to gamble every Saturday night. He said it was a good investment.

"But Jonny, that's stealing!" Sarah cautioned.

"No it's not; not really...it's all in the family isn't it? Now, are you coming with me or should I leave you behind to miss all the fun?"

"I don't know," she replied nervously. "If you're sure it will be all right, I'll come. But where are we going to sleep?"

"It doesn't matter. Let's just wait till we get there. Everything will be okay, I promise. Now hurry up and get dressed."

When Sarah was finally dressed, they both tiptoed down the stairs and out of the house, making as little noise as possible. As they left the rear door and stepped down onto the porch into the cold night air, the Malone's Siamese cat darted in through the cat door, right between Sarah's legs, causing her to gasp with fright. Luckily, she managed to swallow the scream that was building in her lungs and eventually caught up with Jonathan who was shaking his head and grinning. Together, they headed for the showgrounds.

As they ran across the rain-drenched grass, Sarah's flowing blonde hair glistened in the partial moonlight. She had beautiful blue eyes, as bright as any Hollywood actress would wish for, set in a very attractive Lux-soft face. Running through the fields she could very well have been mistaken for a mythical nymph, such was her beauty.

It hadn't rained for nearly two hours, but above them, storm clouds were once again gathering on the horizon. In their eagerness, neither of the children had noticed.

They eventually arrived at the main gate, finding that it was predictably chained and padlocked. Jonathan frowned as he stared at the gate. His green eyes suddenly sparkled as if he had just remembered something of interest. He looked down at his sister who was attempting to pick the lock with her hairpin.

"Never mind about that, I think I know how to get in around the side, but we'll have to climb the fence," he said.

“I saw it done on TV once,” Sarah mumbled, to herself mainly, and then faithfully followed her brother until they stopped at a section of fencing that was considerably lower than the rest. Awkwardly, they both managed to conquer the barrier, and Jonathan headed straight for the nearest canvas construction,

“C’mon Sarah,” he called. “This one looks safe enough. Hurry up.”

“What’s in there, Jonny?” she whispered, but as loudly as she could, to be sure Jonathan could hear her.

“I don’t know yet. I can’t really see and I don’t want to use the torch outside in case someone sees us. But I don’t think there are any wild animals inside. There’s no smell at least!” he teased, briefly looking up towards the sky. He at last noticed the gathering clouds, which had now obscured the security of moonlight.

“Hurry up, Sarah,” he called again. “It might rain again soon.”

This time, Sarah joined her anxious brother and together they entered the Hall of Mirrors.

\* \* \*

Once inside, Jonathan pulled the small torch out of his parka pocket and searched with a thin beam of light for a suitable position to hide until morning.

The Hall of Mirrors was a large construction, nearly the size of the Big Top itself, and always a popular attraction. It had only one main entrance, opening into a wide corridor decorated with an assortment of photos, mirrors and other memorabilia, that divided the structure into two large rooms.

One, that housed the crazy-mirror display, contained a stunning array of convex and concave mirrors used to produce bizarre images and reflections of all that stood before them. The other contained an ingenious mirror-maze consisting of numerous smaller corridors and alcoves.

The mirror-maze was constructed from dozens of mirror-glazed walls, and in some parts, plain glass, creating a frightening effect of a possible exit that was in fact, nothing more than a dead end or a reflection from another part of the maze. Carnival attendants spent a great deal of their days rescuing petrified, yet excited children, and on occasions, adults as well, from the terrifying clutch of the maze.

“Why didn’t you use the torch before, Jonny?” Sarah asked, obviously forgetting what Jonathan had told her only minutes before.

“I told you, silly. I didn’t want anyone to see the light. But no one should see us in here.” he answered, walking further into the crazy-mirror display, then added, “We’ll stay in here until it’s light, okay?”

Sarah said nothing and clung tightly to her brother as they walked further inside the cavern of mirrors. With only torchlight to guide them, Jonathan found a relatively inconspicuous corner of two mirror-lined walls. As they approached the glass, grotesque reflections stared back at them in the dim light.

“Jonny!” Sarah screamed. “Look, in the mirror—what is it?”

“Jonathan turned around to silence his sister, but at the same time noticed what she was looking at. His heart raced, as there before him was an apparition of the image he thought he had seen in the stream earlier in the day. Standing motionless for what could have been an eternity, but was in fact only seconds, Jonathan found himself almost convinced that he was witnessing a supernatural manifestation.

With his overworked heart finally slowing, he managed to move three steps to join his terrified sister. Embracing her gently, he discovered how cold she was and could feel her trembling beneath his hands. Realising what had happened, he managed to engage his panicked voice in an effort to reassure his shivering sister that there was no immediate peril.

“Oh Sarah, you’ve done it again! It’s you in the mirror; just you,” he said, feeling better, although astonished that he had once again mistaken a distorted reflection for something that he could never have seen. Realising his mistake, Jonathan found himself able to laugh, and did so, much to Sarah’s disgust.

“It’s not funny, Jonathan, and how could it be me?” she asked, still quite shaken from the unnerving ordeal, and certainly not seeing any humorous connections.

“Well,” he stopped himself from laughing. “It did trick me too for a minute—not to mention you scaring me half to death with that scream! I hope no one heard you or our plan will be ruined for sure. God Sarah, it was loud enough to wake the dead—”

“Don’t talk like that, Jonathan!” she snapped.

“Sorry, but it *was* loud. Now, as I was about to tell you, these are special mirrors that make us look different. What you saw was just yourself, or perhaps me, squashed one way and stretched another. They are supposed to be for fun and *usually* make people laugh! Look, I’ll show you.”

He walked towards a large mirror, two thirds of which was concave from the floor, extending to a convex hump at the top. Shining his torch onto the glazed surface, Jonathan’s reflection appeared almost twice the size of the figure before it and his head stared back, horribly distorted, gruesomely flat and wide like a mutant toad or similar. Sarah, uneasy of the hideous creature in the mirror, shivered again at the sight of the unusual reflection.

“Stop it Jonny...please, stop it. I don’t like it at all and it’s certainly not funny!”

“That’s just because it’s so dark in here. You’ll love it in the morning; just you wait and see. It’s only my reflection, why don’t you try it for yourself?”

Sarah shook her head and sat down on the carpeted floor, put her head in her hands and started to cry.

“I want to go back to the house, Jonathan. I’m tired, but I don’t think I can sleep in here now!” she sobbed.

Jonathan sat down beside her, hugging her shoulders and rubbing her golden hair.

“I’m really sorry if you got scared. But we’ve got to stay here now. Come on, lay down here and I’ll keep you warm.”

In minutes, they were both fast asleep, completely oblivious to the outside world.

\* \* \*

If the violent storm clouds gathering above Waimerie had the ability of vision, the showgrounds, as viewed from the air, would have appeared similar to a mobile army defence camp. Two massive canvas marquees were centred amongst numerous smaller tents and awnings. Adjacent to these were the animal enclosures, training areas and an assortment of brightly coloured caravans and trailers. Only one of these caravans was still illuminated, the abode of the night caretakers.

For the three caretakers who travelled with the carnival, long nights passed slowly. Only through endless card games and a limitless supply of coffee were they made bearable. Inside their trailer, the three men were all casually slouched over a vinyl-topped card table, dozing somewhat in front of their latest hands of cards. One of them suddenly jerked himself upright.

“Hey! Did any of you hear that?” he asked.

“Hear what, Gary?” another replied.

“Sounded like someone yelling out,” Gary answered

“It’s probably just one of them animals acting up, or Rudolph and Anastasia going at it again. You know how randy those trapeze artists get! Come on Gary, play your next card, I’m sure it was nothing.”

“Still, I’d better check it out just the same.” Gary lifted himself stiffly from the folding chair and proceeded to the door. Looking outside, he noticed the approaching storm clouds racing in front of the moon and could feel the bite of the increasing wind on his unshaven face. “You’re probably right. It may well be the animals getting a bit restless, and it looks like we’re in for another downpour as well. I’ll just go and check—”

The rest of the caretaker’s words were lost amongst the deafening blast of thunder that had followed a blinding flash of lightning, now temporarily etched onto his retinas, as the storm finally broke. Lions roared and elephants trumpeted in frightening chorus.

\* \* \*

Sarah screamed, rolled away from her brother’s warming body and jumped immediately to her feet. She screamed again as another crack of thunder exploded through the canvas structure, this time waking her brother who was probably frightened more by her screaming than from the noise of the approaching storm.

“Jesus, Sarah! Do you have to keep screaming like that? You scared me half to death again.”

“You know I don’t like thunder storms—I’m scared, Jonny. I want to go home!”

“You always get scared, Sarah; it’s just a storm though. Come over here with me and I’ll turn the torch on if you like. It’ll pass soon enough and then—”

“No! I’m going home now!” she interrupted as she ran past him, knocking the torch to the floor as she brushed his arm.

“Sarah, don’t be silly! Come back here now before you run into something and hurt yourself.”

“I’m going back, Jonny, you can stay if you want to,” she yelled back at him, just ahead of another blinding flash of lightning and crash of thunder. She screamed again, tripping slightly as she raced for the exit.

“Sarah no! Come back, please. You can’t go out into the storm. Please, Sarah, come back now!” Jonathan, seeing that she was not stopping, raced after her, only to see her miss the exit completely. Instead, she ran blindly into the mirror-maze and disappeared.

\* \* \*

Outside, the electrical turbulence continued as the strengthening wind increased to gale velocity. With the wind came a deluge of driving rain and hailstones. In the enclosures, animals cried with panicked frenzy. Dozens of horses tried desperately to break free of their corrals. Lions and tigers paced angrily within their cages, clawing at the sodden ground that was once again becoming a muddy bog beneath them.

Canvas flapped wildly in the soaking rain. Lights came on methodically in the caravans as vents, doors and windows were secured safely against the storm. Still the rain fell heavier and the wind increased.

The Hall of Mirrors began to groan and vibrate as the violent gusts pounded the soaked canvas. The walls behind Jonathan began to billow and flap like loose sails on a stricken yacht. He searched desperately for the lost torch, agonising that he had let Sarah out of his sight.

Sarah, realising that she was hopelessly lost within the maze, panicked and screamed for her brother to help her. Jonathan, hearing the screams but unable to find her, even with the light from the constant flashes, continued his search for the torch as behind him, a section of canvas tugged continually at the tenuous hooks that held it in place.

As the gusts increased, metal eyelets finally gave way and the Hall of Mirrors tore open. Blinding flashes of lightning filled the halls and were immediately reflected from mirror to mirror around him.

In this stroboscopic-like light he was at last able to locate the torch and set off to find his sister with only a thin beam of light, persistent flashes and Sarah's incessant screams to guide him. In the brief moments between the deafening thunder, the roar of wind and Sarah's hysterics, Jonathan could again hear canvas tearing and timber splitting. The increasing hail on the canvas roof reminding him of machine gun fire as he fought his way through the trembling corridors of flickering mirrors to find her.

"You'll be all right, Sarah!" he yelled. "Just stay where you are and I'll find you!"

"Hurry, Jonny, hurry. The tent is blowing away!"

"No it's not! Just stay where you are!"

Sarah continued to scream her fears while Jonathan ran through endless rows of hideous reflections to reach her. As he passed them, the mirrored walls rattled and cracked as the destructive gales that blew through the torn canvas continued. He looked up to see that the roof was lifting with the force of the wind. He hurried on through the maze with his torchlight fading rapidly.

"Over here, Jonny; I'm over here! Can't you see me?" Sarah pleaded.

"No, not yet, but I'm coming as fast as I can. What did you have to come in here for anyway?"

"I'm sorry, Jonny, I really am," she sobbed.

"Never mind. Just stay there and be careful if there's broken glass around."

Jonathan pushed open a swinging door mounted on bat-wing hinges. As the door closed and then swung open again, he could see Sarah at the end of the corridor he had just entered. Above him, the canvas billowed and pulled for the last time, tearing free from the rest of the crumbling structure. Stay ropes groaned and then finally snapped as the massive sheet of canvas was blown across the showgrounds.

In the corral, a horse had managed to jump the fencing, knocking part of it down as it sailed over into desperate freedom. The remaining horses and camels, seeing a free path to liberty, stampeded out through the broken enclosure and into the tangle of disintegrating tents and awnings, before scattering into the violent night. By the time the astonished caretakers and attendants had reached the collapsed fences of the corral, all but two horses had fled.

The now airborne canvas roof was swept across the road and into power lines; the snapped stay ropes entangling the cables that eventually collapsed with a spectacular show of arcing sparks, smoke and flames onto the road that was already awash with inches of fast moving water. Immediately, two thirds of Waimerie was blacked out, including the showgrounds; the only light coming from the freakish sky above.

Jonathan and Sarah were instantly soaked with a deluge of driving rain and hailstones that came down on them like pebbles. Continuous lightning reflected and darted around the maze as Jonny ran to save his sister. With her only inches away, he came to an abrupt halt, his face crashing painfully into cold wet glass. He felt his nose break as blood started to flow down into his mouth. Miraculously, the glass didn't shatter, but the impact that had already re-arranged his nose, severely bruised and cut his forehead as, somewhat stunned, he recoiled from the unexpected collision.

Ignoring his injuries, Jonathan realised what had happened. The image he thought was Sarah must have been a reflection from another part of the maze. Desperately, he searched for an opening in the wall. He knew she must have been close, if he could just get through to the correct corridor. With panic beginning to set in, he screamed for his sister.

"I'm here, Jonathan! I didn't move, I promise! Please hurry; everything's starting to fall down on me and I'm frightened!"

He ran into another corridor that ended in a circular room and saw a dozen or more Sarah's waving at him frantically. She must have been standing in the middle of the mirror-lined walls of a keyhole-like room. As Jonathan stared in amazement, the wall behind Sarah started to topple as a wooden upright, which had once supported the now missing roof, crashed down into the room behind her.

"Sarah! Get out of there now and run over to me, but be careful of the broken glass. Hurry, Sarah, hurry!" he screamed, trying to reach her, halting suddenly as another timber pole collapsed with an entanglement of ropes, glass and canvas between them. Realising that she could no longer reach him safely, he instructed Sarah to go back and wait until he could make his way through the debris to reach her.

He ran back down the corridor and found that another section of wall panels had collapsed. This time, allowing him access to the room immediately behind her where the roof supports had already collapsed and hopefully, posed no further danger.

Seeing that there were still large sections of wall blocking his path, he tried to knock them down with his already bruised shoulders. When this desperate attempt failed he searched through the debris for something he could use to smash his way through the glass and panelling.

Backtracking a little, as rain and blood flooded his face, Jonathan at last found a suitable length of timber pole to complete his assault on the wall. Positioning himself around the centre of the pole, he made three unsuccessful charges at the wall. As he recoiled for a fourth attempt the particleboards separated and mirror glass shattered as the wall finally crashed to the floor and joined the rest of the debris and rubble that littered the maze. Not knowing if he had caused the demolition himself, he proceeded on and entered the circular room behind Sarah.

She had remained exactly as she was told; watching helplessly as the Hall of Mirrors crashed down around her. Seeing a cluttered but accessible path to reach her, Jonathan sprinted through the blinding rain, desperate to rescue her.

Running over the smashed glass and split timber that covered much of the carpeted floor, already awash with rivers of muddy water, he caught his foot under a sheet of panelling and fell heavily onto the broken glass. A cry of anguish exploded from his mouth as his already shattered nose was compressed once more; the pain in his face negating his concern for the many cuts that he had just sustained, as well as the sprain in his swelling ankle!

A fresh deep gash on his forehead bled warmly into his eyes and down his face, mixing with the renewed flow from his broken nose, washing away almost immediately as the continual rain and hail stung his wounded body. Sarah had seen or heard none of this as he continued on behind her.

Driven now by desperation and adrenalin, he noticed the two remaining timber support poles swaying precariously in the violent gusts that now howled through the wreckage of the Hall of Mirrors. Fearing his ankle was broken, Jonathan decided it would probably be wiser to stay put and coax his sister over to his somewhat safer position.

"Okay, Sarah, I'm here behind you. Can you see me?" he yelled. "We've got to get out of here fast!"

"I can't see you, Jonathan!" Sarah shouted as she swung herself around in the direction of his voice.

"I'm over here, on the other side of this mess. You're facing the right way now, so just keep walking towards me, but watch where you put your feet!"

Sarah inched her way slowly towards her brother's voice. Seeing him at last through the heavy rain and hail, she stopped again and called for him to come get her.

“I’ll try, Sarah, but please, you try and climb over as well. I think I’ve broken my ankle.” But Sarah once again remained frozen.

“I’m so scared...please help me...please!”

Ignoring his ankle, he leapt up to jump over the pile of debris that separated them. At the same moment, both wooden uprights crashed down onto the remaining walls of the circular room that trapped Sarah. The weakened and soaked partitions began to crumble under their added weight. Seeing this, Jonathan lunged forward, desperate to drag his sister away from the impending danger.

“Sarah! You’ve got to jump now! For God’s sake, Sarah, I can’t reach you in time, you’ve got to move away from the—”

He never finished his sentence and Sarah never heard it. The mass of glass and wood collapsed on top of her, knocking her down into the debris below as the remaining structure crashed down...