

THE BEST WEBZINE FOR SCI-FI, FANTASY, AND HORROR!

# Schlock!

## WEBZINE

VOL. 13, ISSUE 1  
22ND APRIL 2018

### BLINK

BY JOSEF  
DESADE  
*I COULD FEEL  
THE ABYSS  
DRAWING  
NEAR...*

### PANDORA IS PRESENT

BY GK MURPHY  
*"DEAD CENTRE"  
OF TOWN...*

THE UNEDIFYING  
SPECTACLE OF THE  
DUPLICATION OF  
PROFESSOR EUGENE  
AGINCOURT  
BY MS SWIFT

JOHN WYNDHAM'S  
PLAN FOR CHAOS  
REVIEWED BY  
JOHN C ADAMS

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# SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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Gavin Chappell

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Schlock! Webzine

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Desade, GK Murphy, Gregory KH Bryant, Percy Greg, HG Wells*

## SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Welcome to Schlock! the webzine for science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

Vol. 13, Issue 1  
22<sup>nd</sup> April 2018

Schlock! is a weekly webzine dedicated to short stories, flash fiction, serialised novels, and novellas, within the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. We publish new and old works of pulp sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, dark fantasy, and gothic horror. If you want to read quality works of new pulp fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!

For details of previous editions, please go to the [website](#).

Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, graphic novels and comic strips, reviews and art. Submit fiction, articles, art, or links to your own site to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk). We will also review published and self-published novels. Please contact the editor at the above email address for further details.

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This week's cover illustration is *Photos of Free Fantasy*—1920x1080 px by Billi Barrentine.  
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## EDITORIAL

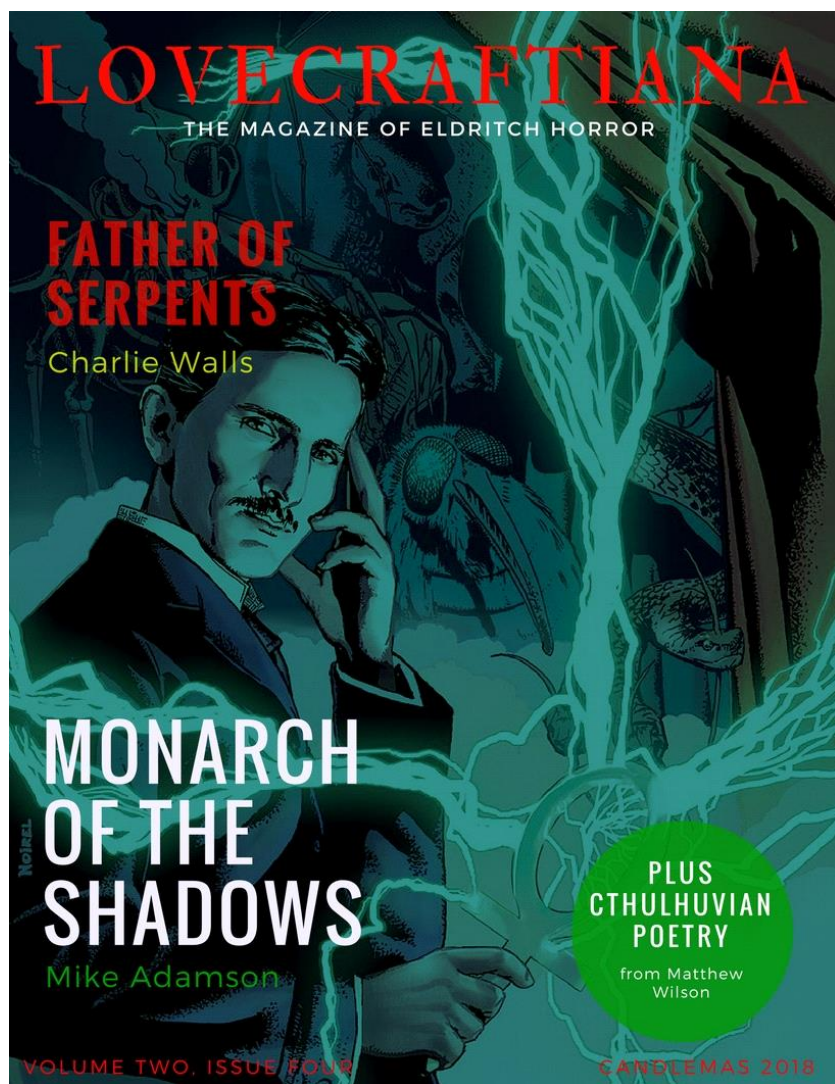
This latest edition begins Volume 13 of [Schlock! Webzine](#)—lucky for some! —with the first installment of a two-part Sir Parnassus Mang steampunk story by MS Swift, whose hero also appears in the new [Rogue Planet Press](#) anthology, [Steam Powered Dream Engines](#). Following this is an ultra-violent mini-epic from Josef Desade, and a vignette of graveyard horror from GK Murphy. John C Adams reviews the new (posthumous) John Wyndham novel [Plan for Chaos](#).

There's murder at the manor in *Sherlock Holmes and the Beast-Men of Atlantis* this week, but just how far will Holmes and Watson journey in their quest to uncover the killer? Meanwhile Emily hears a whispering, and Carter Ward encounters Kharl Stoff. On Mars, our space traveller is fur-hunting, but down on Earth, the human fugitives remain imprisoned in the ruined house.

—Gavin Chappell

Available from Rogue Planet Press: the Candlemas 2018 edition of [Lovecraftiana—the Magazine of Eldritch Horror](#).





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# THE UNEDIFYING SPECTACLE OF THE DUPLICATION OF PROFESSOR EUGENE AGINCOURT by MS Swift

## Part One

*Late-nineteenth century medium Sir Parnassus Mang believes he can commune with spirits using music. When staying at the expansive, West Country estate of his friend and fellow researcher into the weird—Lord Brutus Pemberton—over the summer of 189-, Mang found himself embroiled in a series of bizarre events.*

The noted medium, Sir Parnassus Mang, was passing along the high street of the Wessex village of Paxhill when a cry sounded from within a shop. A group of children admiring the jars of sweets on display jumped in sudden shock as a queer, shrivelled man burst from the door leering and snarling.

“Vinegar, vinegar,” a pursuing lady called, “he’s covered my sweets in vinegar!”

The fleeing man turned once and, laughing maliciously, waved a heavy cane at the stout lady. Before Mang could act, the fellow had barged past him and scurried off at a surprising pace. There was a quality to that fellow’s twisted, simian face that instilled a coldness in his bones, so much so that Mang forgot to raise his hat to the woman. A further shock hit the medium when he realised that the malevolent prankster was familiar—indeed at one time—well known to him; he knew that face from his *alma mater*, it belonged to his university tutor! The leering countenance was that of Professor Eugene Agincourt!

Mang returned in a pensive mood to his temporary residence at Lord Brutus Pemberton’s estate. Finding his rotund host asleep on a conservatory chaise-lounge, the medium changed into robes to practice yoga on the lawn. The August sun was rising to his zenith, baking the hills beneath and sapping the life from the air. The giant carved into the chalk of the nearby hill now looked faint under the haze. From the beech tree that towered at the centre of the lawn, a bird sang tentatively, ceasing as its song was swallowed by the thickening atmosphere. Undeterred, Mang commenced twisting, straining and cavorting; he was greeting Helios with a particularly painful posture when a loud rap resounded on the front door. A minute later, he saw through the French windows his lordship’s man—Prescott—usher in a rather flustered looking fellow, who was dressed in the apparel of a gardener. Pemberton stirred and appeared to wake.

“Eer, I’ve noon id...” Pemberton could be heard to say to the visitor.

“What time do you call this?” Prescott translated for the benefit of the visitor.

“...aargh, harumh, garrabboo ooo, abboooo...”

“His lordship goes on to state that as he has no recollection of what happened last night, nothing can be proved and so good day to you,” Prescott recited his lordship’s usual response to morning

visitors. Mang unravelled himself from his posture and returned to the conservatory.

“It’s terrible,” the visitor was saying as he gestured in the direction of the nearby village of Babblesbury-on-the-Wold, “the big bible in the church, over in the village. The bible has been...defaced!”

Mang recognised the speaker as the sexton of the chapel.

The man went on, his face a picture of shock and outrage. “Someone has entered the chapel and scrawled unpleasant slogans across the good book!”

“It will be a boy. Find him,” Pemberton said, rediscovering speech, “irons, clap him in irons, send him...away!”

“Why are you upon us here?” Mang asked.

“Somebody saw an elderly gentleman, apparently intoxicated, sneaking from the church!” the Sexton replied, scratching his head.

“Well, I hope you’re not implying it was us?” Mang said, rather indignant, but conscious of the liberal quantities of alcohol strewn about the room in various bottles and glasses.

“Oh, gosh no, I’m sorry your lordship and Sir Mang, no,” the Sexton returned. “I was hoping you might help us catch the felon!”

“What did the slogans say?” Mang stoked his briarwood pipe.

“Well,” the Sexton started, rather embarrassed, “I cannot repeat them, such is their blasphemy and obscenity.”

The Sexton began to shake at this point, so Mang sat him next to Pemberton on the couch. Whilst both men trembled and twitched, the memory of the Professor came back to him.

“Leave this to us,” he said to the Sexton as he poured out drinks, “we’ll find this fellow; we’ll find this obscene annotator!”

Once Pemberton had been served some tea and a little in the way of solids, Mang was able to communicate the purpose behind the Sexton’s visit. He was relating his own experiences in Paxhill when a horrified Prescott rushed in, bellowing. “There’s a man dressed in ladies’ clothing knocking down the cider apples!”

Mang and Pemberton leapt to their feet and followed Prescott. The orchards were a particularly prized resource of his lordship, who would often point to the phallic hill figure on the slopes above the trees and say of his fruit, “With old Saturn presiding over them, how could they fail?”



They lay beyond the lake. Prescott rowed them to the far shore where the three alighted. As they reached the first of the trees, they saw the leaves gleaming in the sunlight above, but the ripening fruit lay, for the most part, amid the grass below.

“NO!” Pemberton howled, aghast, “monstrous! Find the monster! Justice!”

A commotion was evident from within the orchard: they could perceive the sound of branches being fiercely shook accompanied by gibbering, malicious laughter. Hurrying in, they came across a sprightly goblin of a man clad in an ill-fitting dress with ladies’ underwear pulled over his wisps of hair, who was roughly shaking the branches of the trees.

“Professor Agincourt!” Mang beheld his former tutor again.

The man turned, an evil, ill-becoming leer etched across his face, and he made to run off, but Prescott was upon him, tackling the man, bringing him down heavily and administering a sharp smack to the back of his head.

“Is this the sourer of the sweets?” Pemberton asked, rage smouldering within him.

“Yes,” Mang replied in shock and disgust, “and, no doubt, the obscene annotator of the bible!”

The Professor was securely bound and the dress removed, revealing his customary tweed suit and blue bow tie before he was taken back to the house. Here he was sat on the floor of the drawing room.

“Good work, Prescott,” Pemberton said, his mood calmer now he had gathered that the damage to his crop had been minimal, “stopped him in the nick of time!”

“Professor, are you mad?” Mang asked, “I recall your fine mind, soaring through celestial regions of speculation, your words weighty and wise, your musings sublime...what happened?”

“I just wanted to wear ladies’ clothes and knock down apples!” the ancient academic cheerfully replied, with the air that his behaviour had been perfectly natural.

“And did you annotate the bible in the village with obscenities?” the medium persisted.

“No!”

“Well, I saw you souring the sweets with vinegar, in Paxhill!” Mang said.

“Wasn’t me!” His mood was becoming rather sullen now.

“Yes, it was; I saw you with my own eyes, man!” Mang replied angrily.

“It was one of us!” the Professor replied archly.

“That’s it—completely mad,” Pemberton diagnosed, “put him in the village stocks, I say!”

“One of us!” Mang exclaimed, “what on earth do you mean?”

“I’ve invented a machine that duplicates myself—I’m having tremendous fun!”

“What?”

“Yes, it’s a marvellous invention,” the Professor said excitedly. “There’s five of us so far!”

“Five, my gods, they’ve infected the whole area!” Pemberton exclaimed, accepting the man’s word unquestioningly, before gesturing to his man, “Prescott, on the double, round up all you can!”

Eugene Agincourt had, for many years, been a prominent physicist. As is the way with all good scientists he balanced his research with a healthy respect for the preternatural. Pemberton, although lacking the benefit of the man’s tuition and guidance in his formative years, knew Agincourt through their London based club, the Noble Order of the Brotherhood of the Apollonian Proclamations of Dismembered Orpheus, where he was renowned for his psychic experiments and research. When not even the most somnambulist of the ‘inspired dreamers’ of Oxford University had been willing to keep on a man whose latter studies involved seeking to invent machines that would convey the thoughts of plants, Agincourt was declared an emeritus professor and had responded by buying himself a crumbling castle deep within the Sunset Downs.

It was there that he happily sauntered away his twilight hours indulging his taste for research into the bizarre and hitherto impractical. For all the eccentric work the Professor had previously engaged in neither of the two men had been aware of anything quite so fanciful as a device that duplicated the human form, indeed they had just decided that the Professor had tipped himself into the abyss of insanity when, within an hour of their leaving, Prescott returned with three other men, all identical to Professor Agincourt. When all three were dumped in a heap, they began greeting their colleague.

“Afternoon, Professor!”

“Afternoon already, heavens!”

“Good afternoon, Professor!”

“Professor!”

“Hello there, Professor!”

“This one’s your sweet sourer, over here your annotator and this one was being ejected from the dairy by the milk maids!” Prescott said, interrupting the various greetings.

“Now then, Mang, time to do your duty as an Englishman,” Pemberton groaned. “There is a peer of the realm who is suffering from mental unease, make me feel better!”

“Indeed, there is little that is odder than all these little old men...” Mang said as he chewed on the stem of his pipe. “There are definitely four of them, and yet none of them is behaving like the Professor! Let’s talk with them over luncheon—we might be able to make some sense of this whole caper!”

The four duplicates settled themselves in the lounge as the good lord took it upon himself to pour them drinks and Mang headed off to oversee the preparation of food.

“Rum for me!” one of them called.

“Oh, how coarse Professor, how you!” another said. “Whiskey for me, the waters of life itself!”

“That will be the Celt in you, Professor!” responded a third.

“Gin, must have gin!” chanted the fourth.

“Gin? Really, Professor, what is happening to you?” the third said. “You must have a decent wine over luncheon, followed of course, by absinthe!”

With so much to prepare, Pemberton felt quite overwhelmed and once the four Professors were happily allocated their appropriate bottles, he collapsed into his chair and rang for his man, calling, “wine, please, white!”

“Really, Brutus!” Mang said as he reappeared with Prescott.

“Well, I think I’ll need a clear head for this afternoon’s work!” Pemberton exclaimed, “gracious me, these fellows are hard work. Rather wish my old nurse was here, she’d soon whip them into shape. Ever ready with a cold spoon, that woman!”

The four men chattered and shrieked and drank until luncheon was brought to them and after a period of coaxing they eventually settled around the table.

“Do you mind if I examine you?” Mang inquired as they ate. He popped his monocle into his eye and surveyed the group. The four men appeared absolutely identical in terms of their physiognomy, yet each seemed to possess a certain quality that distinguished him from his fellows. Although they were clearly identical to the Professor that Mang knew, there was a hunched, pinched, leering quality to the men that was unpleasant. One would quaff deeply and gorge himself on the food; another would take short sips of his drink and glance around with eyes as darting and quick as a fish in water. Another appeared somewhat distracted and would fumble under the table.

“I’ve invented a most wonderful machine!” the rum drinker suddenly announced.

“Steady old boy, top secret,” returned gin.

“Damn your loose tongues!” roared whiskey.

“I’ve already told them. It’s a vision for all to share,” slurred wine and absinthe.

“A machine? Do tell me how it works,” Mang said, sensing he could get some sense from the company, “it truly is an age of wonder that we inhabit!”

“A damned machine,” Pemberton intoned as if the very word ‘machine’ should only be spoken by mean-minded money men, or members of the lower orders.

“No, no, no,” rum quieted his fellows as they began to protest, “the Professor here is correct, it is time for the world to know: we have invented a machine that is capable of duplicating us!”

The Professors took the liberty of leaving the room through the French windows to sprawl across the lawn in the sun.

“Now look here, Mang, I have a few questions,” Pemberton started. “Why, if he had made four or perhaps more of himself, would he then proceed to engage in petty mischief or nonsense?”

“A very good point! I want to find out more about this machine,” Mang said as he strode out into the gardens, “now look here, you fellows...”

A rather heated conversation that they happened to be having was quickly hushed over.

“What on earth is this machine?” Mang demanded. “How does it work and why on earth have you been engaged in mischief—annotating bibles, stealing ladies’ clothes and all that carry on?”

“Well, we have just worked very hard,” one of the Professors replied. “shut away for many months; we needed some fresh air, room to stretch!”

“Yes, even aged Emeritus Professors have...drives!” added another with a knowing wink.

“You should talk to our creator, Professor Eugene Agincourt,” another said. “he’ll show you how the machine works.”

“Well, that certainly sounds a good idea to me,” Mang said as he filled his pipe with fresh leaf.

“So it is decided, we shall visit you back at your lair,” Pemberton announced in the tone of voice he used mostly for summer fetes and the like. And so as Prescott readied the coach and horses, the lord and Mang, their heads filled with questions and exclamations, rounded up the Professors and all set off.

The road to the retirement castle circled the lower slopes of the Sunset Downs, winding through pleasant woodland and passing over sun-parched streams. The racket made by the Professors prompted Mang to sit on top of the coach beside Prescott as he guided the horses along. The medium was idling away time watching a hawk as it wheeled, hovered and dived to the earth when suddenly a speck caught his eye. He started and looked again, yes, there it was—no vision or delusion stemming from either mysticism or alcohol—it was a definite speck that had grown into a triangular shape as it descended.

“Pemberton! Brutus! Look!” he shouted.

Within the coach Pemberton jolted awake, slurring something about ‘...vile grunts...’ and directed by Mang’s shouting, beheld the curious form of aerial navigation that was slowly descending toward them.

“Remarkable,” Mang said, “it appears to be canvas, stretched across some form of frame, with a gentleman bound to it.”

“Is it some form of punishment?” the lord asked as he peered through the window before he noticed that its destination appeared to be the nunnery ahead whose walled enclosure stood beyond the woods at the head of a vale carved by the River Rood.

“Quick,” Pemberton exclaimed, “we must warn them and rescue him!”

The nunnery was occupied by the Sisters of Unrestrained Charity, a reclusive order characterised by the vow of silence each sister was required to take, a vow upheld by all save the Mother Superior, who, an account of the silence that pervaded the order spoke for the entire sisterhood. This formidable woman was known to Lord Pemberton, or rather the vice the versa: Abbess Wheeler was reputed to be the receiver of much boundless wisdom from ‘Our Lady’ and her visions were reputed to have frequently impressed the pope himself with their alacrity. Pemberton filled Mang in on all this as he polished off a bottle of travelling beer.

“So the old girl has some prophetic ability?” Mang inquired.

“Well, it appears... oh by the way old chap, don’t call the old girl, ‘old girl’...”

“Really! Why ever not?” Mang returned, somewhat perplexed.

“Hmmm, yes, funny woman,” Pemberton breathed into Mang’s ear conspiratorially, “she has, ‘Opinions’.”

“Aah! One of those,” Mang returned and nodded sagely.

“Any way, she will be rather suspicious of us.”

“Really! Why is that?”

“Not sure. Gentlemen of leisure, your repute as a fakir, occultist; my past exploits... beer, Mang?”

“Ah, splendid! Just the ticket before talking to nuns!”

The huge gates were opened by silent nuns, their voluminous habits offset by great headdresses that leant their skulls the appearance of rather squashed boxes.

“WE’RE HERE TO SEE THE LADY ABBESS!” Pemberton bellowed.

“Brutus,” Mang observed, “they are not deaf, merely dumb!”

The nuns drew their attention to a sign: MALE VISITORS PLEASE REPORT TO THE SUMMER HOUSE. So leaving the Professors under the care of Prescott, they made their way across the lawn to await the Abbess.

“Vigorous males like us, you see, have to be kept away,” Pemberton observed, “stir up female passions!”

They sat themselves under a hulking image of the Blessed Virgin of Unrestrained Compassion and watched as the curious spectacle in the sky circled some hundred feet above them.

“Getting lower,” Mang observed. A strident bellow announced the approach of the Abbess.

“Now, you men!” she roared at a volume that belied her stature, as she strode across the lawn, her veil trailing in her wake. “I’m glad you two are here, I was wanting to talk to you, I’ve heard all about you two, I know that you are bedfellows of the bizarre and scurrilous!”

The two men exchanged glances at this.

“Whilst I am prepared to admit that perhaps it was not the pair of you who are responsible...” The woman continued at length, complaining about some night time visitor to the Abby grounds and implying that she suspected the two of them. Pemberton began snoring gently and Mang observed the slow-moving air craft circle low over the abbey grounds until he pointed and said, “Sorry to interrupt...”

“Well looks like certain death for that fellow,” Pemberton waking, announced in the tones of one who was reconciled to the misfortune of others, “oh no, there he goes. Ah, magnificent! Into the tree, safe after all. Oh well, drama over.”

“I rather fancy,” Mang announced as he popped his monocle into his eye until it bulged and reared under the glass, “that the occupant of that eccentric air craft is the good Professor...”

“What?” The Abbess stared in astonishment.

“I think if anyone has been creeping around the grounds at night, it will be this fellow,” Mang



said.

“Yes,” Pemberton said, “he and his...companions have been making a right nuisance of themselves.”

By the time they had walked over to the tree, a group of nuns had gathered around the strange craft and its odd occupant. Like a grizzled imp, the Professor hung from the tree, bound into his rather flimsy looking device. He was cackling with the manic gusto that characterised his final years in the groves of academe.

“You!” the Abbess started, “what on earth are you engaged in? You awful little man, clearly it is no good!”

“Yes, Professor!” Mang exclaimed, “what on earth are you up to, old man?”

The octogenarian academic merely swung in his harness and cackled and leered. One of the nuns suddenly emitted a cry of horror and then clamped her hand over her mouth.

“Eustace,” Wheeler said, “is this the awful man you saw peering in through the dormitory windows?”

The young lady nodded, pale and frightened as the apparition continued to leer and jeer.

“Perhaps we should take him into custody,” Pemberton said as Mang untied the Professor, “we’ll make sure he does not bother you again!”

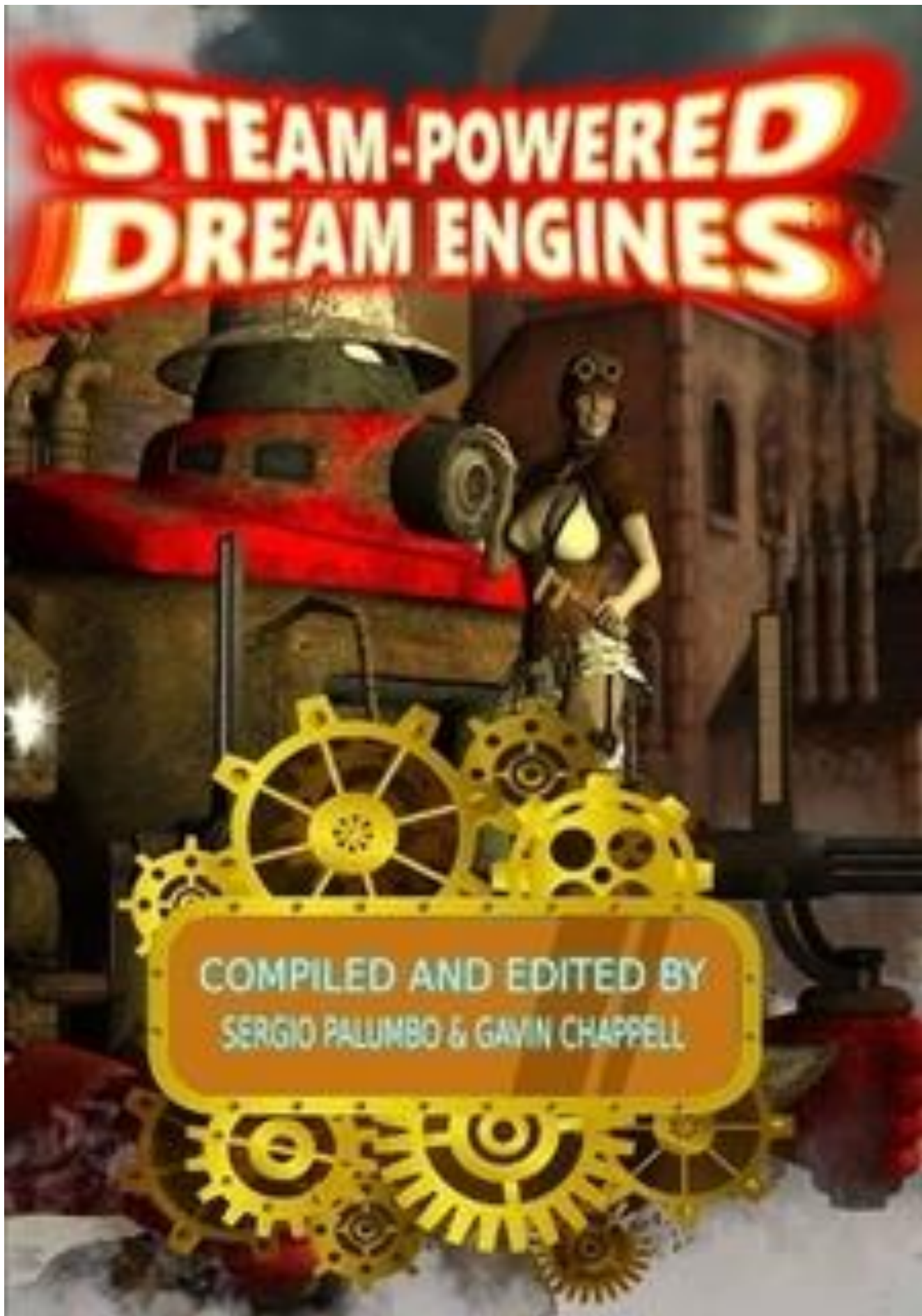
They took their leave of the nuns and upon returning to the coach they found that two of the Professors had absconded, but the noise generated by the new addition compensated for their loss. Pemberton chose to join Mang alongside Prescott as their coach wound through the gently curving lanes, the bird calls and murmuring foliage drowned by the curious range of noises that emanated from the carriage.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK

*For any who can bring themselves to, the further adventures of Mang and Pemberton are to be found in [‘Steam-powered Dream Engines’](#)*

[Available from Rogue Planet Press](#)

# STEAM-POWERED DREAM ENGINES

A detailed steampunk illustration. In the center, a woman with a determined expression wears a dark, form-fitting outfit with a white corset and a leather skirt. She has goggles on her forehead and a small mechanical device on her chest. She stands next to a large, complex mechanical engine. The engine has a prominent red horizontal band and a large, dark, cylindrical component on top. The background shows a dark, industrial setting with various pipes, valves, and mechanical parts. The overall color palette is dominated by dark browns, greys, and the bright red of the engine's band.

COMPILED AND EDITED BY  
SERGIO PALUMBO & GAVIN CHAPPELL

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BLINK by Josef Desade

The sound of a screen door slamming echoed relentlessly in my head...the jeep ahead of me. An unceasing ringing in my ears as leaves crunch softly underfoot, crushed into dust that blew away in the breeze. I hold the side of my head as I feel the rust on the handle of the jeep scrape against my fingers as I squeeze the handle and lift myself up into the dirty and ripped seat behind the worn steering wheel. A loud honk and I jumped, banging my head against the ceiling.

Fucking a... are you fucking serious?!

Breathe...breathe...concentrate...

Reality snapped back into focus as I examined my face in the reflection of the rear-view mirror. I'm fucking sweating...I hate it when I get all sweaty because I know the anxiety is right around the corner.

I shook my head...I could feel the abyss drawing near...

Try to fight it...try to fight it...

Slow breaths...slow...but that fucking bitch...why the fuck is there a fingerprint on the mirror...breathe...don't let the walls close in...

Thump...thump...thump...

Exhale...

I wonder if anyone else finds it calming to just shake their head until everything becomes a blur...

Can't stop it...

I repeatedly punch the steering column until my knuckles are swollen.

Fuck...great...now this fucking beeping won't stop...

I hear myself screaming and know it's time to go.

Fabric brushes against my hand as I reach into my pocket and pull my keys out.

The jingle and dull thud of them hitting the floor sounds deafening inside my head.

FUCK!

Stop fucking shaking...just fucking STOP!

What was that??

Red and blue...flashing...the sound of brakes.

Should I go for it? Should I throw this bitch into drive and just take it for a ride?

My sweat turned ice cold and then a sudden wave of nausea overtook me, followed by a strange calm.

I watched the stupid pig grunt as he pulled his swollen weight up from the inside of the car and started his slow waddle over towards me. Absolutely disgusting. He seemed nervous...as he should be. His hand rested on the unbuttoned holster where that beautiful metallic gleam peeked out from. More brakes squealing as two more cruisers pulled up.

Three...possibly more...

Click...the slow drone of the window going down.

Probably should put my hands where he can see them or some shit...

I watched the door slowly open and swung my legs to the side...

FUCK! I'm going to kill this bastard...

Cold glass and steel against my face...

My head began to pound...

I could hear him grunting right in my damn ear...

My fucking arms...I'm going to kill this goddamn pig...

I could feel the abyss calling my name...

Need to remember to breathe...breathe...but his fucking goddamn voice...

My surroundings blurred, and I watched the piece of shit stumble backwards as I yanked my arm free. His face felt like warm pizza dough in my grip and then there was the beautiful red mixing with sparkling jewels of glass. I smiled as the warm spray of blood slapped me across the face like an ex-lover and breathed in deeply the copper scent. Ripping a piece of broken glass from the car I laughed as I plunged it deep into that fucker's neck.

No time to hesitate...right now action is needed...

I quickly reached down and pulled the Glock from the officer's holster and I swear to fucking god time stood still as I saw the sunlight reflect off of it...the most beautiful fucking thing ever...

BANG...BANG...

Two shots from almost point-blank range at this point, as these other two shocked pieces of shit ran towards me.

Flesh tearing...cracking bone...the splash of a wave of brain matter hitting the pavement, as the Autumn leaves blew calmly on a cool breeze.

Flashing red and blue...

Three little piggies...well I guess that makes me the big, bad, motherfuckin wolf.

Inhale...exhale...inhale...exhale...

My pants suddenly felt tight as I felt a smile creep up my face...

I took a step back towards the house...

Fuck it...this bitch is gonna get it.

I was running...my heart was pounding in my chest and I could barely breathe...

Stumbling...blinded by tears that streamed down my dust covered face...

My feet leaving the ground as I glimpse a twisting tree root poking out of the underbrush behind me...

I hit the ground hard, the little air still in my lungs flying out as I struggled; gasping.

The world spun around as I tumbled down the hill and onto the river bed. I slowly stood up and brushed myself off as I picked ripped denim from a bloody scrape on my leg. Anger overcame my sadness for a moment and I screamed as I kicked the rocky ground next to the river that winded through the landscape. It felt like everything I knew had crashed down around me as I threw my ten-year-old frame to the ground. The sadness washed back over me in a wave as the water next to me licked at my heels and I buried my face into the sand and cried. It felt like forever that I lay there on the river bank, the salty tears falling off my face and making little explosions in the sand that I watched erupt through blurred vision. I don't remember hearing anything before the nervous fingertips pressed against my shoulder and I looked up slowly to the figure that stood before me; a black shadow against the backdrop of the sun.

I wiped my face and felt the sting of sand getting into my eyes as my vision came back into focus. In front of me stood a little girl I knew from school. She was a grade behind me, but I knew her from the neighbourhood as well. In our middle of nowhere town in North-western



Georgia everybody knew everyone. Strangers weren't very welcome, and we were always considered a little strange by the rest of the state.

She looked down at me concerned...I always hated when people gave me that look.

Pity...even at ten I hated pity. It was something people gave to the people they looked down upon and dad always sa...

Dad...

The wood splintered easily with a loud cracking sound...

An animal like yelp to the right as a quick motion caught my eye.

I never liked this dipshit...

I hear myself giggling as the pistol in my hand cracks my roommate's stupid fucking face.

Thump...

Fucking....piece...of...shit! Fuck you! Fuck you!

I start coughing as tears stream down my face because I'm laughing so hard as the steel reinforced toe of my boot repeatedly cracks into his head.

Crunch...crunch...crunch...it reminds me of the leaves outside as they were flattened beneath my feet outside.

I tell him he looks fucking stupid as he gurgles at me...what an annoying sound. He's making a fucking mess of the cream coloured carpet spitting that shit all over the place.

A scream from across the hallway in front of me...

Shit...I thought he'd be easier to drag...

Into the bedroom...

Guess who's home!

This stupid slut...look at her trying to hide behind her knees...stupid fucking cunt. Looking at me with those pretty eyes like an animal caught in the headlights of a car...god I'm fucking hard...

Thud...her boyfriend's legs hit the hardwood floor. One more kick for good measure to this dipshit.

Crunch.

Her fucking screaming is driving me crazy...

SHUT THE FUCK UP!

This bitch just doesn't know when the fuck to quit...

The world blurred as I shook my head...

I can't take this...

If there's one kind of person I can't stand...

Strands of hair wrapped around my fingers as I felt her neck grow stiff as her eyes grew wide in terror as she stared at the ceiling.

A sharp sting as my hand connected to her face with a crack.

Fucking bitch...I told you to just shut the fuck up and you didn't just shut the fuck up so now...SHUT THE FUCK UP.

I began to laugh, and she whimpered as she tried to shield herself from me. Her shirt was turning a beautiful crimson red as blood poured from her nose.

Face down into the mattress...a pool of red forming around her...

Thud...thud...thud...my fist was like a heartbeat against her lower spine.

All she had to do was shut the fuck up...

So fucking horny...I can't take this anymore...

One little crack to the skull and you go to sleep...

Sweet dreams cunt...

Fabric ripping as I turned her across the bed and tore the fabric from her legs.

I started laughing uncontrollably...

Fucking bitch is going to wake up with this asshole's battered face ready for a kiss...

I'm surprised by how quickly his face had turned into a swollen purple mess.

Disoriented moans...

Oh slow down honey, you'll really be moaning in a minute.

She must of opened her eyes and seen her lover because she started screaming as I forced her legs apart...

Thud...

Stay the fuck down bitch...

Ripped panties on the bed...the sound of terror in the air...I was ready to fuck.

My belt jingled as it fell to the floor and the Glock made a pretty little click as it cocked while I put it to the back of her head...

Hold still bitch...

I always loved that unwanted moan they let out as I forced my way into them...

How the fuck do you like that you little slut?! Is that how you like to get it?

She was trying to fight back moaning but she was crying so hard she started to choke...

Her hair...so soft in my grip...I tightened my fingers and she tried to scream as she gazed into her boyfriend's eyes.

Harder...harder...I could feel her body reacting as she tried to feign disgust but she couldn't hold back and started to scream in pleasure.

That's fucking right bitch...

I need to stop laughing...I can't breathe...I need to...

A scream broke my concentration...

I said to shut the fuck up!

BANG.

Her boyfriend's face exploded spraying her with bits of bone and brain matter.

I felt a warm release as I exploded into her.

A rush as I used her as a springboard and jumped up.

Struggling...scrambling...fuck this bitch.

Where ya going, hun? Our date just got started...

Darkness...cold sweat...shivers down my spine...a ringing in the ears...

I sat straight up in my bed, frantically looking from side to side.

All a dream...a stupid fucking dream...nothing more...

Slow down...deep breath...exhale...

I wonder what my shrink is gonna say about this one...

What a fucking joke...

Therapy never helped me. It didn't solve the thoughts...didn't silence them...

Suppression...but you can't suppress darkness for long however; it always finds a way to get its inky tendrils through the smallest crack...before you know it BAM...the plaster is beginning to crumble and you open your fucking mouth to breathe but find that you're choking on your own shit as it pours into your goddamn soul.

It ripped out any form of light that was left inside until all you knew was apathy...and the haunting thoughts...raw emotion...way back in the blackened depths...the ones that you thought you silenced...but deep down in the dark...way in the fucking depths...they were lying in wait within...hidden in the shadows of your soul...just waiting to find that tiny little crack...

A quick glimpse of the ceiling and then the wall as morning sun rays flittered across the canvas before me.

A dark hallway...the sound of someone crying at the end behind a partially closed door...my little feet cautiously crept towards the crack...

My cousin was crying...his clothes dishevelled...for just a brief second our eyes met and then he lowered his towards something on the ground...

I looked down and saw my father's handkerchief bunched up on the floor...white against red...the contrast glared back at me...

For a moment everything was fuzzy...confusion...and then fear took hold as my cousin pulled my uncle's revolver from the side of his bed and put it to his head...

BANG!

Tears falling...everything slowed down...screaming...horrible inhuman screaming...

Suddenly everything grew distant as a high-pitched ringing drowned out the rest of the world...

Sudden clarity...red everywhere...

My mother holding my cousin...but what was wrong with his face? My uncle on his knees...tears streaming...big black boots...the smell of oil and wood...

My father was looking at me as he pulled up his pants and fastened his belt...why was he smiling...leaning forward...

I watched him pick up the handkerchief as he winked at me and left the room...

Leaves crunching under foot...the sound of the rake scraping the ground...it's that stupid fucking cat again...always on my damn steps looking all smug...cloth against my face, the scent of sweat and cologne; a cool breeze as a chill goes down my spine...orange, yellow and red exploding into the air, falling to the ground like feathers...Squeal of tires...burning rubber in the air as metal connects with metal...a seat belt sways against the side of the light blue steel...screaming...a child crying...the mother running from the car and yanking on the man's arm as mascara runs down her face like oil...SLAP...the man backhands her...I can feel my eyes lighting up...kicking and screaming the child under his arm...SLAM...metal against metal...a cloud of dust as the tires spin...I see in my head fire....sparks...a burning flame....then there was silence as the car sped away into the distance...a blurred landscape as my vision goes side to side...I know what needs to be done....THUNK...THUNK...Squeals...THUNK...the cat tore away across the yard...I lower my head...clumps of sticky hair stuck in the rake...what a mess...a big orange crescent rising in the sky...as if the moon fell on its back just to create a Cheshire cat smile that looked down and mocked me...

The blur of the road...I always found a serene quality to the constant movement as if one was watching a symphony of colour as the pavement blended with the green trees...the blue sky...yellow lines...flashing like a movie reel in my mind as they danced in the headlight, flickering through space...time ceased to have a meaning...everything was calm within utter chaos...weightless...visions playing before my eyes...answers...a static feedback echoing around me...immortality...infinity...a wrinkle in time that pulled me in like a lover's soft caress...wrapping around my body as everything ceased to be...purity...menacing neon lights...lips floating in the darkness...the tranquil night takes on a darker visage...pernicious vibes surround me...whispering in my head...spiralling along uneven twists and turns as everything slows to a crawl...menacing hills looming over me...a burning city in the distance...burning bright...into the gaping mouth and everything is red...unexplainable fear...the doorway is closing...growing smaller...instinct...reaching through the fog...the lights went out...I lay on my floor shivering...there was blood everywhere again. Paralysis overtook my body and I lay still. A catatonic calming sensation overtook my body...blink...the world went dark...a strange light through the window as if something was burning...blink...the world went dark...my face stuck to the floor in a pool of blood...blink...the world went dark.

A flashing light...on, off...on, off...red and then black again. The phone in front of me on the floor...a voicemail. An unknown caller on the other end...my cousin had been reported missing. The detective on the other end left a phone number to call back. Stretching and climbing to my

feet, shaking off the dreams from the night before. A soft beeping in the other room as the aroma of coffee drifted through the air. Best part of waking up...a long, exaggerated yawn...everything in its place on the kitchen counter. Watching the slow stream of liquid pour into the mug another yawn escaped me. The warm liquid hitting the back of my throat as I walked towards the half open doorway...descending...step by step into the eternal dusk that was only broken by a single bulb.

It's amusing, the horror in my cousin's face when the hood comes off. Why doesn't he understand this is the only way to heal the past? That fucking whimper...what a fucking coward. There is no fucking room for cowardice in this household. How the fuck does he expect to heal without facing the beasts from the past?! I wish I could remove the ballgag but he would just start screaming again...I thought he would revel in watching his demons exorcised but all he fucking did was scream while I slowly flayed my father's back. At least dad had shut his goddamn mouth after a few hours, now I had to babysit this fucking baby until he could get a grip on himself.

**LOOK IN HIS FUCKING FACE YOU COWARD! TELL HIM YOU AREN'T AFRAID ANYMORE!**

I shook the chair, chuckling as he squeezed his eyes shut. This was going to take longer than I expected. A groan came from father as he slowly turned, the chains holding his arms to the beams glinting in the light of the single bulb. A swift fist to the midsection and he vomited up the remains of whatever he had eaten before I had picked him up the night before. Disgusting...fucking disgusting. The scent of bile was overwhelming and this whole scenario was just pissing me off.

**WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING?! ARE YOU A FUCKING BABY?! WHO THE FUCK IS GOING TO CLEAN UP THIS MESS?!**

No patience for this right now, it would have to wait until later. Perhaps after a few more hours my cousin would come to his senses...if he didn't finish this himself he would never heal. A sigh escaped me as my fist connected with the piece of shit for a second time. The little bitch looked like he wanted to cry...but there are no tears allowed in this household, right dad? Piece of shit. I felt my cousin shudder as I patted his head and walked towards the stairs...he wasn't ready yet. The door made a satisfying click as it shut behind me...now where did I leave my coffee?

**SLAP!**

The belt came down like a whip, leaving a bright red welt across her back. Again and again it slapped against her skin. Tears soaked my face as mother cried out in pain. I turned to look away and he grabbed the sides of my face, his nails tearing into my skin. A yelp escaped me and suddenly I was seeing stars as I felt my legs go out from under me and slammed into the wall. I couldn't stop shaking and he was screaming in my face...I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I couldn't stop saying it as he spit in my face, the scent of whiskey on his breath. His boot caught the side of my head and everything went dark for a minute as I crumpled into a pile on the floor. Play dead...just play dead...I heard the belt come down hard again...the buckle connecting with bone as it cracked



mother's skull...her body lay limp over the table as I heard the zipper on his pants sliding down.

Red knuckles...white skin...shakes again as I gripped the steering wheel...disoriented I looked around at my surroundings...a woman was watching me from the doorway of a gas station with a worried look as she quickly ushered her kid inside. Had I been screaming again? I glanced at the passenger seat, scanning along it...orange...orange...where had they gone? Leaning over I blindly felt around the floor of the backseat until I heard the familiar rattling. There they are...squeezing the cap I felt it turn...nice and smooth...the little white pills fell into my hand with a shake and I downed them as I took a deep breath and cleared my head...The shakes were getting worse with each passing day...the meds would stop them they had told me...bullshit! All part of a fucking plan to dope us all up...take away our minds...stop us from thinking clearly...blood was what would make it stop. The past needed to bleed for us all to heal, how else could they expect things to get better?

Cigarettes...that's why I had stopped here...the door slammed shut behind me as I listened to my footsteps on the pavement, my boots making a calming thump...thump...with each passing step. Leaving the slight chill of outside behind...warmth from inside as a bell jingled, turning to a clang as it rested against the glass door. A line at the counter...some fucking idiot arguing about the price of a bag of chips...the lady from outside pouring coffee at a counter...the little child...scanning the room I caught sight of him in the back corner near the restrooms. Thump...thump...boots against tile...a smile spread across my face as the child looked up from the candy bar he was trying to reach that was just too far from his grimy fingertips. He took a step back, uncertainty written all over his face as I reached past his head and took hold of the candy bar that had eluded him.

Dangling just over his head, he smiled as I dropped it into his waiting arms before his mother yelled at him with concern to stay at her side and shot me a dirty look. Fucking cunt...should teach her a lesson about giving dirty fucking looks to strangers, then maybe she would think twice before being a fucking bitch. Thump...thump...into line as the woman went out of her way to avoid me until I was in front of her. The clerk looked like cattle to me, empty soulless eyes as they handed the pack of Newports over the counter. Satisfying pat as the pack hit my hand and the crisp sound of cellophane tearing as I pulled a cigarette out and shot a smile over my shoulder at the bitch and walked out the door.

Oh father dearest...I'm home...the bulb flickered to life as my heavy steps resounded through the basement. Oh...how rude of me, did you want a smoke? A sizzling as my cigarette was snuffed against his face. A sudden jolt as his body spasmed...fucking little bitch, that's all you are. At least my cousin had finally stopped his sniffing...stupid fucking coward...just as bad in the end as the rest of them...I tried to help him but some people just want to wallow in their own suffering...I could feel the shakes coming back as the scent of copper filled my nose...stumbling back up the stairs...falling to my knees...pulling myself back up, hand on the cool countertop...

The orange pill jar caught my eye next to the sink...the pills...that's what was doing it...they were causing the shakes...fuck what the therapist had said...a little musical tink as they bounced back and forth against steel, spiralling round and down the drain. A sharp pain as my fist clenched and the plastic bottle cracked, causing a jagged little line of blood to form in my palm...I stared at it

as my body shook, teeth held tight together. Stumbling back to find a chair...missed...the floor rushed to greet my face.

Ragged and wild eyed, it scrambled across the floor on its hands and knees like some strange insect before the chains reached their length and she was flung backwards. A quick rush of air as he flew past me in a rage, steel toe boots connecting with her jaw...CRACK! She screamed incoherently and he yelled for me to come closer...cautiously creeping up behind him as he threw her on her back and stomped her pale stomach...she clenched her hands over herself and curled up in a ball as tears created little streams on her dirty face...I shouldn't be scared of the thing he said...she couldn't hurt me as long as she was on her leash...it was time to celebrate...he was screaming in her face...the thing that used to be Mother looked pathetic...like a starving dog, chained up and left to die. His boot connected with her face and she grew still...as quiet consumed the room the fear dissipated...I took a deep breath as he grinned at me, parting the things legs and lifted her skirt...tonight I was thirteen...it was time to become a man.

The girl smiled shyly at me, her pale skin almost glowing against the deep red of the comforter. Her blonde hair was draped over one shoulder as she put her arms out to either side and let me tighten the restraints. Excitement was overwhelming me as the clasp locked in place around her neck and she bent her legs to the side to show me the prize she held between her thighs. I humoured the cheap whore and ran my fingertips along the inside of her leg as she exhaled in approval. I lifted a fishnet covered leg and put it over my shoulder as I slowly teased her with my tongue.

It was a struggle tonight not to let my agitation show as the scent of latex reached me from the bitches cunt...not only was she thirty-eight minutes late, the fucking slut didn't even clean up after being a cum dumpster for whatever scum she had been with earlier. One thing Father had always been right about, a whore is not human, far from it. They were just like cattle awaiting a slaughter. Dirty pieces of shit that deserved no human rights and should be used up and then put to pasture like the filthy animals they were.

She swung her legs over my broad shoulders, wrapping them around me as she tried to ply my tongue closer to her disgusting filth. Fucking stupid cunt wants to be eaten, well why not give her what she wanted...I sunk my teeth in, tearing flesh as I ripped her clit away from her body with a snap, her screams whipping me into a frenzy. I felt control slipping away but medicine never went down easy. I reached into the back pocket of my pants and felt the hand carved handle of the knife I had picked just for tonight. It glimmered in my eyes for a moment before I plunged it deep into her disease, repeatedly fucking the stupid bitch with it. Her screams reached a fevered pitch as the blood poured down my arm...

Dirty fucking cunt, you like that you whore?! I bet you do! Who the fuck said you can go to sleep, open your goddamn eyes and shut your fucking mouth...

She started to spasm as I ripped the knife out and began to stab at her stomach. Such a beautiful sight, like watching a rose bloom as each downward plunge created a new smile in her skin. The flow of blood began to slow as it soaked into the blankets below her. A waste of flesh...bitch probably had aids...well now she will be in the trash where she belongs. The bed bounced a little

under my weight as I hopped off of it and wiped my hands off on the foot of the comforter. Her face was contorted like some strange Halloween mask that someone had stuck on a wet bag of leaves.

The bones were the hardest to cut through...Father guided him as the saw worked its way into the ivory. The flesh fell away in chunks, slow drizzles of blood forming pools on the floor as they dripped to the ground where they began to congeal. It felt like I had been cutting for hours, methodically being guided by my father's more experienced hands. My hands were sore by the time it was done and I stepped back to look at the pieces of meat that had once been Mother. I thought I would have wept, but no tears came. She had served her purpose and if she had been more attentive over the years and less disobedient perhaps she still would have had one, but Father said this time would always come. I felt his hand on my shoulder and glanced over to see a look of pride in his eyes for the first time in my life...I had become a man.

Grogginess...hushed voices...a strange beeping from behind my head. It was hard to breathe as the bright light blinded me. Where am I? What is all of this? The light grew more bearable as I blinked my eyes and everything began to come into focus. The scent of disinfectant reached my nose and I almost gagged as the beeping continued in my ears. So hard to breathe...something stuck in my throat...a hard yank and a tube came out...turning to the side a heart rate monitor came into view...my mouth felt like cotton as I slowly pushed myself up on my elbows, my muscles sore and weak beneath my weight.

I reached for a glass of water that sat on a table next to the bed as a nurse came running in, a look of excitement on her face. She was rambling...yelling for a doctor...something about a coma...out for a week...what had happened? Why was I here? I took a gulp from the glass and felt the cool water rush into my throat as a stickiness filled it and I coughed, the force of it shaking my entire body as a slight pain reverberated in the back of my head. I fell back on a pillow as a doctor came into the room and began to look at a chart at the foot of the bed.

My head ached as I tried to remember...quick flashes of distant memories...a sudden pain. There was yelling...familiar faces from what seemed like dreams...rent money was late...someone shoved me against a wall...threats...it was all hazy. My legs were all pins and needles as the sudden movement from my body started to wake them up from the slumber they had enjoyed the past week. The memory of crunching leaves beneath my feet...it was starting to come back as I saw my Jeep parked at the curb...stride by stride getting closer...a shout from a doorway as a screen door slammed shut...I turned to yell something back and before I could react it hit me...flying through the air...spinning...face down I hit the pavement as my vision blurred...tail lights speeding off in the distance....darkness...

The doctor was talking now, his voice booming in the small room. He was telling me it was a miracle that I hadn't suffered any serious injuries other than the concussion that had caused the temporary coma. My roommate's face flashed in my mind as he continued on, anger welling up beneath my calm demeanour. I listened as he went on to tell me about the accident and that they would be able to release me after a night of observation as long as I had a family member I could call. My father's shit eating grin ran through my mind as the doctor turned and walked into the hallway, leaving the nurse to tend to me.

So, is there someone you would like us to call?

Yeah...my cousin...he has a nice big house...wouldn't mind taking me in for a few days...we have unfinished business anyways...

THE END

*NB: This story first appeared in [Horror, Sleaze, and Trash](#).*

[Cyrus Song](#)



# Cyrus Song

Steve Laker

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## PANDORA IS PRESENT by GK Murphy

Jacob Rosebud had never taken to booze due to its effect on his personality, his interaction with others, and his everyday social life. Alcohol proved an odd beast and often served to change him, some might have said for the worse, much to the 21-year-old's detriment every time he sampled the damned stuff.

On this night in November 2017, Halloween was spent and all that was left in terms of celebration was Christmas, and his birthday in January.

More alcohol—such shindigs demanded it!

He reflected on the evening as he took the short detour through Blast Gates Graveyard on the east side of town, making his way home through the darkness, drunkenly, feeling like he was going to retch. It was what might be one particularly tumultuous journey home after a night on the tiles.

Blast Gates had a reputation. Yes—people were dying to get in here!

It had a history of haunting. Well, what place of burial didn't have such a reputation?

It was “dead centre” of town.

In Jacob's mind, as well as for anybody reading into his thoughts, the jokes seemed to worsen!

There was more...

No, not now, (cut the humour crap) not at all—places like these here consecrated grounds were highly solemn and deserved more respect. You didn't want to distress any wayward spirit or phantom of the woods lurking hereabouts. Lurking, yes, in these darkened enclaves and hollows in and around the barely-visited Blast Gates, at least two to three miles away from the council estate in West Cumbria (in the North of England, no less) where Jacob lived with his parents. Man, why didn't you just take the road and go along the Main Street, and why did you have to be lazy and cut across the fields just to save ten minutes...and also—dummy—why did you do it in the frigging dark, at 2am in the morning, with a skin-full of beer and Jack Daniels?

Halfway across the site, he recalled an old story about this place.

Apparently, it was once a druid place of black celebration and sacrifice, and the hill it sat atop once ran with the blood of murdered, mutilated virgins and innocent children butchered as an offering to the druids' futile lords in the heavens.

The North had a curious history. Cumbria and The Lake District was considered by many to be a Black Magic and Satanist hotspot. This proved the most opportune subject matter to explore, locally and nationally, as acquainted by many a foreign tourist as well, or for those of us who liked to share topics regarding witchcraft and bloodshed.

He paused on top of a burial plot and his eyes widened. He was not alone here. There was a presence nearby, silent yet inexorably there, however invisible.

Dumbly, Jacob looked down and, in his torment, sighed, slurring, “I’m sorry for this. I know I’m trespassing and that doesn’t bode well with all you dead guys...but it’s late and I need to get home, if anything to use the toilet!”

Jacob chuckled at his derisive sense of acidic humour.

A voice, perhaps a few yards away, seemed to whisper, “...No bother, son.”

Eyes widening further, Jacob felt himself shivering like a shitting dog as he scanned the vicinity. His eyes searched every nook and cranny nervously for the slightest movement... an emerging monster (the ghost of a disturbed druid, perhaps), maybe a prowler or pervert, a fellow drunk perhaps...a hobo or homeless person, perhaps—some cold inebriated tramp looking to rest his head somewhere quiet for the night.

“I know you’re there, Pandora!” Jacob screeched like an adolescent, spooked girl, like in a scene from a movie.

Everybody in this vicinity knew Blast Gates was haunted by the spirit of a prostitute named Pandora Riley, who years ago brought her clients here and seduced them, before she sacrificed them horribly. She mutilated her male clients and then devoured their flesh. The lady was young when she died—twenty-three perhaps—yet many would have sworn that youthful, flame-haired and pretty Pandora had a much older head on her shoulders. In the daylight hours, from week to week, Ms Riley travelled the lengths of the country to appear in porno shoots and nude fashion modelling, and yes, was quite a beauty to behold, with a bubbly personality to match—which only served to make her case more sad and unfortunate.

A voice from the dark, a male voice, whispered, “Pandora has been waiting for you. She has wonders to show you. She has places to take you. All you do is pay ten pounds and she’s your slave...she’ll do anything for ten pounds!”

Stock-still and close to tears, Jacob stammered, “First thing I’m going to do is call the cops on this...you don’t scare me. Show yourself like a real man and we’ll sort it out with our fists, one on one...or are you a coward?”

The spiritually gruff voice croaked from the escalating, and claustrophobic, atmosphere, “...The planet is a ruinous blackened pit due to mankind’s fighting and violence and you are a product of such an environment. Our little Pandora will sort you out...Pandora will tackle your sense of violence WITH MORE VIOLENCE!”

Mocking and cocky now, Jacob forced a laugh, “I know about Pandora the Cannibal...she’s a diseased whore and a slut, and a killer that met her end in similar fashion!”

Pandora Riley was buried somewhere in Blast Gates Graveyard, in an unmarked plot. She had always been the town's biggest source of shame, an ugly figure of disgust—despite her beauty and elegant grace, this girl “turned bad”.

“...I'm here, Jacob...behind you!”

Jacob yelped and spun around, feeling the cold palm rest on his right shoulder.

The ghost of Pandora Riley was a vision to behold. She reared her brightly-colourful, plasma-enhanced flank off the ground, above the head of her prey, so that her ghost hovered above the crooked lines of tombs flanked by tall pines, and the unkempt, scruffy plots. The phantom swam and shimmered in its lacy neon trills.

Jacob was enchanted and bedazzled by Pandora's luscious flowing red locks and pale skin, yet most of all, the glacier-blue eyes that glowed like jewels in a crown fit for King or Queen, set in a pure white marble face. It was sheer, glowing majesty, which incited sharp, icy shivers along his spinal-cord, yet also filled him with a deep sense of desire and sexual longing.

None of this would be happening if he had not trespassed on these consecrated grounds and disturbed those at rest.

“I'm sorry, Pandora...” Jacob stuttered, and laughed weakly, “...you're not going to eat me, are you?”

There was a brief pause. He smiled as he recognized something cheeky in her expression.

Pandora's lips curled. “Which part of you would you like me to eat first, Jacob?”

“You know my name?”

“I like your name, Jacob. I know it like you know mine. Oh, nothing is secret around here. And yet...there are so many secrets.” Seriously she continued, “All you men are the same. You use women as sex objects and things to abuse. I ate you men because you damned well deserved it, all of you, yummy yum...I ask—will you ever know how those pigs treated me in those movie-studios in London and Manchester, when they used me, when they abused me...” There was a brief pause as her eyes widened and she scowled, “...Revenge against so many of my enemies and foes was very sweet!”

Jacob said, “But I'm not like that. I mean you no harm. I just need to go home...I desperately need to piss!”

Her tone softened and so did her marble mask. “But you're going to stay here with me and all my friends. Take a look around.”

Dumbly, Jacob looked around. He said, “I see nobody, just you.”



“Look closer...”

As the graveyard started to come to life, Jacob began to weep and moan as he recognised his fate would be a grisly one. Also, to his dismay and horror, he realised there was no way of backing out of this dead-end situation. He wanted to beg for mercy and for Pandora to take his measly uneventful existence, rather than just waste him—and devour his flesh—like all those other poor bastards she lured here in the dark dead of night, butchering them in the cold chill.

The shimmering phantoms, one by one, two by two, emerged from the plots, ghostly likenesses of how they once looked as mortals, some young, some old. They were bright like white or colourful neon as they slithered free of their confines underground and gradually ascended above Jacob’s head.

Soon, Blast Gates was crowded by swirling, darting ghosts. Pandora smiled gently.

Bowing his head, Jacob muttered, “I’ve seen enough. Take me and be on your way. I guess it’s my destiny to join you here, like so many others before me—like those present here now. I’m no better than them...do your worse, Pandora!”

Suddenly, as if prompted by his words, a gust of ice cold wind almost lifted Jacob off his feet. Blinded by the glow of Pandora’s advancing spirit, he gasped when her face was against his face—face to face, snouts an inch apart and nearly touching.

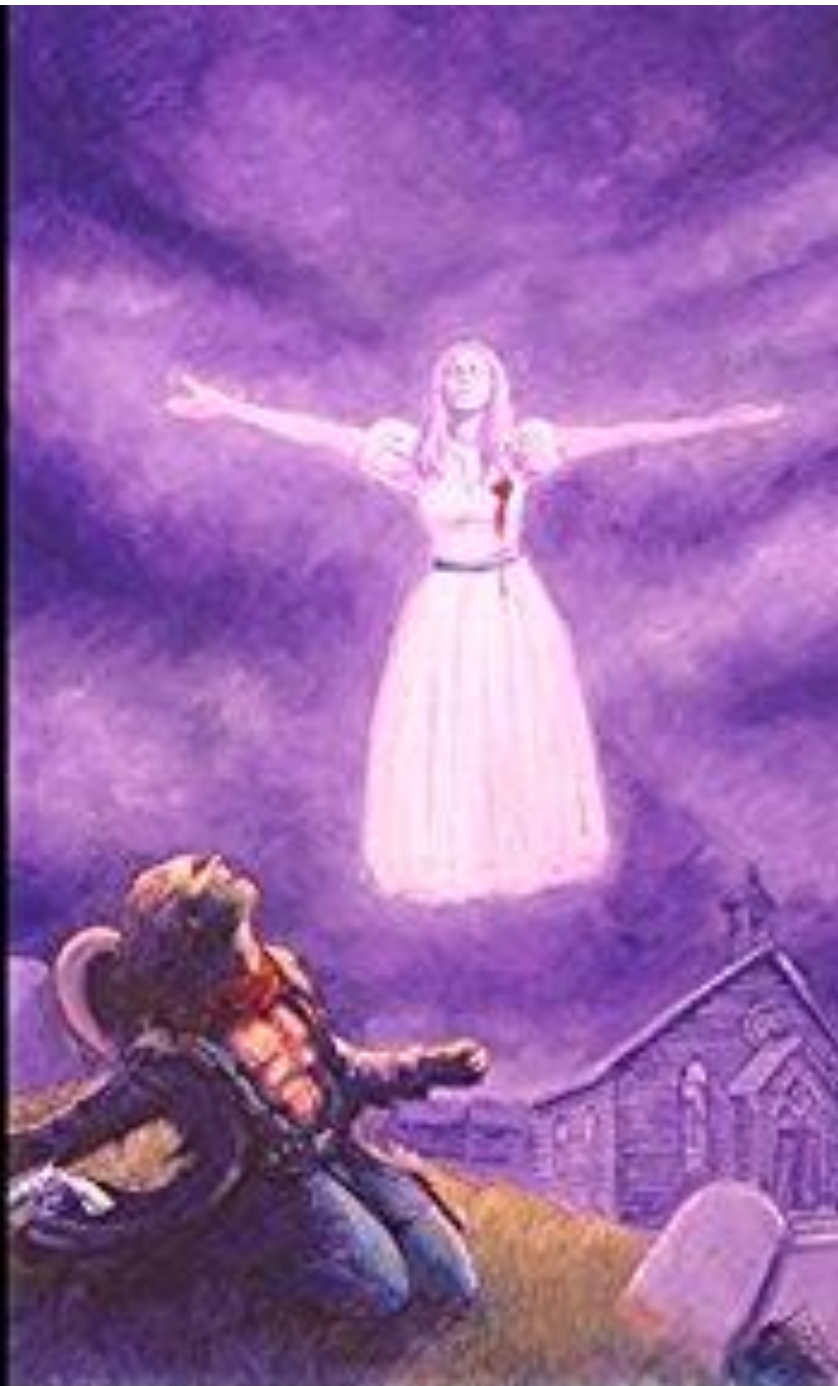
Pandora entered Jacob and started to devour the innards of his body morsel by morsel.

All around, the graveyard was swirling neon, mere ghostly onlookers.

THE END

[Schlock! Presents: Ghostlands](#)

# Ghostlands



*A Book of Ghost Stories*

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PLAN FOR CHAOS BY JOHN WYNDHAM reviewed by John C Adams

*Plan for Chaos* was written around the same time as Wyndham's signature novel *The Day of the Triffids* (1950-51), but that's where the resemblance ends. *Triffids* went on to be adapted for film and TV and by the time the author died it was firmly established as a national treasure. *Plan for Chaos* ended up languishing unread and unpublished in Wyndham's papers, in what is now the John Wyndham Archive, which has been held by the University of Liverpool since 1998.

Johnny Farthing is a photographer in post-WW2 New York. He's engaged to his cousin Freda. Their family is originally Swedish. Johnny's parents made their way to America via England. Their mutual Aunt Marta sounds like something out of Wagner—blonde and Nordic—so it was no surprise to anyone when she became an enthusiastic supporter of Hitler. Johnny and Freda are understandably keen to put that all behind them and concentrate on bringing Freda's father around to the idea of their marrying.

Johnny is unnerved by multiple stories of violent deaths of young women. As a photographer on *Choice* magazine, he's plenty used to snapping crime scenes and corpses, but this is different. Not only are there so many of them but all of them bear a striking resemblance to his fiancée. Even worse, he discovers Freda in her apartment with her head inside the gas oven. Then she disappears completely after she's been stretchered out of the building:

*"The police at home were stalled. They'd found the ambulance. It had been hired. The stretcher with Freda on it had been off-loaded at Grand Central, and the men paid. After that nothing—except one recap seemed to remember a stretcher being loaded into a black van."*

Johnny tracks down one of Freda's doubles who is still alive. If it's unnerving enough to encounter a clone of your future wife, double that when she's nothing like her in personality:

*"It was then that I began to notice more of the things about her that were not Freda. She was with an older man who looked like a Senator would like to look, and knew it: Leonine-orator type. The technique she was using on him—well, of course, to judge these things with a properly evaluating eye you have to be in the racket of being a woman yourself."*

Johnny then discovers that not only are there multiple Fredas but worse still also multiple Johnnys running around. Posing as one of his doubles, he's able to infiltrate the shadowy organisation who have facilitated the cloning process. Everyone speaks German and they are determined to ship him off to deep in the South American jungle:

*"The first weirdness of looking from one similar face to another, and another, did begin to blunt a little in time. And as it did, I began to perceive a new quality about the place: an oppressive something in the atmosphere."*

I loved this book. The publication of a fresh John Wyndham novel forty years after his death was an unexpected treat and it didn't disappoint.

Enjoy!

*Plan for Chaos* is available from [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/John-Wyndham-Plan-Chaos/dp/0141192210).



THE END



WINTER 2017-18

# Schlock!

## Quarterly

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OF MARS**

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Poems  
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SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE BEAST-MEN OF ATLANTIS by Milly “Mad Dog”  
McGuigan

Chapter Five

We caught up with Holmes downstairs, shouldering his way through a confusion of servants towards the study.

‘Watson,’ he said grimly. ‘And Miss Marency. It came sooner than I feared.’

‘My father?’ Miss Marency asked. Holmes nodded.

‘I fear so,’ he said.

‘Where’s Krueger?’ I asked, looking around me. ‘And where’s McAllister? Still asleep?’

‘Wider awake than you, I fear, Dr Watson,’ Holmes said brusquely.

The wails grew louder. A maid ran out from the study. Holmes seized her.

‘What has happened?’ he said, shaking the girl. ‘What have you seen?’ But she couldn’t speak.

‘The girl’s in a state of shock,’ I said, gently prising her away from him. ‘Miss Marency, do you have some brandy?’

‘D—n brandy,’ Holmes said savagely, and strode into the study. Miss Marency gave me a wild look and followed. The maid clinging to me, I hurried after them.

As I entered the study, I saw the body of Sir Digory Marency lying on the floor. Hovering over it was a short, squat shape. Lying on its side nearby was Sir Digory’s invalid chair. On the wall above it the black rectangle of an open safe door yawned like a gaping mouth. On the far side of the room, the French windows stood open. The curtains lashing in the night wind. The maid let out an even louder shrieking.

The ‘shape’ looked up. It was Krueger. The Boer stood over the unmoving baronet, a gun in his hand. I flung the maid into Miss Marency’s arms and fumbled for my gun, which I had thrust into my coat pocket.

‘Mynheer Krueger,’ said Holmes in ringing tones. ‘What have you done?’

‘I think he’s dead. Shot.’ He rose to his feet, and with one last look at the body, reloaded his gun. Without a further word, he ran outside.

‘Watson,’ Holmes said commandingly, ‘examine Sir Digory. Do what you can for him, but I fear he’s not long for this world. Where are the police when you need them? I’ll wager that constable is sleeping under a bush. I must go after Krueger.’

And he too vanished through the whipping curtains of the French window.

I knelt beside Sir Digory while Miss Marency comforted the maid and the other servants crowded into the doorway. I found a bullet hole in the baronet's forehead. It came as no surprise that there were no signs of life, but I made a cursory check nevertheless. This done, I closed the corpse's eyes gently and looked up at Miss Marency.

'I'm sorry,' I said in tones of concern, 'but your father has passed away.'

I rose to my feet, thinking that she would also need comforting. The butler appeared with the requested bottle of brandy, and with unshaking hand she poured a glass for the maid, and held it to the girl's lips.

'Take Peters to the servants' quarter,' she instructed the butler. 'Bert,' she addressed the stable boy calmly, 'go at once to town and inform the police that my father has been shot. The rest of you, please go to your quarters and await further instructions. There is an armed man at large in the grounds, indeed, more than one. Do not endanger yourself.'

'Yes, ma'am,' they chorused, and hurried away, casting horrified looks at their former master's body.

'Your Colonial upbringing has inured you to scenes of horror,' I remarked, pouring her a glass of brandy, and another for myself. 'But I would prescribe this.' I could only admire her aplomb.

She took it absently and went to the French windows. 'Where in G-d's name is your friend and Mynheer Krueger?' she cried. 'And where is Mr McAllister?'

I looked at the open safe and shook my head in despair. 'I can't believe he did this. He has stolen the map.' Sir Digory must have been delayed in putting the map away and that Krueger had come in, calmly shot him, and took the map.

Another shot boomed from deep in the wind lashed night. I spun round, seeing Miss Marency staring wide eyed at the French windows. Revolver in hand, I rushed out into the night, crying, 'Stay here, Miss Marency! I shall be back!'

The wind howled like a lost soul as it roared across the lawn. I raced down the terrace, shooting glances about in hopes of seeing anyone. Who had been shot? The trees shook above the rhododendrons, the gale whipping them about. I could see no one and hear no one. Who had fired? Who had been shot? Fear clutched at my heart. Holmes had gone out there, alone and unarmed. Had McAllister shot him? Or had Krueger? I no longer trusted either of Sir Digory's so-called old friends.

The shrill of a whistle pierced the night. The police! At least Inspector Newbold's constable was awake, and aware of recent events. I ran towards the sound, which came from the other side of the park. But even as I hurtled down the path between the bushes, my feet collided with an

unseen obstacle and I went flying head over heels. Even as I did, I heard the deafening retort of a gun going off so close it sounded as if it was right next to me.

My head collided with the bole of a tree and stars exploded in my mind. For a moment I believe that I was unconscious. I came to my senses to find someone shaking me.

‘Sir? Sir?’ came a frightened voice. It was the constable. ‘Are you alright? What’s going on? The park seems to be full of people. Several men went past me in the bushes. Then I found you.’

I rose to my knees. ‘I fell over something,’ I said. I could still remember the feel of it, soft yet solid. I turned to see a low humped shape lying in the grass. A body? Not Holmes, surely! The constable turned his bullseye on it.

It was Krueger. I checked his pulse. He was dead. Shot through the heart.

‘I was on the other side of the park,’ the constable said. ‘I came when I heard the shots. What’s been happening—?’ He broke off as his foot collided with something small and metallic. Reaching down, he shone his light on a gun. He picked it up and examined it. ‘Service revolver,’ he said, and sniffed, ‘recently fired.’ He looked at me. I remembered the shot I had heard as I fell.

‘It’s mine, officer,’ I said.

‘Oh, is it, sir?’ said the constable, turning the focus of his attention to the great gaping bullet hole in Krueger’s chest. ‘Would you mind telling me why you shot this gentleman?’

‘I didn’t shoot him, officer,’ I protested. ‘The gun was in my hand. It must have gone off when I tripped over his body.’

‘Save it for the judge, sir,’ the constable said heavily, reaching for his handcuffs. ‘I’m going to have to ask you to come quietly. We can’t have you cavorting about the countryside firing at all and sundry.’

‘You don’t understand!’ I cried. ‘Sir Digory has also been shot!’

The constable’s eyebrows climbed almost to the rim of his helmet. ‘So it was you,’ he muttered. He gripped the gun tightly. ‘You come here pretending to be some kind of detective, and it was you who was the killer all along!’

A tall figure appeared from the darkness. ‘It’s alright constable,’ came Holmes’ languorous tones. ‘You can keep your handcuffs for later. Watson didn’t shoot this man. I saw him shot myself.’

‘You saw him being shot?’ I asked. ‘Why didn’t you raise the alarm? Who shot him? This is Krueger. He shot Sir Digory.’



The constable scowled down at the dead Boer. 'He shot Sir Digory?' he gasped. 'What's been going on here?'

'Questions, questions,' said Holmes. 'For one thing, constable, you have been sleeping on duty. For another, the real killer of Sir Digory has now escaped. I saw him silhouetted against the muzzle flash as he shot Krueger, who I was pursuing. Then he ran into the darkness. I ran after him, but he must have known his way round the park like a poacher. I lost him, dammit.'

'It must have been you and the killer who went past me when I was on my way here,' said the constable.

'The police have been called,' I told Holmes. 'Hopefully they'll catch this other fellow. You don't think Krueger was the killer?'

'Krueger found the body,' said Holmes. 'He went after someone, someone he had reason to believe was the killer.'

'But who?' I asked.

Holmes was pensive. 'Is everyone accounted for at the Hall?'

'Yes,' I said. 'Except...' I broke off. 'McAllister is missing.'

'And so is the map,' said Holmes. He started walking back towards the hall, and I followed, leaving the constable standing stupidly by the corpse, pausing only briefly to snatch back my revolver. 'I think for the moment we can work on the hypothesis that McAllister shot Sir Digory and took the map, and that Krueger, who clearly had not been to bed—perhaps McAllister pre-empted him—found him. When we came in, Krueger went after McAllister. I went after Krueger, McAllister saw Krueger following and shot him, then ran. He evidently didn't see me, or...' he broke off as we came into the light from the French windows. 'Good Lord, Watson, you've been in the wars yourself.'

I dabbed ruefully at my bruised brow. Before I had a chance to explain, we heard the sound of whistles from the other side of the park.

'The police,' said Holmes.

Miss Marency appeared in the French windows, now fully dressed. 'I sent the stable boy for them,' she said. 'Did you find Mynheer Krueger?'

'We found him,' said Holmes laconically.

'We found him,' I added more helpfully, 'but it seems that he was not the killer, but McAllister was.'

'Mr McAllister?' She stared at us. 'There's no sign of him in the Hall.' She led us into the

darkened study, whose safe door had been closed although Sir Digory's body lay where it had fallen, and then into the entrance hall, where lights were still burning.

'There's no sign of him outside, either,' said Holmes, 'but he seems to have fled the area, unless our friend the Inspector has caught up with him.'

The stable boy appeared from the direction of the tradesmen's entrance, and behind him was a group of police. He pointed at them with his thumb.

'Here are the police like you asked for, ma'am,' he said.

'Thank you, Bert,' Miss Marency said calmly. She turned to the leader of the newcomers. 'Thank you for coming, sergeant,' she said. 'I'm afraid the worst possible thing has happened.'

'Sir Digory?' the sergeant said. 'Dead?'

She nodded. 'As is Mynheer Krueger. And Mr McAllister has disappeared.'

'Where is your superior officer?' Holmes asked suddenly. 'Couldn't Newbold make it?'

'Called to London, sudden-like,' said the sergeant, Andover. 'Very important business.' He turned back to Miss Marency. 'Statements will have to be taken. From yourself, your guests, and your staff. We'll also have to see the bodies.'

'The constable you left here is standing guard over Krueger's body,' said Holmes. 'Sir Digory's body remains in the study where it lay. But all this is very pointless. The killer has escaped now. He must be found.'

'My men will search the surrounding area with dogs,' Sergeant Andover said. 'But we must do everything we can to examine the scene of the murder. Even an amateur detective should understand that.'

'Yes,' said Holmes thoughtfully. 'We can't go jumping to conclusions, can we, sergeant?'

'Surely the priority is a manhunt,' I said. 'We know the killer's identity. I don't see what else can be gained here.'

'The sergeant knows his job, Watson,' said Holmes. 'The killer will be found, sooner or later. But we must be certain that we have the right man, and only a thorough study of the surroundings will bring that information.'

Miss Marency put her hands together. 'Anything that can be done to catch my father's killer,' she said, 'must be done.'

I stood by as the police began to examine the study and question the staff. Holmes watched sardonically.

‘This is all so much waste of time,’ I fumed, after we were both subjected to a series of dull witted questions from a dull-witted constable.

He shot a look at me. ‘You think so?’ he asked. ‘I think Sergeant Andover is a very thorough and punctilious man. I also have investigations to make. Maybe you’d like to come with me.’

I followed him outside and onto the terrace by the French windows. Out in the park a fallen star marked the spot where the constable still stood vigil over Krueger’s body. No doubt Andover would concentrate his investigations over there in due course. Further off, I could see other lights bobbing up and down and here the barking of dogs as they sought the trail of the fugitive.

All I felt now as I watched Holmes investigate the ground was a kind of anti-climax. McAllister was getting away and we were allowing ourselves to be bogged down by technicalities.

Holmes looked up. ‘Sharp man, that sergeant,’ he said. ‘I’ve learnt a lot more from examining the area than I did running wildly about the park.’

‘All this is a waste of time,’ I repeated.

‘You think so, sir?’

I turned to see that Andover had come out of the French windows to join us. ‘Mr Sherlock Holmes doesn’t seem to agree with you,’ he added. ‘What’s that you’ve found there, sir?’

Holmes indicated the series of tracks in the mud at the top of the steps. ‘The ground is churned up and it’s hard to make out,’ he said. ‘But there is one set of prints here I can’t account for. Wearing boots rather like your own, sergeant.’

‘The constable,’ I said, pointing towards the lonely light in the distance.

Holmes smiled thinly. ‘No, these are his prints,’ he said, ‘with the distinctive square toes. Here are yours...mine...Krueger’s...McAllister’s. I recognise them all. But this last set of tracks I have only seen once before—in the shrubbery yesterday.’

I shook my head. ‘Holmes, shouldn’t we be on McAllister’s trail? Who knows where he might go!’

‘I think we can be fairly sure we know where he is heading,’ said Sherlock Holmes.

‘Where’s that, then, sir?’ asked Sergeant Andover.

‘British West Africa, of course,’ Holmes cried. ‘And the lost city of Nkume.’

The butler appeared in the French windows. ‘Mr Holmes, Dr Watson?’ he said urgently. ‘The mistress wishes to speak with you.’

## Chapter Six

Feeling oddly as I once did at school when called to the headmaster's study, I accompanied Holmes and Chivers into the house while Sergeant Andover took a couple of constables and went to investigate Krueger's mortal remains. Miss Marency received us in her drawing room.

Her face was pale, but she looked determined.

'Thank you for your assistance, gentlemen,' she said, producing her pocketbook from a drawer. 'I think it best that I pay you your fee at this point. In the morning, as long as Sergeant Andover does not need to question you further, I will have Bert run you up to the station and you can make your way back to London.'

Holmes and I exchanged glances. My friend shook his head. 'We can hardly desert you at your hour of need, Miss Marency. Besides, now you have inherited your family's debts, the last thing you need think of is my fee.'

'I retained you,' she said determinedly, 'to find out who was threatening my father's life. My father now lies murdered in the study, subject to the scrutiny of the law. I can only consider our contract at an end.'

She put a hand to her brow, and I came forward to help her to a chair.

'No, no,' she said impatiently waving me away. 'I am a little tired, that is all.'

'More than just a little tired, Miss Marency,' I said determinedly. 'Speaking as a doctor, I insist that you rest your weary mind and body. The strain has all been too much for you. Naturally Holmes and I are not going to depart when your father's murderer is at large. Until we see him behind bars, we shall not rest.'

Holmes poured Miss Marency a brandy and pressed it to her. She sipped it, then invited us to sit, taking her own place by the cold fire.

'I fear I have insulted you two gentlemen,' she said at last.

I protested. 'Not at all, not at all.'

'I have,' she said firmly. 'I have insulted your professional pride. My father's death comes as a blow to me. He was naturally dear to me, although I saw nothing of him for all those years in Africa, and after he had returned from the interior he seemed like a stranger sometimes. It must also have been saddening for you to have all your efforts to identify his enemy set at naught. Well, now he has been killed, and the map whose auction would have at least paid off the family debts if not restored our fortunes is gone. Stolen. The last hope of the Marencys has vanished

tonight.'

There was a knock at the door and she called to the visitor to enter. In came Sergeant Andover, helmet under his arm. He stood before us, and with a nod to Holmes and myself, spoke to the lady of the house.

'Search parties have drawn a blank with regards to the fugitive,' he admitted. 'The trail through the park is confused, but it vanishes as soon as it reaches the road. It can only be assumed that he had some form of transport waiting, or else stole a horse from a nearby stables. All we can say is that when the dogs last found the trail, he was heading north west.'

'North west,' Miss Marency mused.

'Towards Liverpool,' I suggested. 'To take ship for Africa.'

Sergeant Andover mopped his brow. 'His description will be telegraphed to the port authorities' he said. 'Mr Holmes here,' he said with a nod towards my friend, 'has a theory that Mr McAllister has gone to British West Africa.'

'Why else would he kill his old friend and rob him of the map?' Sherlock Holmes said. 'He intends to open up the interior for exploitation of its diamond resources.'

'Africa?' said Miss Marency. 'But he will not be going to Portsmouth. He sailed here from Africa in his private yacht, accompanied by Mynheer Krueger. His yacht is moored nearby in the estuary. Do you really think he has gone to look for Nkume?'

'He wanted to buy the map for the Empire,' I said, 'for Britain.' I shook his head. 'But does he think he can get away with murder? He has so much to lose, even if he could become as rich as Croesus.'

'Mud sticks, undoubtedly,' said Holmes, 'he could hardly hope to get away with murder—unless his part in Sir Digory's death could not be proved in a court of law.'

'You think he hopes to brazen it out?' I was astounded.

'He stands to become a rich man, if all you say is true,' Sergeant Andover remarked. 'Rich enough to buy the best lawyers in the land. Not to mention judges.'

I shook my head dismally. 'Maybe in America,' I said, 'but in England? Buy judges? It's unheard of.'

'Nevertheless, we must prove his guilt,' Holmes said, 'if that is possible.'

'This is really none of my business,' the sergeant said. 'I came here to inform you, ma'am, that we shall be removing the two mortal remains, that of your father and of the foreign gentleman, to our station in the town, for further examination. Constables will patrol the grounds but otherwise

we are pulling out. The coastguard will be noted to be on the lookout for McAllister's yacht, but he could be at sea by now.' He looked apologetic. 'We've done all we can here.'

'Very well, sergeant,' said Miss Marency. 'Goodbye.' As the sergeant departed, she turned to Holmes. 'And have you also done all you can?'

'That remains to be seen,' said Holmes mysteriously. 'Certainly I have examined the scene as much as possible before the descent of the police obliterated all clues.'

She looked hopeless. 'Then I fail to see what else can be achieved. Will you return to London? It seems that all we can do is to wait for Mr McAllister to reappear as the richest man in Christendom and then take him to court with a case based on purely circumstantial evidence.'

I had to admit, she had a point there. 'Assuming he ever reappears,' I said. 'British West Africa is rightly called the White Man's Grave,' and I quoted the old rhyme: "Beware, beware, the Bight of Benin: one man comes out, where fifty went in!"'

'You seem to forget, Dr Watson,' said Miss Marency, 'that I spent my formative years in those parts. What's more, Mr McAllister has lived there most of his life. He knows West Africa better than he knows England or even Scotland.'

'The perils of the interior may cause him a few difficulties, however,' said Holmes, gazing into the distance. 'Your father's journey to and from Nkume left him a withered husk. And the warnings he wrote in the margin of his map suggest dangers beyond even those experienced daily by a district commissioner on the coast. Gigantic arthropods and saurian life, mangrove swamps lethal to all foolish to venture into them... I recall his notes precisely.'

Miss Marency rose in her seat to look at Holmes. 'Do you mean you remember the map?' she said. 'I mean, in detail?'

'We saw it only long enough to know that the city lies high up in these Mountains of Kong,' I said dismissively. 'I for one had not opportunity to read the crabbed notes that accompanied the chart.'

'Naturally,' said Holmes with a slight smile. 'I, however, paid rather more attention. I believe that I could draw the map from memory.'

Miss Marency rose to her feet and put her hands together. 'Then...' she looked incredulous, 'we could follow McAllister to British West Africa and track him into the interior?'

'An expedition into Darkest Africa?' I exclaimed excitedly. 'But it's inconceivable. The cost itself...'

Miss Marency shook her head dismissively, her ringlets bobbing on her brow. 'The estates may be mired in debt,' she said, 'but I will have independent means based on my father's sale of the diamonds. It is not tied to the family fortunes, being invested in gilt edged stock and so forth, and

it will come into my possession on my father's death. Not enough to pay off any of the debts but sufficient to finance an expedition into the interior. We shall need a short while for these monies to be made available, which will delay us, but once that is completed, we shall take ship for Africa and the trail of my father's murderer.'

'You hope to bring him to justice yourself?' Holmes looked up from where he was sketching something on the flyleaf of a novel.

'Africa is no stranger to me,' she reminded us. 'But with two such gallant and talented gentlemen as Dr Watson and the renowned Mr Sherlock Holmes, how can I expect to fail?'

Holmes was still sketching. I eyed Miss Marency in surprise. 'You wish us to follow McAllister to Africa?' I asked her.

She nodded firmly. 'How else can we hope to catch him? We can't depend upon the local constabulary.' By now the police had withdrawn from the house, and it lay in silence. Even the servants had gone to bed and the Hall was empty of life except in this one room. 'Will you do it?' she asked. 'Will you help me in Africa? Dr Watson? Mr Holmes?'

Memories of Stanley's writing flashed through my mind. The horrors of the Dark Continent. Savage beasts and more savage men. Cannibal tribes. Swamps and jungles. Disease. The heat! The horror! Visions of death beneath a tropical sun plagued my mind. I am no coward, and I faced the perils of Afghanistan with aplomb, and since then my time with Holmes had not lacked its attendant horrors. But something about the idea of venturing into the uncharted interior of Stanley's Dark Continent made me shudder.

I turned to my friend. 'Holmes? What do you say? Holmes, whatever are you doing?'

He looked up, a distant expression on his craggy face. Wordlessly, he raised the piece of paper he had been scribbling on. My mouth fell open of its own accord.

Sketched there was a reproduction of Sir Digory's map, accurate in all the details I remembered. I took it from him and gazed at it in wonder. A rustle came from my side and I looked up to see that Miss Marency had joined me. She took the map from my hands.

'Perfect!' she enthused. 'This shows everything that was on my father's map—his whole route from the mission to the lost city. Even the diamond fields are clear. Mr Holmes, you are a wonderful man. Truly wonderful.'

Holmes is not a man for false modesty, but he took these words of praise with little more than a quiet smile. 'With your financial aid,' he said, 'we can set out for the colony, and then equip an expedition and set out into the interior.'

'What if we can't find McAllister?' I asked. 'What if he vanishes into the jungle, never to be seen again? What if he has sailed somewhere else? America, under a false identity, perhaps?'

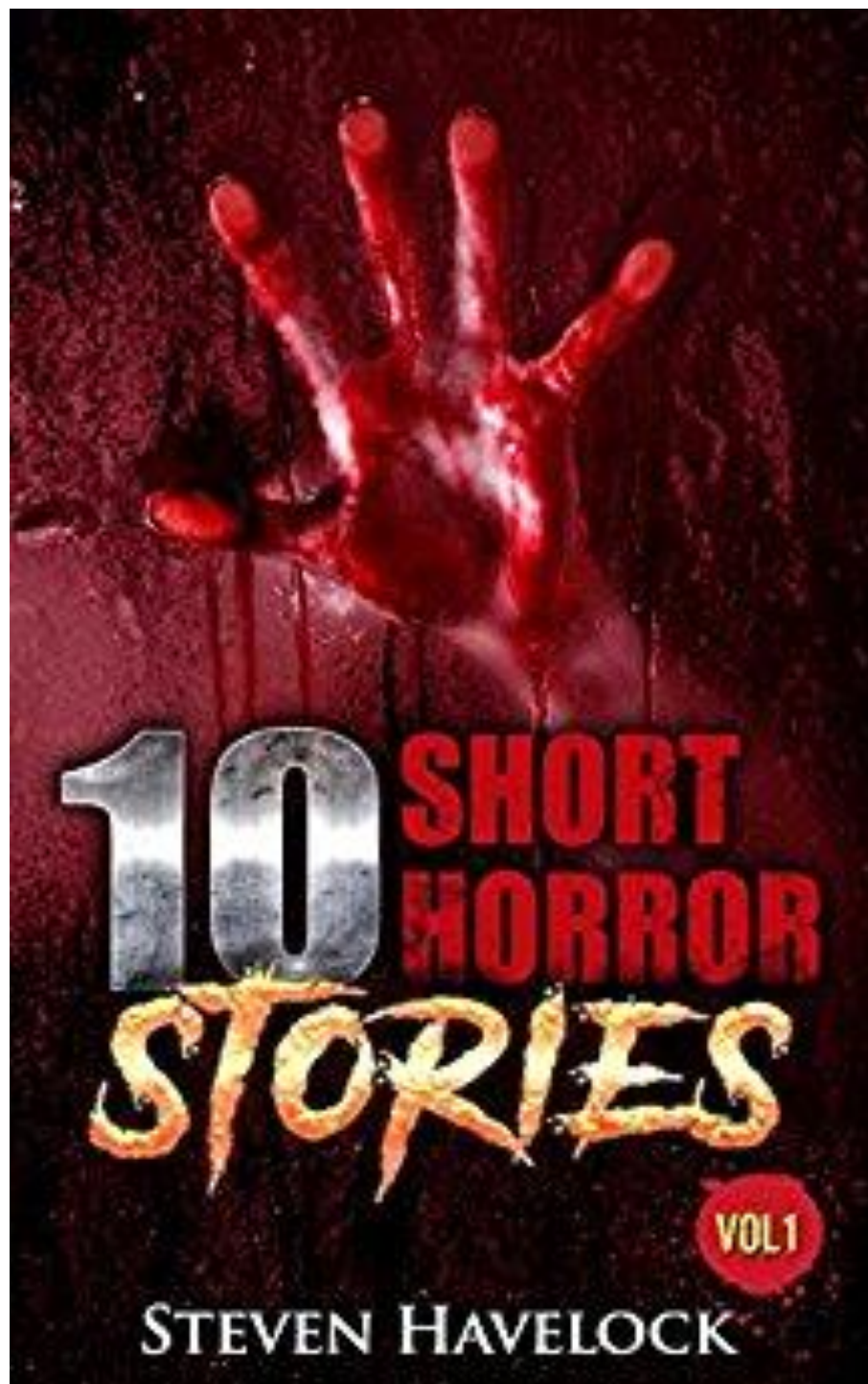
‘You’re forgetting,’ said Holmes, ‘Sir Digory’s murderer killed him to gain the original of this map. Where else will he have gone but in search of Nkume? And here, on my own reproduction, we have the trail that he will follow. And we also can follow it. It will take us to him, and then we shall see justice.’ He glanced at Miss Marency. ‘And no doubt our expedition will have other rewards,’ he added.

Miss Marency sat down in her armchair, the map in her hands, excitement on her face. ‘I suggest we seek our beds,’ she said. ‘It is not far off sunrise, and we have had a disturbed night, to say the least. Tomorrow, we shall begin our preparations. But for tonight, what remains of it, sleep must be the answer.’

We took to our beds shortly afterwards. After the horrors and disturbances, I expected to sleep like the dead. But as I lay there in my comfortable featherbed, visions once more came to me, images of death and horror deep in the unexplored jungles, plaguing my mind, *The white man’s grave, the white man’s grave...* The words rolled round and round my mind. And at last when I fell asleep just as rosy shafts of dawn were thrusting from beneath my shutters, troubling my dreams.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK





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## THE SEARCH FOR ASTRA PALACE by Gregory KH Bryant

### Part Nine

Her eyelids fluttered, then closed again. A long, endless murmuring came to her. Sometimes softly, gently. Sometimes it was an urgent whisper. She did not know what this murmuring was. She did not know anything. But this ceaseless murmuring seemed to carry with it some demand upon her, or some appeal to her, a plea to her that she respond.

She could not respond. The merest fluttering of her eyelids drained her entirely, left her exhausted and unable to make even the smallest movement.

What she felt was heaviness, an inexpressible heaviness. And that was all. Had she any knowledge left to her, any capability of attaching names to things, she could then be able to think to herself that her legs, her arms, and her head all felt heavier than she could describe.

Sometimes she sensed a presence. To her, it was an ancient presence, something more ancient than she could comprehend. There were other presences, too, all of them, she came to understand, were somehow associated with the murmuring. The presences seemed to grow large, and then small again, and then they disappeared, only return, to grow large again with their urgent whispers.

If she were capable of knowledge, of words, she would be able to recognize that the murmur, part of it, came from a woman named 'Mother', Mommy' and sometimes, 'Mom'. To the rest of the world, she was known as 'Joyce', mother of eleven-year-old Emily and the seventeen-year-old Jeffrey.

Jeffrey, who was Emily's brother, and who added his own murmur to the endless petitions for Emily's recovery, when he was not labouring his twelve-hour shifts at Callisto Base 1, assisting with the rebuilding of the base after its near destruction in the Battle for Callisto. It was her father, the aged Story Talbot, a man in his seventies, who was the ancient presence, the one who gently caressed Emily's arm, who ran his fingers through her hair, but who scarcely trusted himself to talk.

The brief flickering of her eyelids was so slight, so brief, it had gone unnoticed by Emily's mother, who happened at that moment to have been the sole person standing vigil at Emily's bed at the hospital at Callisto Base 2. Nor did the flickering register on any of the monitors that were tracking body's functions as she lay unconscious upon the narrow bed.

So there was no change in the attention given to her. The doctors attending her—roughly a dozen—had suggested only once, several Jovian months back, that the Talbot family might want to consider removing her from the multitudes of machines that monitored her. When they found that Emily could live without machines keeping her heart pumping, her lungs breathing, or her kidneys functioning—she was not brain-dead, after all, but in an extended coma—when they learned that removing her from the feeding tubes meant that the child would slowly starve to death, they had Emily immediately placed back on life support, and the subject was not raised

again.

And Emily lay, unable to move, unable to respond to the murmurs and the whispers that touched her ear, or the soft caresses that stroked her wrist, or the blonde locks that still grew upon her head.

And though she did not know what those murmurs were, or those caresses, though she was scarcely aware at all, still they kept her alive.

For otherwise she found herself in an infinite ocean of nothingness, a place of no duration, of no depth or distance, a place of neither sight nor sound, but one of endless darkness. It would not be correct to say that she was surrounded by this darkness, for that would suggest she felt herself an individual inhabiting an environment.

But she was not even that much. The darkness did not surround her. It was her. She was it. The emptiness which that darkness was—it was her.

Only except for that murmuring, that hoarse whispering that touched her from somewhere without. That murmuring, and the gentle caresses told her, somehow, that there was something other than the vast and boundless emptiness that was her. And that murmuring wanted something. It craved something from her, and in that craving, there was something—if she were capable of putting words to it—vastly enriching. It was something that, if she were to respond to it, would give back to her infinitely more than her gesture of responding required from her.

Then, through all the murmurings, and the infinite silence that muffled the murmurings like a shroud, came what Emily would have recognized as a voice, had she only the knowledge to put that name, or any name, to the sound. It was flatter than any other of the murmurs, yet sharper. Like the others, it seemed to want something, but what it was the sound wanted, she could not know.

There was in this voice something different. There was in it something like a suspended threat, something deadly, but something which had made for her an exception. Were she anyone or anything else, that sound, that voice, would have filled her with terror. But now, for her, she found something of profound comfort. The force behind this sound would never harm her, nor would anyone or anything else with this voice present.

And when the words “See ya, Emily,” touched her ears, spoken by Carter Ward, and the last words he uttered to her as he left Callisto, they roused something within her heart. The gentle whisperings from her mother and father, and her brother Jeffrey aroused in her an almost tepid craving to respond to them.

But the three words spoken by Ward as he was leaving her caused an urgency to arise in her. If only she knew how, she wanted to respond, to let the will, the mind, whatever it was behind those words, to let it know that she was real, alive, something that was part of the world. Those three words, “See ya, Emily,” filled Emily with a need, a craving to exist.

Many more weeks would pass as the girl strove to pull the pieces of her soul together, until she had strength sufficient only to make that small gesture, the fluttering of her eyelids. But she was able to do it, and the effort left her completely exhausted. Many more weeks were to pass before she would be able to make any such unconscious motion again.

Kharl Stoff was one cunning prick, Ward said to himself as he followed the signal from the man's ship. Wouldn't give Ward any clue where this derelict he was talking about might be found. Of course not. Ward would have dropped Stoff and his cronies and lit straight for the derelict himself.

But he couldn't do that. All Ward could do was follow behind Stoff, at a distance of five thousand miles, holding on to the signal Stoff sent back to him.

Angry and frustrated as he was with Stoff's manoeuvre, it was, of course, exactly what Ward himself would have done, had he been in Stoff's position. But there was also that very faint, nagging signal from behind. Dimara told Ward about it. It was, indeed, unlikely that any human eye or ear would have even picked up on it.

"Dimara must inform the Carter Ward that he is being followed," she had warned him in the cramped bridge of the O8-111A"

"That so?" Ward asked.

"Unfortunately, yes," Dimara said. "It maintains a distance ten to fifteen thousand miles."

"You sure it's following us?" Ward asked.

"Dimara has sought to elude this ship when she was asked by the Carter Ward to pilot the O8-111A. This entity which follows the O8-111A has been most scrupulous in maintaining a constant distance of ten to fifteen thousand miles."

"A ship?"

"Most likely so."

"Well, whaddya think?"

"The ship is most probably connected to the Scroungers with whom Carter Ward spoke before leaving asteroid AT-4442-ST."

"That Kharl Stoff guy? Ward asked.

"Exactly so."

“Any idea how we can shake this guy?”

“While revealing to Kharl Stoff that Carter Ward knows of Stoff’s machinations? The Dimara still does not understand why it was Carter Ward undertook this venture with these Scroungers. It is most uncharacteristic of the Carter Ward to do such things.”

“He gave us the only clue yet, where we might find Turhan Mot,” Ward answered.

“And Carter Ward chose not to remain at asteroid AT-4442-ST to seek out any others who might have similar information?”

“It was maybe worth a chance,” Ward said, with a shrug.

“Tell ya what,” he said. “Let’s see what happens when I do this.”

He shut down the ship’s thrusters, while powering up the forward thrusters. This brought the O8-111A to a near stop. He held his ship in that position for over an hour. Ward studied his monitors closely. He saw nothing remarkable in them.

“Any change in our friends out back?” he asked Dimara.

“Dimara notes that the entity following us is slowing.”

“That so?”

“Dimara hesitates to project any motive, but it does appear that the entity following us is yet matching its own speed with ours... it is slowing further... it has stopped.”

A voice came through the communicators. It was Kharl Stoff.

“You all right?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Ward answered. “Just looking the ship over for anomalies.”

“Want us to come back and lend ya a hand?”

(“Whose hand?” he asked himself. But he kept that quip quiet.)

“Nah. I’ll just be a couple hours.”

“Couple hours?” There was a sudden edge to Kharl Stoff’s voice. “You sure you don’t need any help?”

“The man didn’t like to be kept waiting,” Ward smirked to himself.

“Nah. They’ll just get in the way. I’ll hurry it up, as much as I can.”

“Yeah, (Kharl made no effort to hide the impatience he felt.) Do that. We don’t have time to piss around.”

That angered Ward.

“Then go ahead without me,” he said. “And you can fuck yourself, too, while you’re at it.”

A moment’s silence passed before Kharl answered.

“Talk to me like that again, asshole, and I’ll open your throat for you. Doncha forget, fuckwit, we’re doing you a damn favour, cutting you in on this deal.”

“Back atcha, prick. You wanna get pissy, go talk to someone else. I won’t be talked to like that. So like I said, go fuck yourself. I don’t need your shit.”

Ward turned to Dimara.

“Now, we’ll find out whether this is a set up or not,” he grinned.

Dimara smiled back at him.

A moment later, Kharl Stoff was back on the communicator.

“Yeah...” he said, slowly. “I guess I oughta be mindin’ my own manners, huh? Take the time you need. We’ll wait on ya.”

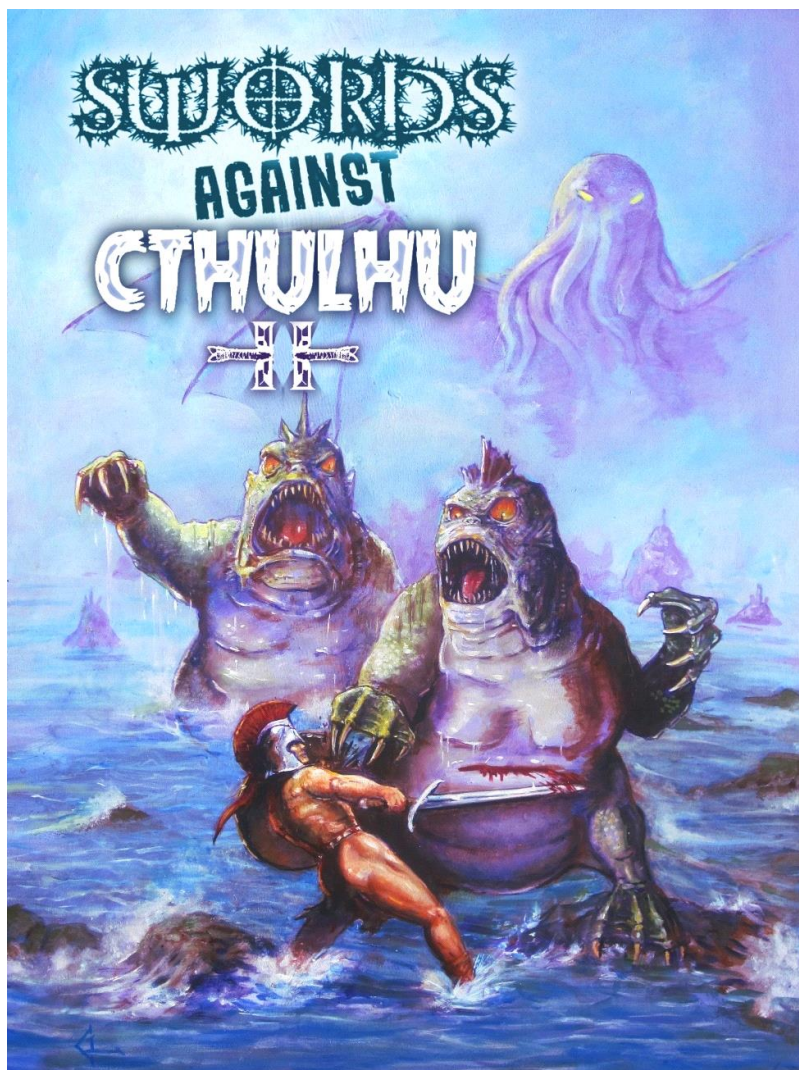
Ward looked at Dimara.

“Yup,” he said. “It for damn sure is a set up.”

“Yes,” Dimara agreed.

“And the only question is whether Turhan Mot is tied in to this set up, or not.”

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK



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## ACROSS THE ZODIAC by Percy Greg

### Chapter XV—Fur-Hunting.

Ergimo landed to make arrangements for the chase, to witness which was the principal object of this deviation from what would otherwise have been our most convenient course. Not only would it be possible to take part in the pursuit of the wild fauna of the continent, but I also hoped to share in a novel sport, not unlike a whale-hunt in Baffin's Bay. A large inland sea, occupying no inconsiderable part of the area of this belt, lay immediately to the northward, and one wide arm thereof extended within a few miles of Askirita, a distance which, notwithstanding the interposition of a mountain range, might be crossed in a couple of hours. One or two days at most would suffice for both adventures. I had not yet mentioned my intention to Eveena. During the voyage I had been much alone with her, and it was then only that our real acquaintance began. Till then, however close our attachment, we were, in knowledge of each other's character and thought, almost as strangers. While her painful timidity had in some degree worn off, her anxious and watchful deference was even more marked than before. True to the strange ideas derived chiefly from her training, partly from her own natural character, she was the more careful to avoid giving the slightest pain or displeasure, as she ceased to fear that either would be immediately and intentionally visited upon herself. She evidently thought that on this account there was the greater danger lest a series of trivial annoyances, unnoticed at the time, might cool the affection she valued so highly. Diffident of her own charms, she knew how little hold the women of her race generally have on the hearts of men after the first fever of passion has cooled. It was difficult for her to realise that her thoughts or wishes could truly interest me, that compliance with her inclinations could be an object, or that I could be seriously bent on teaching her to speak frankly and openly. But as this new idea became credible and familiar, her unaffected desire to comply with all that was expected from her drew out her hitherto undeveloped powers of conversation, and enabled me day by day to appreciate more thoroughly the real intelligence and soundness of judgment concealed at first by her shyness, and still somewhat obscured by her childlike simplicity and absolute inexperience. In the latter respect, however, she was, of course, at the less disadvantage with a stranger to the manners and life of her world. A more perfectly charming companion it would have been difficult to desire and impossible to find. If at first I had been secretly inclined to reproach her with exaggerated timidity, it became more and more evident that her personal fears were due simply to that nervous susceptibility which even men of reputed courage have often displayed in situations of sudden and wholly unfamiliar peril. Her tendency to overrate all dangers, not merely as they affected herself, but as they might involve others, and above all her husband, I ascribed to the ideas and habits of thought now for so many centuries hereditary among a people in whom the fear of annihilation—and the absence of all the motives that impel men on earth to face danger and death with calmness, or even to enjoy the excitement of deadly peril—have extinguished manhood itself.

I could not, however, conceal from Eveena that I was about to leave her for an adventure which could not but seem to her foolhardy and motiveless. She was more than terrified when she understood that I really intended to join the professional hunters in an enterprise which, even on their part, is regarded by their countrymen with a mixture of admiration and contempt, as one wherein only the hope of large remuneration would induce any sensible man to share; and which,



from my utter ignorance of its conditions, must be obviously still more dangerous to me. The confidence she was slowly learning from what seemed to her extravagant indulgence, to me simply the consideration due to a rational being, wife or comrade, slave or free, first found expression in the freedom of her loving though provoking expostulations.

“You must be tired of me,” she said at last, “if you are so ready to run the risk of parting out of mere curiosity.”

“Sheer petulance!” I answered. “You know well that you are dearer to me every day as I learn to understand you better; but a man cannot afford to play the coward because marriage has given new value to life. And you might remember that I have threefold the strength which emboldens your hunters to incur all the dangers that seem to your fancy so terrible.”

That no shade of mere cowardice or feminine affectation influenced her remonstrance was evident from her next words.

“Well, then, if you will go, however improper and outrageous the thing may be, let me go with you. I cannot bear to wait alone, fancying at every moment what may be happening to you, and fearing to see them carry you back wounded or killed.”

Touched by the unselfishness of her terror, and feeling that there was some truth in her representation of the state of mind in which she would spend the hours of my absence, I tried to quiet her by caresses and soft words. But these she received as symptoms of yielding on my part; and her persistence brought upon her at last the resolute and somewhat sharp rebuke with which men think it natural and right to repress the excesses of feminine fear.

“This is nonsense, Eveena. You cannot accompany me; and, if you could, your presence would multiply tenfold the danger to me, and utterly unnerve me if any real difficulty should call for presence of mind. You must be content to leave me in the hands of Providence, and allow me to judge what becomes a man, and what results are worth the risks they may involve. I hear Ergimo’s step on deck, and I must go and learn from him what arrangements he has been able to make for to-morrow.”

My escort had found no difficulty in providing for the fulfilment of both my wishes. We were to beat the forests which covered the southern seaboard in the neighbourhood, driving our game out upon the open ground, where alone we should have a chance of securing it. By noon we might hope to have seen enough of this sport, and to find ourselves at no great distance from that part of the inland sea where a yet more exciting chase was to employ the rest of the day. Failing to bring both adventures within the sixteen hours of light which at this season and in this latitude we should enjoy, we were to bivouac for the night on the northern sea-coast and pursue our aquatic game in the morning of the morrow, returning before dark to our vessel.

Ergimo, however, was more of Eveena’s mind than of mine. “I have complied,” he said, “with your wishes, as the Camptâ ordered me to do. But I am equally bound, by his orders and by my duty, to tell you that in my opinion you are running risks altogether out of proportion to any object our adventure can serve. Scarcely any of the creatures we shall hunt are other than very

formidable. Even the therne, with the spikes on its fore-limbs, can inflict painful if not dangerous wounds, and its bite is said to be not unfrequently venomous. You are not used to our methods of hunting, to the management of the caldecta, or to the use of our weapons. I can conceive no reason why you should incur what is at any rate a considerable chance, not merely of death, but of defeating the whole purpose of your extraordinary journey, simply to do or to see the work on which we peril only the least valuable lives among us.”

I was about to answer him even more decidedly than I had replied to Eveena, when a pressure on my arm drew my eyes in the other direction; and, to my extreme mortification, I perceived that Eveena herself, in all-absorbing eagerness to learn the opinion of an intelligent and experienced hunter, had stolen on deck and had heard all that had passed. I was too much vexed to make any other reply to Ergimo’s argument than the single word, “I shall go.” Really angry with her for the first and last time, but not choosing to express my displeasure in the presence of a third person, I hurried Eveena down the ladder into our cabin.

“Tell me,” I said, “what, according to your own rules of feminine reserve and obedience, you deserve? What would one of your people say to a wife who followed him without leave into the company of a stranger, to listen to that which she knew she was not meant to hear?”

She answered by throwing off her veil and head-dress, and standing up silent before me.

“Answer me, child,” I repeated, more than half appeased by the mute appeal of her half-raised eyes and submissive attitude. “I know you will not tell me that you have not broken all the restraints of your own laws and customs. What would your father, for instance, say to such an escapade?”

She was silent, till the touch of my hand, contradicting perhaps the harshness of my words, encouraged her to lift her eyes, full of tears, to mine.

“Nothing,” was her very unexpected reply.

“Nothing?” I rejoined. “If you can tell me that you have not done wrong, I shall be sorry to have reproved you so sharply.”

“I shall tell you no such lie!” she answered almost indignantly. “You asked what would be said.”

I was fairly at a loss. The figure which Martial grammarians call “the suppressed alternative” is a great favourite, and derives peculiar force from the varied emphasis their syntax allows. But, resolved not to understand a meaning much more distinctly conveyed in her words than in my translation, I replied, “I shall say nothing then, except—don’t do it again;” and I extricated myself promptly if ignominiously from the dilemma, by leaving the cabin and closing the door, so sharply and decidedly as to convey a distinct intimation that it was not again to be opened.

We breakfasted earlier than usual. My gentle bride had been subdued into a silence, not sullen, but so sad that when her wistful eyes followed my every movement as I prepared to start, I could willingly, to bring back their brightness, have renounced the promise of the day. But this must

not be; and turning to take leave on the threshold, I said—

“Be sure I shall come to no harm; and if I did, the worst pang of death would be the memory of the first sharp words I have spoken to you, and which, I confess, were an ill return for the inconvenient expression of your affectionate anxiety.”

“Do not speak so,” she half whispered. “I deserved any mark of your displeasure; I only wish I could persuade you that the sharpest sting lies in the lips we love. Do remember, since you would not let me run the slightest risk of harm, that if you come to hurt you will have killed me.”

“Rest assured I shall come to no serious ill. I hope this evening to laugh with you at your alarms; and so long as you do not see me either in the flesh or in the spirit, you may know that I am safe. I could not leave you for ever without meeting you again.”

This speech, which I should have ventured in no other presence, would hardly have established my lunacy more decisively in Martial eyes than in those of Terrestrial common sense. It conveyed, however, a real if not sufficient consolation to Eveena; the idea it implied being not wholly unfamiliar to a daughter of the Star. I was surprised that, almost shrinking from my last embrace, Eveena suddenly dropped her veil around her; till, turning, I saw that Ergimo was standing at the top of the ladder leading to the deck, and just in sight.

“I will send word,” he said, addressing himself to me, but speaking for her ears, “of your safety at noon and at night. So far as my utmost efforts can ensure it you will be safe; an obligation higher, and enforced by sanctions graver, than even the Camptâ’s command forbids me to lead a brother into peril, and fail to bring him out of it.”

The significant word was spoken in so low a tone that it could not possibly reach the ears of our companions of the chase, who had mustered on shore within a few feet of the vessel. But Eveena evidently caught both the sound and the meaning, and I was glad that they should convey to her a confidence which seemed to myself no better founded than her alarms. To me its only value lay in the friendly relation it established with one I had begun greatly to like. I relied on my own strength and nerve for all that human exertion could do in such peril as we might encounter; and, in a case in which these might fail me, I doubted whether even the one tie that has binding force on Mars would avail me much.

Immediately outside the town were waiting, saddled but not bridled, some score of the extraordinary riding-birds Eveena had described. The seat of the rider is on the back, between the wings; but the saddle consists only of a sort of girth immediately in front, to which a pair of stirrups, resembling that of a lady’s side-saddle, were attached. The creature that was to carry my unusual weight was the most powerful of all, but I felt some doubt whether even his strength might not break down. One of the hunters had charge of a carriage on which was fixed a cage containing two dozen birds of a dark greenish grey, about the size of a crow, and with the slender form, piercing eyes, and powerful beak of the falcon. They were not intended, however, to strike the prey, but simply to do the part of dogs in tracing out the game, and driving it from the woods into the open ground. Our birds, rising at once into the air, carried us some fifty feet above the tops of the trees. Here the chief huntsman took the guidance of the party, keeping in front of the

line in which we were ranged, and watching through a pair of what might be called spectacles, save that a very short tube with double lenses was substituted for the single glass, the movement of the hawks, which had been released in the wood below us. These at first dispersed in every direction, extending at intervals from end to end of a line some three miles in length, and moving slowly forwards, followed by the hunters. A sharp call from one bird on the left gathered the rest around him, and in a few moments the rustling and rushing of an invisible flock through the glades of the forest apprised us that we had started, though we could not see, the prey. Ergimo, who kept close beside me, and who had often witnessed the sport before, kept me informed of what was proceeding underneath us, of which I could see but little. Glimpses here and there showed that we were pursuing a numerous flock of large white-plumed or white-haired creatures, standing at most some four feet in height; but what they were, even whether birds or quadrupeds, their movements left me in absolute uncertainty. Worried and frightened by the falcons, which, however, never ventured to close upon them, they were gradually driven in the direction intended by the huntsman towards the open plain, which bordered the forest at a distance of about six miles to the northward. In half-an-hour after the "find," the leader of the flock broke out of the wood two or three hundred yards ahead of us, and was closely followed by his companions. I then recognised in the objects of the chase the strange thernee described by Eveena, whose long soft down furnished the cloak she wore on our visit to the Astronaut. Their general form, and especially the length and graceful curve of the neck, led one instinctively to regard them as birds; but the fore-limbs, drawn up as they ran, but now and then outstretched with a sweep to strike at a falcon that ventured imprudently near, had, in the distance, much more resemblance to the arm of a baboon than to the limb of any other creature, and bore no likeness whatever to the wing even of the bat. The object of the hunters was not to strike these creatures from a distance, but to run them down and capture them by sheer exhaustion. This the great wing-power of the caldectaa enabled us to do, though by the time we had driven the thernee to bay my own Pegasus was fairly tired. The hunters, separating and spreading out in the form of a semicircle, assisted the movements of the hawks, driving the prey gradually into a narrow defile among the hills bordering the plain to the north-eastward, whose steep upward slope greatly hindered and fatigued creatures whose natural habitat consists of level plains or seaboard forests. At last, under a steep half-precipitous rock which defended them in rear, and between clumps of trees which guarded either flank—protected by both overhead—the flock, at the call of their leader, took up a position which displayed an instinctive strategy, whereof an Indian or African chief might have been proud. The caldectaa, however, well knew the vast superiority of their own strength and of their formidable beaks, and did not hesitate to carry us close to but somewhat above the thernee, as these stood ranged in line with extended fore-limbs and snouts; the latter armed with teeth about an inch and a half in length tapering singly to a sharp point, the former with spikes stronger, longer, and sharper than those of the porcupine; but, as I satisfied myself by a subsequent inspection, formed by rudimentary, or, more properly speaking, transformed or degenerated quills. The bite was easily avoided. It was not so easy to keep out of reach of the powerful fore-limb while endeavouring to strike a fatal blow at the neck with the long rapier-like cutting weapons carried by the hunters. My own shorter and sharp sword, to which I had trusted, preferring a familiar weapon to one, however suitable, to which I was not accustomed, left me no choice but to abandon the hope of active participation in the slaughter, or to venture dangerously near. Choosing the latter alternative, I received from the arm of the thernee I had singled out a blow which, caught upon my sword, very nearly smote it from my hand, and certainly would have disarmed at once any of my weaker companions. As it was, the stroke maimed the limb that

delivered it; but with its remaining arm the creature maintained a fight so stubborn that, had both been available, the issue could not have been in my favour. This conflict reminded me singularly of an encounter with the mounted swordsmen of Scindiah and the Peishwah; all my experience of sword-play being called into use, and my brute opponent using its natural weapon with an instinctive skill not unworthy of comparison with that of a trained horse-soldier; at the same time that it constantly endeavoured to seize with its formidable snout either my own arm or the wing or body of the caldecta, which, however, was very well able to take care of itself. In fact, the prey was secured at last not by my sword but by a blow from the caldecta's beak, which pierced and paralysed the slender neck of our antagonist. Some twenty thernee formed the booty of a chase certainly novel, and possessing perhaps as many elements of peril and excitement as that finest of Earthly sports which the affected cynicism of Anglo-Indian speech degrades by the name of "pig-sticking."

When the falcons had been collected and recaged, and the bodies of the thernee consigned to a carriage brought up for the purpose by a subordinate who had watched the hunters' course, our birds, from which we had dismounted, were somewhat rested; and Ergimo informed me that another and more formidable, as well as more valuable, prey was thought to be in sight a few miles off. Mounted on a fresh bird, and resolutely closing my ears to his urgent and reasonable dissuasion, I joined the smaller party which was detached for this purpose. As we were carried slowly at no great distance from the ground, managing our birds with ease by a touch on either side of the neck—they are spurred at need by a slight electric shock communicated from the hilt of the sword, and are checked by a forcible pressure on the wings—I asked Ergimo why the thernee were not rather shot than hunted, since utility, not sport, governs the method of capturing the wild beasts of Mars.

"We have," he replied, "two weapons adapted to strike at a distance. The asphyxiator is too heavy to be carried far or fast, and pieces of the shell inflict such injuries upon everything in the immediate neighbourhood of the explosion, as to render it useless where the value of the prey depends upon the condition of its skin. Our other and much more convenient, if less powerful, projective weapon has also its own disadvantage. It can be used only at short distances; and at these it is apt to burn and tear a skin so soft and delicate as that of the thernee. Moreover, it so terrifies the caldecta as to render it unmanageable; and we are compelled to dismount before using it, as you may presently see. Four or five of our party are now armed with it, and I wish you had allowed me to furnish you with one."

"I prefer," I answered, "my own weapon, an air-gun which I can fire sixteen times without reloading, and which will kill at a hundred yards' distance. With a weapon unknown to me I might not only fail altogether, but I might not improbably do serious injury, by my clumsiness and inexperience, to my companions."

"I wish, nevertheless," he said, "that you carried the mordyta. You will have need of an efficient weapon if you dismount to share the attack we are just about to make. But I entreat you not to do so. You can see it all in perfect safety, if only you will keep far enough away to avoid danger from the fright of your bird."

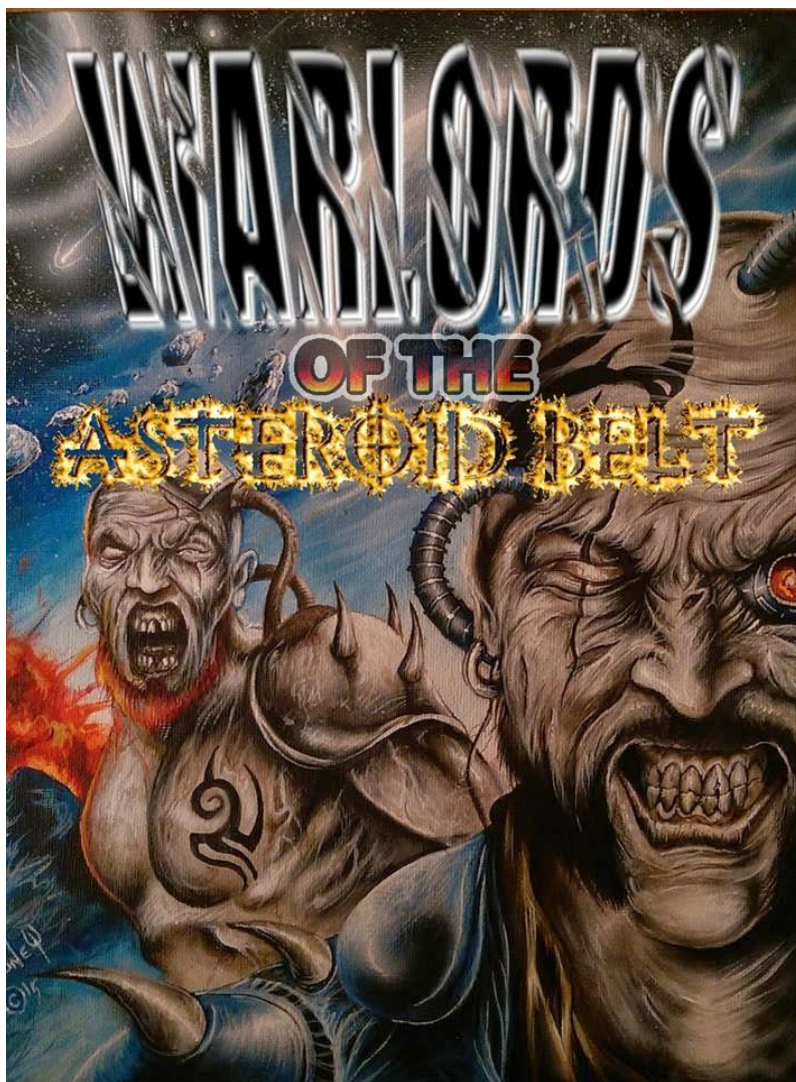
As he spoke, we had come into proximity to our new game, a large and very powerful animal,

about four feet high at the shoulders, and about six feet from the head to the root of the tail. The latter carries, as that of the lion was fabled to do, a final claw, not to lash the creature into rage, but for the more practical purpose of striking down an enemy endeavouring to approach it in flank or rear. Its hide, covered with a long beautifully soft fur, is striped alternately with brown and yellow, the ground being a sort of silver-grey. The head resembles that of the lion, but without the mane, and is prolonged into a face and snout more like those of the wild boar. Its limbs are less unlike those of the feline genus than any other Earthly type, but have three claws and a hard pad in lieu of the soft cushion. The upper jaw is armed with two formidable tusks about twelve inches in length, and projecting directly forwards. A blow from the claw-furnished tail would plough up the thigh or rip open the abdomen of a man. A stroke from one of the paws would fracture his skull, while a wound from the tusk in almost any part of the body must prove certainly fatal. Fortunately, the kargynda has not the swiftness of movement belonging to nearly all our feline races, otherwise its skins, the most valuable prize of the Martial hunter, would yearly be taken at a terrible cost of life. Two of these creatures were said to be reposing in a thick jungle of reeds bordering a narrow stream immediately in our front. The hunters, with Ergimo, now dismounted and advanced some two hundred yards in front of their birds, directing the latter to turn their heads in the opposite direction. I found some difficulty in making my wish to descend intelligible to the docile creature which carried me, and was still in the air when one of the enormous creatures we were hunting rushed out of its hiding-place. The nearest hunter, raising a shining metal staff about three and a half feet in length (having a crystal cylinder at the hinder end, about six inches in circumference, and occupying about one-third the entire length of the weapon), levelled it at the beast. A flash as of lightning darted through the air, and the creature rolled over. Another flash from a similar weapon in the hands of another hunter followed. By this time, however, my bird was entirely unmanageable, and what happened I learned afterwards from Ergimo. Neither of the two shots had wounded the creature, though the near passage of the first had for a moment stunned and overthrown him. His rush among the party dispersed them all, but each being able to send forth from his piece a second flash of lightning, the monster was mortally wounded before they fairly started in pursuit of their scared birds, which—their attention being called by the roar of the animal, by the crash accompanying each flash, and probably above all by the restlessness of my own caldecta in their midst—had flown off to some distance. My bird, floundering forwards, flung me to the ground about two hundred yards from the jungle, fortunately at a greater distance from the dying but not yet utterly disabled prey. Its companion now came forth and stood over the tortured creature, licking its sores till it expired. By this time I had recovered the consciousness I had lost with the shock of my fall, and had ascertained that my gun was safe. I had but time to prepare and level it when, leaving its dead companion, the brute turned and charged me almost as rapidly as an infuriated elephant. I fired several times and assured, if only from my skill as a marksman, that some of the shots had hit it, was surprised to see that at each it was only checked for a moment and then resumed its charge. It was so near now that I could aim with some confidence at the eye; and if, as I suspected, the previous shots had failed to pierce the hide, no other aim was likely to avail. I levelled, therefore, as steadily as I could at its blazing eyeballs and fired three or four shots, still without doing more than arrest or rather slacken its charge, each shot provoking a fearful roar of rage and pain. I fired my last within about twenty yards, and then, before I could draw my sword, was dashed to the ground with a violence that utterly stunned me. When I recovered my senses Ergimo was kneeling beside me pouring down my throat the contents of a small phial; and as I lifted my head and looked around, I saw the enormous carcass from under which I had been

dragged lying dead almost within reach of my hand. One eye was pierced through the very centre, the other seriously injured. But such is the creature's tenacity of life, that, though three balls were actually in its brain, it had driven home its charge, though far too unconscious to make more than convulsive and feeble use of any of its formidable weapons. When I fell it stood for perhaps a second, and then dropped senseless upon my lower limbs, which were not a little bruised by its weight. That no bone was broken or dislocated by the shock, deadened though it must have been by the repeated pauses in the kargynda's charge and by its final exhaustion, was more than I expected or could understand. Before I rose to my feet, Ergimo had peremptorily insisted on the abandonment of the further excursion we had intended, declaring that he could not answer to his Sovereign, after so severe a lesson, for my exposure to any future peril. The Campâtâ had sent him to bring me into his presence for purposes which would not be fulfilled by producing a lifeless carcass, or a maimed and helpless invalid; and the discipline of the Court and central Administration allowed no excuse for disobedience to orders or failure in duty. My protest was very quickly silenced. On attempting to stand, I found myself so shaken, torn, and shattered that I could not again mount a caldectâ or wield a weapon; and was carried back to Askinta on a sort of inclined litter placed upon the carriage which had conveyed our booty.

I was mortified, as we approached the place where our vessel lay, to observe a veiled female figure on the deck. Eveena's quick eye had noted our return some minutes before, and inferred from the early abandonment of the chase some serious accident. Happily our party were so disposed that I had time to assume the usual position before she caught sight of me. I could not, however, deceive her by a desperate effort to walk steadily and unaided. She stood by quietly and calmly while the surgeon of the hunters dressed my hurts, observing exactly how the bandages and lotions were applied. Only when we were left alone did she in any degree give way to an agitation by which she feared to increase my evident pain and feverishness. It was impossible to satisfy her that black bruises and broad gashes meant no danger, and would be healed by a few days' rest. But when she saw that I could talk and smile as usual, she was unsparing in her attempts to coax from me a pledge that I would never again peril life or limb to gratify my curiosity regarding the very few pursuits in which, for the highest remuneration, Martialists can be induced to incur the probability of injury and the chance of that death they so abjectly dread. Scarcely less reluctant to repeat the scolding she felt so acutely than to employ the methods of rebuke she deemed less severe, I had no little difficulty in evading her entreaties. Only a very decided request to drop the subject at once and for ever, enforced on her conscience by reminding her that it would be enforced no otherwise, at last obtained me peace without the sacrifice of liberty.

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## THE WAR OF THE WORLDS by HG Wells

### Book Two: The Earth Under the Martians

#### Chapter Three: The Days Of Imprisonment

The arrival of a second fighting-machine drove us from our peephole into the scullery, for we feared that from his elevation the Martian might see down upon us behind our barrier. At a later date we began to feel less in danger of their eyes, for to an eye in the dazzle of the sunlight outside our refuge must have been blank blackness, but at first the slightest suggestion of approach drove us into the scullery in heart-throbbing retreat. Yet terrible as was the danger we incurred, the attraction of peeping was for both of us irresistible. And I recall now with a sort of wonder that, in spite of the infinite danger in which we were between starvation and a still more terrible death, we could yet struggle bitterly for that horrible privilege of sight. We would race across the kitchen in a grotesque way between eagerness and the dread of making a noise, and strike each other, and thrust and kick, within a few inches of exposure.

The fact is that we had absolutely incompatible dispositions and habits of thought and action, and our danger and isolation only accentuated the incompatibility. At Halliford I had already come to hate the curate's trick of helpless exclamation, his stupid rigidity of mind. His endless muttering monologue vitiated every effort I made to think out a line of action, and drove me at times, thus pent up and intensified, almost to the verge of craziness. He was as lacking in restraint as a silly woman. He would weep for hours together, and I verily believe that to the very end this spoiled child of life thought his weak tears in some way efficacious. And I would sit in the darkness unable to keep my mind off him by reason of his importunities. He ate more than I did, and it was in vain I pointed out that our only chance of life was to stop in the house until the Martians had done with their pit, that in that long patience a time might presently come when we should need food. He ate and drank impulsively in heavy meals at long intervals. He slept little.

As the days wore on, his utter carelessness of any consideration so intensified our distress and danger that I had, much as I loathed doing it, to resort to threats, and at last to blows. That brought him to reason for a time. But he was one of those weak creatures, void of pride, timorous, anaemic, hateful souls, full of shifty cunning, who face neither God nor man, who face not even themselves.

It is disagreeable for me to recall and write these things, but I set them down that my story may lack nothing. Those who have escaped the dark and terrible aspects of life will find my brutality, my flash of rage in our final tragedy, easy enough to blame; for they know what is wrong as well as any, but not what is possible to tortured men. But those who have been under the shadow, who have gone down at last to elemental things, will have a wider charity.

And while within we fought out our dark, dim contest of whispers, snatched food and drink, and gripping hands and blows, without, in the pitiless sunlight of that terrible June, was the strange wonder, the unfamiliar routine of the Martians in the pit. Let me return to those first new experiences of mine. After a long time I ventured back to the peephole, to find that the newcomers had been reinforced by the occupants of no fewer than three of the fighting-machines.

These last had brought with them certain fresh appliances that stood in an orderly manner about the cylinder. The second handling-machine was now completed, and was busied in serving one of the novel contrivances the big machine had brought. This was a body resembling a milk can in its general form, above which oscillated a pear-shaped receptacle, and from which a stream of white powder flowed into a circular basin below.

The oscillatory motion was imparted to this by one tentacle of the handling-machine. With two spatulate hands the handling-machine was digging out and flinging masses of clay into the pear-shaped receptacle above, while with another arm it periodically opened a door and removed rusty and blackened clinkers from the middle part of the machine. Another steely tentacle directed the powder from the basin along a ribbed channel towards some receiver that was hidden from me by the mound of bluish dust. From this unseen receiver a little thread of green smoke rose vertically into the quiet air. As I looked, the handling-machine, with a faint and musical clinking, extended, telescopic fashion, a tentacle that had been a moment before a mere blunt projection, until its end was hidden behind the mound of clay. In another second it had lifted a bar of white aluminium into sight, untarnished as yet, and shining dazzlingly, and deposited it in a growing stack of bars that stood at the side of the pit. Between sunset and starlight this dexterous machine must have made more than a hundred such bars out of the crude clay, and the mound of bluish dust rose steadily until it topped the side of the pit.

The contrast between the swift and complex movements of these contrivances and the inert panting clumsiness of their masters was acute, and for days I had to tell myself repeatedly that these latter were indeed the living of the two things.

The curate had possession of the slit when the first men were brought to the pit. I was sitting below, huddled up, listening with all my ears. He made a sudden movement backward, and I, fearful that we were observed, crouched in a spasm of terror. He came sliding down the rubbish and crept beside me in the darkness, inarticulate, gesticulating, and for a moment I shared his panic. His gesture suggested a resignation of the slit, and after a little while my curiosity gave me courage, and I rose up, stepped across him, and clambered up to it. At first I could see no reason for his frantic behaviour. The twilight had now come, the stars were little and faint, but the pit was illuminated by the flickering green fire that came from the aluminium-making. The whole picture was a flickering scheme of green gleams and shifting rusty black shadows, strangely trying to the eyes. Over and through it all went the bats, heeding it not at all. The sprawling Martians were no longer to be seen, the mound of blue-green powder had risen to cover them from sight, and a fighting-machine, with its legs contracted, crumpled, and abbreviated, stood across the corner of the pit. And then, amid the clangour of the machinery, came a drifting suspicion of human voices, that I entertained at first only to dismiss.

I crouched, watching this fighting-machine closely, satisfying myself now for the first time that the hood did indeed contain a Martian. As the green flames lifted I could see the oily gleam of his integument and the brightness of his eyes. And suddenly I heard a yell, and saw a long tentacle reaching over the shoulder of the machine to the little cage that hunched upon its back. Then something—something struggling violently—was lifted high against the sky, a black, vague enigma against the starlight; and as this black object came down again, I saw by the green brightness that it was a man. For an instant he was clearly visible. He was a stout, ruddy, middle-

aged man, well dressed; three days before, he must have been walking the world, a man of considerable consequence. I could see his staring eyes and gleams of light on his studs and watch chain. He vanished behind the mound, and for a moment there was silence. And then began a shrieking and a sustained and cheerful hooting from the Martians.

I slid down the rubbish, struggled to my feet, clapped my hands over my ears, and bolted into the scullery. The curate, who had been crouching silently with his arms over his head, looked up as I passed, cried out quite loudly at my desertion of him, and came running after me.

That night, as we lurked in the scullery, balanced between our horror and the terrible fascination this peeping had, although I felt an urgent need of action I tried in vain to conceive some plan of escape; but afterwards, during the second day, I was able to consider our position with great clearness. The curate, I found, was quite incapable of discussion; this new and culminating atrocity had robbed him of all vestiges of reason or forethought. Practically he had already sunk to the level of an animal. But as the saying goes, I gripped myself with both hands. It grew upon my mind, once I could face the facts, that terrible as our position was, there was as yet no justification for absolute despair. Our chief chance lay in the possibility of the Martians making the pit nothing more than a temporary encampment. Or even if they kept it permanently, they might not consider it necessary to guard it, and a chance of escape might be afforded us. I also weighed very carefully the possibility of our digging a way out in a direction away from the pit, but the chances of our emerging within sight of some sentinel fighting-machine seemed at first too great. And I should have had to do all the digging myself. The curate would certainly have failed me.

It was on the third day, if my memory serves me right, that I saw the lad killed. It was the only occasion on which I actually saw the Martians feed. After that experience I avoided the hole in the wall for the better part of a day. I went into the scullery, removed the door, and spent some hours digging with my hatchet as silently as possible; but when I had made a hole about a couple of feet deep the loose earth collapsed noisily, and I did not dare continue. I lost heart, and lay down on the scullery floor for a long time, having no spirit even to move. And after that I abandoned altogether the idea of escaping by excavation.

It says much for the impression the Martians had made upon me that at first I entertained little or no hope of our escape being brought about by their overthrow through any human effort. But on the fourth or fifth night I heard a sound like heavy guns.

It was very late in the night, and the moon was shining brightly. The Martians had taken away the excavating-machine, and, save for a fighting-machine that stood in the remoter bank of the pit and a handling-machine that was buried out of my sight in a corner of the pit immediately beneath my peephole, the place was deserted by them. Except for the pale glow from the handling-machine and the bars and patches of white moonlight the pit was in darkness, and, except for the clinking of the handling-machine, quite still. That night was a beautiful serenity; save for one planet, the moon seemed to have the sky to herself. I heard a dog howling, and that familiar sound it was that made me listen. Then I heard quite distinctly a booming exactly like the sound of great guns. Six distinct reports I counted, and after a long interval six again. And that was all.

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