

A black and white photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in fallen leaves and branches, leading into a dense forest of trees. The trees are mostly bare, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. A large, dark, semi-transparent rectangular box is centered over the path, containing white text. The text is arranged in a vertical stack, starting with the title 'TREASURE OF THE BARTER DIAMOND' in a large, bold, serif font. Below the title is the author's name 'G. WELLS TAYLOR' in a smaller, bold, serif font. At the bottom of the box is the year '2024' in a very large, bold, sans-serif font.

**TREASURE
OF THE
BARTER
DIAMOND**

G. WELLS TAYLOR

2024

TREASURE OF THE BARTER DIAMOND

The Variant Effect

ZONE BETWEEN SERIES BOOK 2

G. Wells Taylor

COMING 2024

(eBook Sample)

Pop Dawson awoke to the sound of something heavy brushing against the front door of his shack. He set his scarred hand gently on the .38 where it lay beside him on the bed.

He'd always kept the revolver close, but since his run-in with the raiders from the northern ruin, he'd made a habit of keeping its hard steel barrel pressed against his right hip when he slept. He

set it out that way drunk or sober, so the potential for a deadly accident was there, but it was worth the risk.

He'd kept a lower profile than usual since the raid on Homestead that had seen the kidnapping of his friends' daughter Hanna, and the resulting search for and rescue of the girl.

His violent confrontation with the deadly Captain Atwood, and the resulting decimation of her mounted horsemen and pig-riders guaranteed that payback was a looming threat going forward.

It was part of the reason that he had declined Homestead's offer of a place to live. It was likely that revenge would be coming for him, and he had no desire to

die fighting in the defense of a settlement that he helped build in cooperation with people that later exiled him.

THUMP! There it was, right against the door, and then a rough brushing sound suggested hooked fingers sliding over its surface. The noise had been enough to raise him. Thankfully, his ears were more reliable than his eyes.

Borland lifted his gun high, cocked it slowly, and swung his legs off the side of the bed to leave him facing the entrance at an angle. He glanced at the back door. It was closed and bolted like the front, just as the window shutters on each wall were.

He'd been security minded of late.

Over a year had passed since he found the girl, and killed so many of her kidnappers, so he'd kept any supply trips to Rifle Roundup or back to Homestead barter brief.

Keeping low, Borland crept across the rough wood floor to the entrance, his socks snagging splinters as he went. Sweat ran down his back and into his full-body union suit underwear. He cautiously pressed his half ear to the door, while keeping his .38 ready in his right hand.

A muffled breathing sound came from past the wooden panels, like someone trying to catch his breath. He looked around the shack.

Enough ambient light snuck in around the shutters, the doors, and cracks in the walls to form dull blue indicators of the single-room setting. The old building was not robust enough to withstand a prolonged attempt to break in, so the idea of waiting it out was risky. If there was a force of intruders outside, *bandits* perhaps, getting into position, then an attack on both doors would easily win any standoff.

Pop Dawson would be ambushed in his own home.

Better to take the upper hand. If the action at the front door *was* part of something like that, it was intended to be a distraction while others got into position. That's what *he* would do, so ...

Borland paced softly across the shack, grabbing his gun belt and its bullets from where it hung on the back of a chair. Then he held his breath a moment, peering out through a thin crack between the back door and its frame. There was nothing in his line of sight out there, so he unlatched it as quietly as he could and pulled it open.

Still nothing. Just a stretch of ground with a grave maker and a line of trees farther on. Peering to his right he saw the outhouse on its little mound.

He slung the gun belt over his shoulder, stepped out into the night and his breath caught. The air was chill and dry. His heart raced as the sweat on his back cooled.

Borland bit his lower lip, peeking around the back left corner of the shack, and saw a blue-gray stretch of earth and sparse grass sweeping alongside the building and past it to a black line of trees some twenty yards from the front door.

The sky was a very dark blue with many stars. The moon had to be up there somewhere to give everything a deep indigo tint.

Then he noticed a scent in the air. It was floral, and almost sweet enough to have a natural source like a flower, but it left a sharp tang in his sinuses that suggested perfume, or some kind of soap. It wasn't strong enough to be

cologne.

If it hadn't been sprayed or daubed on a woman, then the scent could portend something worse, like the *poison folk* on a hunt. He'd heard of polk creepers using scents to cover the stink of their decrepit bodies now, masking it to help complete their disguises.

They had always masqueraded as normal folk when they were hungry for flesh, but something had changed since the polk-raider alliance collapsed.

Borland scanned the shadows, eyes restless, roving, as he started forward, keeping his revolver level, and staying near the wall with his sleeve catching at the old boards until he reached the front

of the building.

He edged around the corner and saw a woman lying face down by the door. He could hear her cough as her shallow breath sucked at the sandy earth.

She wore a gray and white checkered dress, knitted shawl, and sturdy leather boots.

Borland lowered his gun, but kept its muzzle pointed between her shoulders as she coughed feebly. Some long locks of frizzy white hair trailed out between where her shawl-covered head and neck met the collar of her dress and narrow shoulders.

Borland gritted his teeth and steadied his hand, by increments applying pressure to the trigger.

Do it. Now!

With raider vengeance overdue, he couldn't afford to take a chance ... to give *her* a chance.

The woman moaned, and raised a hand to press against the door. The fingernails clawed weakly at the wood as her arm drooped.

Borland's lips rolled back in a heartless grimace. His arm trembled, but he was ready to fire.

"Please ..." her ragged old voice called out feebly. "*Joe!* It's ... I mean ... *POP it's—it's ...*"

He swore, lifting the gun up and away as he knelt by the woman.

She tensed when he pulled on her shoulder to turn her—hoping to

recognize her features in the dim.

But it was impossible! The face was a bluish gray patch among many such patches. It was framed by thick ropes of white hair, and divided by a pair of flashing eyes.

Then the shadowed mouth snapped opened.

“*POLK!*” she screamed, and Borland half-turned his head.

There it was! The scent of perfume, or flowers—it was coming from behind him where he knelt, from the direction of the shed, and Dorsey’s pen.

A gentle eastbound breeze was carrying the perfume.

Borland had lost his edge.

Two tall dark, angular shapes broke

free of the shed's ominous black mass and raced toward him. The creatures had long flexible limbs that kept their narrow torsos erect to mimic an upright human posture. He soon made out their fake clothing: rough-cut dresses or coats flapping behind them, covering their powerful limbs, obscuring animal-like deformities beneath.

And they were wearing perfume—*the bastards!*

A makeshift wig of twisted weeds and horsehair quivered like a nest of snakes atop the creeper on the left and the other polk wore a tattered bonnet with ribbons tied under its dripping jaws and chin.

The poison folk cried out their hungry

lust for skin and flesh and blood as they charged in for the kill.

End of this eBook Sample

The Story Continues in
The Variant Effect
ZONE BETWEEN SERIES
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

G. WELLS TAYLOR was born in Oakville, Ontario, Canada in 1962, but spent most of his early life north of there in Owen Sound where he went on to study Design Arts at a local college. He later traveled to North Bay, Ontario to complete Canadore College's Journalism program before receiving a degree in English from Nipissing University. Taylor worked as a freelance

writer for small market newspapers and later wrote, designed and edited for several Canadian niche magazines.

He joined the digital publishing revolution early with an eBook version of his first novel *When Graveyards Yawn* that has been available online since 2000. Taylor published and edited the *Wildclown Chronicle* e-zine from 2001-2003 that showcased his novels, book trailer animations and illustrations, short story writing and book reviews alongside titles from other up-and-coming horror, fantasy and science fiction writers.

Still based in Canada, Taylor continues

with his publishing plans that include additions to his Vampires of the Kind books, the Wildclown Mysteries, and sequels to the popular Variant Effect series.