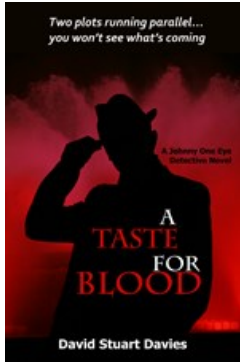


A Taste for Blood



The sixth novel in the Detective Johnny (One Eye) Hawke series. Two laser-sharp detectives, two thought-provoking cases and two skilful plots.

By David Stuart Davies

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David Stuart Davies is the author of five novels featuring private detective hero, Johnny Hawke, and another five novels featuring Sherlock Holmes as well as several non-fiction books about the Baker Street detective including the movie volume Starring Sherlock Holmes.

As well as being a committee member of the Crime Writers' Association, and editing their monthly magazine, Red Herrings, David is the general contributing editor for Wordsworth Editions Mystery & Supernatural series and a major contributor of introductions to the Collectors' Library classic editions.

About the book

The sixth novel in the Detective Johnny (One Eye) Hawke series.

Two laser-sharp detectives, two thought-provoking cases and two skilful plots. Featuring private investigator Johnny (One Eye) Hawke, and his one-time colleague in the police force Detective David Llewellyn. Llewellyn is investigating the chilling crimes of a top psychiatrist and his scheming patient who the doctor believes has knuckled under his authority. In the meantime, Hawke is on the case of a mysterious suicide in Edgware Road... soon discovered as not your average suicide.

The guts and insight of the two investigators bring both cases to a head - though you won't even begin to see how until you have turned the last pages.

Reviews

“Johnny Hawke breathes new life into the traditional British mystery. He’s a hero with a heart.” - *Val McDermid*

“I wholeheartedly recommend David Stuart Davies to those who enjoy a good read.” - *Amazon review*

“This book by Davies is a good read for mystery followers. The characters are well sketched out and the plot will twist and turn and leave you wondering how it will all turn out – that’s what you want isn’t it? This is a delightful read because you are not quite sure what will happen and you are hooked

enough to keep on reading. Enjoyable.” - *J Robert Ewbank, author*

“A well crafted thriller that had me gripped from the first chapter. I tend to be a fussy reader who is easily bored with so called thrillers that fail to live up to their billing. 'A Taste for Blood' far exceeded expectations with its carefully crafted plotting and characterization. So good were these that it encouraged me to read the novel a second time.

“I had not read any of David Stuart Davies but now am eagerly waiting his next titles. Comparisons may be made with other novels in this genre such as *Silence of the Lambs* but Davies has produced a work that whilst being less extreme becomes more fearful through its naturalness.

“I wholeheartedly recommend David Stuart Davies to those who enjoy a good read.” - *Alan Semmens, Educator, UK*

“Even though this was the sixth novel in the series it can be read as a stand-alone, forming an intriguing double set of mysteries. I enjoyed the hunt for the serial killer more than that of Hawke’s suicide case, so I think it might have been better if the book focused on one case rather than two. Nevertheless, both mysteries are wrapped up with a nerve-wracking conclusion that will have you on edge until it’s resolved. The murderer is truly chilling, definitely not for the faint-hearted.” - *Rebecca Chandler, Reviewer, UK*

“Interesting mystery that takes place in the 1930’s in England. Private Investigator Johnny Hawke is investigating a suicide that seems off and his police buddy, Detective David Llewellyn is investigating a bloody crime involving an escaped convict and a psychiatrist. The two stories merge for a twisted ending. The details are grisly and the main villain enjoys his victims just a bit too much. But other than that, it was a good story with an unpredictable ending – just how I like my mysteries.

“Although this is the sixth Johnny Hawke novel, you can read it and understand it without reading the previous books. Enough background is given so that you know who Johnny is.” - *Donna Miller, Librarian, USA*

“‘A Taste For Blood’ is set in 1940s, London, during World War Two, and features two characters that fans of the author will have met before - Detective Inspector David Llewellyn of the Metropolitan Police and Private Detective, Johnny Hawke. As this is the first time I had encountered any novels by David Stuart Davies, I had no knowledge of these two characters. However, this did not affect my enjoyment of this crime novel.

“There are two storylines to the book, one in which we meet a particularly horrible villain who had previously been caught by D. I. Llewellyn and incarcerated for eight years before his escape. He is a ghoulish character, who is determined to imprint himself on the world in a very unpleasant manner. The other storyline concerns Johnny Hawke’s investigation of a suspicious suicide. Both cases touch each other at intervals throughout the book, as David Llewellyn and Johnny Hawke are friends - this friendship plays an important part in the last part of book.

“I enjoyed ‘A Taste for Blood’. It was rather gruesome in parts, but the violence was not gratuitous. I particularly liked the way in which the author used words and phrases which resonated with me. They reminded me of films and novels written in the 40s and 50s, giving the novel an authentic period feel. I had no idea how these intertwined plots would resolve themselves and was kept guessing until the end.

“I shall certainly search out some more of David Stuart Davies’ work, starting, I think, with the first

book featuring Johnny Hawke.” - *Angela Thomas, Reviewer, UK*

“I didn’t really want this story to end. I didn’t know how it was going to end, and I just loved that feeling. Too often can you predict what’s going to happen in a book, but *A Taste For Blood*? Nope. You can’t. It keeps you in the dark until the very end.

“First take a look at the cover. It's dark and twisted and broody and makes me think of Jack the Ripper, a world awash with blood.

“I love crime books, I probably read one each week, but I didn’t think this would be my cup of tea. How wrong I was.

“The narrative switches between a few different characters in this book, but that didn’t bother me at all. All of the characters had their own strong voice, their own mannerisms with language which made them stand apart from each other.

“The characters are really very British, so there’s an abundance of tea - and we all know how I love my tea.

“I grinned. ‘I’m anybody’s for a cuppa and a biscuit.’

“I could relate to the characters. Well, most of them. Not really Sexton or Northcote. Although I did understand Northcote’s motives towards the end. My favourite character to read was probably David Llewellyn.

“This book twists and turns so unexpectedly that I re-read more than a few sections, just to make sure I'd taken it all in properly. It’s gruesome and violent and more than once my toes curled. It’s horrific in the way that all good crime should be, with blood and gore everywhere and enough mystery to keep you, as a reader, on your toes...” - *Cora Linn Ballantine, Reviewer, UK*

Excerpt

PROLOGUE

He would never forget the blood. It wasn’t just the quantity – although there was a great deal of it collected in dark, shining, sticky pools on the stone floor with errant rivulets escaping down the grooves between the flagstones. It wasn’t just that sweet sickly smell either, which assailed his nostrils with pungent ferocity and etched itself forever on his memory, or the crimson stains splattered on the walls and floor that had remained with him, to return at the midnight hour to haunt his dreams. Most of all it was that face, that crazed visage with mad bulbous eyes and chomping teeth. Revisiting the scene in his nightmares, these images seem to shift and spread like a living organism coagulating into one great patch of red and then from the crimson mist the giant mouth would appear ready to swallow him up.

At this juncture, he would jerk himself awake with a brief tortured sigh, his body drenched in sweat. ‘Just a silly nightmare,’ he would murmur to placate his concerned wife Sheila and pat her shoulder reassuringly. ‘Just a silly nightmare.’

Almost ten years later, the nightmares still came. Not as often but the images were still as vibrant, as threatening, as horrific as ever. He never talked about them to anyone, not even Sheila. They were his personal burdens and he was determined that they should remain so. He certainly didn’t want to reveal his secret to his colleagues and have some brain doctor try to analyse his disturbed psyche.

Besides if it got out that Detective Inspector David Llewellyn was being scared witless by bad dreams it would hardly do much for his police career. So, with typical stoical reserve, his 'silly nightmares' remained private and self contained.

Until...

ONE

1935

The night was bitterly cold and the frosty lawn shimmered like a silver carpet in the bright moonlight. Concealed in the shrubbery, Detective Sergeant David Llewellyn gazed at the dark and silent house some fifty yards away. His body was stiff with apprehension and fear while his bowels churned with nervous tension. He knew he shouldn't be here. He knew he was taking a risk. He knew he was following his heart rather than his head. But he also knew that sometimes one had to take risks to achieve the right result.

The house, Hawthorn Lodge, gothic and imposing, appeared as a black threatening silhouette against the lighter star-studded sky. It rose out of the earth like a giant claw, its gables and chimneys scratching the sky, while its windows glistened darkly in the moonlight. There was no observable sign of life or occupancy and yet Llewellyn knew that there was some one in there: Doctor Ralph Northcote.

No doubt he was in his basement, a section of the house that the doctor had successfully kept secret from the officers when they had searched the premises. What he was doing there? Llewellyn preferred not to think about it at that moment. His boss, Inspector Sharples, a whisker off retirement, was a tired and sloppy officer and had not been thorough or dogged enough in his investigations. Llewellyn had been sure that a house as large as Hawthorn Lodge would have quarters below ground – a wine and keeping cellar at least – but Sharples wasn't interested. He was convinced that the arrogant and smarmy Dr Ralph Northcote was in no way associated with the terrible crimes he was investigating. How could a man of such intelligence, refinement and breeding perpetrate such horrible murders? The fiend who slaughtered those women was an animal, a beast, a creature of the gutter, not a respectable and respected medical man. Or so the blinkered, forelock tugging Inspector believed.

David Llewellyn had other ideas.

To satisfy his curiosity – at least – he had visited the local solicitor's office where he had been able to examine the original plans for Hawthorn Lodge. To his delight and satisfaction he had discovered that, as he suspected, the house did have a series of cellars. The plans indicated that these chambers were accessed by an entrance in the kitchen. However, instead of passing this information on to his superior, Llewellyn had decided to carry out some undercover work of his own. Why should he allow the old duffer Sharples take the credit for his detective prowess? He'd been sneered at and ridiculed when he'd offered his opinion, his strong conviction, that Dr Northcote was the man they were after.

Now he intended to prove it.

Gripping the police revolver in his pocket with one hand and picking up his battered canvas bag with the other, David Llewellyn emerged from the shrubbery and with a measured tread made his way across the lawn towards the front of the house, his footsteps leaving dark imprints in the frosted grass like the trail of some ghostly creature. On reaching one of the tall sitting-room windows, he knelt down in the flowerbed and withdrew a jemmy from the bag. With several deft movements,

accompanied by the gentle sound of splintering wood, he managed to prise the window from its fastenings and open it a few inches. That was all that was needed. Gripping the lower edge of the window with both hands and exerting all his strength he pushed it higher, creating an aperture large enough to allow him to pass through.

Within moments he was in the house, a gentle smile of satisfaction resting on his taut features. From the innards of the bag, he extracted a torch. He had visited the house on two previous occasions in a formal and more conventional capacity with Sharples. These visits, allied to his studies of the plans, gave him the confidence to move swiftly through the dark sitting room, into the hallway and towards the kitchen.

* * *

The murders had started six months earlier. The pattern was the same in all four cases. A young woman in her early twenties was reported missing by her distraught parents and then a few days later her mutilated body was discovered in woodland or waste ground. In all instances the victim's arms, legs and breasts had been amputated and were missing. There was also evidence that the victim had been tortured. Most of the gruesome details had been held back from the press but despite that, because of the youth of the victims, the murderer had been labelled 'The Ghoul' by the more downmarket rags.

The limbs had been expertly severed and so it was suspected that a member of the medical profession was the perpetrator of these horrendous crimes. The girls had all lived within five miles of Hampstead Heath and doctors and surgeons residing within this radius had fallen under particular scrutiny. Two suspects emerged: Stanley Prince, a middle-aged GP who had been struck off the medical register some years before for conducting a series of abortions; and Ralph Northcote, a surgeon at St Luke's Hospital who twelve months earlier had been accused of assault by one of the nurses who had mysteriously disappeared before she could testify against him at a medical tribunal. As a result, the case was dropped and Northcote continued to practise.

Inspector Brian Sharples was placed in charge of the case and given one of the promising new live wires at the Yard, Detective Sergeant David Llewellyn, as his assistant. The two men did not get on. Sharples was an old hand, steady on the tiller, a great believer in doing things by the book, a book it seemed to Llewellyn that Sharples had written himself at some time back in the Middle Ages. With Sharples it was a case of softly, softly, catchee monkey. This may work in the long run, thought Llewellyn, but there may be three or four more murders before this particular monkey was apprehended. Llewellyn was a great believer in stirring up the waters and in the power of intuition. He was convinced that he had a nose for sniffing out a murderer.

Both Prince and Northcote were investigated and interviewed, but apart from their past misdemeanours nothing could be pinned on them. However, Llewellyn did not like Northcote. There was something about his oh-so- charming and rather slimy manner that set alarm bells ringing for the young Detective Sergeant. So much so that, unknown to Sharples, and any other of his colleagues, he had started to do a little digging on his own. Northcote was now in his mid-thirties and living alone, but in his youth he had been a bit of a ladies' man with, Llewellyn discovered, a string of broken engagements. Engagements which had all been ended by the girls. Llewellyn had managed to track one of these girls down and interview her. Doreen French was touching forty now, plump and comfortable looking. She had married a greengrocer and was the mother of twins. She seemed content with her lot and more than happy to talk about Northcote. She revealed nothing that was legally incriminating, but confirmed Llewellyn's impression that the man was odd and put up a false front to the world. 'In the end,' said Doreen French, her eyes twinkling brightly, 'he gave me the willies. He was... how can I say...? He liked to touch me. Not in a sexual way, you understand,

but... just to touch my skin. He loved to run his fingers down my bare arm. He once gave my arm such a squeeze, it caused a great big bruise. He wasn't much of a kisser, but ...' she giggled innocently... 'he did like to lick me. On my cheek and round the back of the neck. I thought it was sweet at first. Affectionate like – but in the end... as I say, it gave me the willies'.

Llewellyn nodded sympathetically. It would give him the willies too. 'Was he ever violent to you?'

Doreen did not have to ponder this one. 'Oh, no. Not deliberately, anyway. There was that bruise I mentioned, but he never slapped me or anything like that. But I have to say, that towards the end, I just didn't like being alone with him. He just seemed odd. What had started out as endearing quirks became rather spooky. And his eating habits... ugh!'

'What about them?'

'Well, he hardly ate anything that was cooked. He liked raw steak and his lamb chops hardly sat in the pan a minute before they were on his plate, all bloody and raw.' Doreen pulled a face that effectively mirrored her revulsion.

Well, thought David, there was nothing in the interview that would provide evidence that Northcote was this Ghoul, but he certainly seemed a strange chap and it was certainly a strange chap with medical knowledge who was murdering these young girls. Now a fifth one had disappeared. Her body had not been found yet so there was a slim chance that she was still alive. Very slim, he had to admit. Sharples had refused to interview Northcote again – 'We've nothing to go on, lad. We're here to investigate crimes not cause a nuisance to respectable law abiding folk.' And so David decided to take things into his own hands.

* * *

Once in the kitchen, he examined the walls carefully for some kind of hidden door that would provide access to the cellars. His search was fruitless, however. As he stood in the centre of the lofty chamber, the beam of his torch slowly scanning his surroundings, a sound came to his ears, one which froze his blood.

It was a high-pitched scream of pain. It was sharp and piercing like nails down a blackboard. He shuddered involuntarily at the sound. Where had it come from? It was clear yet distant, like a train whistle down a long tunnel. He listened, straining his ears in the hissing silence but the sound did not come again. As he waited in the dark, he relaxed the hold on his torch and the shaft of light sank towards the floor and rested on the base of a large kitchen cabinet by the far wall. What it illuminated made Llewellyn's heart skip a beat. There were faint skid marks marking the dark wooden flooring: tiny grooves that had imprinted themselves on the boards. It was quite clear to Llewellyn that these had been made by the stout legs of the cabinet as it had been pulled away from the wall.

With a tight grin, he rested the torch on the large kitchen table in the centre of the room so that the beam fell on to the cabinet and then he attempted to drag it away from the wall. Kneeling in order to obtain a more secure purchase, he tugged hard at the lower section. Slowly the cabinet moved, the feet following exactly the track of the grooves in the floor. When he had managed to create a gap between the wall and the cabinet big enough for him to squeeze himself into, he saw it.

Llewellyn's grin broadened. 'The secret door,' he whispered to himself.

He now pushed the cabinet fully clear of the wall and attempted to open the door. The handle rattled encouragingly but the door did not budge. It was locked. This did not daunt Llewellyn for although

the lock was new and stout, the door was old. Retrieving the jemmy from his canvas bag, he got to work levering the door open. It was the work of a matter of moments. The wood splintered easily and surrendered to the force of the jemmy.

Gingerly he pulled the door open and with the aid of his torch he peered into the darkness beyond. There was a set of stone steps leading down into ebony void. ‘Now the adventure really starts,’ he muttered to himself as he moved slowly forward into the cold blackness. On reaching the bottom of the stairs he thought he heard faint, indistinguishable noises in the distance. How far away they were he could not tell. Maybe it was just the movement of rats and mice – maybe it was something else. Using his torch like a searchlight, he tried to get a sense of his surroundings. He was in a passageway with a low vaulted ceiling. He saw that there were two light bulbs dangling down but no sign of a switch by which to turn them on. He knew, however, that it would be foolish to do so even if he could. He had no intention of announcing his presence in such an ostentatious fashion.

On reaching the end of the passage, he came to another door. A thin line of light seeped out at its base. This is it, thought Llewellyn, heart thumping. Swiftly he clicked off the torch and stowed it away in his coat pocket and then pulled out his revolver before turning the handle of the door. This one was not locked. Gently he opened it and stepped inside. The first impression was of the brightness of the chamber. The walls and floor were covered in white ceramic tiles while fierce strip lights hung down from the ceiling flooding the room with harsh illumination which created dense shadows. It had the antiseptic ambience of an operating theatre.

An operating theatre.

In the centre of the room was a stone slab on which was laid the twitching naked body of a young girl. At first glance, she seemed to be coated from head to foot in some dark shiny substance. Then, to Llewellyn’s horror, he realised that it was blood. Leaning over her was a man in a white coat which was also splattered with crimson stains. As Llewellyn entered the chamber the man glanced up in surprise, his eyes wide and manic. It was a moment that was forever etched on David’s mind. Like a scar, that image was to stay with him for life; it was seared into his consciousness ready to feed his nightmares and catch him unawares during unsuspecting waking moments. It was as though a fierce flashbulb had exploded, the harsh, vibrant light freezing the scene as vile photograph.

The creature seemed unconcerned that he had been disturbed in his activity. The lower half of his face was dripping with blood and something seemed to be trailing from his mouth, glistening and moist. As Llewellyn took a step nearer, he realised to his disgust that it was a piece of pink meat. Instinctively, his gaze moved to the mutilated body of the naked girl and then the truth hit him like a mighty blow to the solar plexus. This fiend was eating her flesh.

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