

A sample from Fred Adams Jr.s' upcoming novel *Monsters and Mobsters: the Adventures of C. O. Jones*, coming in 2015 from Airship 27 Productions:

Onyx beads – a curtain of them separated the front of the little basement shop from the back, and through them Simmons could see shelves of flasks, urns, and dusty boxes. The London apothecary shop traded in modern medicines but these shared space with bins of exotic roots and hanging bundles of dried flowers and plant stalks. On the counter, leeches swam in a large glass ginger jar.

Simmons's tattoos began to itch as soon as he stepped down from the sidewalk and through the door. A spring bell announced his entry, but no one appeared immediately, giving him a chance to look the place over. The Japs were still fighting hard in the Pacific theater but Germany was nearing collapse. Hitler's use of magic had shifted from conquest to revenge. Like the Milton's Satan, he would destroy what he could not rule. Intel determined that pockets of wizardry were springing up in allied countries to wreak havoc on the home front and to weaken the resolve of their people; one last serpent to be scotched.

The onyx beads parted and a short, squat man passed from the back room to the counter. As he approached, Simmons's tattoos began to throb. The magic was strong in this one. The bald man was dressed in a rusty black suit, a yellowed dress shirt missing its celluloid collar, and thick lensed glasses that made his black eyes frog-like. He wore grey gloves on his hands; the left forefinger had worn through, and Simmons saw a dark fingernail hooked like a talon pushing through the opening.

"Yessssss?" The shopkeeper's voice drew out the sibilance. "How may I help you?" His accent was unplaceable. The voice should have been inaudible, but Simmons felt as well as heard every syllable, as if the man were speaking inside his head. He smiled, and Simmons saw teeth not pointed, but angular like fangs whose points had been filed off. Their appearance was just enough to give the impression of a feral predator.

Simmons pulled a list from his pocket and said, "I need several items that I can't find elsewhere. Perhaps you have them here."

"We have many things you may not find elsewhere," the shopkeeper said. "May I see your list?"

"Yes, these things." He held out the list to hand it to the shopkeeper. The little man's hand flashed across the counter like a sprung trap and seized Simmons's wrist in

a crushing grip. He turned Simmons's hand over, revealing the runes on the back side of the paper.

"You are a fool to think me one," he said, grinning wickedly. "You'll not pass those runes to me, human." Simmons's hand lashed out and his fist smashed into the thick glasses, pushing the twisted wire frame into one of those round black eyes. The shopkeeper roared in pain but didn't slacken his grip on Simmons's wrist. His mouth opened wide and Simmons saw a second set of rip-saw teeth hidden behind the first. The shopkeeper was a troll.

The creature slammed Simmons's forearm to the counter and laughed, a hollow, echoing sound from deep in its chest. Simmons could feel the bones in his wrist grinding. The troll stretched the fingers of its free hand and nails popped through the glove like cat's claws. It swiped at Simmons's face but missed, its reach impaired by its height and the counter between them. Simmons flicked his free wrist and a silver knife dropped into his palm. He slashed it at the shopkeeper's face and when the creature pulled back from the silver and the runes carved in the blade, Simmons drove it full force through the enemy's forearm pinning it to the counter.

This time, the troll screamed as foul green smoke poured from the wound but still held his grip on Simmons's wrist. "I'll eat your heart," it hissed, snapping at Simmons's face. The troll caught Simmons's free arm and dragged him half over the counter. Fangs bit deep, snapping ribs and tearing flesh. Simmons could feel the burn of venom in his side. Then the troll's head snapped back and choking, it spat a goblet of Simmons's skin from its maw. The glowing tattoo was poison to the troll.

The troll threw back its head roaring, its tongue on fire, and from behind it, a bright blade flashed and the creature's head tumbled from its shoulders and rolled into a corner where it landed upright. For a few seconds a hateful light flashed from its remaining eye, then went out like a snuffed candle.

Simmons saw his MI-5 counterpart Guinness wiping the blade of a hooked Ghurka knife on the troll's suit. His face, sandy hair, and moustache were spotted with dark blood. Guinness looked at the troll's hand, locked in a death grip around Simmons's wrist and with a short chop severed it from the creature's forearm. Simmons, nearly unconscious from shock and pain tumbled backward onto the floor. Guinness vaulted the counter and hauled him to his feet. "Sorry to be late for the party, mate. You should have seen what I had to fight to get through the back door."

Simmons felt as if the floor were tilting and whirling. Guinness put a shoulder under Simmons's arm and said, "We've got to get out of here now. We'll pry that claw off you later."

“Wait,” said Simmons weakly. “Tattoo.” He pointed to the gob of skin and flesh the troll had bitten from him.

Without letting go of Simmons, Guinness scooped the red mass from the floor and thrust it in his pocket. “Now, my friend, we have to get out of here, because in a minute or so there’ll be no here left.”

Guinness dragged Simmons around the counter and through a storeroom where something indescribable lay in a tattered heap of flesh and bone. In the alley, Guinness propped Simmons against a wall and signaled with his flashlight. A car started up the block and rolled toward them lights off. Guinness pulled the back door of the sedan open and shoved Simmons inside. “Take him to base. He’s hurt bad and needs special attention.”

Simmons grabbed Guinness’s coat and croaked again, “Tattoo.”

“Oh bloody hell.” Guinness took the bitten flesh from his pocket and thrust it into Simmons’s hand. “If I were you, I’d get that sewn back on, mate,” he said, closing the car door. “Never know when it might come in handy again, right?”

As the sedan turned the corner, Simmons heard the explosion, but his eyes were closed too tightly by his pain to see the flash.