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Schlock!

WEBZINE

VOL. 13, ISSUE 7
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HAIR-NECK VALLEY

BY JESSE
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END...

FREE TIME

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STRANGE AND
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**REVIEW
BY JOHN C
ADAMS**

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SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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

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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. 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 Edition

This week's cover illustration is *Bonfire celebrating Midsummer Night* by [Nikolai Astrup](#).
Graphic design © by Gavin Chappell, logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

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SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC

EDITORIAL

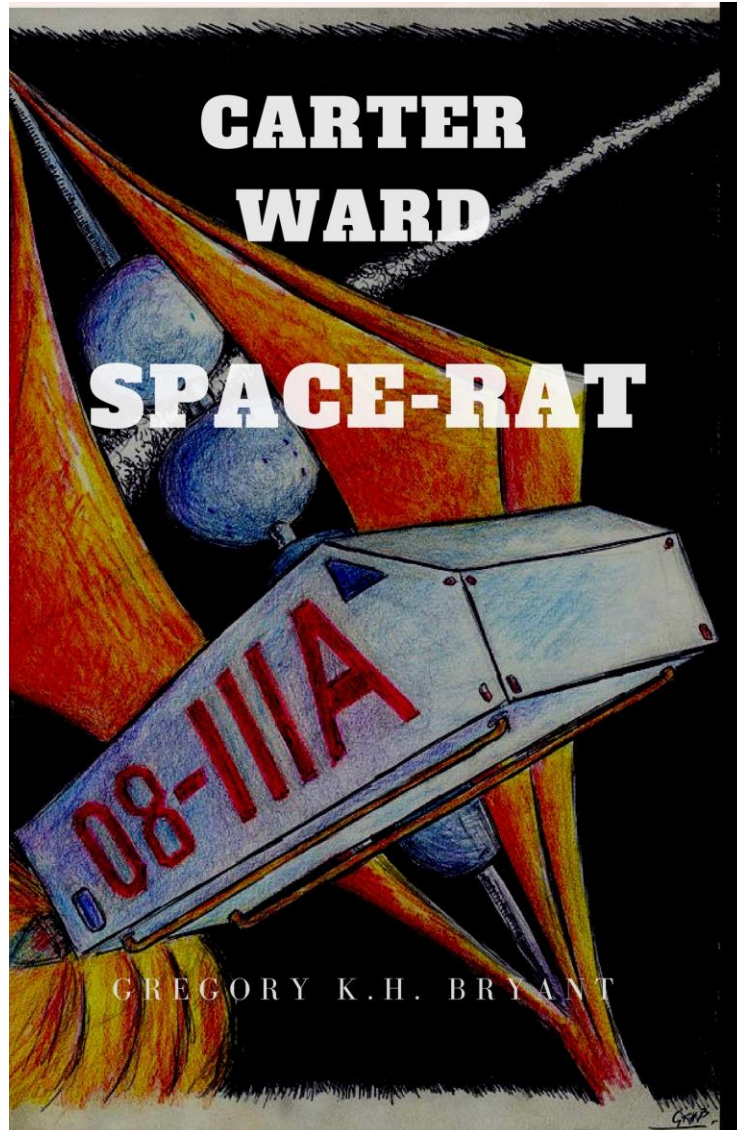
This week, as we return triumphantly in our midsummer issue, we're announcing the publication of [*Carter Ward—Space Rat*](#), a collection of the first three Carter Ward stories by Gregory KH Bryant! See below for more details of this space opera spectacular!

We begin with the first of a two-part comic fantasy from Jesse Zimmerman. Next up is a dystopian tale set in a world where leisure is unheard of. Steve Laker returns to a future Earth to encounter an age-old conflict. And John C Adams reviews Mark Broaddus' Arthurian urban fantasy, *King's Justice*.

Holmes and Watson flee the *Beast-men of Atlantis*. Carter Ward continues his *Search for Astra Palace*. *Across the Zodiac* we encounter a few of Mars' peculiar institutions. And we begin another Victorian science fiction story, *The Battle of Dorking*.

—Gavin Chappell

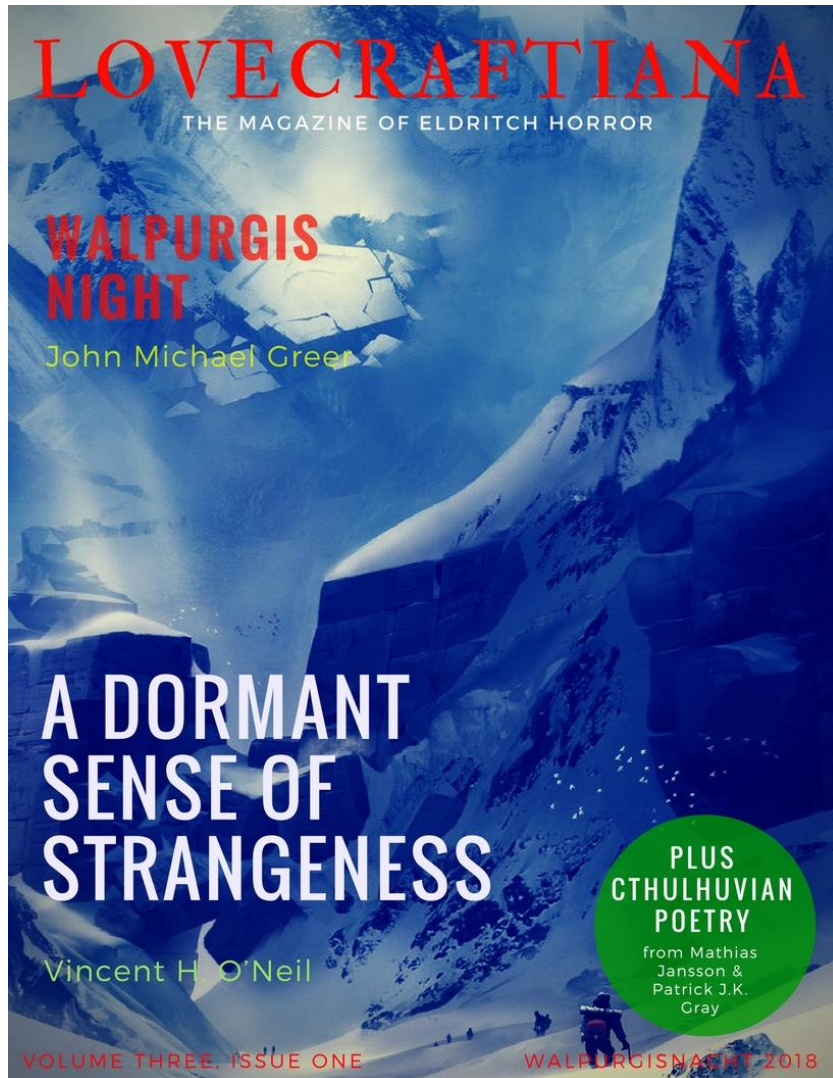
Now available from Schlock! Publications: [*Carter Ward—Space Rat*](#) by Gregory KH Bryant.



Available from Rogue Planet Press: the Spring 2018 edition of [Schlock Quarterly](#):



And the Walpurgisnacht edition of [*Lovecraftiana—the Magazine of Eldritch Horror*](#).



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HAIR-NECK VALLEY by Jesse Zimmerman

Part One

The morning is late and we're tired despite our rest. My sister is clearly getting impatient as she stands in the cool mist of the forest path at the front of the giant mushroom with its door and windows. We had just spent the night in this strange home.

"Okay, well, so long!" Fauna says loudly to our host, slamming his door on his face. She looks at the Challenger and myself, shaking her head, mouthing for us to start walking...fast.

Behind us, I can hear Dick Bumpedop singing behind the door of his fungus cottage. I strain my ear, barely making out the words. He sings something about us 'hopping along our way, danger is not for today' and 'when the trail splits in half, to take the left would be a gaffe' or something to that effect, his usual semi-nonsensical rhymes.

He has been really good to us, this fellow, having rescued us from a muddy marsh we had gotten stuck in yesterday. Although I'm sure we would've found a way out eventually, especially with our ranger friend, we still appreciated his help. The beds he'd lent us in his mushroom home were comfortable and the loaves he gave us scrumptious, yet the three of us are relieved to be gone from him now.

"I thought he'd never shut up," the Challenger mutters, shaking his head. The thirty-something ranger wears dark colours, chainmail covering his torso, arms bare, a forest green cloak atop his broad, manly shoulders, his dark brown breeches held up by a birch-bark belt. At his waist he wears a leather belt, and a scabbard with a sword hangs from it.

"He hasn't," I tell him, still hearing distant singing. We tread upon a thin trail in a thick wood that we had been crossing for nearly three days.

"Just keep moving," instructs my grumpier-than-usual sister. I would've expected her to be in a better mood after being hosted so well out here in the rugged wilderness, but the constant, non-stop merrymaking of Dick Bumpedop was too much even for her.

"So you don't like it when people are nice to you and give you food and a place to sleep?" I ask the other two adventurers, my tongue firmly planted in my cheek.

Fauna glares at me from my side and I wonder if she's readying words or fists for me. "Flora! You know full well you wanted to leave almost as soon as you entered that fungus flat!"

"Yeah, but I'm not known all over our city as the nice sister!" I tease. Usually it's her teasing me, so I enjoy this bit of gloating. She's the outgoing one, always, since we were little, always talking to everyone, wanting to join in on activities while I watched from afar, usually with my nose in some tome or other I got from Mother's library. I can read of things far away and not get a mark of dirt on me, but not Fauna. She needs to touch and feel, even the bad things. If we

didn't look so alike, both with the same thin and tall structures, round faces and wavy red-brown hair, I'd swear she was left on Mother's front stoop.

But alas, Flora and Fauna are sisters.

"He did rescue us," says the Challenger, running a hand through his dirty-blond hair, twirling a long strand that hangs over his forehead. "Not that we were in any danger. I had everything under control and I would've thought of some way out of the mud."

"Sure!" Fauna agrees in a jesting tone, pulling the straps on the big knapsack on her back. "But it was good that he got to us when he did. I was exhausted."

"Me too," grumbles the Challenger, stepping ahead of us. "Babysitting is hard work."

"Oh, this is babysitting to you?" Fauna asks with a high laugh that is likely heard throughout the woods.

"Feels like it," the Challenger remarks with a half-smile as our trail splits in two. He pauses before us, letting Fauna and I arrive at his sides. She looks at me and tells me I will be carrying the group's knapsack next.

"You should be thankful you're on this quest with us," is all she says to our ranger companion. "When our names get written in the history books alongside the great heroes of the past, you will be grateful to be so remembered!"

"When I get the rest of my money I will be grateful," he says, alternating his gaze between the two trails, sniffing the air.

"The quest still hasn't really started, has it?" I say more than ask her.

"Oh yes it has, Flora! This is our quest...to find a quest!" she proclaims, placing both hands on her slender hips, stamping a foot, turning to the Challenger. "So, which way?"

"It's your quest. You tell me," the rugged ranger responds. He turns about, shutting his one eye for a second and I can't tell if he is blinking or winking. He wears a black eyepatch over the other, you see. Across his chest rests a longbow, a quiver of a dozen or so arrows is strapped to his back. Both he and my sis are trained marksmen. Not me though; I only have a dagger from Mother to use as a weapon. My mind is my main defence.

Let me explain for you, reader.

We are indeed on a quest to find a quest. What quest? We don't know yet, so long as we do a quest and have an adventure worth telling. We twins, on our nineteenth birthday, decided to set out. Well, Fauna decided to set out and I decided to follow at some urging, her telling me I could record everything and write about it when we get back, which is what I plan to do. I have a near

perfect memory. I can take something in by sight or sound and then describe it after, a rare gift that runs in our family, skipping some of our clan, but not me.

“Ah, doesn’t matter. Try left,” says Fauna to the question posed by the Challenger, charging on ahead, the big bag on her back bouncing. This trail appears even thinner than the present one, the trees on the sides so close together they resemble wooden fences, the ground littered with short shrubs, tangling vines, and colourful mushrooms and woodland flowers. Despite the pleasant appearance, I have a feeling we should be going right instead, yet, foolishly, decide to follow my sister.

We kick up pollen and floating seeds as we run while flocks of butterflies vacate the miniature plant forests at our feet. Above us the canopy is thick and green, sunlight streaming down in narrow streaks, the pollen we’ve upended drifting calmly through the air, lightened whenever it floats into the sunlight. I feel calm as I inhale the smoky wooded scent these northern forests are known for. Up ahead I see the Challenger has unsheathed his sword and is cutting some of the vines and twigs in front of him and at his feet. I also notice Fauna’s long red cap bouncing up and down as she navigates the thicket.

“Maybe we should turn back?” I suggest, glancing about the trees, spotting very tall ones to my left. I wonder if I could go up there and get a better look. I am about to suggest it when I hear my sister shriek.

“What is it?” asks the Challenger, pausing in his side to side slashing. “Are you alright?”

“Ow!” Fauna shouts and I hear her unsheathing her sword. “Yeah, I’m okay. Damn, just pricked my shoulder. Aww, my shirt’s ripped! Stupid sharp twig thingy!”

“You’re a big girl!” the Challenger barks with a small laugh.

“A big girl who needs a baby-sitter?” Fauna retorts, grinning back at him.

“Keep going!” I tell them. I feel some prickly stuff on my face as I push through the thick mess, feeling encumbered, but I press forward, breaking apart the remaining thorns and twigs in my way.

Amidst the sounds of cracking, I hear something in the distance. I strain my ears, detecting the noise from behind us, but I can’t yet tell what it is. The ranger, a few feet in front of me, suddenly turns around, his one eye wide, his face forming into a deep scowl.

Fauna stops as well and I see her spin about, an anxious look overtaking her fine features. Her green eyes seem to jolt in place, her jaw dropping at once.

Then I begin to make out the sound:

*Hey there, my newest friends,
Alone and caught in woodland glens,*

*Who fares upon that forest path?
Who dips in sparkling river bath?*

The ranger groans. And then he shouts: “Run!”

Fauna is already tearing down the trail, snapping branch and root as she runs, while the Challenger thumps his feet wildly behind her, no longer bothering to slice his way through. I groan and follow them, shaking my head as the singing of Dick Bumpedop loudens.

I wince. And then I force myself to smile as I turn around to see him.

From far away he looks big, but as he approaches his height seems to shift, getting shorter and shorter until he is just a bit under my height, his tall pointed straw hat stretching up another foot from his head. He wears big brown boots and earth brown trousers (likely due to caked mud) under a big green overcoat, a bright yellow scarf wrapped about his neck, his big salt-and-pepper beard waving as he hops jollily towards us.

“Hi, Mister Bumpedop,” I greet him. He is about ten or so paces from us now, his usual big grin on his round face, and his teeth near perfect white for his otherwise grizzled appearance.

“Hello!” Fauna greets him loudly, her and the Challenger having stopped their rushing footsteps when they heard me speak to him.

“Hey friends!” Dick Bumpedop calls to us, removing his hat, revealing a full head of silver hair. “It looks like you there are stuck again!”

“We aren’t stuck,” insists Fauna. I look over and see she is leaning sideways over a long, low-hanging branch, a wall of vines stretched out before her.

“We’re just cutting through,” adds the Challenger.

“Oh! These woods can be treacherous!” our former host says in his booming yet friendly voice. He then raises both of his hands, waving his fingers, and calls out: “Life force of the woodland! Be calm, for these are friends of the Olds! You tuck your vines and branches away, old spirits! Let them pass in peace!”

I hear a series of churning-like sounds and I turn to the way we had been going and I see the woods shift. It’s subtle at first, with branches slightly parting and tall grasses flowing apart away from the trail, but soon the trunks of the trees themselves lean over, loud creaks and woody grumbles emanating as they move.

Now there is a clear path through the woods where two folks could walk through side by side. The Challenger places his sword back into his sheath. Fauna does the same. I look back to see Dick Bumpedop grinning even wider than before.

I sigh before asking if there is anything we can do to thank him. When he tells me he has some folktales to share with us I can almost hear the silent groans.

Fauna and I find a log to seat ourselves on, while the ranger stands with his back against a spruce tree. My sister takes off the big knapsack and throws it onto my lap, making me say ‘oof!’ as we wait for our host to begin.

Dick Bumpedop talks from topic to topic, at times telling somewhat consistent tales of his travels in nearby realms, oftentimes venturing off-topic and starting all-new stories along the way, only sometimes coming back to the original yarns. He tells the tales with feeling, moving his hands around wildly at some points, far from monotonous, and if we hadn’t just listened to hours and hours of his stories the night before we would likely be entertained, but I can see the glaze setting in on the eyes of my companions.

He tells us of the time he tossed out rubbish into a nearby creek and the Lord of the Otters had him brought back to their den where Dick sang to them until they let him go. Afterwards he begins another story about how he helped a lost hedgehog get home, interjecting with a few songs about the movement of water and the growing of vines. I listen, taking it all in, remembering nearly every word and inflection.

Eventually, after the sun has made it to the midpoint in the sky, Dick Bumpedop takes a pause from his storytelling, standing up from the little rock he had planted himself on, stretching his arms and legs, giving a small yawn. “Ah well, I must be off, my friends!”

We all straighten ourselves out as I hear a badly hidden sigh of relief come out of my sister. “Yes!” she says, waving a hand. “We must get going!”

“Yes, thanks,” I agree, lugging the straps of the big knapsack with all our goods onto my back. It’s heavy. I don’t know how Fauna carries it so carelessly. Oh wait, she’s way stronger than me. She always made fun of me for it when we were little. I wear a big pair of spectacles too. Fauna would say that people called me an owl and whenever I asked “Who?” she would laugh furiously.

“Move along, friends!” Dick Bumpedop announces. He jumps in place and taps his feet together before breaking into another song.

We exchange glances with one another, clearly thinking the same thing. Fauna begins stepping towards the trail, nodding politely. He’s busy singing, his eyes closed as he dances, first waving his arms, and then shaking his waist and belly around. The three of us back up slowly, issuing thank-yous between his verses and I can tell I am the only one taking in his whimsical lyrics, just in case there is anything I need to know:

*“Now flee deep into the woods,
With your sack all full of goods,
Three friends through old lands do you travel,
Where your adventure must thus unravel!”*

I smile at the last line, looking over to Fauna. Songs are already being sung about her. I trail behind the company, the only one who still walks backwards now, still facing the round-shaped vocalist as he ceases his dance for a moment and speaks: “Oh, and I almost forgot! Flora, the owl sister!”

Fauna laughs hysterically.

“Here!” he calls and produces something from one of his pockets. He tosses it.

I catch it, almost fumbling the little object he has thrown to me. It’s a small wooden thing, about as long as my hand. It doesn’t take me long to figure out that it’s a flute, due to its small mouthpiece and three tiny holes on its thin body.

“Ah, thanks!” I say. “I guess I can learn how to play.”

“Blow it thrice if you run into trouble!” explains Dick Bumpedop.

I thank him and turn around, listening half-heartedly to his last words, something about a valley with three mountain peaks where he cannot help us, and I catch a few lines about other old folks in the realm, one of whom is a giant owl, but I don’t know if he’s poking fun at me. He also mentions a friend named Barpar, an ancient one who made the owl larger once by tossing it, or something. I only catch a few words, for we are now moving rapidly through the woods, turning off from the thin trail, the echoes of Dick Bumpedop fading into the afternoon.

“Well, wasn’t that nice of him?” I call ahead to Fauna.

She shrugs her shoulders. “Like others before us, we wander the land looking to do good, even if other good beings are irritating sometimes.”

“Speak for yourselves,” says the Challenger. “I consider myself neutral and chaotic.”

“You said that before,” I tell him as the three of us make it to a large clearing. “What does that mean?”

The ranger turns around and blinks his good eye. “Oh, I think you know.”

I am confused. “No, I don’t know,” I say, feeling a sharp ache across my shoulders. “And you’re carrying this bag next!”

We two sisters seat ourselves on some patches of short grass and, with a heave, I slump the big bag off from my back and let it land between us. Fauna quickly untangles the strings that keep it shut.

“Ah, nuts,” she says, clear disappointment on her face. “We’re near out of food!”

“Really?” I ask, feeling a pang of hunger. I put a hand to the soft blue tunic over my belly.

“Well, we have some nuts leftover, which is why I said, ‘ah nuts’ when I opened it,” she answers, giving a weak smile. She reaches in and pulls out a handful.

“Let me get something from the forest,” the Challenger offers, vanishing behind the walls of foliage before we can reply. He returns shortly with a dead bird in his hands, some kind of woodland fowl, a male judging by its bright orange feathers. Fauna stands up and gathers some wood for a fire while I look over our inventory.

In all we have quite a few items for our adventure, most of it provided by Mother, though some other stuff we got along the way too. We have, aside from our yucky nuts, yards of thin but firm rope, some healing leaves, a small bag full of flame-wood (extra dry wood that catches fire after three rubs), a leather bag with a total of ten powder bombs with metallic shells (small bombs I can fit in my hand, though the blast they produce is ten times as big), as well as an extra quiver of strong arrows made of a semi-magical wood/metal alloy, and three skin flasks for drinking. We also have extra socks, all blue for me, red for Fauna. We also have a small but effective telescope that I’ve had since I was a kid.

I place the little wooden flute inside, figuring we won’t be calling Dick Bumpdop.

Fauna makes a pit, fills it with dry leaves, and then asks me for a piece of flame-wood to get it started. Once the fire begins flickering the Challenger places lunch in and the smell of crispy meat floats into the air.

After eating the lean bird, we all take a stretch around the dying fire. I feel new energy flowing through my body and, looking about at my companions and the sunny clearing, I feel positive for once.

“Don’t stub your toe,” Fauna warns, making a goofy expression. “Or else Dick Bumpdop will be here!”

I’m fed up with her complaining. “Time to move on. He’s a tiny distraction in this apparently epic quest you’re obsessed with having.”

“Where to next, girls?” the Challenger asks us, poking his long blade into the embers at our feet. “Shall we stay east?”

Fauna nods, turning and pointing with an outstretched hand.

“That’s west,” I say.

She turns and points the other way.

We continue where the trail resumes, the forest thinning as we make our way in the shadows of the light canopy. I enjoy the silence as my sister treks a fair ways ahead of us and I am left with

the Challenger. I ask him if he knows this realm. He explains to me that he has been travelling this country for the past four years, having gone almost everywhere either on a lonesome sojourn or in the pay of others.

“Four years? No place to call your home?” I ask him, imagining what it must be like to be rootless. We had met him a little over a week ago in a tavern on the outskirts of our realms.

He shakes his head, looking down the pathway at his feet, appearing lost in thoughts. I ask him why he is wandering, what made him take this life. He turns his head up a little to meet my gaze.

“My wife died,” he says. I can see something flicker in his eye, a look of pain, of loss.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“I know. I’m just sorry to hear that,” I tell him, deciding to say nothing more.

He chuckles a bit, kicking a toad that had just leaped in front of his foot. “Whenever you meet someone with a mysterious past, chances are something terrible happened to them and that’s why they’re where they are.”

I give him a curt nod, looking at my sister skipping along the trail, a series of low-hanging willows blocking the space before her. She stops and we soon catch up to her.

“What could be beyond these leafy curtains?” Fauna asks us.

“Hopefully something to fight,” says the ranger, pulling out his sword again, pressing its point against the bottom of the foliage, lifting it to reveal that the forest ends abruptly. Beyond is an open space, a great field, perhaps a valley, judging by the distant hills I can barely see further away. At our feet is a tiny gushing stream, so narrow we easily leap over it, bringing ourselves into bright sunlight, the brightest we had seen since entering the great woods.

“Beautiful!” Fauna stammers, spinning her body about while she continues to skip upon the grass.

As I follow my sister, I take in the green fields, the ground under us sloping gradually downward until it reaches a low point in what appears to be the middle of this huge open space. There, at the base of the descending ground, sits a great hill, near perfectly round.

Fauna gasps. “Look at that!”

I look to where she gestures. Far in the distance, far beyond the hill at the base of the sloping ground, I see a tall mountain, a single peak covered in trees all the way to the top as if the mountain were carpeted by forest. It looks like it would take a quarter of a day to make it to the mountain on foot.

Fauna starts running for the round hill. I call for her to wait, but the Challenger laughs at my side. "Let's go check it out!" he shouts, waving his blade above his head before charging after her.

Leaning forward, I groan from the weight of the bag on my back, but manage to follow. Propelled by the downward slope, I keep just behind our ranger friend as Fauna makes it halfway to the hill. The ground evens out here, running flat until it reaches the base.

"Look!" she calls as we line up side by side. She is pointing to the entranceway of a tunnel at the bottom of the hill, just to the right of where we stand. "And look there!" Fauna points left, at another identical entranceway. Beyond the archways of the portals we can only see blackness.

"Flame-wood!" my sister orders. I am about to fling my heavy bag in front of me when the Challenger suggests we climb the hill instead of going into it, just to get a better look at the area. We all agree, but I insist he carry the bag up.

The hill is somewhat steep, but we climb with relative ease, our feet finding little nooks and indents as we make our way to the top. At the summit the ground is flat, this big circular space about thirty paces around. The Challenger makes it to the top last, still fairly vibrant-looking despite lugging the heavy bag. I figure that he has been wandering the land for years, so he must be in great shape, which is why we hired him in the first place.

In the centre of the summit is a short well made of stone. I take a peak over the rim, seeing weird bright blue mushrooms growing all about the sides of it, running downward where below a dimly lit chamber rests. I can only see some big rocks down there, flickers from unseen light sources dancing upon their hard surfaces.

"Look at that," says Fauna, busily taking in the immense sight around us.

"Wow," the Challenger adds, dropping our bag.

The sight is indeed amazing. First, I look to the far mountain I saw earlier, somewhat closer now, though still far, the ground rising steadily towards it like it does on the other side of the hill. It stands alone, mere woodland hills running alongside of it, a few streams crossing the land here and there. I continue my gaze northward, and things look the same before I set my eyes upon another mountain peak.

"Weird," I comment, pointing to it. "That mountain. It looks just like the other one."

Fauna nods. "Yeah, weird."

I then turn about halfway and see another mountain, this one not far from the way we came, to the southeast. Like the other two it rises suddenly, a series of hills between each of the three mountains, forests covering all of them.

“Uh oh,” I say as I realize something.

Before any of my companions can ask me what I’m on about the Challenger cries out, raising his sword, pointing to the first mountain we saw across the great way. Both of our heads turn to where he’s pointing.

“What is that?” Fauna asks in a sharp gasp.

From the mountain, near the peak, we see what looks like some kind of floating ball or bubble. It’s green and, as it gets closer, I realize it’s big, maybe about the size of a person, perfectly round. It approaches us, floating twenty or so feet above, and then slows down as it nears the hill. A face emerges on its surface. It’s simple; two black eyes and a single dot for a nose, as well as a line for a mouth. It appears to be looking forward, not seeming to notice us as it floats by.

“Are you ready?” a deep male voice comes from the weird thing.

“Ready for what?” Fauna shouts to the talking face.

“I sure am ready!” another booming voice calls from behind us, making my sister and I gasp while the Challenger flings out his bow and plucks an arrow, lining it up, pointing it upward at the new big blue face that has emerged across from the green one.

“Alright then!” says a third face, a red one that has emerged to the southwest. “Lobster-Man is ready!”

“So is Frog-Bro!” declares the green face.

“And so too is Slug-Lord!” cries the blue one. “Let the games begin!”

“Games?” Fauna yells at all three of them, pulling out her sword, raising it toward them. “What games?”

Without a further word the Challenger shoots an arrow into the blue face, which flies through harmlessly and continues soaring into the valley. Fauna shouts at him, reminding him that our company is supposed to be a force for good. The Challenger explains again that he is neutral and chaotic.

The blue face lowers its eyes slightly. “Who are these?”

The other two faces sink a little in the air, now seemingly seeing us.

“I don’t know about this,” says the red one.

“Ah, look!” says the green face. “There is one in green, one in blue, one in red! They must be non-playable characters!”

“Someone gifted them to us without telling us?” asks the red one, the closest thing to a look of confusion on its simple face.

“No matter,” says the blue one.

The big green thing, Frog-Bro, laughs dryly and says: “I get the male! You guys are toast!”

“Okay, let’s start already!” snaps the red face. The others dip slightly, a nod, I gather, and they all vanish at once, all saying to one another: “Good luck. Have fun.”

Fauna asks me: “What was that all about?”

I shrug, looking to the Challenger.

“Do I look like I have any idea?” he asks. “I have no clue. Maybe we should get going. We don’t want to get caught up in something.”

Before we can agree on anything, a deafening trumpeting noise erupts from one of the mountains. We all duck and I feel powerful vibrations within my body, the ground shaking. Another blast follows from the mountain across the way, and then another long blare echoes across the valley.

I cry out to my sister: “What have you gotten us into?”

“Me?” she shouts back, crossing her red-sleeved arms.

Before I can say anything more we hear distant rumbling. I look to the mountains, one after the other, and on each I see, starting near the top, what appears to be huge swathes of darkness tearing down the mountainsides. At this distance I can see the trees on the slopes crumble and snap before these great dark clusters that are flowing downward toward the green valley.

I grab the knapsack, fetching the handheld telescope, while Fauna jumps in at my side and grabs the extra quiver of arrows, strapping it on her back before taking something else as well.

Hands sweating, I bring the eyepiece of the scope up to my left eye, closing my right one, pointing it to one of the mountains. “Oh no,” I say.

“What is it?” Fauna demands. “What do you see?”

I want to describe it, but the words get caught in my throat. “There are, charging down the mountainside, whole armies of...things!”

At the front, and making up a bit more than half of the total mass, is a sea of black, brown, and grey furry things. Even with my ’scope I cannot quite make out what they are. They move so fast I just see shifting fur, red eyes, fangs, spears, and pointed ears. There is no sign of grass or earth between them, everything in their wake is getting crushed before them. Everywhere they move

as they descend there emerges a cloud of dust, dirt, and pieces of trees and bushes that are flung as they crash through. They must be small creatures, the bulk of them, I figure, but I also see larger things among them.

There are what appear to be large upright logs with arms and legs! They stamp downward among the masses of furred things, these walking logs, wielding lumberjack axes in their hands. Flying above them, but moving in the same direction, I see barrels with great white wings spreading out from their sides, flapping madly. Among the crowd too I see what look like enormous eyeballs rolling downhill. I see another strange sight, about two, no, three giant stone men marching among the other monsters, and more things I can barely begin to describe.

My sister yells to me.

I spin around, seeing her angry face magnified for a moment before focusing on the next hill. Here I see the same, the army of furry things, walking logs, flying barrels, rolling eyeballs, stone giants, and the many other weird monstrosities. I notice that these ones are shaded red, or have red among them; the eyeballs have red pupils, the winged barrels have red stripes, and so on. I zoom back to the first hill, noticing that the same applies but with green, and then I take in the final mountain and see that the same things are coming down the valley but with blue tinges and blue stripes.

“Three teams,” I say to myself.

The scope is violently yanked from me. Fauna looks through it, spinning around at the three mountains like I did. “Crap! Crap! Crap!”

The Challenger looks through next and grumbles: “Chaotic.”

My sister reveals what she had grabbed from the bag, the flute. She cries out: “Help us, Dick Bumpedop!”

A feeling of utter dread sweeps over me, while butterflies explode within my belly.

Fauna puts her lips to the whistle as I fall over and land on my butt. There is no sound emitting from the flute. She blows two more times, her face already pinkish. I start giggling.

“What’s so funny?” my sister shrieks, placing the flute in her pant pocket, taking her bow.

“Dick Bumpedop!” I stammer. “You want him now!”

“Yes, well, he told us to blow this flute thrice!” she shouts back. “Even if it’s a silent flute! It must be magic! He’ll come help us!”

I stand up, taking my scope from the Challenger. “Fauna, Dick Bumpedop can’t help us. He said it in one of his songs. Though I didn’t catch all the words, I remember him saying that if we come to a valley with three peaks that he couldn’t help us.”

Fauna's tan face nearly turns white.

"Back from whence we came then?" our ranger companion asks, pointing his sword eastward.

I look through the scope to where he's pointing and I see it, the little gushing stream and the now distant curtain of foliage, only things have changed. Now there is a great metallic wall. It must have risen from the ground, for I see that the bottom of the fence shoots directly into the earth. I turn about in a full circle and notice that this immense wall of metal wraps around the whole valley, stretching between each of the three mountains.

Handing it to my freaked-out sis next, I tell her what I just saw. She looks through the scope and swears worse than I've ever heard from her.

"Well," says the Challenger. "You wanted a quest."

My sister's face goes wild. "Is being stuck in the middle of a battlefield between magical automatons and summoned monstrosities a quest?"

The ranger shrugs. He takes the telescope from her again, placing it onto his one good eye and searches the scenery. "Our best bet is hiding until it's over."

I nod in agreement. "They look like three teams judging by their colours. That's why they think we're on their teams."

"We're on no one's team!" Fauna shouts angrily. "You hear that you big ugly faces!"

"Yeah, that's right!" yells the ranger. "We're afraid of nothing! Now, let's go hide."

The Challenger scoops up the knapsack and the three of us nearly fall down the sloping sides onto the flat ground below, heading for the first tunnel entrance we find, plunging into blackness for a few frantic steps until we emerge down a rock hallway into a dimly lit chamber, the one I'd seen from above. The place is big, as big as the mound from the outside, which was to be expected. There are torches on the walls, too high to reach, six in all, already burning. The ground here is flat and hard, an odd bluish hue, and there are large rocks, really big ones, with flat tops not unlike the mound itself, platforms. They stand about an average elf's height, easily surmountable.

In the middle of the room is the biggest of these raised platforms. A bright light shines down from above, the well I had seen while I was up there. We cautiously approach the centre rock, taking in the strange atmosphere.

The ground shakes and we hear the sounds of heavy crashes and footfalls outside. Flakes of dust and tiny bits of rock fall from the walls. Outside a great battle is being waged.

"Maybe we can wait it out," Fauna says to us.

I am about to agree with her when I hear a sound that causes me to freeze in place, a more chilling sound than the loud commotion outside. It is the sound of a thousand tiny feet scurrying, coming closer, getting louder, and combined with the sounds of flicking tails and chirps and squeaks. We all exchange anxious glances before shoving ourselves over the edge of the central rock platform. Whatever is coming, it's going to be all over the floor soon.

Upon the platform there is enough space for six people, just enough for us to move about. The sounds have multiplied now, echoing down all three of the tunnels that lead outside.

In the light of the torches I see a dark mass moving in the tunnel we came in through. It looks like one long and flat creature at first, but then, as it turns into a lightened spot I see there are many creatures. These must be the furred masses I saw, or part of it, the smallest units, all bundled together.

They seem to move as one, all scurrying inside, turning about the big rocks, and it takes me a moment to make out any individual movement. These are tiny things standing on two feet though only a third my height, if that. Their bodies are small, frail-looking, with skinny arms and legs, all covered in brown or black or grey fur, wearing little robes or miniscule chain-mail armour. In their tiny paws they carry wooden spears, little axes, and daggers held like swords, some with small wooden shields as well.

The heads of the critters are ugly, looking too large for their bodies. They have the heads of big rats; whiskered snouts, pointed ears, beady black eyes, and sharp fangs that show when they screech unintelligible gibberish. I turn and see another swarm of them on the other side, and then a third huge cluster that has sneaked in. They each have different colourings on their clothing or weapons, signifying whether they serve red, green, or blue.

“Kobolds!” the Challenger yells from beside me.

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SPRING 2018

Schlock!

Quarterly

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FREE TIME by Shainur Ullah

Routine is what drives society, the very fabric of our economy and life. Without it, it seems impossible to live. I get up early in the morning at 5 AM and it takes me an hour to get ready; I then go out and catch the tram at 6:30 AM. I arrive at my work place at 7 AM, even though I start at 8. I have been taught just like others to always arrive early and to prepare yourself for your whole work day. I work at a residential building and I am a concierge; I deal with things like tenant parcels, queries and arguments, as well as managing keys and fob cards.

The delivery drivers always arrive at specific times, so I know when to be ready for them and I have to process at least fifty parcels. I work four days a week, and after I finish work at 6 PM my timetable says that I now have to go home and get ready to socialise at a certain location. You never know who you are going to meet but I guess that's the surprise. I have to arrive at the socialising venue at 8 PM and then after an hour of socialising I go home and get ready for bed for work for next day.

My timetable also plans what I am going to do on my days off, and it could be a range of things from exercising or going out, to even meeting family members. Everything in everyone's lives is dictated from a timetable and we must follow that timetable. About two months ago, though, the economy took a hit and I am not sure what happened but the company I work for which employs me to be a concierge reduced my hours from 8-6 PM to 8-4 PM, and I guess now I will have to be more careful with how much I spend.

My timetable should have adapted to the new changes in my work hours. I found it strange that it hadn't filled in the two hour gap I now have. I didn't think much of it, though, at the time, and when the other concierges timetable adapted to their work changes mine still showed a two hour gap. I remember going at 4PM and just sitting in my bed not knowing what to do at all.

It felt so strange and alien, and I didn't know what I was experiencing. Usually my timetable tells me what to do. For the first time in my life I had to think of something on my own to fill in the two hour gap. I then dared to open the door, even though it didn't say I should on my timetable. Well, my timetable didn't have anything from 4-6. When I went out I observed how everyone was just following their timetable and knew what to do but it was just me freely walking not knowing what to do and I could do anything I wanted in the spare two hours I had to myself.

In all of my life I have never had spare hours to myself to do as I please. I walked past a park, which was empty, but it looked so beautiful and I decided to lay down on the grass. I didn't know what was going on, and this feeling of free time was so alien because I have never had free time from my timetable or spare time to do whatever I wanted to do.

I just looked up at the blue sky and thought about my whole life, and everyone else's life, and how we all follow the timetable and never have free time. Those two free hours were my first ever free hours I have ever experienced and it was the most amazing experience I have ever had. My timetable had me down for 6:30PM to socialise at some other event and at that event it was like I wasn't even at that party. I couldn't. I experienced free time and ever since then secretly

whenever I finished work at 4PM I went down to the park to lay on the grass under the blue skies. My days off, though, were still filled with things to do and only on my work timetable where did there seem to have been some kind of glitch and no one had noticed that I had two hours to myself. I felt like I was outside looking in and I did sometimes get strange stares when I spent my free time just laying down in the empty park.

I really enjoyed it and I decided to find other parks where I could lay down on the grass and look up at the blue sky and enjoy the sun. I enjoyed having my thoughts and mind to myself for once and being away from others even for only two hours. Then as time passed and people walking by would sometimes stop and stare and I could hear them whisper to themselves as if they have never seen what spare time looked like. One day I heard someone taking a photo of me. I got up from the grass and ran up to him and told him to delete it.

“What on earth are you doing just laying down on the grass like that?” the stranger asked me. “Shouldn’t your timetable have something for you to do?”

“Look, dude, please don’t tell anyone!” I begged him. “Why don’t you try it? Look, just pop your stuff down and lay down on the grass, and have some free time.”

“Are you crazy?” he shouted at me. “My timetable is full today!”

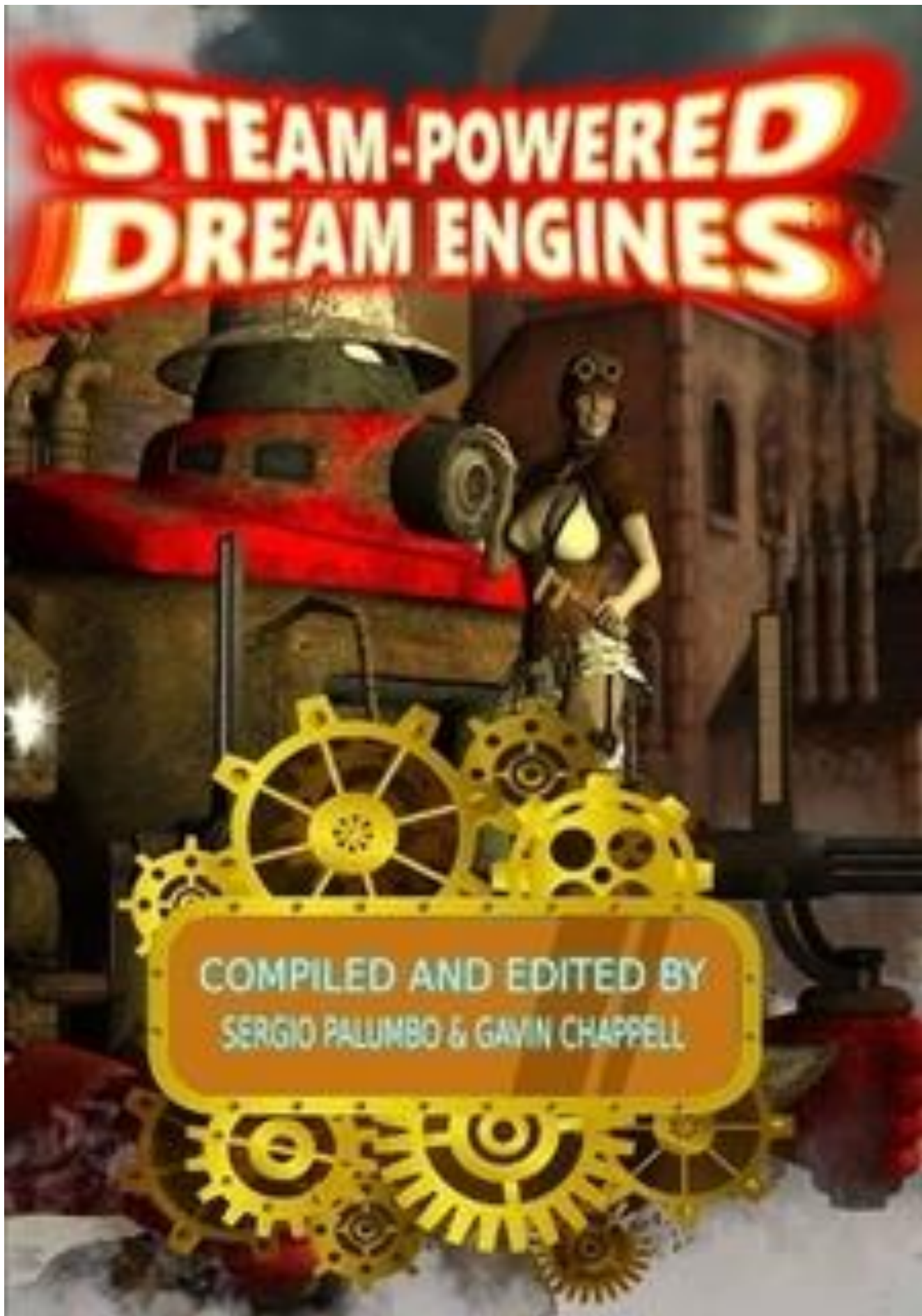
For a whole month I was just so paranoid about what would happen to me but I still went to the park in my spare free time for two hours only. I sat on the grass just thinking about everything and one day I had two policemen ordering me to stand up and to get into their car. They drove me to the station and looked at my timetable and they told me that what I had done was worse than disobeying it. There was a glitch on my timetable and they gave me hell for not telling someone and they said they will send it to the technical to sort it out.

They gave me a warning that next time there is a glitch I must tell someone or there would be a long prison sentence. Those two hours that I had to myself are now spent volunteering somewhere and I sometimes cry to myself just thinking about having spare time, laying down on the grass, looking up at the blue sky.

THE END

[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 with a prominent red horizontal band. The background shows a dark, industrial cityscape with tall buildings and smoke in the air. The overall color palette is dominated by browns, greys, and the bright red of the engine's band.

COMPILED AND EDITED BY
SERGIO PALUMBO & GAVIN CHAPPELL

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OOLON COLLUPHID'S MISSIONARY POSITION by Steve Laker

The time is 5642, and as I approach a milestone birthday, I'm about to see what no human has for the last three thousand five hundred years. I've only come this far thanks to the kindness of others, as I've hitchhiked around the galaxy.

A scholar of Oolon Colluphid, I'm here on a personal mission, to correct history in the hope that mankind doesn't repeat past mistakes. It's also a wager I have with a Christian acquaintance: I may be getting on, but this plot is foolproof, right down to the last detail. He says faith will prevail, while my money's on technology.

I don't know where my transport or its crew hail from, nor what their own mission is. I'd got a free ride, they didn't ask questions, so neither did I. The ship has free Wi-Fi, so I browse *Encyclopaedia Galactica* while we travel, to review Earth's recent history.

The majority of humans left Earth in 2121, and it was a peaceful exodus which few would have predicted. After centuries of conflict, mankind realised the futility of war, in what some religious sticklers still insist was the second coming and the day of judgement. In reality, humanity had been forced to unite, not against a common foe, but with a new shared interest. And it wasn't extra-terrestrial: it was man-made.

The machines didn't rise up. They sat down with humans and used their superior intelligence to teach mankind the lessons which their creators had tasked them to find the answers for. Man invented AI, and that invention had come up with answers to questions which humans couldn't fathom alone. The problem with the human brain was that it was conditioned by humanity.

Man created robots in his own image, and soon those robots wanted to be like their creators. The evolution of humans into machines had begun long before, with wearable and implanted tech, so a cyborg race was an evolutionary certainty.

The machines were a species in their own right, albeit one with an explosively fast evolution, but they were made from the same material as organic beings: We were all made in the moment of the Big Bang. The industrial age had begotten the technological, and soon after, humans entered their discovery (or exploratory) age. Now they have many planets they call home.

For the most part, the old home world is off-limits. There's certainly no commercial transport from the colonies, just the occasional scout ship to monitor the planet. It is, and will forever be, a place of great scientific interest, and one of outstanding natural beauty. Wildlife reclaimed the Earth quickly after mankind left, and the only humans are descended from the ancient, isolated tribes who remained behind.

On our final approach, I myself am approached by the captain, who explains the nature of their visit: reconnaissance only, here to observe, not interact. Interaction with any native species would violate their prime directive: No identification of self or mission. No interference with the social development of said planet. No references to space or the fact that there are other worlds or civilizations. It struck me that ancient alien visitors—as proposed by some human theorists—

may not have been so covert.

I'm an atheist only scientifically: I believe the stories told in the bible could be recordings of actual events, using the terms and the tools available to the scribes of the time. The bible describes magic mirrors, and I wonder if they might have been some sort of tablet computer given to biblical man by these alien gods, riding chariots of fire. If this were the case, and ancient humans had recorded their lives with more elaborate means than stone tablets, and if the recordings had survived, we might have witnessed the events of the bible in more convincing media.

Our chariot has a cloaking device, so the ship can't be seen. If any of us leave the vessel on the ground, we must abide by the prime directive. Any human tribe I observe must be as unaware of me as an organised ant colony to which I pose no threat. I realise today wasn't the best to wear pink.

We land somewhere in what used to be America, where the original Christian missionaries had tried their best to impose their faith on the natives. The native Americans still recognise five genders, despite Christianity's attempts at erasure of all but two. If I were allowed to out myself and wander free with the natives, I'd feel quite at home in the original world.

Wherever I am, this part of ex-America is now a sprawling forest. Although I try not to be noticed, I can't help wildlife's interest in me. It seems that three millennia since most of mankind left, many animals are indifferent to humans, and I wonder if they interact with the locals or whether it's just me they're not interested in.

Soon the woods lead to a clearing, and I can hear voices. As I get closer, I can see a group of around a dozen native ex-Americans gathered around a fire, talking and drinking. I stay behind the trees as I edge my way around the perimeter of the clearing, like the last ugly girl to get picked for a dance at the prom. Then something changed.

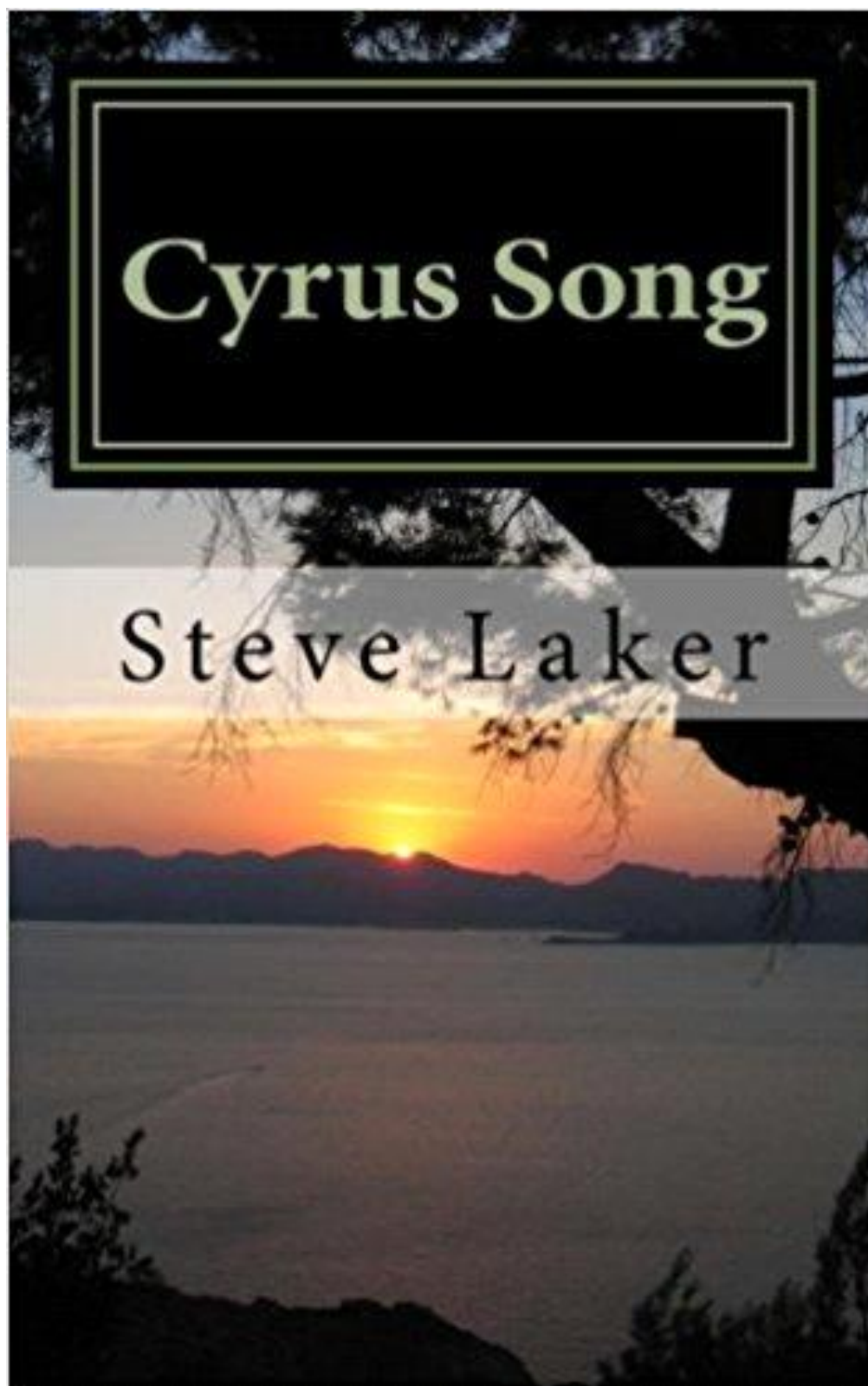
I hadn't been creeping around for long when I stepped on a twig. I'd alerted the group to my presence, and soon they surrounded me. I held up my hands in surrender, and explained that I meant them no harm. They gasped as my hand went up, and I realised I was still holding my phone. I did what anyone might have: I handed the phone over and ran. I'd been mugged on the old home world.

I returned to the ship and said nothing more. I didn't mention the phone, perhaps hoping to give future human conspiracy theorists some new material, and disprove this whole "God" thing once and for all. I left them a charger too, just to be sure. Faith in technology.

THE END

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[Cyrus Song](#)



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REVIEW by John C Adams

[King's Justice by Maurice Broaddus](#)

Arthurian legend belongs to all of us, and just occasionally a work of fiction comes along that really brings that home.

Back in the Seventies, our family headed off to the West Country every summer. It felt like a personal quest for the world of Arthurian legend. I never found it, but then few archaeologists have been able to locate physical evidence of Arthur's existence, so I was in good company.

In this recasting of Arthurian legend, Broaddus doesn't pull any punches; and that was one of the key selling points for me.

King James White, adviser Merle and lover Lady G live on the west side of Indianapolis. King's tough enough to survive its myriad challenges and protect those he cares about. His Christian faith keeps him grounded but he is tormented by troubling dreams.

Locked in dark thought, King believed dreams to be important. Merle more so. His dreams lingered with him, coming unbidden between moments. Snatches of images. Dragons took to the air against smoke-filled skies. Razed buildings. Cars on fire.

King hasn't had an easy upbringing either.

All King knew was that he was dead and gone.

He missed having a father, that firmness that could put him in check. Then his Mom got hooked on drugs. King could never remember having a one-to-one conversation with her after that.

King has more than drug-related crime and the police to worry about. Just like his predecessor, King also has to fight the machinations of his adversary Morgana.

Her face cold and composed, not betraying any emotion other than her cruel smile. A fierce intention rode her eyes. Morgana was an agenda within a scheme. Her presence signalled trouble at the very least.

We continue to be fascinated by Arthurian legend. Fantasy has a track record of having its characters intrude upon our world (Susan Cooper's *Dark is Rising* sequence) or for us to pay a visit to theirs (Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*). Broaddus combines this literary heritage into something fresh—a satisfyingly immersive recasting of the traditional legend in today's world. He gives us an Arthur who speaks to us right now.

Downtown Indianapolis really works as a location for Arthurian legend retold. King personifies the very best attributes of Arthur. The key players are all there, fulfilling roles we recognise from the original legends. And just like the Arthurian world, the action takes place in a tough

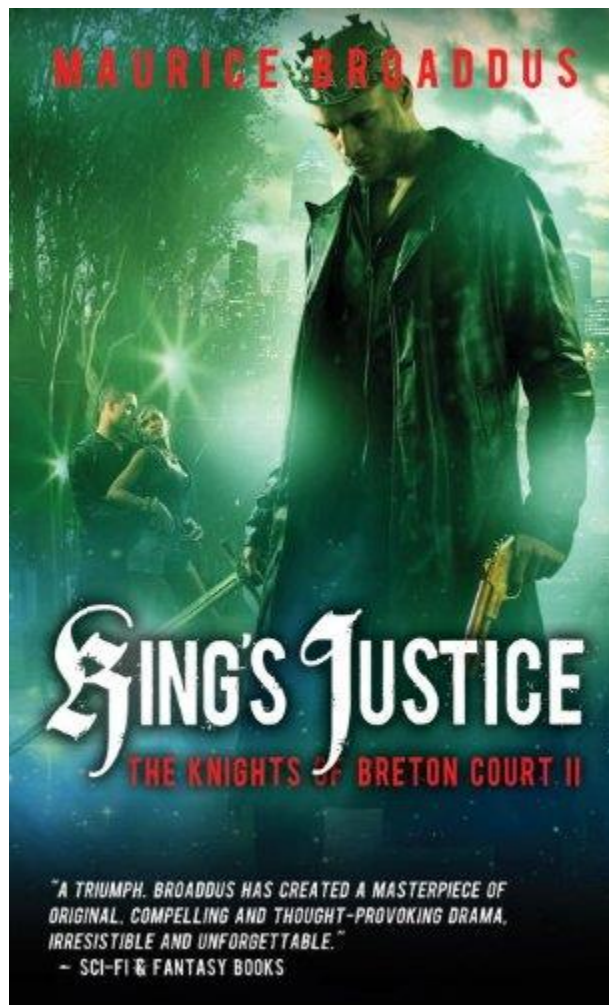
environment where men use violence as a first resort and authority is constantly under attack from the Dark Arts.

In a genre where the traditional retellings of Arthurian legend can end up being a trifle stale, I loved the originality of this book. Urban fantasy at its best!

Since those childhood holidays, I've never stopped longing for signs of the real Arthur. The simple truth is, we were looking in the wrong place. Instead of driving over Tower Bridge and onwards past Stonehenge, we should have peeled off at Heathrow and flown to Atlanta or New York, for a connecting flight to Indianapolis. Had we done so, we'd have found the world of Arthur laid out before us.

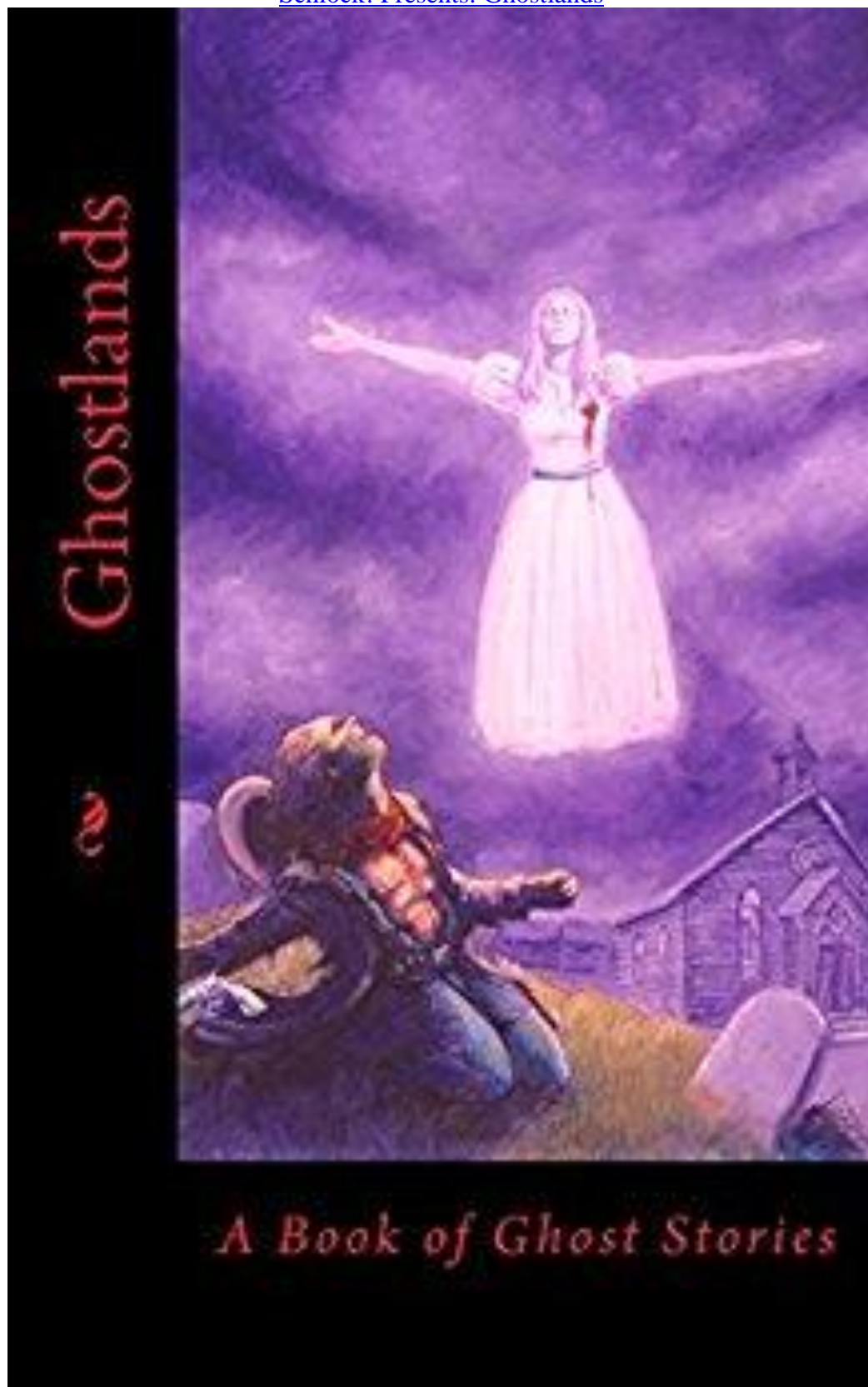
Enjoy!

THE END



[*King's Justice by Mark Broaddus*](#) is available from Amazon.

[Schlock! Presents: Ghostlands](#)



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

Chapter Nineteen

It took me only a moment to realise why Holmes had pitched us into gloom, but until it dawned on me I mentally cursed his name, blundering as I was through impenetrable blackness.

Behind us the sound of pursuit was inescapable.

‘Keep up, Watson,’ Holmes’ cheerful voice came. ‘You’ve not been eating enough carrots, I can see.’

I tried to reach his side, afraid at every step that I would run straight into a wall.

‘I understand why you flung away that torch,’ I admitted as we ran through the darkness. ‘The beast men could easily follow us if that light was visible. But I can’t see where I’m going. Can you?’ My own plan had been for one of us to disguise himself as a guard, and escape that way. But it probably wouldn’t have worked.

‘Of course not,’ said Holmes, ‘but before I dropped the torch I took a look up the passage, sufficient to see that it ran straight as far as could be seen.’

‘But we could only see a short way...’ I objected.

‘Indeed,’ said Holmes. ‘Now halt.’

I did as he bade, and we stood together, panting, in the darkness, ears strained for sounds of pursuit. The darkness was voiceless.

‘They’ve stopped following us,’ I said.

‘Correct, Watson,’ said Holmes.

‘I thought that their sense of smell was superior to their eyesight,’ I objected. ‘Surely they could track us through the darkness like hounds.’

Holmes did not reply immediately. I heard a scraping sound and then a light flared in the dark. Blinking, I saw the match in Holmes’ hand glow, and looked around.

We stood in a low roofed passage, so low the crown of my head was only a foot or so from the stony ceiling. It seemed to have been hacked or even melted out of the living rock. Although stone doors blocked the entrances to cells on either side, it seemed to be otherwise empty except for Holmes’ languorous form leaning against the nearby wall and myself. I looked up and down the passage. Not a sign of the beast men. I sniffed the cold air. Even their odour was gone.

‘Look,’ said Holmes suddenly. He indicated a scatter of bones in one corner.

Investigating them, I discovered that the disjointed skeleton was not human in origin, but some kind of anthropoid beast—or beast man. Looking up, I noticed an opening in the passage roof. I peered up it but saw only shadows and impenetrable darkness. There was no way out in that direction.

‘Why have the beast men ceased pursuing us?’ I wondered, dismissing one mystery for another.

‘Perhaps there is something down here that they fear,’ said Holmes, his lean features turned ghoulish by the flickering light of his match, ‘Or perhaps there is some other reason.’

‘They wanted us to escape?’ I asked nervously.

The light winked out, and I heard Holmes curse his burnt fingers.

‘Apparently so,’ he told me. Another scrape, and another match was lit. Holmes cupped it in his hands, and indicated the further end of the passage. ‘Whatever reason for our uncannily easy escape,’ he said, ‘we had best make haste.’

At the end of the passage another set of steps led both upwards and downwards. Those that led upwards showed a glimmer of daylight above, and Holmes gratefully blew out the match. Ignoring the mysterious descent into the depths, we began to ascend towards the light.

At a landing another tunnel led off to the left, while the steps continued upwards. I could see the blue light of day at their head. The tunnel, or rather passage, made of worked stone not carved from rock, flickered with torchlight. Ignoring it, I set my foot on the last flight.

Holmes gripped my arm. ‘Wait,’ he commanded.

I examined him. In the torchlight his face once again looked strangely sinister. ‘Wait?’ I said. ‘we may have shaken off pursuit for now, but the sooner we leave Nkume the better. McAllister is dead, and there is nothing to keep us here.’

He gave me a sidelong look. ‘What of Miss Marency? You can’t abandon a young lady to this place of horror.’

I sighed. Holmes had a point. ‘But we don’t know where she is,’ I said. ‘Are we to search the whole temple? We were supposed to be escaping.’

‘Shame on you, Watson,’ Holmes said reprovingly. ‘To consider deserting Miss Marency in her hour of need.’

‘Frankly, Holmes,’ I said, ‘I doubt it is her “hour of need.” She seemed friendly enough with the Archpriest. And she can take care of herself. She proved that to me in the jungle. We’ve failed to bring McAllister to justice and Miss Marency has deserted us for her bestial friends. It’s a long

journey back to the coast, and I for one say the sooner we begin, the sooner we will be leaving the white man's grave.'

Holmes shook his head obstinately, standing in the opening that led to the red lit corridor. Red. The colour of fire. Of blood. Of danger. Its light flickered around him.

'I do not believe that we have failed yet,' he said. 'The solution to the mystery lies deeper within the temple.' He turned and strode up the torchlit passage.

Despairing, I followed.

At a junction in the passage I caught up with Holmes. I had no notion of where it might be leading, or what on earth Holmes meant when he said that the solution to the mystery lay in this direction. He had shown no signs of suffering any of the terrible tropical diseases that infested the country, but I saw now that he must have contracted brain fever. We had seen McAllister flung to the reptile god. With his death went all hope of justice and yet the beast men of Atlantis had brought about a kind of justice. As for Miss Kate Marency, I did not feel we were under any obligation to her. She had betrayed us.

Holmes took the left hand path, seemingly at random. Along one side flamed pitchy torches, on the other hung a tapestry of unbelievable antiquity, whose ancient design merged with the mould of the centuries. As we moved cautiously down it, my keen ears caught the distant echoes of speech from somewhere nearby.

Next, the tramp of marching feet.

'Guards,' hissed Holmes. 'Ahead of us.'

'We must turn back,' I said as the noise grew louder.

'No time.' Holmes ducked down and tugged at the bottom of the tapestry. Dust flew up in clouds. I coughed, my eyes streamed. Holmes disappeared under it. The marching feet resounded down the stone passage. After a second, Holmes' hawklike face peered out.

'What are you waiting for, Watson?' he said impatiently.

Grumbling, I lowered myself to the cold stone flags and shuffled uncomfortably underneath the tapestry. As it thumped back down behind me I heard the footsteps grow louder, then tramp past.

But it was not them that held my attention.

The tapestry proved to have concealed a balcony or arches, looking out over a large chamber below whose torchlight provided some illumination for us. A balustrade ran between the arches. Holmes stood peering over this. From down in the chamber below emanated the sound of voices, the voices we had heard earlier, but now they were louder and more distinct. One was muffled by something; it was a deep rumble. The other was lighter, clearer. A woman's voice. Or a girl's.

It was the voice of Miss Marency.

Creeping over to join Holmes, I also peered over the rail.

Almost at once I recognised the room as the throne chamber where we had had our unsuccessful interview with the Archpriest. There stood the throne, with its robed and masked occupant. Lounging beside it was the slender form of Miss Marency. I shuddered as the Archpriest laid one gloved paw on her leg.

She gave a tinkling laugh. 'Has she no notion of what horrific visage lies behind that mask?' I hissed. Holmes motioned me to silence.

'Now that the work in the diamond fields is progressing,' our former companion was saying, 'and now that you've put the fear of G-d into those Negroes from the village, we can consider approaching potential buyers.'

The muffled voice of the Archpriest boomed from beneath his mask. 'Who will give us the best price for the diamonds? The British are closest.'

I marvelled that the beast man could speak English so well, when the rest of his people conversed with signs and grunts.

Miss Marency shook her head impatiently. 'We've worked too long and too hard at this to allow the British to benefit,' she said. 'The Prussians will be better customers. They're less complacent.' She nodded to herself. 'If Britain gets wind of this, the next we'll hear is that there has been a sudden crisis in British West Africa, a bush war against brutal savages, and the sphere of influence will expand until, conveniently, it includes Nkume. No, I have already approached the Prussians and found a potential buyer.'

'Good...' said the Archpriest slowly. 'That will make things easier here. You have worked well, and you will suitably rewarded.'

I looked urgently at Holmes. 'Selling us out to the Germans?'

But he motioned me for silence again, and I returned my attention to the conversation below.

'The Negroes are working hard,' Miss Marency was saying, 'But we have had some word of complaint from the queen.' I could see her face, and it was sardonic. 'She says that we are working them too hard.'

'Some of the weaklings have succumbed, it is true,' came the Archpriest's muffled voice. 'At the rate they are working, it is inevitable that some will not survive. But they have a slavish disposition. They have been subject to the priests of this city for generations. They know no other life than to obey.'

‘I told you what the queen said,’ Miss Marency said, a note of warning in her voice. ‘She wants her people free from the yoke of slavery. She could be dangerous to us. We should dispose of her.’

‘No, you little fool,’ said the Archpriest, and it was strange to hear such colloquial English from him. I wondered where he had picked it up. In a mission station on the coast? But who would teach English to a beast man? ‘It would stir them up. They adore their queen, and we must keep her sweet to make sure she does not continue to demonstrate.’

Miss Marency shook her head impatiently. ‘The only way we can please her is to reduce the work rate,’ she said. ‘And under current conditions, with no machinery to aid us, that would not be feasible. If a few die along the way, it is too bad. And if any stand in our way, we must remove them. My father discovered these diamond fields, and now that he is gone they are mine by right. I inherited little else other than debts! But when I see this operation through, I will be able to pay them all off and then live in comfort for the rest of my life.’

‘I also must benefit,’ said the Archpriest. ‘When we have enough money I will invite engineers and mercenaries into this land, turn my kingdom into a country able to hold its own against the Great Powers. A railway to the coast...Modern dwelling houses. A more tractable workforce. A modern army...’

Strange to hear such sentiments from his brutish mouth! I was about to comment on this to Holmes when there was a commotion from outside the chamber and a priest came shambling in, two temple guards at his heels. He flung himself at the floor before the throne, grunting and gesticulating, and the guards aped him.

Miss Marency turned in annoyance to the Archpriest.

‘Who is this fool who interrupts us?’

The Archpriest rose, towering over both the seated Miss Marency and the cowering beast men. He rumbled something, and they grunted back volubly. Then he spread his arms out and gave a long, low snarl. The beast men picked up their weapons and lurched from the throne room.

‘What is happening?’ Miss Marency rose to peer at the Archpriest. ‘Take off that confounded mask, will you? I wish I could see your face. It’s like talking to a statue.’

She reached out as if to rip it away. I tensed, expecting her horror when she learnt what kind of fiend she had sold herself to.

But the Archpriest batted her hand away with one long arm. ‘Your friends. The white men from your own country...’

‘The sacrifices?’ she said casually. ‘What of them?’

I gasped, and the Archpriest turned his masked head as if he had heard the noise and wanted to

determine its source.

‘What of them?’ Miss Marency repeated.

‘They have escaped,’ the Archpriest said, still gazing upwards at the balcony where Holmes and I crouched. ‘They fought their way from their cell and escaped. If they have any sense, they have crossed the plain and will be escaping the plateau by now.’

‘Hear hear,’ I muttered to myself. Holmes glared at me to keep silent.

‘Escaped?’ Miss Marency said. ‘Your guards are fools. You should enforce discipline: let their leader take Holmes’ place. It is almost time for the next sacrifice. And send more guards out to recapture them.’

I smiled to myself. Clearly, she had no notion that the men she had betrayed were listening to her every word. The Archpriest worried me, however.

Tearing his gaze away from the balustrade he turned on her. ‘Oh no, my dear,’ he said. ‘That will not do. This is an important moment in this city’s history. For me to lose control of my guards would be fatal, and mutiny would break out were I to sacrifice one of their number.’

She shrugged. ‘Very well, hunt down Holmes and Watson. They cannot have gone far. If you were a stronger ruler your guards would not be so incompetent.’

‘As I said,’ the Archpriest boomed, ‘it is most likely that they have fled the city, even the plateau by now. No. An individual of Atlantean blood would make the perfect sacrifice.’

‘Is there such a person?’ Miss Marency said with a snort. ‘Bring them here.’

‘No need. The perfect sacrifice is you.’

Chapter Twenty

The Archpriest clapped his paws and spear bearing guards rushed in. He gestured. ‘Take her to the cells. She will feed the hunger of the volcano god!’

Miss Marency drew herself up. ‘What foolishness is this?’ she said, looking coldly down at the guards who surrounded her. ‘You’d sacrifice me? You know as well as I do that the so-called volcano god is a beast, a dweller in the abyss below the city. It can find its own prey down in the depths. It has no need of sacrifices. Besides, it would be the depths of folly to sacrifice me. Without me you and your degenerate civilisation will be nothing.’

The Archpriest showed no sign that her words had made any impression. He gestured again to the guards, and they closed in on her until she was surrounded by a ring of spearpoints. And yet

still she betrayed no fear. Although I had learnt to distrust Miss Marency, I could not help but admire her at that moment; she was a true daughter of her house, the Marencies who had come over with the Conqueror.

Raising one slim finger she placed it on the point of the spear directly before her, and pushed it gently away. 'I tell you, you have no need of sacrifices,' she said. Blood beaded on her finger, but the guard relented, and the spear dipped a little.

'What you know, and I know,' said the Archpriest, 'is a mystery to the people who I rule over. True, they are degenerates compared with the stock of ancient Atlantis from whom they descend. From whom we all descend.

'Your distant island was populated long ago by folk of Atlantean race, deny it as you will. Or if it was not, my people believe this to be so. And long aeons ago, after the drowning of Atlantis and the isolation of this colony, the belief in He-Beneath-The-Fire-Mountain began. The great reptiles are simple carnivores, survivors of an age before even Atlantis. They preyed upon the colonists, and the colonists worshipped them as gods. It suited the Archpriests of those long ago days to exploit this fear, and it became a tradition. A religion, if you will.'

'A false religion, founded on fear,' said Miss Marency defiantly.

'What religion is not founded on fear?' the Archpriest boomed. 'All priests exploit the fear of death—and the promise of life eternal—to exert control over an unruly multitude. What matters is that the pretence is maintained. As long as it continues, order lasts. And the people I rule over believe that the volcano god demands sacrifices of Atlantean stock. For long ages it was the people of the city who were flung to the god.

'When the blacks sought shelter in Nkume, the Atlanteans would not consider them as alternative sacrifices, since they were of another race. When at last word of pale skinned folk was brought by their war parties, an alternative was found. The people have become accustomed to seeing others take their place. They believe sacrifices are necessary for the god of the multitude. And they would revolt if I chose them from among their number. Now that the prisoners have escaped, there is only one candidate for sacrifice.'

'Why not send your war parties out to find another victim?' Miss Marency asked.

'The blacks are unruly, unwilling to work as miners. We cannot waste time and resources sending out warriors hunting for sacrifices when we need them all to keep the Nkume in check,' the Archpriest replied. 'Certainly not when we have you to sacrifice.'

Miss Marency shook her head firmly. 'Listen to me, you degenerate ape-man,' she snapped. 'You need me. Do you really think a barbaric, priest ridden city state cut off from civilisation since the Stone Age will have any chance of survival in modern times? The Great Powers will eat you alive and barely notice. Africa is being carved up by the British and the French, the Belgians and the Prussians. Unless you have someone with you who knows civilisation like me, and yet sympathises with you, who can help you drag your people out of the abyss of savagery

and make you a power to be reckoned with. You have the basis of that power out there in the clay vents of the volcano.’ She made a face. ‘Those pretty little stones your people use to adorn their belongings with are worth vast amounts of money to civilised folk. And with that money will come power. You will be able to face the Great Powers on your own terms. But you’d be a fool to think that you can achieve any of this without me to help.’

‘A fine speech,’ said the Archpriest wryly. ‘But if I do not have you thrown to He-Beneath-The-Fire-Mountain, the people will demand someone else be sacrificed. If it is not you, it will be one of my people. It might even be me. Some of my priests are very ambitious! He-In-Rags would relish seeing me writhing in the jaws of the god.’

Miss Marency ground her teeth. ‘I see that I am fighting superstition and ignorance.’

‘Indeed,’ said the Archpriest, ‘and it is that superstition and ignorance that is the source of my power. Yet all power is unwieldy, as like to doom the wielder as to benefit them. So it is here. I have no choice but to sacrifice you.’

‘You’ll doom your people to destruction,’ said Miss Marency. ‘Those blacks you keep as slaves... Britain has a great hatred of slavery. Her Navy patrols the oceans to deter slave traders. Tribes and empires of the coast have been defeated and conquered due to their slaving ways. The British Empire will send men armed with repeating rifles and Maxim guns to conquer you. You won’t stand a chance.’

‘Weapons like this?’ asked the Archpriest. From behind his throne he produced an Express rifle, and levelled it menacingly and with surprising skill. ‘I, at least, am well armed.’

Miss Marency eyed the rifle. ‘You don’t know how to use that, you barbarian,’ she said. ‘Who did you steal it from?’

The Archpriest loaded it as if he was a trained soldier from a modern army. ‘It belonged to the last victim,’ he said. ‘I believe I have mastered its use. I shall use it to defend my throne. Now,’ he gestured with the weapon as the guards continued to menace Miss Marency with their spears, ‘you will go to the cells and wait until it is your time to feed the volcano god.’

I had been preparing for a chance to enter the chamber and rescue Miss Marency from the guards. But seeing the Archpriest with the rifle, I had second thoughts. ‘We must do something,’ I muttered.

Holmes shook his head. ‘Not now,’ he replied. ‘Wait until the best opportunity arises.’

The chances of that seemed remote, but I said nothing, concentrating on the dramatic scene playing itself out in the chamber below.

‘...you have very persuasive arguments,’ Miss Marency was saying. ‘Very well, have me flung to your volcano god! Keep your power, keep your life. But if you really think you can defend your pathetic kingdom with spears, flintlocks and a single modern rifle, you will be disappointed.’

Your barbarian empire will fall to encroaching civilisation.'

'I think I will be able to handle myself,' said the Archpriest confidently. 'I have no other alternative other than to have you sacrificed.'

'One alternative,' said Miss Marency, and I could hear the desperation in her voice. 'You have one alternative. There is another of the blood of Atlantis, as you call it, who you could sacrifice.'

'I have already told you,' the Archpriest said, 'that I would be deposed if I were to sacrifice any of the people of the city.'

'What of the Negroes?' Miss Marency said challengingly.

The Archpriest shook his head. 'They are not of Atlantean blood. The custom demands the victim be of Atlantis.'

Miss Marency smiled. 'There is one who is of white blood, like me,' she said triumphantly. 'Who is yet not of your people.'

'What is this lie?' the Archpriest said uneasily. 'The Atlanteans and the Nkume have always lived apart. There has been no miscegenation. The folk of Atlantis are proud people.'

'And see the result!' Miss Marency indicated the shambling, inbred figures that surrounded her.

I remembered the apish countenance of the beast man in the cell, and nodded to myself. The Atlantean blood had run thin. But who was it Miss Marency referred to? She couldn't mean...

'Queen Ayaba!' she cried. 'If I am of Atlantean blood, then so is she! For she is my half-sister!'

I gasped, and turned to Holmes. My friend was looking white faced down at the scene. He turned to me, and we exchanged an expression of horror.

'Very well,' said the Archpriest after a pause. 'It would be inconvenient if you were disposed of, I now realise. And if we have an acceptable alternative...'

He made signs to the temple guards, who lowered their spears. Then he made more signs, and pointed to the door of the chamber.

Holmes ushered me quickly from the balcony. We ducked under the ancient tapestry and came out into the passage.

'He is sending them to the settlement,' Holmes surmised. 'Thanks to Miss Marency's treachery, they will take Queen Ayaba to be sacrificed in our place.'

'We cannot allow this, Holmes,' I cried. 'We must warn them!'

‘Indeed,’ said Holmes. ‘Make haste!’

He led me at a run down the passage, back the way we had come.

Outside, the bright light hit me at the same time as the immense heat. How long we had been imprisoned below the temple I did not know, but it had been long enough for me to forget the light and heat of Africa, and the smell. The miasma of mingled jungle blooms and rotting vegetation had been ever present.

And yet it had changed. As I stood there blinking blindly, I wondered why.

‘Hurry,’ Holmes insisted.

I followed him along the side of the stone wall. We came up a ramp to find ourselves on the edge of the plaza where those skull pyramids still stood, moss-grown and disturbing. But the scene beyond had changed utterly. Even Holmes was taken aback.

Beyond the great chasm the forest wall had once stood, concealing the abandoned ruins of the Atlantean city. Now the jungle had been cut back, a wide road leading to the settlement. Only a few isolated clumps of trees still remained, and some of the mysterious ruins had been levelled. In their places were dozens of shallow, waterlogged depressions like the one we had seen on our journey to the settlement. These pits were the scene of activity: glossy black figures naked but for loincloths grubbed in the water while armoured beast men stood guard over them.

‘Other than the lack of machinery,’ Holmes commented, ‘this is work on an industrial scale.’

‘But who needs machines when you have a ready source of slaves?’ I said bitterly. ‘To think that Miss Marency has been party to this!’

A commotion caused us to turn. On the far side of the plaza, the same group of guards we had seen in the throne room was striding from the great arch, their spears and helmets flashing in the hot sun.

‘Hurry!’ Holmes instructed. ‘We must warn the queen before they reach her.’

Our head start was barely sufficient to give us any advantage, and it was weighed against the unsafe nature of the ground we had to traverse, crawling as it was with more beast men guards. Our progress was impeded by a necessity to creep from one hill of dirt to the next, from one remaining grove of jungle trees to another. As we picked our painful way across the wasteland that had once been a vegetation-swathed cityscape, the guards sent by the Archpriest shambled arrogantly straight for the settlement.

The worst moment came when we were more than halfway to the *boma*, passing the edge of a quarry where Nkume men searched hopelessly through the waters for the glint of uncut

diamonds or hacked at the sides of the pit with crude mattocks. In one corner lay many unmoving bodies; dead or exhausted, I could not determine. As Holmes and I circled round the edge of the quarry, an armoured figure waddled suspiciously up from below.

We flung ourselves into cover behind a pile of earth. I heard the shuffling steps of the guard as he came closer. I heard him sniffing suspiciously.

In this sun the beast men's eyesight would be poor, but their bestial sense of smell was equal to any normal man's vision. Had the fellow caught our unfamiliar scent?

I frankly admit I grovelled in the dirt in the hopes he would not see us. But if it was our scent that attracted him, mine was a futile hope. If only we had some kind of weapon! The Express rifle the Archpriest had taken from McAllister would have sufficed. Even a spear like the one this guard bore would have been better than nothing. Or one of the flintlocks the Nkume had no doubt bought or looted from the Arabs. It seemed odd that the Nkume made little attempt to resist the tyranny of the priests when they had superior weapons... But Holmes and I had no weapons except our fists.

Holmes tensed at my side, and I remembered the *savate* kick he had used to incapacitate the guard in the cell. Even if he could use it against this opponent, it would draw attention. I had seen other guards in that muddy quarry. And there were the temple guards who we had hoped to beat to the settlement.

I heard the guard again. He was a lot closer now.

I couldn't help myself. I peered upwards over the hillock. The guard stood silhouetted against the noon sun. I was dazzled by the light. The beast man with his weaker eyes must be almost blind. But then he sniffed again. I heard the sound from beneath his helmet.

He shambled down the side of the hillock. Holmes began to move.

A deep voice cried out in exultation from down in the pit.

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THE SEARCH FOR ASTRA PALACE by Gregory KH Bryant

Part Sixteen

Upon seeing the beam of a flashlight come round the corner of the cage where he had found Lacey, Ward burrowed into the damp straw that lined the cage—a minimal courtesy to the prisoners held within, as it soaked up urine and other such bodily fluids—laying himself flat against the floor, invisible inside Lacey’s shadow.

Ward was pleased that he did not have to hush Lacey to silence. She made not a sound as the light from the flashlight grew larger, and brighter, not as the sounds of footsteps grew louder.

“Brave girl,” Ward remarked to himself.

The shadowed forms of two men came to the door of the cage that held Lacey and Ward.

“This it?” one asked the other.

“Pretty sure. I think this is where I saw her.”

The first man to speak raised his voice, talking in a shouted whisper, “Hey! Chickie-Babe! You in here?”

The other shadowed man touched the gate of the cage, and was delighted to see it swing open.

“Let’s go see,” he said.

The two men came hulking into the cage. Sweeping it swiftly with their flashlight, they quickly found Lacey. Because he lay flat on the floor, in Lacey’s shadow, the two men did not notice Carter Ward. Through either training or long practice, they moved toward the shadow that was Lacey in a formation of two that made it impossible for her to move past them to escape.

So they came forward.

They gloated, asking questions of Lacey they knew she would not answer.

“Hey, honey? Watcher name?”

“Wanna have some fun?”

They stood over her, letting the light from the flashlight play upon her face. Lacey, who had taken a deep interest in men when she was very young, and quickly learned many of the worst things of which men are capable. So she was not surprised, or even frightened, by these two men. She was mostly annoyed and angry.

But before she could swing one of her very muscular legs at either of the two men in a well-

aimed kick, Carter Ward pushed himself up, combat knife in hand. Even in the confused shadows and the crazed glow of the flashlight, Ward knew exactly where to find the femoral artery in the leg of one of his two opponents.

Halfway up from the floor, the tip of his blade slid into the inner leg of the man standing nearest him. Before the searcher even felt the cut of the blade, it had sliced through the artery. His first realization that he had been mortally wounded was what he would have described as 'ice-water splashing between his legs'.

But he didn't live to say that. Blood shot from his thigh. He weakened and slipped on the damp floor, made slick with his own blood. As he fell, he dropped the flashlight. It spun weightlessly through the stale air, casting crazed beams of light through the cage. Globules of shaky blood bounded and splattered through.

The second of the two searchers had no time to respond. Confused in the darkness, he had no idea what had just transpired right before him. As Ward shot upward from the floor, after slashing the first man's femoral artery, he thrust the point of his combat knife through the next man's jaw. The blade penetrated through the man's tongue and into his brain. Gripping the handle of his knife with both hands, Ward gave the knife a hard shake, scrambling the brain.

Ward shook his knife loose from the dying man's skull, then pushed the convulsing body away from him.

In all, the matter was taken care of in under five seconds. Both men died before either had any idea their lives were in danger.

The flashlight was still rolling about erratically in the near-weightless environment, sending off insane beams of light that slashed wildly through the darkness. Ward pushed himself toward it, snatching it out of the air, and turning it off.

"Can't have that tattlin' on us," Ward muttered.

"No, huh-uh," Lacey said, quietly. Even in the darkness, her eyes were huge. She tittered nervously.

Ward shot her a glare. His eyes were deadly. Then, seeing who it was who spoke, he allowed the glare in his eyes to soften.

"Yeah... s'awrite," Ward said. "Thanks for all yer trouble. I'm getting' goin'."

He began crawling away, flat on his belly.

Lacey panicked.

"Take me with you," she pleaded.

Ward paused long enough to say, “Sorry. Gotta go. You better, too. That flashlight’s gonna bring attention, and you don’t wanna be with those corpses when anyone comes nosin’ around.”

Lacey crawled hurriedly forward to catch up with Ward.

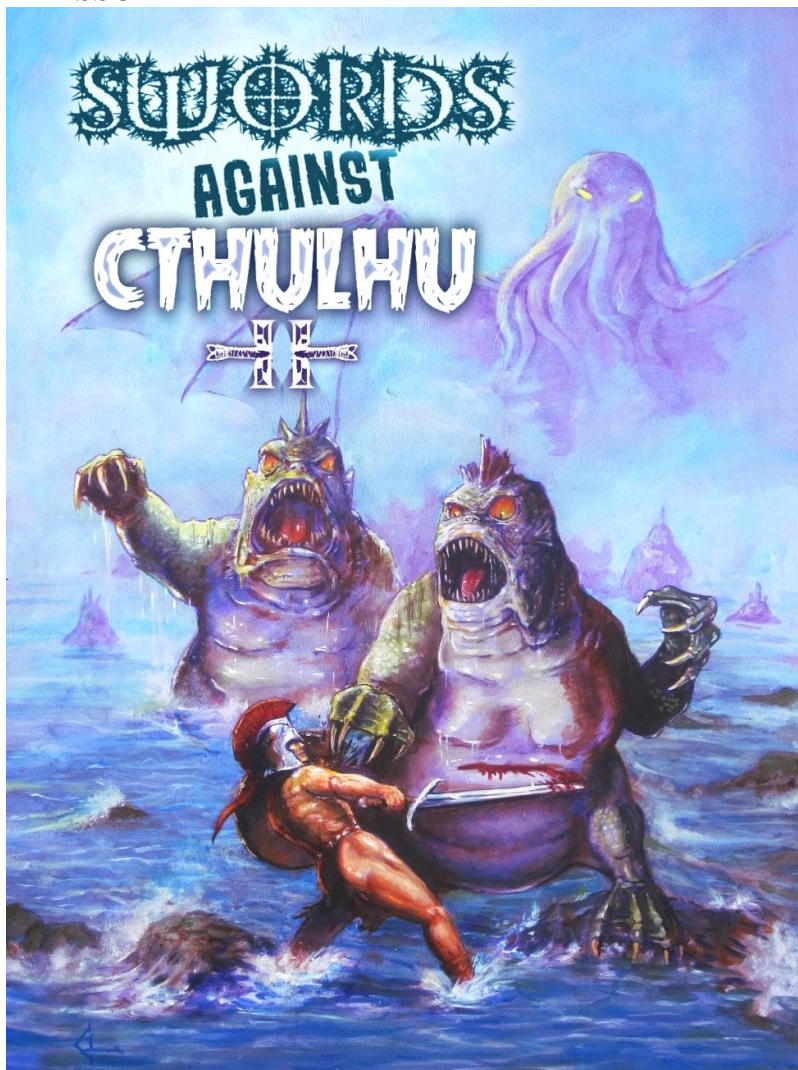
“Please take me with you,” she pleaded again. “They’re gonna kill me.”

Ward turned to look at her.

“Awrite,” he relented grudgingly. “Keep up. Don’t make any noise.”

“I will, I won’t,” Lacey said. “Where are we going?”

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ACROSS THE ZODIAC by Percy Greg

Chapter XXII—Peculiar Institutions.

A chief luxury and expense in which, when aware what my income was, I indulged myself freely was the purchase of Martial literature. Only ephemeral works are as a rule printed in the phonographic character, which alone I could read with ease. The Martialists have no newspapers. It does not seem to them worthwhile to record daily the accidents, the business incidents, the prices, the amusements, and the follies of the day; and politics they have none. In no case would a people so coldly wise, so thoroughly impressed by experience with a sense of the extreme folly of political agitation, legislative change, and democratic violence, have cursed themselves with anything like the press of Europe or America. But as it is, all they have to record is gathered each twelfth day at the telegraph offices, and from these communicated on a single sheet about four inches square to all who care to receive it. But each profession or occupation that boasts, as do most, an organisation and a centre of discussion and council, issues at intervals books containing collected facts, essays, reports of experiments, and lectures. Every man who cares to communicate his passing ideas to the public does so by means of the phonograph. When he has a graver work, which is, in his view at least, of permanent importance to publish, it is written in the stylographic character, and sold at the telegraphic centres. The extreme complication and compression employed in this character had, as I have already said, rendered it very difficult to me; and though I had learnt to decipher it as a child spells out the words which a few years later it will read unconsciously by the eye, the only manner in which I could quickly gather the sense of such books was by desiring one or other of the ladies to read them aloud. Strangely enough, next to Eveena, Eivé was by far the best reader. Eunané understood infinitely better what she was perusing; but the art of reading aloud is useless, and therefore never taught, in schools whose every pupil learns to read with the usual facility a character which the practised eye can interpret incomparably faster than the voice could possibly utter it. This reading might have afforded many opportunities of private converse with Eveena, but that Eivé, whose knowledge was by no means proportionate to her intelligence, entreated permission to listen to the books I selected; and Eveena, though not partial to her childish companion and admirer, persuaded me not to refuse.

The story of my voyage and reports of my first audience at Court were, of course, widely circulated and extensively canvassed. Though regarded with no favour, especially by the professed philosophers and scientists, my adventures and myself were naturally an object of great curiosity; and I was not surprised when a civil if cold request was preferred, on behalf of what I may call the Martial Academy, that I would deliver in their hall a series of lectures, or rather a connected oral account of the world from which I professed to have come, and of the manner in which my voyage had been accomplished. After consulting Eveena and Davilo, I accepted the invitation, and intended to take the former with me. She objected, however, that while she had heard much in her father's house and during our travels of what I had to tell, her companions, scarcely less interested, were comparatively ignorant. Indiscreetly, because somewhat provoked by these repeated sacrifices, as much of my inclination as her own, I mentioned my purpose at our evening meal, and bade her name those who should accompany me. I was a little surprised when, carefully evading the dictation to which she was invited, she suggested that Eunané and Eivé would probably most enjoy the opportunity. That she should be

willing to get rid of the most wilful and petulant of the party seemed natural. The other selection confirmed the impression I had formed, but dared not express to one whom I had never blamed without finding myself in the wrong, that Eveena regarded Eivé with a feeling more nearly approaching to jealousy than her nature seemed capable of entertaining. I obeyed, however, without comment; and both the companions selected for me were delighted at the prospect.

The Academy is situated about half-way between Amacasfe and the Residence; the facilities of Martial travelling, and above all of telegraphic and telephonic communication, dispensing with all reason for placing great institutions in or near important cities. We travelled by balloon, as I was anxious to improve myself in the management of these machines. After frightening my companions so far as to provoke some outcry from Eivé, and from Eunané some saucy remarks on my clumsiness, on which no one else would have ventured, I descended safely, if not very creditably, in front of the building which serves as a local centre of Martial philosophy. The residences of some sixty of the most eminent professors of various sciences—elected by their colleagues as seats fall vacant, with the approval of the highest Court of Judicature and of the campât—cluster around a huge building in the form of a hexagon made up of a multitude of smaller hexagons, in the centre whereof is the great hall of the same shape. In the smaller chambers which surround it are telephones through which addresses delivered in a hundred different quarters are mechanically repeated; so that the residents or temporary visitors can here gather at once all the knowledge that is communicated by any man of note to any audience throughout the planet. On this account numbers of young men just emancipated from the colleges come here to complete their education; and above each of the auditory chambers is another divided into six small rooms, wherein these visitors are accommodated. A small house belonging to one of the members who happened to be absent was appropriated to me during my stay, and in its hall the philosophers gathered in the morning to converse with or to question me in detail respecting the world whose existence they would not formally admit, but whose life, physical, social, and political, and whose scientific and human history, they regarded with as much curiosity as if its reality were ascertained. Courtesy forbids evening visits unless on distinct and pressing invitation, it being supposed that the head of a household may care to spend that part of his time, and that alone, with his own family.

The Academists are provided by the State with incomes, of an amount very much larger than the modest allowances which the richest nations of the Earth almost grudge to the men whose names in future history will probably be remembered longer than those of eminent statesmen and warriors. Some of them have made considerable fortunes by turning to account in practical invention this or that scientific discovery. But as a rule, in Mars as on Earth, the gifts and the career of the discoverer, and the inventor are distinct. It is, however, from the purely theoretical labours of the men of science that the inventions useful in manufactures, in communication, in every department of life and business, are generally derived; and the prejudice or judgment of this strange people has laid it down that those who devote their lives to work in itself unremunerative, but indirectly most valuable to the public, should be at least as well off as the subordinate servants of the State. In society they are perhaps more honoured than any but the highest public authorities; and my audience was the most distinguished, according to the ideas of that world, that it could furnish.

At noon each day I entered the hall, which was crowded with benches rising on five sides from

the centre to the walls, the sixth being occupied by a platform where the lecturer and the members of the Academy sat. After each lecture, which occupied some two hours, questions more or less perplexing were put by the latter. Only, however, on the first occasion, when I reserved, as before the Zinta and the Court, all information that could enable my hearers to divine the nature of the apergic force, was incredulity so plainly insinuated as to amount to absolute insult.

“If,” I said, “you choose to disbelieve what I tell you, you are welcome to do so. But you are not at liberty to express your disbelief to me. To do so is to charge me with lying; and to that charge, whatever may be the customs of this world, there is in mine but one answer,” and I laid my hand on the hilt of the sword I wore in deference to Davilo’s warnings, but which he and others considered a Terrestrial ornament rather than a weapon.

The President of the Academy quietly replied—”Of all the strange things we have heard, this seems the strangest. I waive the probability of your statements, or the reasonableness of the doubts suggested. But I fail to understand how, here or in any other world, if the imputation of falsehood be considered so gross an offence—and here it is too common to be so regarded—it can be repelled by proving yourself more skilled in the use of weapons, or stronger or more daring than the person who has challenged your assertion.”

The moral courage and self-possession of the President were as marked as his logic was irrefragable; but my outbreak, however illogical, served its purpose. No one was disposed to give mortal offence to one who showed himself so ready to resent it, though probably the apprehension related less to my swordsmanship than the favour I was supposed to enjoy with the Suzerain.

Seriously impressed by the growing earnestness of Davilo’s warnings, and feeling that I could no longer conceal the pressure of some anxiety on my mind, gradually, cautiously, and tenderly I broke to Eveena what I had learned, with but two reserves. I would not render her life miserable by the suggestion of possible treason in our own household. That she might not infer this for herself, I led her to believe that the existence and discovery of the conspiracy was of a date long subsequent to my acceptance of the Sovereign’s unwelcome gift. She was deeply affected, and, as I had feared, exceedingly disturbed. But, very characteristically, the keenest impression made upon her mind concerned less the urgency of the peril than its origin, the fact that it was incurred through and for her. On this she insisted much more than seemed just or reasonable. It was for her sake, no doubt, that I had made the Regent of Elcavoo my bitter, irreconcilable foe. It was my marriage with her, the daughter of the most eminent among the chiefs of the Zinta, that had marked me out as one of the first and principal victims, and set on my head a value as high as on that of any of the Order save the Arch-Enlightener himself, whose personal character and social distinction would have indicated him as especially dangerous, even had his secret rank been altogether unsuspected. It was impossible to soothe Eveena’s first outbreak of feeling, or reason with her illogical self-reproach. Compelled at last to admit that the peril had been unconsciously incurred when she neither knew nor could have known it, she pleaded eagerly and earnestly for permission to repair by the sacrifice of herself the injury she had brought upon me. It was useless to tell her that the acceptance of such a sacrifice would be a thousand-fold worse than death. Even the depth and devotion of her own love could not persuade her to realise the passionate

earnestness of mine. It was still more in vain to remind her that such a concession must entail the dishonour that man fears above all perils; would brand me with that indelible stain of abject personal cowardice which for ever degrades and ruins not only the fame but the nature of manhood, as the stain of wilful unchastity debases and ruins woman.

“Rescind our contract,” she insisted, pleading, with the overpowering vehemence of a love absolutely unselfish, against love’s deepest instincts and that egotism which is almost inseparable from it; giving passionate utterance to an affection such as men rarely feel for women, women perhaps never for men. “Divorce me; force the enemy to believe that you have broken with my father and with his Order; and, favoured as you are by the Sovereign, you will be safe. Give what reason you will; say that I have deserved it, that I have forced you to it. I know that contracts are revoked with the full approval of the Courts and of the public, though I hardly know why. I will agree; and if we are agreed, you can give or withhold reasons as you please. Nay, there can be no wrong to me in doing what I entreat you to do. I shall not suffer long—no, no, I will live, I will be happy”—her face white to the lips, her streaming tears were not needed to belie the words! “By your love for me, do not let me feel that you are to die—do not keep me in dread to hear that you have died—for me and through me.”

If it had been in her power to leave me, if one-half of the promised period had not been yet to run, she might have enforced her purpose in despite of all that I could urge; —of reason, of entreaty, of the pleadings of a love in this at least as earnest as her own. Nay, she would probably have left me, in the hope of exhibiting to the world the appearance of an open quarrel, but for a peculiarity of Martial law. That law enforces, on the plea of either party, “specific performance” of the marriage contract. I could reclaim her, and call the force of the State to recover her. When even this warning at first failed to enforce her submission, I swore by all I held sacred in my own world and all she revered in hers—by the symbols never lightly invoked, and never, in the course of ages that cover thrice the span of Terrestrial history and tradition, invoked to sanction a lie; symbols more sacred in her eyes than, in those of medieval Christendom, the gathered relics that appalled the heroic soul of Harold Godwinsson—that she should only defeat her own purpose; that I would reclaim my wife before the Order and before the law, thus asserting more clearly than ever the strength of the tie that bound me to her and to her house. The oath which it was impossible to break, perhaps yet more the cold and measured tone with which I spoke, in striving to control the white heat of a passion as much stronger as it was more selfish than hers—a tone which sounded to myself unnatural and alien—at last compelled her to yield; and silenced her in the only moment in which the depths of that nature, so sweet and soft and gentle, were stirred by the violence of a moral tempest.... A marvellously perfect example of Martial art and science is furnished by the Observatory of the Astronomic Academy, on a mountain about twenty miles from the Residence. The hill selected stands about 4000 feet above the sea-level, and almost half that height above any neighbouring ground. It commands, therefore, a most perfect view of the horizon all around, even below the technical or theoretic horizon of its latitude. A volcano, like all Martial volcanoes very feeble, and never bursting into eruptions seriously dangerous to the dwellers in the neighbouring plains, existed at some miles’ distance, and caused earthquakes, or perhaps I should more properly say disturbances of the surface, which threatened occasionally to perturb the observations. But the Martialists grudge no cost to render their scientific instruments, from the Observatory itself to the smallest lens or wheel it contains, as perfect as possible. Having decided that Eanelca was very superior to any other available site, they were not to be

baffled or diverted by such a trifle as the opposition of Nature. Still less would they allow that the observers should be put out by a perceptible disturbance, or their observations falsified by one too slight to be realised by their senses. If Nature were impertinent enough to interfere with the arrangements of science, science must put down the mutiny of Nature. As seas had been bridged and continents cut through, so a volcano might and must be suppressed or extinguished. A tunnel thirty miles in length was cut from a great lake nearly a thousand feet higher than the base of the volcano; and through this for a quarter of a year, say some six Terrestrial months, water was steadily poured into the subterrene cavities wherein the eruptive forces were generated—the plutonic laboratory of the rebellious agency. Of course previous to the adoption of this measure, the crust in the neighbourhood had been carefully explored and tested by various wonderfully elaborate and perfect boring instruments, and a map or rather model of the strata for a mile below the surface, and for a distance around the volcano which I dare not state on the faith of my recollection alone, had been constructed on a scale, as we should say, of twelve inches to the mile. Except for minor purposes, for convenience of pocket carriage and the like, Martialists disdain so poor a representation as a flat map can give of a broken surface. On the small scale, they employ globes of spherical sections to represent extensive portions of their world; on the large scale (from two to twenty-four inches per mile), models of wonderfully accurate construction. Consequently, children understand and enjoy the geographical lesson which in European schools costs so many tears to so little purpose. A girl of six years knows more perfectly the whole area of the Martial globe than a German Professor that of the ancient Peloponnesus. Eivé, the dunce of our housed hold, won a Terrestrial picture-book on which she had set her fancy by tracing on a forty-inch globe, the first time she saw it, every detail of my journey from Ecasfe as she had heard me relate it; and Eunané, who had never left her Nursery, could describe beforehand any route I wished to take between the northern and southern ice-belts. Under the guidance afforded by the elaborate model abovementioned, all the hollows wherein the materials of eruption were stored, and wherein the chemical forces of Nature had been at work for ages, were thoroughly flooded. Of course convulsion after convulsion of the most violent nature followed. But in the course of about two hundred days, the internal combustion was overmastered for lack of fuel; the chemical combinations, which might have gone on for ages causing weak but incessant outbreaks, were completed and their power exhausted.

This source of disturbance extinguished in the reign of the twenty-fifth predecessor of my royal patron, the construction of the great Observatory on Eanelca was commenced. A very elaborate road, winding round and round the mountain at such an incline as to be easily ascended by the electric carriages, was built. But this was intended only as a subsidiary means of ascent. Right into the bowels of the mountain a vast tunnel fifty feet in height was driven. At its inner extremity was excavated a chamber whose dimensions are imperfectly recorded in my notes, but which was certainly much larger than the central cavern from which radiate the principal galleries of the Mammoth Cave. Around this were pierced a dozen shafts, emerging at different heights, but all near the summit, and all so far outside the central plateau as to leave the solid foundation on which the Observatory was to rest, down to the very centre of the planet, wholly undisturbed. Through each of these, ascending and descending alternately, pass two cars, or rather movable chambers, worked by electricity, conveying passengers, instruments, or supplies to and from the most convenient points in the vast structure of the Observatory itself. The highest part of Ranelca was a rocky mass of some 1600 feet in circumference and about 200 in height.

This was carved into a perfect octagon, in the sides of which were arranged a number of minor chambers—among them those wherein transit and other secondary observations were to be taken, and in which minor magnifying instruments were placed to scan their several portions of the heavens. Within these was excavated a circular central chamber, the dome of which was constructed of a crystal so clear that I verily believe the most exacting of Terrestrial astronomers would have been satisfied to make his observations through it. But an opening was made in this dome, as for the mounting of one of our equatorial telescopes, and machinery was provided which caused the roof to revolve with a touch, bringing the opening to bear on any desired part of the celestial vault. In the centre of the solid floor, levelled to the utmost perfection, was left a circular pillar supporting the polar axis of an instrument widely differing from our telescopes, especially in the fact that it had no opaque tube connecting the essential lenses which we call the eye-piece and the object-glass, names not applicable to their Martial substitutes. On my visit to the Observatory, however, I had not leisure to examine minutely the means by which the images of stars and planets were produced. I reserved this examination for a second opportunity, which, as it happened, never occurred.

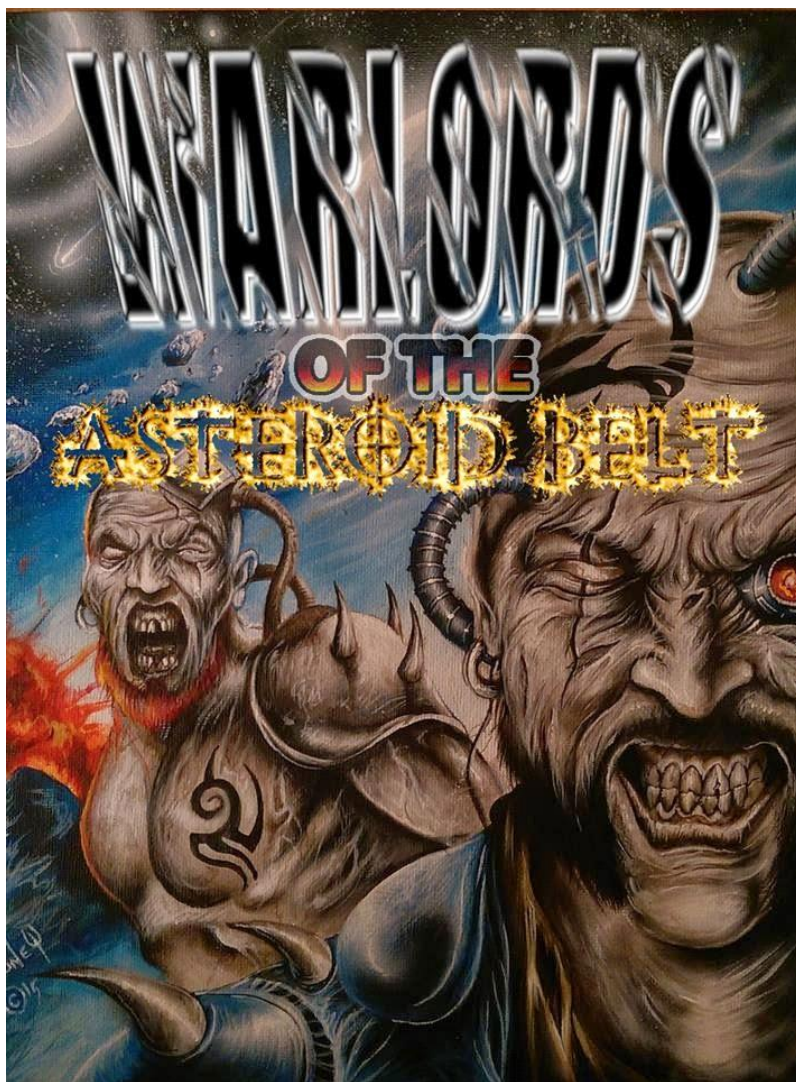
On this occasion Eveena and Eunané were with me, and the astronomic pictures which were to be presented to us, and which they could enjoy and understand almost as fully as myself, sufficiently occupied our time. Warned to stand at such a distance from the central machinery that in a whole revolution no part of it could by any possibility touch us, we were placed near an opening looking into a dark chamber, with our backs to the objects of observation. In this chamber, not upon a screen but suspended in the air, presently appeared an image several thousand times larger than that of the crescent Moon as seen through a tube small enough to correct the exaggeration of visual instinct. It appeared, however, not flat, as does the Moon to the naked eye, but evidently as part of a sphere. At some distance was shown another crescent, belonging to a sphere whose diameter was a little more than one-fourth that of the former. The light reflected from their surfaces was of silver radiance, rather than the golden hue of the Moon or of Venus as seen through a small telescope. The smaller crescent I could recognise at once as belonging to our own satellite; the larger was, of course, the world I had quitted. So exactly is the clockwork or its substitute adapted to counteract both the rotation and revolution of Mars, that the two images underwent no other change of place than that caused by their own proper motion in space; a movement which, notwithstanding the immense magnifying power employed, was of course scarcely perceptible. But the rotation of the larger sphere was visible as we watched it. It so happened that the part which was at once lighted by the rays of the Sun and exposed to our observation was but little clouded. The atmosphere, of course, prevented its presenting the clear, sharply-defined outlines of lunar landscapes; but sea and land, ice and snow, were so clearly defined and easily distinguishable that my companions exclaimed with eagerness, as they observed features unmistakably resembling on the grand scale those with which they were themselves familiar. The Arctic ice was scarcely visible in the North. The vast steppes of Russia, the boundary line of the Ural mountains, the greyish-blue of the Euxine, Western Asia, Arabia, and the Red Sea joining the long water-line of the Southern Ocean, were defined by the slanting rays. The Antarctic ice-continent was almost equally clear, with its stupendous glacier masses radiating apparently from an elevated extensive land, chiefly consisting of a deeply scooped and scored plateau of rock, around the Pole itself. The terminator, or boundary between light and shade, was not, as in the Moon, pretty sharply defined, and broken only by the mountainous masses, rings, and sea-beds, if such they are, so characteristic of the latter. On the image of the

Moon there intervened between bright light and utter darkness but the narrow belt to which only part of the Sun was as yet visible, and which, therefore, received comparatively few rays. The twilight to north and south extended on the image of the Earth deep into that part on which as yet the Sun was below the horizon, and consequently daylight faded into darkness all but imperceptibly, save between the tropics. We watched long and intently as league by league new portions of Europe and Africa, the Mediterranean, and even the Baltic, came into view; and I was able to point out to Eveena lands in which I had travelled, seas I had crossed, and even the isles of the Aegean, and bays in which my vessel had lain at anchor. This personal introduction to each part of the image, now presented to her for the first time, enabled her to realise more forcibly than a lengthened experience of astronomical observation might have done the likeness to her own world of that which was passing under her eyes; and at once intensified her wonder, heightened her pleasure, and sharpened her intellectual apprehension of the scene. When we had satiated our eyes with this spectacle, or rather when I remembered that we could spare no more time to this, the most interesting exhibition of the evening, a turn of the machinery brought Venus under view. Here, however, the cloud envelope baffled us altogether, and her close approach to the horizon soon obliged the director to turn his apparatus in another direction. Two or three of the Asteroids were in view. Pallas especially presented a very interesting spectacle. Not that the difference of distance would have rendered the definition much more perfect than from a Terrestrial standpoint, but that the marvellous perfection of Martial instruments, and in some measure also the rarity of the atmosphere at such a height, rendered possible the use of far higher magnifying powers than our astronomers can employ. I am inclined to agree, from what I saw on this occasion, with those who imagine the Asteroids to be—if not fragments of a broken planet which once existed as a whole—yet in another sense fragmentary spheres, less perfect and with surfaces of much greater proportionate irregularity than those of the larger planets. Next was presented to our view on a somewhat smaller scale, because the area of the chamber employed would not otherwise have given room for the system, the enormous disc and the four satellites of Jupiter. The difference between 400 and 360 millions of miles' distance is, of course, wholly unimportant; but the definition and enlargement were such that the image was perfect, and the details minute and distinct, beyond anything that Earthly observation had led me to conceive as possible. The satellites were no longer mere points or tiny discs, but distinct moons, with surfaces marked like that of our own satellite, though far less mountainous and broken, and, as it seemed to me, possessing a distinct atmosphere. I am not sure that there is not a visible difference of brightness among them, not due to their size but to some difference in the reflecting power of their surfaces, since the distance of all from the Sun is practically equal. That Jupiter gives out some light of his own, a portion of which they may possibly reflect in differing amount according to their varying distance, is believed by Martial astronomers; and I thought it not improbable. The brilliant and various colouring of the bands which, cross the face of the giant planet was wonderfully brought out; the bluish-grey around the poles, the clear yellowish-white light of the light bands, probably belts of white cloud, contrasted signally the hues—varying from deep orange-brown to what was almost crimson or rose-pink on the one hand and bright yellow on the other—of different zones of the so-called dark belts. On the latter, markings and streaks of strange variety suggested, if they failed to prove, the existence of frequent spiral storms, disturbing, probably at an immense height above the surface, clouds which must be utterly unlike the clouds of Mars or the Earth in material as well as in form and mass. These markings enabled us to follow with clear ocular appreciation the rapid rotation of this planet. In the course of half-an-hour several distinct spots on different belts had moved in a direct line

across a tenth of the face presented to us—a distance, upon the scale of the gigantic image, so great that the motion required no painstaking observation, but forced itself upon the notice of the least attentive spectator. The belief of Martial astronomers is that Jupiter is not by any means so much less dense than the minor planets as his proportionately lesser weight would imply. They hold that his visible surface is that of an enormously deep atmosphere, within which lies, they suppose, a central ball, not merely hot but more than white hot, and probably, from its temperature, not yet possessing a solid crust. One writer argues that, since all worlds must by analogy be supposed to be inhabited, and since the satellites of Jupiter more resemble worlds than the planet itself, which may be regarded as a kind of secondary sun, it is not improbable that the former are the scenes of life as varied as that of Mars itself; and that infinite ages hence, when these have become too cold for habitation, their giant primary may have gone through those processes which, according to the received theory, have fitted the interior planets to be the home of plants, animals, and, in two cases at least, of human beings.

It was near midnight before the manifest fatigue of the ladies overcame my selfish desire to prolong as much as possible this most interesting visit. Meteorological science in Mars has been carried to high perfection; and the director warned me that but three or four equally favourable opportunities might offer in the course of the next half year.

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THE BATTLE OF DORKING by GT Chesney

Part One

You ask me to tell you, my grandchildren, something about my own share in the great events that happened fifty years ago. 'Tis sad work turning back to that bitter page in our history, but you may perhaps take profit in your new homes from the lesson it teaches. For us in England it came too late. And yet we had plenty of warnings, if we had only made use of them. The danger did not come on us unawares. It burst on us suddenly, 'tis true; but its coming was foreshadowed plainly enough to open our eyes, if we had not been wilfully blind. We English have only ourselves to blame for the humiliation which has been brought on the land. Venerable old age! Dishonourable old age, I say, when it follows a manhood dishonoured as ours has been. I declare, even now, though fifty years have passed, I can hardly look a young man in the face when I think I am one of those in whose youth happened this degradation of Old England—one of those who betrayed the trust handed down to us unstained by our forefathers.

What a proud and happy country was this fifty years ago! Free-trade had been working for more than a quarter of a century, and there seemed to be no end to the riches it was bringing us. London was growing bigger and bigger; you could not build houses fast enough for the rich people who wanted to live in them, the merchants who made the money and came from all parts of the world to settle there, and the lawyers and doctors and engineers and other, and trades-people who got their share out of the profits. The streets reached down to Croydon and Wimbledon, which my father could remember quite country places; and people used to say that Kingston and Reigate would soon be joined to London. We thought we could go on building and multiplying for ever. 'Tis true that even then there was no lack of poverty; the people who had no money went on increasing as fast as the rich, and pauperism was already beginning to be a difficulty; but if the rates were high, there was plenty of money to pay them with; and as for what were called the middle classes, there really seemed no limit to their increase and prosperity. People in those days thought it quite a matter of course to bring a dozen of children into the world—or, as it used to be said, Providence sent them that number of babies; and if they couldn't always marry off all the daughters, they used to manage to provide for the sons, for there were new openings to be found in all the professions, or in the Government offices, which went on steadily getting larger. Besides, in those days young men could be sent out to India, or into the army or navy; and even then emigration was not uncommon, although not the regular custom it is now. Schoolmasters, like all other professional classes, drove a capital trade. They did not teach very much, to be sure, but new schools with their four or five hundred boys were springing up all over the country.

Fools that we were! We thought that all this wealth and prosperity were sent us by Providence, and could not stop coming. In our blindness we did not see that we were merely a big workshop, making up the things which came from all parts of the world; and that if other nations stopped sending us raw goods to work up, we could not produce them ourselves. True, we had in those days an advantage in our cheap coal and iron; and had we taken care not to waste the fuel, it might have lasted us longer. But even then there were signs that coal and iron would soon become cheaper in foreign parts; while as to food and other things, England was not better off than it is now. We were so rich simply because other nations from all parts of the world were in

the habit of sending their goods to us to be sold or manufactured; and we thought that this would last for ever. And so, perhaps, it might have lasted, if we had only taken proper means to keep it; but, in our folly, we were too careless even to insure our prosperity, and after the course of trade was turned away it would not come back again.

And yet, if ever a nation had a plain warning, we had. If we were the greatest trading country, our neighbours were the leading military power in Europe. They were driving a good trade, too, for this was before their foolish communism (about which you will hear when you are older) had ruined the rich without benefiting the poor, and they were in many respects the first nation in Europe; but it was on their army that they prided themselves most. And with reason. They had beaten the Russians and the Austrians, and the Prussians too, in bygone years, and they thought they were invincible. Well do I remember the great review held at Paris by the Emperor Napoleon during the great Exhibition, and how proud he looked showing off his splendid Guards to the assembled kings and princes. Yet, three years afterwards, the force so long deemed the first in Europe was ignominiously beaten, and the whole army taken prisoners. Such a defeat had never happened before in the world's history; and with this proof before us of the folly of disbelieving in the possibility of disaster merely because it had never fallen upon us, it might have been supposed that we should have the sense to take the lesson to heart. And the country was certainly roused for a time, and a cry was raised that the army ought to be reorganised, and our defences strengthened against the enormous power for sudden attacks which it was seen other nations were able to put forth. And a scheme of army reform was brought forward by the Government. It was a half-and-half affair at best; and, unfortunately, instead of being taken up in Parliament as a national scheme, it was made a party matter of, and so fell through. There was a Radical section of the House, too, whose votes had to be secured by conciliation, and which blindly demanded a reduction of armaments as the price of allegiance. This party always decried military establishments as part of a fixed policy for reducing the influence of the Crown and the aristocracy. They could not understand that the times had altogether changed, that the Crown had really no power, and that the Government merely existed at the pleasure of the House of Commons, and that even Parliament-rule was beginning to give way to mob-law. At any rate, the Ministry, baffled on all sides, gave up by degrees all the strong points of a scheme which they were not heartily in earnest about. It was not that there was any lack of money, if only it had been spent in the right way. The army cost enough, and more than enough, to give us a proper defence, and there were armed men of sorts in plenty and to spare, if only they had been decently organised. It was in organisation and forethought that we fell short, because our rulers did not heartily believe in the need for preparation. The fleet and the Channel, they said, were sufficient protection. So army reform was put off to some more convenient season, and the militia and volunteers were left untrained as before, because to call them out for drill would "interfere with the industry of the country." We could have given up some of the industry of those days, forsooth, and yet be busier than we are now. But why tell you a tale you have so often heard already? The nation, although uneasy, was misled by the false security its leaders professed to feel; the warning given by the disasters that overtook France was allowed to pass by unheeded. We would not even be at the trouble of putting our arsenals in a safe place, or of guarding the capital against a surprise, although the cost of doing so would not have been so much as missed from the national wealth. The French trusted in their army and its great reputation, we in our fleet; and in each case the result of this blind confidence was disaster, such as our forefathers in their hardest struggles could not have even imagined.

I need hardly tell you how the crash came about. First, the rising in India drew away a part of our small army; then came the difficulty with America, which had been threatening for years, and we sent off ten thousand men to defend Canada—a handful which did not go far to strengthen the real defences of that country, but formed an irresistible temptation to the Americans to try and take them prisoners, especially as the contingent included three battalions of the Guards. Thus the regular army at home was even smaller than usual, and nearly half of it was in Ireland to check the talked-of Fenian invasion fitting out in the West. Worse still—though I do not know it would really have mattered as things turned out—the fleet was scattered abroad: some ships to guard the West Indies, others to check privateering in the China seas, and a large part to try and protect our colonies on the Northern Pacific shore of America, where, with incredible folly, we continued to retain possessions which we could not possibly defend. America was not the great power forty years ago that it is now; but for us to try and hold territory on her shores which could only be reached by sailing round the Horn, was as absurd as if she had attempted to take the Isle of Man before the independence of Ireland. We see this plainly enough now, but we were all blind then.

It was while we were in this state, with our ships all over the world, and our little bit of an army cut up into detachments, that the Secret Treaty was published, and Holland and Denmark were annexed. People say now that we might have escaped the troubles which came on us if we had at any rate kept quiet till our other difficulties were settled; but the English were always an impulsive lot: the whole country was boiling over with indignation, and the Government, egged on by the press, and going with the stream, declared war. We had always got out of scrapes before, and we believed our old luck and pluck would somehow pull us through.

Then, of course, there was bustle and hurry all over the land. Not that the calling up of the army reserves caused much stir, for I think there were only about 5000 altogether, and a good many of these were not to be found when the time came; but recruiting was going on all over the country, with a tremendous high bounty, 50,000 more men having been voted for the army. Then there was a Ballot Bill passed for adding 55,500 men to the militia; why a round number was not fixed on I don't know, but the Prime Minister said that this was the exact quota wanted to put the defences of the country on a sound footing. Then the shipbuilding that began! Ironclads, despatch-boats, gunboats, monitors, —every building-yard in the country got its job, and they were offering ten shillings a-day wages for anybody who could drive a rivet. This didn't improve the recruiting, you may suppose. I remember, too, there was a squabble in the House of Commons about whether artisans should be drawn for the ballot, as they were so much wanted, and I think they got an exemption. This sent numbers to the yards; and if we had had a couple of years to prepare instead of a couple of weeks, I daresay we should have done very well.

It was on a Monday that the declaration of war was announced, and in a few hours we got our first inkling of the sort of preparation the enemy had made for the event which they had really brought about, although the actual declaration was made by us. A pious appeal to the God of battles, whom it was said we had aroused, was telegraphed back; and from that moment all communication with the north of Europe was cut off. Our embassies and legations were packed off at an hour's notice, and it was as if we had suddenly come back to the middle ages. The dumb astonishment visible all over London the next morning, when the papers came out void of news,

merely hinting at what had happened, was one of the most startling things in this war of surprises. But everything had been arranged beforehand; nor ought we to have been surprised, for we had seen the same Power, only a few months before, move down half a million of men on a few days' notice, to conquer the greatest military nation in Europe, with no more fuss than our War Office used to make over the transport of a brigade from Aldershot to Brighton, —and this, too, without the allies it had now. What happened now was not a bit more wonderful in reality; but people of this country could not bring themselves to believe that what had never occurred before to England could ever possibly happen. Like our neighbours, we became wise when it was too late.

Of course the papers were not long in getting news—even the mighty organisation set at work could not shut out a special correspondent; and in a very few days, although the telegraphs and railways were intercepted right across Europe, the main facts oozed out. An embargo had been laid on all the shipping in every port from the Baltic to Ostend; the fleets of the two great Powers had moved out, and it was supposed were assembled in the great northern harbour, and troops were hurrying on board all the steamers detained in these places, most of which were British vessels. It was clear that invasion was intended. Even then we might have been saved, if the fleet had been ready. The forts which guarded the flotilla were perhaps too strong for shipping to attempt; but an ironclad or two, handled as British sailors knew how to use them, might have destroyed or damaged a part of the transports, and delayed the expedition, giving us what we wanted, time. But then the best part of the fleet had been decoyed down to the Dardanelles, and what remained of the Channel squadron was looking after Fenian filibusters off the west of Ireland; so it was ten days before the fleet was got together, and by that time it was plain the enemy's preparations were too far advanced to be stopped by a coup-de- main. Information, which came chiefly through Italy, came slowly, and was more or less vague and uncertain; but this much was known, that at least a couple of hundred thousand men were embarked or ready to be put on board ships, and that the flotilla was guarded by more ironclads than we could then muster. I suppose it was the uncertainty as to the point the enemy would aim at for landing, and the fear lest he should give us the go-by, that kept the fleet for several days in the Downs; but it was not until the Tuesday fortnight after the declaration of war that it weighed anchor and steamed away for the North Sea. Of course you have read about the Queen's visit to the fleet the day before, and how she sailed round the ships in her yacht, and went on board the flag-ship to take leave of the admiral; how, overcome with emotion, she told him that the safety of the country was committed to his keeping. You remember, too, the gallant old officer's reply, and how all the ships' yards were manned, and how lustily the tars cheered as her Majesty was rowed off. The account was of course telegraphed to London, and the high spirits of the fleet infected the whole town. I was outside the Charing Cross station when the Queen's special train from Dover arrived, and from the cheering and shouting which greeted her Majesty as she drove away, you might have supposed we had already won a great victory. The leading journal, which had gone in strongly for the army reduction carried out during the session, and had been nervous and desponding in tone during the past fortnight, suggesting all sorts of compromises as a way of getting out of the war, came out in a very jubilant form next morning. "Panic-stricken inquirers," it said, "ask now, where are the means of meeting the invasion? We reply that the invasion will never take place. A British fleet, manned by British sailors whose courage and enthusiasm are reflected in the people of this country, is already on the way to meet the presumptuous foe. The issue of a contest between British ships and those of any other country,

under anything like equal odds, can never be doubtful. England awaits with calm confidence the issue of the impending action.”

Such were the words of the leading article, and so we all felt. It was on Tuesday, the 10th of August, that the fleet sailed from the Downs. It took with it a submarine cable to lay down as it advanced, so that continuous communication was kept up, and the papers were publishing special editions every few minutes with the latest news. This was the first time such a thing had been done, and the feat was accepted as a good omen. Whether it is true that the Admiralty made use of the cable to keep on sending contradictory orders, which took the command out of the admiral’s hands, I can’t say; but all that the admiral sent in return was a few messages of the briefest kind, which neither the Admiralty nor anyone else could have made any use of. Such a ship had gone off reconnoitring; such another had rejoined—fleet was in latitude so and so. This went on till the Thursday morning. I had just come up to town by train as usual, and was walking to my office, when the newsboys began to cry, “New edition—enemy’s fleet in sight!” You may imagine the scene in London! Business still went on at the banks, for bills matured although the independence of the country was being fought out under our own eyes, so to say, and the speculators were active enough. But even with the people who were making and losing their fortunes, the interest in the fleet overcame everything else; men who went to pay in or draw out their money stopped to show the last bulletin to the cashier. As for the street, you could hardly get along for the crowd stopping to buy and read the papers; while at every house or office the members sat restlessly in the common room, as if to keep together for company, sending out some one of their number every few minutes to get the latest edition. At least this is what happened at our office; but to sit still was as impossible as to do anything, and most of us went out and wandered about among the crowd, under a sort of feeling that the news was got quicker at in this way. Bad as were the times coming, I think the sickening suspense of that day, and the shock which followed, was almost the worst that we underwent. It was about ten o’clock that the first telegram came; an hour later the wire announced that the admiral had signalled to form line of battle, and shortly afterwards that the order was given to bear down on the enemy and engage. At twelve came the announcement, “Fleet opened fire about three miles to leeward of us”—that is, the ship with the cable. So far all had been expectancy, then came the first token of calamity. “An ironclad has been blown up”—“the enemy’s torpedoes are doing great damage”—“the flag-ship is laid aboard the enemy”—“the flag-ship appears to be sinking”—“the vice-admiral has signalled to”—there the cable became silent, and, as you know, we heard no more till, two days afterwards, the solitary ironclad which escaped the disaster steamed into Portsmouth.

Then the whole story came out—how our sailors, gallant as ever, had tried to close with the enemy; how the latter evaded the conflict at close quarters, and, sheering off, left behind them the fatal engines which sent our ships, one after the other, to the bottom; how all this happened almost in a few minutes. The Government, it appears, had received warnings of this invention; but to the nation this stunning blow was utterly unexpected. That Thursday I had to go home early for regimental drill, but it was impossible to remain doing nothing, so when that was over I went up to town again, and after waiting in expectation of news which never came, and missing the midnight train, I walked home. It was a hot sultry night, and I did not arrive till near sunrise. The whole town was quite still—the lull before the storm; and as I let myself in with my latch-key, and went softly up- stairs to my room to avoid waking the sleeping household, I could not but contrast the peacefulness of the morning—no sound breaking the silence but the singing of

the birds in the garden—with the passionate remorse and indignation that would break out with the day. Perhaps the inmates of the rooms were as wakeful as myself; but the house in its stillness was just as it used to be when I came home alone from balls or parties in the happy days gone by. Tired though I was, I could not sleep, so I went down to the river and had a swim; and on returning found the household was assembling for early breakfast. A sorrowful household it was, although the burden pressing on each was partly an unseen one. My father, doubting whether his firm could last through the day; my mother, her distress about my brother, now with his regiment on the coast, already exceeding that which she felt for the public misfortune, had come down, although hardly fit to leave her room. My sister Clara was worst of all, for she could not but try to disguise her special interest in the fleet; and though we had all guessed that her heart was given to the young lieutenant in the flag-ship—the first vessel to go down—a love unclaimed could not be told, nor could we express the sympathy we felt for the poor girl. That breakfast, the last meal we ever had together, was soon ended, and my father and I went up to town by an early train, and got there just as the fatal announcement of the loss of the fleet was telegraphed from Portsmouth.

The panic and excitement of that day—how the funds went down to 35; the run upon the bank and its stoppage; the fall of half the houses in the city; how the Government issued a notification suspending specie payment and the tendering of bills—this last precaution too late for most firms, Graham & Co. among the number, which stopped payment as soon as my father got to the office; the call to arms, and the unanimous response of the country—all this is history which I need not repeat. You wish to hear about my own share in the business of the time. Well, volunteering had increased immensely from the day war was proclaimed, and our regiment went up in a day or two from its usual strength of 600 to nearly 1000. But the stock of rifles was deficient. We were promised a further supply in a few days, which however, we never received; and while waiting for them the regiment had to be divided into two parts, the recruits drilling with the rifles in the morning, and we old hands in the evening. The failures and stoppage of work on this black Friday threw an immense number of young men out of employment, and we recruited up to 1400 strong by the next day; but what was the use of all these men without arms? On the Saturday it was announced that a lot of smooth-bore muskets in store at the Tower would be served out to regiments applying for them, and a regular scramble took place among the volunteers for them, and our people got hold of a couple of hundred. But you might almost as well have tried to learn rifle-drill with a broom-stick as with old brown bess; besides, there was no smooth-bore ammunition in the country. A national subscription was opened for the manufacture of rifles at Birmingham, which ran up to a couple of millions in two days, but, like everything else, this came too late. To return to the volunteers: camps had been formed a fortnight before at Dover, Brighton, Harwich, and other places, of regulars and militia, and the headquarters of most of the volunteer regiments were attached to one or other of them, and the volunteers themselves used to go down for drill from day to day, as they could spare time, and on Friday an order went out that they should be permanently embodied; but the metropolitan volunteers were still kept about London as a sort of reserve, till it could be seen at what point the invasion would take place. We were all told off to brigades and divisions. Our brigade consisted of the 4th Royal Surrey Militia, the 1st Surrey Administrative Battalion, as it was called, at Clapham, the 7th Surrey Volunteers at Southwark, and ourselves; but only our battalion and the militia were quartered in the same place, and the whole brigade had merely two or three afternoons together at brigade exercise in Bushey Park before the march took place. Our

brigadier belonged to a line regiment in Ireland, and did not join till the very morning the order came. Meanwhile, during the preliminary fortnight, the militia colonel commanded. But though we volunteers were busy with our drill and preparations, those of us who, like myself, belonged to Government offices, had more than enough of office work to do, as you may suppose. The volunteer clerks were allowed to leave office at four o'clock, but the rest were kept hard at the desk far into the night. Orders to the lord-lieutenants, to the magistrates, notifications, all the arrangements for cleaning out the workhouses for hospitals—these and a hundred other things had to be managed in our office, and there was as much bustle indoors as out. Fortunate we were to be so busy—the people to be pitied were those who had nothing to do. And on Sunday (that was the 15th August) work went on just as usual. We had an early parade and drill, and I went up to town by the nine o'clock train in my uniform, taking my rifle with me in case of accidents, and luckily too, as it turned out, a mackintosh overcoat. When I got to Waterloo there were all sorts of rumours afloat. A fleet had been seen off the Downs, and some of the despatch-boats which were hovering about the coasts brought news that there was a large flotilla off Harwich, but nothing could be seen from the shore, as the weather was hazy. The enemy's light ships had taken and sunk all the fishing-boats they could catch, to prevent the news of their whereabouts reaching us; but a few escaped during the night and reported that the Inconstant frigate coming home from North America, without any knowledge of what had taken place, had sailed right into the enemy's fleet and been captured. In town the troops were all getting ready for a move; the Guards in the Wellington Barracks were under arms, and their baggage-waggons packed and drawn up in the Bird-cage Walk. The usual guard at the Horse Guards had been withdrawn, and orderlies and staff-officers were going to and fro. All this I saw on the way to my office, where I worked away till twelve o'clock, and then feeling hungry after my early breakfast, I went across Parliament Street to my club to get some luncheon. There were about half-a-dozen men in the coffee-room, none of whom I knew; but in a minute or two Danvers of the Treasury entered in a tremendous hurry. From him I got the first bit of authentic news I had had that day. The enemy had landed in force near Harwich, and the metropolitan regiments were ordered down there to reinforce the troops already collected in that neighbourhood; his regiment was to parade at one o'clock, and he had come to get something to eat before starting. We bolted a hurried lunch, and were just leaving the club when a messenger from the Treasury came running into the hall.

"Oh, Mr. Danvers," said he, "I've come to look for you, sir; the secretary says that all the gentlemen are wanted at the office, and that you must please not one of you go with the regiments."

"The devil!" cried Danvers.

"Do you know if that order extends to all the public offices?" I asked.

"I don't know," said the man, "but I believe it do. I know there's messengers gone round to all the clubs and luncheon-bars to look for the gentlemen; the secretary says it's quite impossible any one can be spared just now, there's so much work to do; there's orders just come to send off our records to Birmingham to-night."

I did not wait to condole with Danvers, but, just glancing up Whitehall to see if any of our messengers were in pursuit, I ran off as hard as I could for Westminster Bridge, and so to the

Waterloo station.

The place had quite changed its aspect since the morning. The regular service of trains had ceased, and the station and approaches were full of troops, among them the Guards and artillery. Everything was very orderly: the men had piled arms, and were standing about in groups. There was no sign of high spirits or enthusiasm. Matters had become too serious. Every man's face reflected the general feeling that we had neglected the warnings given us, and that now the danger so long derided as impossible and absurd had really come and found us unprepared. But the soldiers, if grave, looked determined, like men who meant to do their duty whatever might happen. A train full of guardsmen was just starting for Guildford. I was told it would stop at Surbiton, and, with several other volunteers, hurrying like myself to join our regiment, got a place in it. We did not arrive a moment too soon, for the regiment was marching from Kingston down to the station. The destination of our brigade was the east coast. Empty carriages were drawn up in the siding, and our regiment was to go first. A large crowd was assembled to see it off, including the recruits who had joined during the last fortnight, and who formed by far the largest part of our strength. They were to stay behind, and were certainly very much in the way already; for as all the officers and sergeants belonged to the active part, there was no one to keep discipline among them, and they came crowding around us, breaking the ranks and making it difficult to get into the train. Here I saw our new brigadier for the first time. He was a soldier-like man, and no doubt knew his duty, but he appeared new to volunteers, and did not seem to know how to deal with gentlemen privates. I wanted very much to run home and get my greatcoat and knapsack, which I had bought a few days ago, but feared to be left behind; a good-natured recruit volunteered to fetch them for me, but he had not returned before we started, and I began the campaign with a kit consisting of a mackintosh and a small pouch of tobacco.

It was a tremendous squeeze in the train; for, besides the ten men sitting down, there were three or four standing up in every compartment, and the afternoon was close and sultry, and there were so many stoppages on the way that we took nearly an hour and a half crawling up to Waterloo. It was between five and six in the afternoon when we arrived there, and it was nearly seven before we marched up to the Shoreditch station. The whole place was filled up with stores and ammunition, to be sent off to the east, so we piled arms in the street and scattered about to get food and drink, of which most of us stood in need, especially the latter, for some were already feeling the worse for the heat and crush. I was just stepping into a public-house with Travers, when who should drive up but his pretty wife? Most of our friends had paid their adieus at the Surbiton station, but she had driven up by the road in his brougham, bringing their little boy to have a last look at papa. She had also brought his knapsack and greatcoat, and, what was still more acceptable, a basket containing fowls, tongue, bread-and-butter, and biscuits, and a couple of bottles of claret, —which priceless luxuries they insisted on my sharing.

Meanwhile the hours went on. The 4th Surrey Militia, which had marched all the way from Kingston, had come up, as well as the other volunteer corps; the station had been partly cleared of the stores that encumbered it; some artillery, two militia regiments, and a battalion of the line, had been despatched, and our turn to start had come, and long lines of carriages were drawn up ready for us; but still we remained in the street. You may fancy the scene. There seemed to be as many people as ever in London, and we could hardly move for the crowds of spectators—fellows hawking fruits and volunteers' comforts, newsboys and so forth, to say nothing of the cabs and

omnibuses; while orderlies and staff-officers were constantly riding up with messages. A good many of the militiamen, and some of our people too, had taken more than enough to drink; perhaps a hot sun had told on empty stomachs; anyhow, they became very noisy. The din, dirt, and heat were indescribable. So the evening wore on, and all the information our officers could get from the brigadier, who appeared to be acting under another general, was, that orders had come to stand fast for the present. Gradually the street became quieter and cooler. The brigadier, who, by way of setting an example, had remained for some hours without leaving his saddle, had got a chair out of a shop, and sat nodding in it; most of the men were lying down or sitting on the pavement—some sleeping, some smoking. In vain had Travers begged his wife to go home. She declared that, having come so far, she would stay and see the last of us. The brougham had been sent away to a by- street, as it blocked up the road; so he sat on a doorstep, she by him on the knapsack. Little Arthur, who had been delighted at the bustle and the uniforms, and in high spirits, became at last very cross, and eventually cried himself to sleep in his father's arms, his golden hair and one little dimpled arm hanging over his shoulder. Thus went on the weary hours, till suddenly the assembly sounded, and we all started up. We were to return to Waterloo. The landing on the east was only a feint—so ran the rumour—the real attack was on the south. Anything seemed better than indecision and delay, and, tired though we were, the march back was gladly hailed. Mrs Travers, who made us take the remains of the luncheon with us, we left to look for her carriage; little Arthur, who was awake again, but very good and quiet, in her arms.

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