

# **The Adventures of Rupert Bulmer, Esq.**

an account of mystery, peril, adventure, bravery, stupidity, love, death, eldritch things man was not supposed to know and madness

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An in-character transcript of a Call of Cthulhu™ campaign  
by  
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Plot by Robin Langridge

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# **Dramatis Personae**

## ***The Heroes***

Rupert Bulmer – gentleman of leisure, adventurer, big game hunter, patron to the sciences and all-round good egg (played by Ozzy)

Dunbar – Bulmer's valet, wingman, advisor and friend (played by John)

Robert Walker – Great War veteran, now watch merchant (played by Graham)

Thomas Gladstone Salisbury – dealer in antiques and arts (played by Richard)

Prof. Jeremy Carter – eminent archaeologist (played by Marcus)

(Reverend) Alexander Jones – priest and pulp author (played by Oliver)

Skipper Silas Torrance – steamer captain (played by John)

Nicolas Wright – American archaeologist (played by Marcus)

Dr. Henry Vargas – physician (played by Oliver)

## ***The Villains***

Dr. Parsons – an unsavoury academic with illusions of grandeur

Jim - a mysterious figure

Roger Hill – a shady assistant

Alfred Grantham – not a gentleman

Nicoli Ruiz – an evil pastor

Prof. Nigel Bonaparte – an archaeologist

## ***Innocents and Victims***

William Wright – a gentleman who lives on the Isle of Wight and friend of the heroes

Mr. Matthews – an inventor

Dr. Pike – a scientist

Prof. Anthony Nelson – an archaeologist

Mrs. Stephenson – an heiress

Peter Rogsby – expedition leader and big game hunter

Prof. Fudar – an expert in the occult

Prof. Seymour – Canadian archaeologist

## ***Supporting Cast***

Jenkins - William's butler

James Ellis – American mummy aficionado

Colonel Warwick (retired) – a fine ex officer

Count Kurosov – a mysterious Russian gentleman

**Part 1**  
**Second Hand Artifacts**

It was a normal afternoon down at my London club, I'd just had a spot of lunch and had my nose in the latest crime novel while nursing a fine brandy, when a letter arrived.

It was from my old friend William Wright, with whom I had shared many an adventure in Africa and the ruins of Mesoamerica. His old man, the Colonel, was turning 80 and he invited me to the celebrations, hoping that reminiscing about our past adventures would alleviate the boredom the event would surely cause.

I thought it a splendid opportunity to take out the Rolls again so I scooted over to my flat and instructed good Dunbar (who thought it a splendid idea, too) to pack and prepare the car. I prepared some hunting and adventuring gear (you never know, there might be pheasants or grouse to hunt on the Isle of Wight or cliff caves to explore) and off we went the next morning.

The drive down to Portsmouth was reasonably pleasant but the closer we got to the coast the worse the weather turned and when we reached the port, the fog was as thick as pea soup.

Having just missed the previous one, we had to wait for the last ferry of the day, which saw us crammed on with a variety of farm and commercial vehicles and several herds of livestock. Quite undignified, if you ask me but there was nothing we could do.

Having arrived on the other side, I found someone who would give the Rolls a bit of a wash so we could get to the castle in style.

Our gracious host welcomed us with open arms, clearly glad to have someone else to talk to. We caught up on old times and settled into our quite splendid rooms. Some other guests had also arrived, all of them friends of William's. I'm writing down their names here as for some reason we would all get involved in some odd and, quite frankly, out this world business but more of that later: Reverend Jones; Jeremy Carter, an archaeology professor from Cambridge; Thomas Gladstone Salisbury, an arts dealer from London; and Robert Walker, owner of a clock shop in London and Great War veteran, who all seemed to be fine fellows.

More guests to be expected included James Hill (with whom William and I had shared many an adventure) and two Boer War veterans of the Colonel's troop.

Later that evening, we walked into town, had a few drinks at the pub and as we came back, Robert mentioned that he saw an odd green light out at sea but it had disappeared later. There were also some men shuffling crates around at the docks but when Dunbar checked, he couldn't find anything out of the ordinary.

The less said about the birthday celebrations on the next day the better (all dry talk about the Boer War bored us to death, with James never turning up) until we managed to extract ourselves and have a look through the crates William had brought back from his latest trip to Africa.

There was the usual tat but a few things caught our eye:

- a crudely carved ivory statuette
- a "crocodile head" carved from wood
- an intricately and very finely worked wooden box, almost like a puzzle box

We fiddled around a bit with the things when Thomas suddenly recognised something carved into the base of the ivory statuette, it was some sort of curved squiggle, almost like an ear. He got quite excited and left the cellar to get something from his room. He returned with a rather odd painting (just colours, a gray rectangle with two yellow "windows" or lights). The main thing was on the back, though. A number of odd squiggles (the professor called them pictograms) and one of them was identical to the thing on the statue.

This was still not much help as nobody could discern what the thing meant.

There were some Latin inscriptions on the back of the paintings which didn't make much sense, either.

We also took the box apart which broke away in several sections to reveal a ball made of some metal (and having what almost looked like a weld line around the perimeter). There was a peculiar story attached to it, too. William mentioned that the shopkeeper first didn't want to give it up but later seemed quite in a hurry to sell it, even without haggling.

(apologies for mixing things up. for reasons that might become clear later, I might not be able to remember everything in sequence)

There was a nutter at the pub who claimed he could smell something odd at the cemetery so we went with him but nobody could smell anything apart from the professor but he couldn't locate the source of the odd smell, either. It was a normal sort of graveyard with the exception of the rather large tomb which was in quite a bad state, delapidated and almost crumbled to a pile of bricks. Not even the inscription was legible anymore, just "Lord something".

Anyway, after a few more whiskies we decided to call it a night and retired to our rooms and that's when the first signs of weirdness started. I fell asleep quickly but then had a bit of a nightmare. I was back in Africa, out in the Savannah, when suddenly a huge herd of wildebeests stampeded over me, pretty much trampling me into a bloody pulp. As much as I'm loath to admit it, I awoke screaming. I only really mention it because the others had a similar experience (not wildebeests but similar nightmares). Now, the scream was just not from the experience but also from the pain in my left hand. I looked at it and there was the symbol from the ivory statuette burned into my palm! The others were similarly marked.

Quite distracted and unable to go back to sleep, we assembled for an early breakfast and tried to figure out what to do with our time.

Randomly, someone spotted that one of the "lights" in Thomas' painting had gone out and the "window" was now dark...

The metal ball was still intriguing and we thought it might be hollow and contain something interesting so we found the blacksmith/mechanic the butler Jenkins had mentioned to ask him for his assistance. He said he'd look into it. We decided not to wait but take a stroll along the cliffs while Thomas spoke to the fishermen.

As we walked, I felt a bit peckish so thought I reach for the packed lunch Jenkins had kindly given to us when I felt a searing pain behind my eyes, one hell of a headache. I'd had a few hangovers in my time but this was nothing like that. After having recovered a bit, I looked up only to see that my companions had suffered a similar fate (except Dunbar, for some reason but we later figured it was because he had never actually touched the ball).

We made our way back to the blacksmith who complained about having broken a hacksaw blade, having only made a small groove into the ball (as it turned out at the same time we felt the pain). The good man changed the blade and set to work again and what happens? We're in serious pain again, I throw up, the others fall over, begging him to stop. We grab the ball (and some of the metal filings) and hoof it back to the castle, catching our breaths, and getting some decent lunch and a few sips of brandy into us to calm us down.

Right, so, now. There was definitely something peculiar about this ball. Not only were its origins unclear but there seemed to be some kind of connection between it and our little group (William, me, Robert, Jeremy, the Reverend and Thomas). Thinking about it, it seems only those who actually handled the ball were affected.

While we were deliberating, Jenkins came in to report that the basement had been broken into and the pieces of the box that used to hold the ball had been stolen. Blimey, another mystery.

By then, it was time to attend the Evensong at the church as our good Reverend had an idea that taking the ball there and blessing it might break the, er, curse or whatever was on it and caused us so much trouble.

The service was a bit tedious but not so bad and afterwards we assembled in the small side chapel. The Reverend did his thing, spoke a few nice words, sprinkled the ball with holy water and all that. We tried to damage the ball a little bit by cracking it against a stone and - the headaches were back so that hadn't worked, either. Too bad.

William headed to the pub while we made our way back to the castle. Having arrived there, Jenkins had another piece of bad news: Miss Fry, the maid, hadn't returned from her day off and the butler was a bit worried. So Thomas, Robert and I headed off into the village again while the Reverend opted to stay at the castle to "guard the ball" (you'll learn the significance of the quotes later). Oh, you might ask why I hadn't mentioned the professor in a while, well, he had been feeling poorly all day and excused himself from our company.

So, we found the maid's mother's house, knocked and managed to just start our conversation with the lady (who hadn't seen her daughter all day but suggested she might be with her fiancée) when the headaches started again. Argh. So, feeling a bit worse for wear, we made our way to the fiancée's house who hadn't seen Miss Fry either and the headaches again got worse. Something must have been going on with the ball, so we stopped by the pub to pick up William who had just been talking to some gentleman (a Dr. Parsons as we found out later) and was also concerned about his missing maid so we returned to the castle.

Having arrived there, Jenkins reported that nothing else had been taken from the house but a side door had been forced (but was now fitted with a bolt to secure it).

There was also a game of hide and seek and some scuffling as we found out that the Reverend had "experimented" with the ball by heating it in the oven. It now shone quite brightly which was even odder.

We also talked a little more and found out that there was one other person who'd known about the box/ball: James Hill, our adventure companion who had never turned up to the birthday party.

As it was now very late, we decided on a course of action for the next day: report the missing maid to the constabulary and send a telegram to find out whether James had left or where he was. The ball was put in the safe after William changed the combination.

Exhausted, we all retired to our rooms and that's when things started to go really wrong...

I woke after I thought I heard some noise from outside my door so I got up to investigate, opened the door and ... closed it again because that was just odd. I opened it again, sure enough, there wasn't the corridor I expected but a high, vaulted octagonal room with a door in each side. The others had emerged from other doors (except the professor who just appeared and disappeared again). Astonishment and incredulity was written on everybody's faces, nobody knew what was going on. Oh, I should mention the people in the room were Robert, Thomas, the Reverend (who, for some reason was punched in the face by Robert, again), William, and I. No sign of Dunbar or the staff and no idea what was going on. There were two more doors, one that wouldn't open and another one.

I opened the door and on the other side ... was a huge vista of an ancient city, crumbling and partially overgrown like the Mayan cities when they were first discovered in the jungle. No-one around, though, just the vast city and some ... large thing flying overhead in the night sky. I closed the door, opened it again, it was still there.

I went back to my room to check a few things. Behind the window was utter blackness and the frame was stuck. I picked up my pocket watch to check the time and saw that the second hand was

moving very slowly indeed. I checked with the others and everybody had a different malfunction, Robert's was going a lot faster, Thomas' was even going backwards. The same applied to the clocks in our rooms. How peculiar!

There was nowhere we could go except our rooms, there was no exit to the rest of the house, the windows were blocked but there was the city. I was intrigued by it, anyway so I went to my room and got dressed. As I came back, Robert had opened the door to the city and was looking out with his binoculars. He seemed to look at the giant eagle or whatever it was and seemed to be quite shocked at what he saw. I finally wanted to get a good look, too so I took the binoculars and searched for the beast, thinking its head might find a good place above my fireplace back home. Now, forgive me if the next bit is a tad disjointed. What I saw couldn't be real, let's put it like that. It had the head of an eagle, sort of, and an almost human body but all wrong and tiny wings. That's what I remember.

I then remember a knocking on my room door and William coming into my room. For some reason I was *\*under\** my bed, wrapped in blankets and bathed in sweat.

That's when I had enough and suggested we all go to bed which we did. It took me a while to fall asleep again but I eventually did.

When I woke up, it was a bright, sunny morning. I opened the window and there was a nice breeze. Just a dream, then, but what a dream. I don't think I'd want another one like that...

## 2

Right, where were we? Ah yes, the morning after the dreadful nightmare. Everything outside the window looked fine and bright, well, at least there was an outside. There was a knock on the door. I opened it carefully, peeked around it and there was just a corridor and faithful Dunbar with a tray of tea, not some dreadful octagonal room. Quickly I got dressed and wandered downstairs to join the others (with exception of the Professor who refused to come out of his room and Thomas who would join us later when we had almost finished breakfast). Thomas looked more worse for wear than everybody else and apparently he "had fallen out of his window". Truth be told, his face looked as if he had... Added to that, his painting had changed again. In the sky there was a blob which was shaped curiously like the thing I had seen in my dream and I tried so much to banish from my mind...

Our little group established that we'd indeed all had the same nightmare and after a quick deliberation we decided to head down to the village.

Having arrived there we found a crowd gathered around the blacksmith's shop. Investigating, we heard that he apparently had jumped out of his window at night and fallen to his death. The Reverend went to speak to the wife while we tried to disperse the crowd and find out more. Not much more info was forthcoming, the constable only knew what the wife told him and the body was covered by a sheet on the floor. The doctor wasn't here yet as he had to be summoned from elsewhere on the island. Oh, while we were there we told the constable about the missing maid, Miss Fry.

The Reverend returned but had not much else to report. Apparently, the poor blacksmith had screamed in his sleep (which woke his wife) and then jumped out of bed and literally run through the window.

Our next stop was the post office where I sent a telegram to James Hill's estate to see what might

have become of him.

On our way back, we noticed a commotion by the ferry where several workers were arguing. Turned out the ferry's rudder had jammed in a way and the ferry would be going nowhere until it was repaired. That was our easy way off the island gone but we were sure we could organise a boat from somewhere if the need arose.

As lunchtime was getting close we decided to head to the pub for a drink and a bite and to debate how to proceed. The place was packed but we managed to get a drink and some really nice fish pie. While we were deliberating what to do next, I spotted a rather odd fellow, ugly as sin, who was quite clearly watching us. I motioned Dunbar to keep an eye on him and then we left. We walked across the road to the first guesthouse on our list. Our object: to find the mysterious Dr. Parsons who had to be staying somewhere. Luck was on our side as it was indeed the place he was staying (and paying by the day). Interestingly, we hadn't been the first ones to enquire after him, there had also been a stocky gentleman in a bowler hat with piercing blue eyes (the man, not the hat). We thanked the man and set off down to the docks again. Every now and then, I spotted the ugly fellow from the pub following us in a safe distance. OK.

Down by the docks we learned that the ferry's rudder was actually missing and needed to be replaced and they were trying to get an engineer from the mainland as the only person who could have fixed it was now dead (the blacksmith/mechanic). Conspiracy? Who knows?

As we didn't really have anything else to do, we returned to the castle, also to see what our shadow would be doing.

When Dunbar returned he reported that the ugly chap had followed us for some way but must have realised we returned to the castle and went back into town, down the docks and into a warehouse. That was our next lead.

As we were chatting back at the castle, Jenkins reported that a stocky gentleman in a bowler hat with piercing blue eyes (yes, I know) had enquired after William but was sent away because William had still been asleep. Mysteriouser and mysteriouser...

### 3

After a hearty dinner of pheasant casserole we decided that we had to know what was going on in the warehouse (which was near where those workers had shifted crates a couple of nights ago) so we got various things ready and then waited til after midnight before heading out.

We found the warehouse without running into anyone. The back door was locked with a chain and padlock but Robert managed to crack it with a crowbar. The door creaked open and we went in, Dunbar watching by the door with his trusty 6 iron.

The warehouse was, as far we could see with the light from our lanterns, packed with large shipping crates. While the others spread out to look around, Thomas and I had a look at the office to one side. The door was locked but Thomas knocked out a shard from the window, reached in (badly cutting his arm in the process) and unlocked the door. Inside we were greeted by the absence of any filing system whatsoever, just stacks and stacks of papers, most of which looked like shipping manifests but none were filled in properly. Some had a name on it but there was nothing really useful.

While we were searching through the papers, we heard shouting and noise from the other part of the warehouse so went out. Past one crate that had been prised open and seemed to contain boxes of wine, some fine French plonk, if I remember correctly, Chateaunoef du Pape, 1902, I believe. Further on, the others were gathered around a crate, which the Reverend was just closing again. Dunbar looked after Robert, who was leaning against a crate, an empty expression on his face, as if he'd just seen a ghost. The Reverend went on to describe a demon from hell with tentacles and teeth



and mouths and things. Usually, I would have laughed at him but after last night, I wasn't so sure anymore.

Anyway, that crate had curious markings on its side, not a language any of us knew but curiously similar to the pictograms on the back of Thomas' painting, on the bottom of the ivory statuette and, of course, on the palms of our hands. So I went back to the office to search for the relevant shipping manifest and by sheer chance found it! Not that it was any good to me because it was all written in that curious language but it was a clue!

Now things got a little hectic. Suddenly, Thomas came crashing through the door, almost knocking himself out on the floor and there was shouting and scuffling and flickering of light coming from further down the warehouse. We headed over there to find the others battling with another old and ugly chap. We joined the fray but none of us managed to connect a blow or at least make any kind of impression, the man was slippery as a snake! Finally, Robert got out his gun and the fight stopped. The man demanded an explanation as to why we were there and threatened us with the authorities, babbling about breaking and entering and we wanted to know what this was all about. Needless to say, nobody got an answer and before long, the ugly fellow suddenly grabbed me and off the fight went again. He pulled out something from his jacket, twisted it and threw it to the floor, upon which we were blinded by a searing painful light in which awful shapes seemed to float. It took us a while to come around again and return to where we left off. More scuffling until I finally managed to hit him across the arm with my walking stick in a fine Bartitsu move which brought him down. I don't know why he was so mad but before anyone could do anything, Thomas pointed Robert's revolver (which he had dropped after being kneed in the groin - ouch) at the chap's knee and fired, severing his lower leg. The shock was too much for him and the poor chap was clearly quite dead and had taken his secret to his not yet dug grave.

Dunbar suggested that leaving this place was a good idea but before we set off I thought the ugly fellow might have something on him that could help us so went through his pockets. I found a small, curious pouch with odd feathery drawstrings and a round stone thing with a metal cap, that looked a bit like the thing he threw to the ground and blinded us with.

As an afterthought, someone had the idea to burn down the warehouse, both to cover our tracks and to destroy what else was in there (like the thing in the one crate, apparently a monstrosity in a bell jar) and the living(?) coral thing in the other (which, I realise, I had declined to mention up until now) so fire was set to the paper in the office and we made our way out.

The fire would soon attract a crowd so we decided to split up. Dunbar and I stayed behind to see what happened, the others headed back to the castle. Well, to make this brief, I'm sorry to report that the villagers were quite well organised, set up a bucket chain (which Dunbar and I joined so as not to raise suspicion) and the fire was actually put out rather quickly before it could do much damage. After it was clear we could gain no more information from here, we returned to the castle as well.

Back at the castle, it was already very late at night so after Dunbar and the Reverend administered medical care to those who needed it (especially Thomas and Robert), we decided to retire for the night.

Just before I went to sleep, I looked into that curious pouch and found a number of odd, small stones. As it wasn't something I could immediately investigate, I decided it would have to wait til morning and turned off the light...

I woke up, turned on the light, got up, checked the window, inky blackness. Right, I thought, I'm dreaming again and who knows what'll happen. I rang the bell for Dunbar, got dressed and looked around a bit more.

Just as I opened the door to my room, Dunbar appeared on the other side. Interesting, so he was there this time... Beyond the door was, as expected not the castle corridor but a round room (unlike the octagonal one last night) with a high, vaulted ceiling and ten white doors set in the circular wall. A few of these were already open or opened and various figures emerged: William (with a shotgun, good man), Robert, Prof. Carter (who seemed to have recovered a bit), Thomas, and, curiously both Jenkins the Butler and Mrs. Black the cook (who had come out with a frying pan in hand but vanished inside again when she saw the odd room). The Reverend was still in his room as we could hear him pray. He would also not come out so we let him be.

That left one door which let ... to that ancient, ruined city under a night sky with a half moon. Prof. Carter seemed to have overcome his reservations and suggested we investigate. So he tied a rope around his waist and to a door handle and ventured out into the city. While the others were still arguing, I figured I could take a photo or two, just to prove what we've seen. I set up the camera, took two exposures of various lengths and put it away again. Then I followed the Professor into the city. I looked back and saw that we had come from a round tower, made, like the rest of the city, of large granite slabs which were crumbled and weathered. The top of the roof had collapsed inwards and the "door" from which we had come was just a doorway. Curiously, I could look through the half open door into what was the actual interior of the round tower in this, for want of a better word, world. I walked towards the door again and held my hand behind it but I couldn't see it! Confused, I gave up on the door and followed the rope towards the other tower, equally ruined, the professor had vanished into. At the doorway, I saw him fussing around a large, circular slab of granite. Prof. Carter had found an inscription: the ear symbol! Now that was unusual and everything we had experienced seemed to be connected. With the help of Dunbar, we rolled the piece of rock into "our" tower and Prof. Carter's room to be studied later but Prof. Carter made a quick rubbing of it.

Prof. Carter then conducted another experiment: he climbed up the outside of the tower and then down on the inside. I could see him through the almost closed door and he walked towards me and then he ... was sucked outwards and thrown to the ground. Very peculiar. Nobody understood this but when the door was open, we could go into the circular room which led to the our bedrooms and when the door was closed, we saw the inside of the tower but could not enter...

While we were having a look around the outside of the tower, various companions mentioned that they could hear some kind of music. Eventually the wind turned and I could hear it, too. It was undulating, almost like song but played by some sort of wind instrument. The closest style I could compare it to would have been Arabic/Middle Eastern/African but no description would fit. The music seemed to come from a larger building a good way off so after some discussion, we (that was all of us except the Reverend, William, Jenkins and the cook) decided to head there.

Long story short, we got there past another ruined tower and other equally dilapidated buildings, all built from large, finely cut and smooth granite slabs. There were also two streams in which a black, foul smelling water flowed. The big structure was on a raised area, a high wall ringed around a central circular building. There was a gap in the wall, flanked by two tall, dark, smooth stone cones. Unlike the rest of the city, all the parts were pristine and neither weathered nor crumbling.

The music had grown louder or at least more distinct but we could still not make out from where exactly it came from, other than the large structure. Prof. Carter, Dunbar and I circled the building anti-clockwise to get a better idea of its layout. Three quarters around the building, there was another gap in the wall, again flanked by those black cones.

Beyond it was the most peculiar sight: A large contraption which Dunbar, my trusted Scottish fellow, described as a bagpipe and that wasn't far off. It was an undulating, wheezing mound of soft stuff which had various bits, pipes and nozzles protruding from it and it was very clear that the music was coming from it.

Next to it stood two tall figures in grey robes wearing large crocodile masks which resembled the mask in William's collection very closely indeed. One of the figures was holding a long staff. As we looked on, the pitch of the music suddenly changed and rose in volume, the thing pulsating quicker. I'm still not sure if they spotted us or not but that was the time we decided that staying wasn't a good idea so we ran back to the front of the building where we had left the others.

We told them what we had seen but Prof. Carter clearly had not had enough yet so climbed the stairs up to the gap in the wall. I'm not quite sure what happened but he touched one of the stone cones and collapsed. The "music" was even worse now and surely those figures we saw early would soon come and get us.

Dunbar and I raced up and helped Prof. Carter. He was coming to and finally everyone had enough and we raced back to "our" tower as fast as we could. Apart from the music, there was also some screeching in the air which didn't bode well but we made it into the relative safety of the central chamber in our tower.

I wanted to take another photograph of the large building so grabbed the camera, went outside again, held the camera around the "corner" and shot another two exposures. There was some even louder screeching and one of those awful huge flapping things was bearing down on me. I do not know how I escaped but I made it into the chamber and closed the door. Nothing was coming through so I guess the thing just saw a ruined tower. Phew.

As we were recovering with a few drinks Dunbar had mixed, I remembered the odd stones I had found in the peculiar pouch the old man in the warehouse had on him. I took them out and showed them to the others. It was rather curious as at closer inspection, they seemed somewhat soft and elastic and Prof. Carter suggested they were some kind of marine plant. I took out my pocket knife and made an incision in one of them and some thickish liquid welled up through the cut and it actually smelled quite nice, almost like honey and also alcoholic, quite enticing. Prof. Carter dipped his finger in the liquid and tried it! He didn't fall over or react in any other bad way but said that it was very nice indeed so I tried some as well and it was indeed rather lovely. We'd soon had finished what had been in this shell but resisted opening any others.

There was nothing else we felt we could do and we were also rather sleepy so we went back to our beds and slept.

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When we woke the next morning, everything was back to normal but the large circular slab was gone from Carter's room and the rubbing was just a sheet of paper.

During breakfast, Jenkins brought some sad news. William's father, the colonel, had passed away during the night. William obviously wanted not to be disturbed but invited us to remain at the castle. After breakfast, I developed the film and the four exposures were completely white. Nothing, no evidence of what we had found during our dream. Bother.

A discussion about what it all meant broke out (shared hallucinations, evil influence from the artifacts, sheer randomness etc.) but there wasn't really any point so we decided to see what could be done. After all, we still had a few telegrams to chase and a mysterious Dr. Parsons to find.

Hence, Prof. Carter, Dunbar and I walked into town.

At the post office, I received a telegram from James Hill's valet reporting that James had left his estate a day before the celebration. Now I was worried that something had happened to him but there was no way of finding out what and where, not at least until there was a way of getting to the mainland with the ferry being out. Prof. Carter enquired if there was a possibility we could hire a fishing boat to take letters to the mainland to be posted there and the lovely lady recommended the "Mermaid".

As we left the post office we were approached by a man, stocky fellow, piercing blue eyes, bowler hat.

Now there was a coincidence. He introduced himself as Jim (a likely name), erstwhile valet to one Dr. Parsons (hello!) and claiming that Dr. Parsons had stolen certain artifacts from a secret and old tribe in Africa, artifacts we recognised as the crocodile mask, the ivory statuette and the box with the ball.

Meanwhile we had decamped to a secluded tea room and continued our discussion. It seemed that William had been used in some way to bring the items to England. "Jim" claimed that the items were the property of that tribe and that it was his duty to return them. We gave no clear indication that we would be willing to hand over the items (if back in our possession as the box was currently missing), despite Jim urging us that it would be a very good idea. He also asked us several times if we were sleeping well...

Then I had a strange thought and tried something: I moved my hands about so that Jim could see the ear symbol branded into my left palm. Jim reacted by scratching his neck so I could see the very same symbol on the side of his neck, underneath the collar. Right, this meant that there was a connection, just not what kind of connection, friendly or unfriendly.

We left it at that and Jim said we could find him if we left a message with the barman at the tavern and left. After Dunbar had swiped Jim's teacup (for fingerprinting, apparently), we left a good tip and left as well.

At the guesthouse we enquired about Dr. Parsons, only to learn that he had checked out the day before and wanted to leave the island so we made our way to the harbour to see if he had taken one of the boats. The harbourmaster was eager to help us and told us that a man fitting Parsons' description had enquired about passage on a boat and had been pointed at the Mermaid. We thanked the man and made our way to the pier where the Mermaid was made fast. The fisherman was sorting out his nets so we asked him about posting letters which he was willing to do for a small donation (Prof. Carter sent off samples of the obscure writing and I sent filings from the ball and the empty pod to be analysed). We also asked him about a passenger he might have had the day before and he told us the most peculiar story: Dr. Parsons had indeed paid him to take him across to the mainland but after spending some time in the cabin - he had a curious box with him he was stroking(!), obviously this was our box - he demanded to be brought back to the island, being clearly very upset about something...

So, Jim hadn't been lying and Parsons was really after the artifacts. Why only the box and not the others were stolen was a mystery, though. In any case, we made our way back to the castle to pass on our news to the others to discuss matters. We realised that the disappearance of the maid (or rather, non-reappearance after her day off) could be explained by Parsons hiring her to steal the artifacts and then disposing of her, poor thing. She'd certainly had access to the cellar and everywhere else in the house.

During our absence, Thomas and Robert had hatched another plan: He had built a contraption consisting of a long piece of string tied to Thomas' bed on one end and then trailing through a light fitting in the ceiling to the drawing room downstairs where an empty tin with a spoon was attached.

The idea was to have someone wait downstairs during the night and when he woke up in the dream world, he would pull on the string so the person downstairs could check on him in his room.

## 5

As it was only late afternoon we (including the Reverend who had come out from his room to join us again) thought we could try and find a lead on Dr. Parsons so headed down to the pub. It was quite empty but “Smelly” Jim was there (the old mad codger who thought he could smell odd things in the churchyard) propping up one end of the bar and muttering to himself. Prof. Carter went and talked to him. I asked the landlord about Parsons and while he hadn't been to the pub in a while (since the day he tried to leave) he had asked about anyone enquiring about him. I obviously asked the landlord to not mention us (and gave him a good tip). Then I spotted Jim (bowler hat, piercing blue eyes, you remember the chap), shall we call him “Bowler Hat Jim”, lurking outside the window so I went outside and followed him around the corner. We had a brief conversation about Dr. Parsons and that none of us had been able to spot him. He also insisted that the box and the ball belonged together and that as soon as we had them, he would take them back to their rightful owners. I pride myself a good judge of character and I slowly began to think that Jim's concerns are genuine and that we should trust him. We'll see. Anyway, we also agreed to meet the following morning with the aim to find Dr. Parsons, possibly in one of the abandoned houses on the island.

Back in the pub a mad plan was hatched with Smelly Jim. The Professor wanted to do some excavating in the churchyard both to find the source of the mysterious smell (which he claimed to be able to smell, too) and to have a look at that curious dilapidated tomb. Jim was obviously part of the plan as he would be able to locate the source of the smell best. So it was decided to meet up with Smelly Jim by the church after we'd gone back to the castle to get tools and, well, weapons might come in handy, too.

Back at the castle, everything was in order, even William was up and about but understandably still under shock. While the others got ready and then headed to the church, I decided to stay behind and keep William company. We enjoyed a fine supper and talked about our adventures which seemed to cheer him up a bit.

Just as a rather nice blackberry crumble was served, there was a rucous outside and the front door was thrown open. I had a look and spotted Thomas, Robert, the Reverend and the Professor just throwing the door shut and bolting it as well as instructing Jenkins to shutter the windows. They all looked shocked, especially Professor Carter, and were shouting and babbling about abominations and the walking dead. It took a while to get a coherent thought out of them but it finally became clear that they dug at the church wall and found a very deep grave, covered by the original front stone of that tomb face down. There was a well-preserved wooden lid that had suddenly shattered and a hand had emerged at which point even the Professor started to run. Everyone was accounted for and unhurt, thankfully. Smelly Jim had apparently fled towards the village, to the pub most likely. We weren't really worried that he might blab about some of us digging at the church and even if he did, it was unlikely that anyone would believe him.

So another mad plan was hatched. After making sure the house was secure, we (William's friends without William or the house staff) took all the weapons we could find, lights etc. and headed towards the church. Robert made a big fuss about ordering us around to make sure we wouldn't shoot each other and cover as much ground as possible. We arrived at the church without seeing anything on our way but there was a flicker of light in the church and the sound of broken glass when we got closer so we hurried towards the churchyard.

It all gets a bit muddled from here so excuse me if things aren't quite in order. Outside the church, we spotted a ... thing with red glowing eyes by the old tomb but it disappeared before we got a good look at it. There was some noise from inside so we went around and inside. There was no one inside but the church wasn't in a good state, various windows were broken and things were strewn about. We split up and a good look around and just as I wanted to move the curtain to the clocktower aside, I heard a shout from behind me. Another one of those things had dropped from the ceiling and attacked Carter, biting him in and almost through the upper arm. It was an ugly thing, human in shape but not more than skin and bones, maggot-eaten and horrible, with those eyes glowing with an unholy fire. There was a scuffle and then a shotgun blast and the thing fled out of the window.

Quite flustered, we searched the church and found what was left of the pastor all over his quarters. Poor man. What were those things and why on Earth did Carter dig them up? We did not know but now had to deal with them. The grave was outside the church and apparently there were still more of them in there so Dunbar poured a can of petrol into it and threw a match. After a sizeable fireball, we all fled because we really didn't want to get caught causing another fire. Supporting Professor Carter between us, we made our way back to the castle. We heard voices and saw lights coming up from the village so we extinguished our lights and continued in darkness. We arrived at the castle without incident and nobody followed us, either.

Back and safe in the drawing room, we pondered what to do and decided to wait it out. After the events of the evening, nobody had any desire to investigate anything should we wake up in the odd place again so we agreed on camping out in the drawing room, only Jenkins and the cook went to their quarters. Sure enough, shortly after we'd fallen asleep we were awake again. The main door to the lobby was shut but the other one opened into a square room, with one door each for the servants and one that most likely led to the broken city. We shut the door and spend time playing cards, dominoes and parlour games until we fell asleep again.

## 6

Morning dawned and all was back to normal. Well, at least with the house. Dunbar reported that smoke was coming from the church and a lot of people were milling around there. Thankfully, no mob bearing torches and pitchforks had yet turned up at our doorstep so we seemed safe from suspicion. Until there was a knock on the door. True enough it was the constable, clearly distraught but he didn't come with accusations but was mainly concerned with our well-being and if we had seen anything. Even Prof. Carter's injury was explained away with an attack by a wild dog. Now comes the best bit. The current theory as to the cause of the explosion at the church and its partial destruction was an invasion of revolutionary "Red Bolsheviks" bent on the disruption of rural life on the island. Also, various people were injured and some disappeared after townsfolk investigated the church.

During the morning, we split up to look after various clues. Dunbar continued his attempt of losing lots of money at the bookmakers so he might pose as a possible victim for Dr. Parsons (someone in need of money to hire), Prof. Carter and Thomas visited the missing maid's fiancée (who didn't know any more than before but had seen Parsons at the bookmakers where he worked once) and Robert and I met up with Blue Eye Jim.

There were far too many people in and around the pub (the whole town was up and about and discussing the night's happenings it seems) so we chose a little cafe further away. Jim still had no clue about Parsons' whereabouts but some idea as to what we encountered at the church. He called them "the Restless Dead". We agreed to another meeting the next day.

There was some hubbub at the docks, people shouting and pointing at one of the boats but it was time to meet the others at the pub so we went there first.

Dunbar had the worst news. A little boy had come up to him saying he needed to show him something at the beach. Turns out it was the maid's body, possibly with a broken neck. Sad news indeed...

He also found out that Parsons had bought quite a lot of provisions and supplies and things like blankets, a mirror, a clothes brush etc. which supported our theory that he had holed up somewhere like a barn, one of the beach huts or even one of the holiday cottages.

The excitement at the docks was due to one of the boats being stolen. Later, we assumed it had been Smelly Jim and the theory that the "Red Zombies" had stolen the boat (the Restless Dead not really known for sailing skills) was dropped.

Back at the castle, the doctor visited, had a good look at Prof. Carter's arm and was extremely surprised at how well his arm had healed already. We then remembered that the good professor had eaten one of those pods from the little bag the dead man at the warehouse had on him. The stuff inside tasted really nice and it seems it has healing properties, too.

As we didn't want to poke around too much and possibly draw unwanted attention to ourselves, we decided to lie low and just relax for an evening. There was also Prof. Carter's arm and Thomas didn't feel well, either (after falling out of his window a few nights ago) so a good rest would do all of us some good. If there was rest...

Oh, I almost forgot, I had a look at Thomas' painting and the winged beast was now sitting on the "tower".

The camping out in one room didn't change anything last night so many of us slept in their own rooms. Sure enough, we woke in a differently configured house with a central room into which all the doors led.

Prof. Carter couldn't be dissuaded from exploring the city beyond one of the doors so we joined him. Oddly, this time we emerged from the tower closest to the central building. The odd and horrible music was still faintly in the air, emanating from the huge central building. We searched a few of the buildings but nothing but a serpent's head carved in a stone. Everything seemed to be quiet and empty so we moved further towards the central area to have a look at one of the bigger buildings. One of the taller ones had some passing resemblance to the "tower" in the painting. Just as in the painting, that giant winged beast was sitting on top and as we looked on, it took off and swooped towards us. We tried to flee, some of us more successful than others and Dunbar decided to face the beast and shoot it with our hunting rifle. He missed, the thing soared down, swinging its huge spiky tail at Dunbar but thankfully missing him, if barely.

The thing soared up again for another pass, Dunbar fired another shot and hit, definitely injuring the foul beast which was now screaming in agony! I was finally in a good position and emptied both barrels of my shotgun, the combined shot tearing off one of its leathery wings making it lose its bearings and fall instead of fly.

Now there was a problem, the thing was coming straight down at where my man Dunbar was standing. I was still a bit dazed from the recoil of my double blast so was unable to help but Robert ran up and tackled Dunbar to the ground, out of the way of the crashing beast. Phew. The vile monster crashed to the ground and didn't get back up again but was still (breathing?) (alive?) howling a little but Robert stepped up again and emptied both barrels of his shotgun into the thing's head. It spluttered and was finally still.

Thomas had just been standing there staring but suddenly he went mad. He screamed and gibbered, throwing himself to the ground, writhing around and trying to dig and eat his way into the hard,

stone slabs. The poor arts dealer had to be grabbed by several of us and eventually he calmed down.

Not wanting to hang around much longer and possibly attracting the attention of another one of those things, we hurried back to the tower and the room connected (hopefully, still) to our reality. We were all positively exhausted and retired to our rooms.

## 7

It was the morning after our dream battle with the winged beast. I woke up, and the lights didn't work. That was a bit odd but nothing out of the ordinary. I opened the curtains and there was a bright, wonderful morning outside. Phew. As I was taking a shower, a polite knock and cough from Dunbar reminded me we wanted to lie low in the morning in order to possibly draw out anyone who might be either watching the castle or even try and get in. We positioned ourselves strategically around the castle. I was up in the tower where I had a wonderful view and should have seen anyone approach with my telescope but I failed to notice anything and neither did the others. Turns out later that someone had forced the back door to the kitchen but apparently didn't get any further. The dumb waiter was a possibility but only a child could have fit in there. Nevertheless, we searched the castle but couldn't find anyone nor anything missing.

While Robert and Thomas waited for the police to arrive, the Professor, the Reverend, excuse me, Alex Jones, adventure writer, as he's now to be called (after running into serious issues with his faith, he had burned his collar and bible and sent a resignation letter to his bishop and considering what we witnessed, nobody was surprised), Dunbar and I headed into town to meet up with Blue Eyed Jim. He'd not had any further clues as to Dr. Parsons' whereabouts so we decided to search the beach huts. On our way we stopped at the post office to check if any telegrams had arrived and indeed they had. Professor Jonathon Templeton of London University had a look at the metal filings from the ball and found out that they consisted of "several complex alloys". The empty pod (which used to contain the lovely sweet rejuvenating nectar) was apparently "similar to a whelk pod but of dissimilar structure". I guess I have to talk to him when I'm back in London. Professor Carter received no further information as to the identity of the symbols (from the painting, the statuette and the shipping manifest) but a colleague had seen something similar in a book in Paris and sent off for it. Let's see what comes from that.

Anyway, by the beach we had a good look around and I spotted some footprints leading off the jetty to one of the huts which was locked and shuttered. After a few failed attempts to pick the lock or flip the latch of the shutters from the outside, brute force finally made the door give up and we found a lair. A primitive bed, some tins and remnants of food and other bits were a sure sign somebody had been hiding here and after searching thoroughly we found ... the box. Now it was clear it was Dr. Parsons' hideout. We also found a map which had three locations marked: the castle, a certain warehouse and a hillside not far from the castle. Remembering the location, we added the church as a forth to lead the trail off us and onto the "Bolshevik revolutionaries".

So we picked up the box, headed back to the castle and told the others what we had found. It was decided to put the ball into the box and then back in the safe in the hope that might help us sleep better in the night. I pointed out the hill on a map to William and he said that it was near a piece of woodland where they usually hunted for pheasants but there wasn't anything of particular interest except a few shacks. Nevertheless, we armed ourselves as we had some idea that we might finally find Parsons and marched off towards the hill.

Sure enough, when we got there, I saw some movement near one of the shacks and Dunbar spotted



someone running into the woods. It was quickly decided that we split. While some of us tried to follow the figure into the woods, the others would hurry back to the castle which was pretty much unguarded as only Jenkins and the cook were there. The Professor, Dunbar and I followed the trail we eventually picked up and the others went back the way we had come. It took us quite some time to find the trail and we spotted a running figure now and then but we never managed to catch up. When it was finally clear that he was headed for the castle, it was too late. As we found out, it had indeed been Dr. Parsons who had burst into the drawing room, demanded that Jenkins tell him where the box was but, good man as he was, didn't tell him anything and took a bullet into the chest for it. He was still alive and it looked like he would make it after Alex had patched him up. We searched the house and looked outside but Parsons was nowhere to be found. Nothing was missing, either.

The police arrived shortly afterwards and we told him our version of what had happened, stressing that it had been someone with a definite Russian air about him (I have no idea where that thought had come from but blaming all on the imaginary revolutionaries seemed to be a good idea at the time) who demanded Jenkins hand over valuables. After offering to send for a locksmith to have the back door repaired (which William gladly accepted) and to leave an officer behind for our safety (which we declined), the police left again. The doctor came and took care of Jenkins. To our relief the bullet had missed his lungs and he would pull through, provided he got enough rest. Jenkins protested and wanted to return to his duties but William would have none of it and ordered him to bed where he stayed. Good man.

While the cook (who had to be rescued from the Gazebo at the back of the castle, was unhurt, just a bit shaken) was on her feet again and prepared dinner in the kitchen, we sat and made plans which would last well over and past dinner. In the end, we decided that leaving the island and moving to London would be the best idea. It would be the best place to continue our research into the things we found and if Parsons was still on our tail, we might be able to catch him there, too. The plan was to hide the box (with the ball inside) in my Silver Ghost which Dunbar and I would take on the first ferry and then onto London. The others would follow on the next two ferries as only one vehicle would fit and eventually, we would meet in London. I was positive I could secure some accommodation for the others and both William and I prepared letters of recommendation for the Old Bore's Club so we could relay messages through there and have a secure place to meet.

Exhausted as we were, we soon retired to our rooms where - finally - we all had a full night's sleep, no shared dreams, no individual nightmares, just blissful sleep. Putting the ball in the box apparently did indeed protect us from its effects.

We got up early in the morning, packed final things in the car and headed to the docks where we secure passage on the first ferry. We crossed safely and were soon on the road to London. After a while, we noticed that we were followed by a truck but no matter what Dunbar did, we didn't manage to shake it, at least not while we were on the road.

## 8

As we were driving towards London, we noticed a truck following us. It must have had a fiendish driver because despite all the tricks Dunbar tried to shake it, it would keep up with us. I think I will need to write a stern letter to the Rolls Royce company that one of their finest cars was quite unable to leave a simple truck behind...

Anyway, eventually an opportunity presented itself. Just at a turnoff to Bristol there was a petrol station where we managed to distract and finally escape the truck as they needed to fill up and we didn't.

We made it into London without any further vehicles following us, checked into my flat and then trundled over to The Old Bore's Club to pass on the letters of recommendation so our new friends could join. The idea was to make the club our temporary meeting and hiding place. There was good security so the place was ideal to leave the box in my gun cabinet before we would move it to a bank vault the following day.

While waiting for the others to arrive, I spent some time catching up with friends at the Club and hearing the latest gossip.

Thomas, Alex and Jim hadn't been followed but Jeremy and Robert had. Curiously, they managed to shake their tail at the same place we did, the petrol station.

In the evening, the new members were introduced to the club's members during a rather merry restaurant visit in Soho. Nobody had any objections, so they all are now members.

During the next few days we chased up various leads via our personal contacts. Professor Carter wasn't able to find out more about the ominous book that could possibly tell us more about the script in which the shipping manifest and other inscriptions were written as the university in Paris where it's kept was unwilling to lend it so he needs to travel to Paris to find the book. Maybe I'll join him, I haven't been to Paris in quite some time.

The scientists at London University who I sent the filings to seemed rather helpless when Dunbar and I visited. They had conducted various tests and found that the metal was complete inert. It didn't even react to acids or bases. They also found a rather curious property involving electricity: When an electric current was applied, the filing would amplify it by 25% while itself remaining completely unchanged. The pod (that had been filled with the refreshing honey-like liquid) was still a mystery but seemed to be of maritime origin. I left the third and final pod at the laboratory for further studies.

Via John Richardson, an old friend who's a member of the Athenæum Club, I managed to get in touch with the "mad inventor" Matthews (recommended by William before we left the Isle of Wight) who might be able to help us finding out what the ball is all about. This Matthews had been involved in all kinds of experiments, had invented the "aerophone" for communication between aeroplanes and the ground and other both remarkable and curious things. His latest effort was what he called the "Death Ray", apparently an electric device that can disable machinery from a distance. There is to be a demonstration for the press on the 20th and we managed to get an invitation.

## 9

We had driven up to Stansted the night before and spend the night at the local inn so we could arrive at Mr. Matthews' estate in time for the demonstration. There was a bit of snow in the morning, possibly a bit odd this time of year but not unusual. This would get weirder later...

We arrived at Matthews' estate in style in the Rolls and had a look around. A larger area had been cleared of trees, in the center a table with a metal box was set up and further a rather big and odd contraption was set up whose function was quite unfathomable from the distance. It was roughly cone shaped (lying on its side) and had various controls and gauges attached. A cable led to another area with a pile of sandbags. A fellow we had passed on the way to the estate arrived as well. Turns out it was Julian Knight, reporter for the Daily Star. He asked us who we were and we introduced ourselves. Mr. Knight told us a little more about his expectations. Apparently, the "Death Ray" as he liked to call it, was to be "the next weapon of the century". The reporter also suspected Mr. Matthews might be after the government prize that was offered to anyone who could come up with a method of shooting down zeppelins. In the last demonstration, Matthews stopped an engine from afar.

Then Mr. Matthews himself came up to greet us and explained that the metal box contained some gunpowder which would be ignited from a distance by the “death ray” or, more scientifically, a field of charged particles that would travel through the air from the device to the target without wires. Apart from the apparent range (500 yards) of the device, Matthews would not divulge any more details of his invention.

He then asked us to stay behind the felled tree and proceeded to the sandbagged area where he busied himself with a number of cables and clamps. With the final clamp in place there was an almighty explosion as the metal box was torn apart and a black mushroom cloud rose into the sky. Quite an impressive display! We applauded and were then invited inside for tea and cakes.

After a bit of a chat from which we couldn't really learn any more about the “death ray”, I touched on our reason to visit Matthews in the first place.

When I showed him a filing of the curious metal, he was most interested and conducted a number of tests one of which involved throwing tiny fragments of the stuff into a flame which caused a marvellous flash of heat that temporarily blinded us all but thankfully harmed no-one. Quite impressed with the metal's properties, Mr. Matthews had similar results when applying an electric current as Prof. Templeton had at London University. Matthews obviously wanted to know the source and we handed over the ball. The mad scientist immediately concluded that the “weld line” between the two halves was of the same material and found it quite extraordinary. Experiments involving weighing the ball both in and out of the box (the box would weigh the same regardless whether the ball was inside or not) led to attempts of putting other objects inside which had not only similar results regarding the weight but some entirely new ones as well: it looked like that anything placed inside the box for a short while would instantly freeze. A most curious development which sadly didn't really help us in finding out what it was all about.

As we reacted negatively to Matthews' suggestion of trying to open the ball (the memories were still too strong in our minds), he suggested we visit a colleague of his, a Dr. Pike who had been working on X-Rays and might find a way of looking inside the ball without destroying it.

We thanked the man and drove to our next destination, Dr. Pike's estate. Curiously, the closer we came (he lived quite a way outside a village a few miles away), the colder it became and soon there was snow on the road. There was even more snow on the driveway towards the house and it was eventually so heavy that Dunbar and a few others went outside with shovels to make a way for the Rolls while I remained behind the wheel. Even curiously, there soon was not only snow but also a large number of bluish mushrooms in various sizes from small ones growing on tree trunks to one a foot across that grew in the middle of the driveway. This was dispatched and eventually we reached the house. Everything was covered in snow, ice and mushrooms of various sizes as if it had been freezing and snowing and the house had been abandoned for weeks, not just hours. There was a snow-covered shape in front of the house which turned out to be a Rolls. While others searched the car (uncovering a body of a certain Nigel Simms in the process), I made for the front door. Nobody answered our knocks so we opened the door and were greeted by a frost-covered corridor in which more mushrooms grew. How could a house get so bad that mushrooms grow all over it and how on Earth could it freeze inside when it hadn't really been freezing recently? This required investigation.

Armed with lanterns and shotguns or rifles, we searched the ground floor of the house which consisted of a drawing room/library with a book on “Fungi of the Western Hemisphere” out on a table but nothing else remarkable, a dining room and a kitchen. Like in the corridor, ice and mushrooms everywhere and the more organic an area was, the more and bigger mushrooms grew. Dunbar tried to light a fire in the dining room. First it wouldn't catch at all and even with a generous helping of petrol, it would only burn feebly. Very curious.

We were just about to go on when there was an ear-splitting, high and low pitched screeching coming from two floors up. We raced up the stairs ready for anything and when we reached the top

had to hack our way through a veritable forest of mushrooms first.

Up ahead was a bedroom filled with mushrooms and what could barely be made out as a body on the bed but we couldn't see the source of the screech so carried on. Prof. Carter tried to break open the door when there was another screech so loud and jarring that I thought my head would explode. Some of the others seemed to fare even worse, complaining of being very cold and being quite distraught.

For some reason I'm a bit unsure of the exact sequence of events that followed, possibly because it was all a bit much to take in and quite disturbing, too so I'll put together what I can remember.

Behind the door Carter had tried to pry open was another bedroom, equally covered in mushrooms but there was also some sort of large spherical pod, broken open. I then remember that we all ran downstairs and outside to see a huge thing burst through the roof of the house and hover there for a while. It had flippers and tentacles and was pink and insect-like, unlike anything we'd ever seen not even in that odd cyclopean city we had visited in our dreams. Robert made as if to raise his gun and then the thing shot into the sky at incredible speed and was gone in an instant.

At the sight of the thing, Carter started gibbering in an unusual, ululating language which sounded a bit like Arabic or Egyptian but it was impossible to glean any meaning from it. After he had calmed down a bit, the professor said that "there were voices in my head".

Alex, Robert and I quickly searched the rest of the house, finding crumpled notes ripped out from a notebook in the study. The only other room was a darkroom that didn't contain anything useful but one photo of the other bedroom. Curiously, the odd spherical thing was not in the photo, just an empty space where it should have been.

As by this time it was completely dark, we decided the best way to proceed was to go back to the Rolls (where we warmed up), return to the village and stay the night at the inn. We also took a number of mushroom samples with us which Prof. Carter packed well in ice and snow to preserve them as they seemed to melt in the warmth. Thankfully, Carter's idea of trying to preserve the mushroom sample in the box was voted off as nobody wanted to repeat the experience of waking up somewhere else.

I had an appointment with the University's biology department the following day where we might learn more if the mushroom survived...

## 10

The next morning, we all awoke afresh having had no bad dreams at night. It was still a bit chilly outside but quite a nice day. When everyone (with exception of Alex who had taken to the bottle again) had gathered for breakfast I quickly recapped what I had gathered from Dr. Pike's notes which I had read before going to sleep.

The man had only recently (a few months ago) acquired the estate just outside Elsenham and moved in with his intended wife, Emma. One morning, he found an odd blue mushroom and decided to study it. He did various experiments with it and managed to grow and multiply it. The mushrooms were rather cold but when left in a warm place, would melt completely until only a bluish fluid remained. Eventually he was so obsessed with these mushrooms that he neglected his fiancé who left him when she had enough. After Dr. Pike found another, bigger mushroom, things started to get really strange. He claimed to hear sounds and songs in his head and the mushroom he had planted in his spare room turned into a sphere of sorts (which we had seen broken open). The diary also mentioned that the mushrooms couldn't be photographed until Dr. Pike accidentally spilled some of

the mushroom fluid into the developer. Then the photos would come out. Another point of note was that the mushroom fluid emanated "a radiation similar to X-Rays" according to one of his colleagues, Roger Coles, who still had some mushroom juice.

By this point, the diary became more and more disjointed, he was only rambling about mushrooms being everywhere, the cold and "the song inside my head" and the thing in the pod calling out to him. The last page only consisted of a few words among the undecipherable scribbles about needing sleep, the cold and the plan to escape.

After some debating, a plan was hatched. Prof. Carter and I would visit the local priest to find out more about Pike while the rest would go back to his estate to search it more thoroughly during daytime and possibly find some more clues.

The church was just opposite the Coach&Horses and Gavin the pastor was willing enough to talk to us and invited us in to tea and biscuits. We explained we had wanted to visit our friend Dr. Pike and congratulate him on his wedding plans but had found the house deserted. We didn't learn much more other than Dr. Pike hadn't been seen for two months and his future wife leaving him around that time and returning to London.

As we were talking, we saw a van pull up outside the inn and stepping out was no other than ... Dr. Parsons, our nemesis, who then entered the inn. It wasn't long before the evil Doctor came out again, got into the van and shot off.

We quickly made our excuses and bade the pastor farewell, rushed over to the inn to find out that it had indeed been a Dr. Parsons who had claimed to be a friend of ours and inquired after our whereabouts. The poor barman obviously told him that we were most likely at Pike's place. Some debating later, we managed to convince the landlord to lend us two horses which turned out to be rather sluggish mares. It took us ages to get to Pike's estate at nothing better than a trot. Hoping it wouldn't be too late, we spurred on our horses and eventually got there. The van we had seen earlier was there as were several people and some of our friends, some armed with shotguns, others with clubs and a figure bent into the boot of my car. Then there was a white flash, I felt an odd rushing sensation and a burning pain inside my head and then it was dark...

When I came to, I was ... in that cyclopean city we had previously visited in our dreams ... I wanted to get up but heard a voice threatening to shoot me. The voice sounded close so I stayed put. Then I heard a horse whinny and galloping past very close to my head, a gurgling scream and some rather wet sounding thuds. The thug had been trampled to death by Prof. Carter's horse!

As I said, we were in that dream city and there were also some of Parsons' henchmen, Thomas, Prof. Carter and Dunbar as well as my Rolls. Robert and Parsons were fighting a bit further away and there was more scuffling going on, several shots were fired and punches thrown.

It was all a bit hectic and I was still rather disoriented from my passing out but eventually, Robert knocked out Parsons (after receiving and surviving a shotgun blast into his back) who then dropped the box, the ball and a book he had been holding. Suddenly, one of those flying beasts came swooping in, grabbed Parsons and took off with him.

I think what happened next was that Robert put the ball back into the box. There was another flash and we were back in front of Pike's house. We, meaning everyone except Dunbar. My faithful companion of many years was gone, stuck back in the dream world, most likely. Prof. Carter put the ball back into the box but nothing happened.

One of the thugs was left so I tied him up with his belt and knocked him one with the shotgun I had taken from the trampled thug.

Robert was in a bad state, not just was his back badly bloodied from the shotgun blast but it looked like one of Parsons' punches had dislocated his jaw so we carried him and the thug into the Rolls and raced back into the village. The inn's landlord showed us the way to the local doctor's, who took care of Robert's wounds and had a look at the thug, too.

The police was called and we explained that we had surprised a number of people breaking into

Pike's house and car and had to defend ourselves against the thugs.

With Dunbar gone and Robert out of the picture for a while we reconvened at the pub, trying to figure out what to do.

Prof. Carter had been busy trying to read the book Dr. Parsons had dropped but only managed to decipher some of the sections in Latin which were still a lot of gobbledigook talking about powers and dreams and walls and things. It was all quite incomprehensible.

What now? I seriously don't know. What I really want to do now is go back to the dream world and try and find Dunbar. Go to sleep with the ball outside the box to recreate the situation back on the Isle of Wight seems to be the only possibility for doing that so we might try that tonight. I hope I can persuade the others.

## 11

Back at the inn, Robert was made as comfortable as possible and the rest of us quickly agreed to attempt to rescue Dunbar by sleeping while the ball was out of the box. We quickly prepared and then went to sleep in the same room, not bothering to get undressed.

True enough, a distant screeching woke us up but looking out of the window was a bit of a shock. The now familiar cyclopean cityscape was clearly visible outside the window... Checking outside the door, we found the inn's first floor corridor and the guest from down the corridor running screaming and then falling down the stairs. He had hit his head badly and was unconscious so Prof. Carter and I carried him upstairs to his room, put him on his bed and closed the door again. Downstairs, the door to the inn was oddly changed, it and the wall half fused into one of those buildings in the strange city. However, the door worked and we were able to enter the city. Nothing had changed much except that there were now two moons in the sky! It took us a while to get our bearings but we soon found the place where we had last been, coming across the remains of a horse's carcass on the way. Pike's car was still there but almost destroyed with various claw marks visible. We looked around for a while and also found two bloody smears on the ground, one of which was identified as the remains of my faithful erstwhile companion, Dunbar. I'm not quite sure what followed as I was in a bit of state after this realisation but I gather Prof. Carter collected the remains, we walked back to the building from which we entered the city, went upstairs to our room and Prof. Carter put the ball back into the box. For some reason, we all thought this was a good idea at the time until we felt that odd wrenching pain again. When I came to, everybody was there except for Carter... He mustn't have made it through, just like Dunbar... Going back to sleep didn't work (when I woke up again, I was still in the real world). As it looked like we had to wait til the next night, we decided it was time to head back to London. I had to make arrangements with Dunbar's agency and there was an appointment at the university to keep. Access to the strange city seemed to be possible wherever ball and box were so it didn't matter if we tried in London next time.

Back in London, Robert rested while I contacted Dunbar's agency and dealt with his matters and Thomas visited the university. The professors there had conducted various experiments with the metal filings from the ball and their basic conclusion was that the material was a catalyst or accelerant that would greatly enhance any chemical or electrical reaction to the point that during one experiment involving acids, the lab was destroyed. Thankfully, nobody was injured. The pod (containing the honeylike substance) was some part of an organism similar to a whelk. The liquid inside had regenerative properties or simply accelerate biological processes in a similar way the ball filings accelerated chemical reactions.

There also had been a message from William at the club, directing me to a London address where I would find a Silas Torrance who would apparently be able to help with our questions. Thomas accompanied me there (a B&B as it turned out) and we met this Torrance character who turned out to be a steamer captain who used to ply his trade along the Athi and Tana Rivers in Kenya. He was a likeable fellow so we soon got talking. It turned out he had met mysterious Jim (Parsons' alleged former valet) on one of his trips and had seen the ear symbol as well. Sadly, this didn't bring us any further than the indication that the tribe who Jim had been talking about and might be the origin of the box/ball was located in that area rather than South Africa (where William had picked up the box).

Mr. Torrance (who insisted we call him Skipper) seemed to be quite taken with our tale and fate and offered to help us search for Prof. Carter. Good man.

After some considerable discussion as to where we should go (we didn't want to risk dragging the club's residents into the dream city like we had the inn's), a plan was hatched to use one of the huts in Hyde Park, surely abandoned at this time of night. We made our way over the fence, found a hut (looked like storage for one of the music pavillions) and Thomas managed to pick the lock. Inside we made a few makeshift beds, took the ball out of the box and went to sleep. When we woke up, we were in the dream world, Skipper screaming. I realised we forgot to tell him that the first time usually involved nightmares of sorts and pain as the ear symbol was burned into one's palm. Oh well, he didn't seem to be too bothered by it.

We opened the door and tried to find our bearings. The two moons were a bit closer to each other than the night before and possibly the odd light skewed our vision as it took us quite a while before we found the building we had entered from the inn. We looked around for a while and soon enough found Prof. Carter hiding behind some ruins, alive and well! As we had no reason to stay around for much longer and possibly fall prey to one of those screeching beasts, we made our way back to where we had come from, again with some difficulty - blast this odd light! - but eventually we found the "hut" again. We went back to sleep and ... woke up with birds singing in Hyde Park, everyone accounted for. As the park opened we gradually made our way out without raising suspicion. Phew.

## 12

After our night out in the dream city and the successful recovery of Prof. Carter, we headed back to the Club and spent a week to relax and recover, look after personal business and make plans for our next step to uncovering the secrets of the artifacts we seemed to be stuck with.

Alex, the erstwhile Reverend, had come out of hiding and it turned out he had drafted his first novel and was now looking for a publisher but had so far been unsuccessful. As he mentioned this, I remembered my good friend John Richardson who's a bit of a nutter when it comes to literature and has helped quite a few young hopeful writers to get their foot in the door to getting published; so I arranged a meeting and it turned out he quite liked the manuscript and it's going to get published! I'm really pleased with this.

Prof. Carter visited the biological department at the University again to have the mysterious mushrooms analysed we had collected at Dr. Pike's estate. Apparently similar specimen had been found ten years previously in the Himalayas at a mysterious site that had looked as if it had exploded but none of them survived the journey back as they melted.

Jeremy also managed to translate various pages of the book we had taken from Parsons' cold dead hands. Most of it seemed to be illegible gibberish but a few pages appeared to contain actual

writing, however rather obscure ramblings about gates, the keys to such, all connected to the "Sleepless City" which most likely related to the city in our dreams and the ball might be the key. The text also contained a warning that the key/ball will eventually take over its owner's mind, at least that was Prof. Carter's interpretation.

Even more strangely, the text also contained instructions for some sort of ritual that will summon ... something, something the caller will be able to command. Jeremy seemed keen on trying this but everybody else was not really happy with the idea until we knew what we might be dealing with. I'm all up for taking on risky endeavours but my adventures so far had usually featured physical threats like forces of nature, wild animals and angry natives - like that Amazonian tribe who insisted on making me a member of their society, feeding me hallucinogenic plant cocktails that made me vomit for days and marrying me to the chief's daughter, just because I had saved her from a rampaging tapir, saving a lady in distress being my duty as a gentleman. Luckily, I managed to escape and finally shake them after three days of being chased through the jungle - but I digress. Where was I? Ah yes. So, physical threats I can live with, summoning the unknown from the depths of the abyss, not so much.

Prof. Carter and I also spent some time researching the area where we assumed the tribe who made our artifacts lives or used to live. We found a rough map and a description of the area and our new friend Skipper knew how to get there, too.

Mentioning Skipper, he had taken a trip to Newcastle to order parts for his boat and on the way back a lady on the train was hit by something that had shattered the window and turned parts of her hair stark white. A ball lighting, perhaps? Skipper didn't know and the lady was too distressed to answer any questions and was recovering at Sheffield Royal Hospital.

As all our leads pointed to Africa, we decided to mount an exhibition. Via ferry and train to Paris where we would stay two days so Prof. Carter could possibly find more information about the odd script at the university there. Then it's onto the Orient Express to Istanbul, from there a steamer to Cairo, a boat up the Nile, a train to Mombasa and then again a river boat towards our destination. All tickets were booked, various pieces of equipment had been shipped ahead and the following Monday morning we would be on our way.

## 13

On Monday the 3rd of March we set off, first by train to Dover, then a ferry to Calais and another train to Paris, arriving in the early evening. After settling in at the hotel, Thomas, Robert, Silas and I enjoyed a night out in town (first on a pleasure boat on the Seine where I failed to win at Roulette, then onto various bars, cafes and Burlesque establishments, getting back to the hotel rather early in the morning. Prof Carter and Alex had stayed at the hotel to work on the translation of the odd book and the revision of his manuscript respectively.

When I rose in mid-afternoon, I discovered a note from Professor Carter stating he'd had some success at the national library, meeting his contact (Pierre Duchamp, I believe) who had indeed seen the odd writing in the documents and artifacts we'd collected before and knew that a book existed in the library's restricted section which might tell more about the origins of the language. We were all invited to meet Pierre for dinner at the restaurant overlooking the Eiffel Tower. Jolly good idea I say. When everybody had finally made themselves presentable, we met up again and Prof. Carter had something else to tell us: After leaving the library, an American fellow called Nicolas Wright approached him and warned him of the people at the library, who weren't what they seemed. The Yank alleged there was an international conspiracy of librarians who wanted to keep certain knowledge and books secret. Wright offered to tell more at a meeting in the evening at the Cafe du



Nord later that evening.

Now that was interesting. It would clash with our dinner but we were sure excuses could be made. Another interesting development was that we had picked up a tail. Robert had spotted someone who was clearly watching us.

True enough, when we left for dinner, he was cycling after the first cab (which had Jeremy, Silas and me in) and he was also later spotted on the terrace of the restaurant by the Eiffel Tower, this time accompanied by a woman. When it was time to leave for the secret meeting, Thomas went outside to distract our watchers. I'm not quite sure what he did but he talked to them and they were very agitated and definitely distracted. Jeremy and Robert excused themselves and "visited the lavatory", only to return an hour or so later.

Meanwhile, the dinner at the restaurant continued and a merry affair it was. There was rather fine food, rather a lot of wine and idle conversation which was quickly mainly reserved to Alex telling tall tales (our true adventures) and how they all meant that there was no point in believing in god and that the world was out of control in an exceedingly agitated (and loud) fashion which apparently caused some concern with the other patrons of the restaurant. When Jeremy and Robert returned and the meal was finished we quickly took our leave.

Back at the hotel Prof. Carter told us all about what this Nicolas Wright fellow had had to say: Wright had searched for clues most likely to be found in that elusive book at the library that would lead to him being able to not only save his family but all the other residents of his village. He claimed that the town priest used nefarious rituals on the townspeople to prolong his life and had apparently done so for several generations.

During his research he found hints to the whereabouts of a book that might be able to tell him more, the same book Prof. Carter was to be shown the following day. The symbols Wright had seen were indeed identical to the ones on our artifacts and to top it all off, Wright had also seen someone else with a mark of the ear symbol in the palm of his left hand, a gentleman who he described as wearing a bowler hat and having quite remarkably piercing blue eyes: Jim. Not only did he see him enter the library but also leave it after talking to the director. According to Wright getting an audience with the director was generally quite difficult. Usually people who arrived at the library with rare books and/or talked to the director were being found floating in the Seine face-down soon after... Was Jim part of this international conspiracy of librarians? Oh, I just had a thought, I wonder if Wright knows (of) our erstwhile adversary, Doctor Parsons?

Jeremy and Robert had arranged for another meeting with Wright at lunchtime on Wednesday to discuss things further with all of us.

The next morning, we decided to throw off our tail a bit. I went shopping for some new outfits and a rather fetching cane with an elephant head, appropriate for our upcoming African adventure. Silas went out disguised as Prof. Carter and the tail promptly followed. Oh, we had decided that Jeremy's appointment at the library was best not to be kept, after all the dire warnings by Wright.

Eventually, everyone converged at the Cafe du Nord for lunch with Wright. He told us more about what went on at the library after hours (meetings of robed figures, chanting at midnight, repeating an unspeakable name) and despite all this, we hatched a plan to infiltrate the library during the day, hide in various places and then in the early morning try and find that elusive book with the help of Wright's key he had copied. Then off to the station, where our belongings would already be waiting transported there by Jeremy. Wright agreed to accompany us on the Orient Express, provided he was able to procure a ticket this afternoon.

So, the plan was set. Prof. Carter would stay behind, try and get an Orient Express ticket for Nicolas and get our luggage and things ready for the train in the morning. Alex would remain near the library, providing backup if necessary. Nicolas, Robert, Thomas, Silas and I would enter the library during opening hours, spend some time there, hide before the doors closed and remain hidden until the early morning before leaving our hiding places to look for the secret book. That was the plan, anyway.

So part one worked fine. We spread out at the library, reading, “doing research” and so forth and when the bell rang and closing time was announced, we found our hiding places. Robert and Thomas in a corner behind two tall bookshelves, the rest in a janitor's cupboard. Nobody saw us and after closing we had the guard making his rounds but he didn't spot us. Later in the night, a group of people arrived and there were odd noises for an hour or so but nothing really scary. A bit disappointing, really.

We waited for another hour and then left our hideouts, much earlier than originally planned but we were getting restless. The first locked door was unlocked by one of Nicolas' copied keys and we were in the map room. Just as he was about to unlock the next door, I spotted the shape of a person behind the stained glass panel in the door. I quickly put my hand on Nicolas' shoulder to stop him. I looked through the keyhole and saw another guard (the one who had been wandering around was sleeping at his desk in the lobby). Damn. After some discussion it was decided to just open the door and surprise him. That we did and with some fast talking and passing of banknotes, Robert persuaded the guard to leave! Excellent. Still, phew. The way was free and we were in a corridor with a variety of rooms, all full of books. Nicolas pointed out the right one and we tried to find our target. Robert finally did, or rather the spot where it should have been. There was just a gap. Foiled again! Still, there was another door to be opened at the end of the corridor. We didn't have a key that fit, though. However, the guard at the front might. So Robert and I snuck up to the poor man who was still in Morpheus' arms. I was ready to gag him should Robert fail getting the keys but that wasn't necessary and he managed to grab the keys without the guard noticing!

The last remaining door was unlocked and we were in a dark stone room. My electric torch brought a stairwell to light, winding its way down so down we went. Surprisingly, we went down quite far, quite possibly at least two floors although it was hard to judge as there were no landings or doors, at least none that could be opened as about half way down there was a bricked up doorway. At the base of the stairs was a huge wooden door with an iron ring and a piece of paper attached to it. I had a closer look and it turned out to be some sort of symbol but unlike any we'd seen before, written in a red, thickish ooze. Was it blood? Who knows. I didn't really want to think about it. Wasting no time, I pushed open the door into a huge, stone room.

There were odd writings in chalk (or possibly white powder) on the floor. A quick test with my cane, no traps so in I went. My torch light revealed further markings on the floor in a large circle which had some sort of stone pedestal in the centre. I stepped into the circle and the lights came on in the room, revealing tall, towering shelves, bending with ancient books on either side of the room. The pedestal in the centre was made of individual pieces of stone making a vague shape of ... something.

On the top was a round, flat stone on which rested a large, leather bound book. Next to it lay an ornate knife, its blade still dripping with congealing ... blood? Silas had come with me and we looked around for a while. The book was opened on a page with odd writing and an illustration of the circle in which we stood as well as of wrists being cut with a knife looking uncannily like the one next to the book. I turned a few pages towards the front and felt an odd sensation, I seemed to

hear things (bells ringing? it was hard to tell) that weren't there and a shiver ran down my spine. Then something else odd happened. I looked up and saw Thomas and Robert from the outside of the circle waving, moving their lips and clapping their hands but I couldn't hear anything and neither could Silas but we could hear each other. Must have been the circle... It was all getting a bit much so I closed the book and then it really started.

There was a cacophony of sounds and the whole room started to shake and it felt like ... something was coming. I'd had enough of big gribbly things so I turned towards the door. Silas grabbed knife and book and started to run, I quickly overtook him and Robert and Thomas ran as well, Robert being the first through the door, then Thomas and I basically abreast, followed by Nicolas and finally Silas bringin up the rear. Up the stairs we ran, along the corridor, behind the final door was the guard from the front desk, probably ran over by Robert. I didn't care and continued to the front door. Nicolas fiddled with the keys and we heard a banging from the other side and Alex shouting. The door opened and we made our way out. The guard was here, too but he ran past us into the night. We didn't linger because more crashes and sounds were coming from deep in the library and we smelled smoke, too.

Fortunately, there were two carriages which took us back to our hotel. On our way there, there were two fire engines going the other way. That was rather alarming. Let's hope we didn't unleash anything really bad. Oh my, all those books, going up in flames...

Robert and I ran in to fetch Jeremy and our luggage and off we went to the station where our things were transferred to the Orient Express office. On a suggestion by Silas we entered the station hotel, where we found the barman still awake fixing nightcaps for guests. A few notes convinced him to stay up for us so we sat and calmed our nerves with a few fine drops.

Prof. Carter had some good and also some less good but interesting news. He had managed to secure another ticket for Nicolas but he would have to share his compartment with ... no other than Blue Eyed Jim. Yes, our mysterious friend(?) had found us. That would be interesting.

With the discussion of this news, the rest of the night passed quickly and it was soon time to board the Orient Express. What a splendid affair, like a luxury hotel on wheels.

We gathered at the four person compartment and discussed what had happened. Tickets were shuffled so that Silas would share the compartment with Jim and Prof. Carter told us what he had managed to translate from Parsons' book. Things were getting clearer but also more mysterious. It (and Parsons' annotations) talked about six objects with different powers that, brought together, would ... do something. Give the owner power? Parsons certainly thought so. We didn't know, yet. One of the objects was our nightmare ball, called the key. Another could be the knife we recovered. And the African mountain, which was our current target, played an important role, too.

Now, to relax and enjoy a week of luxury on the Orient Express.

## 15

Having left the still smouldering embers of Paris behind, the Orient Express set off on its eastwards journey.

After sleeping off our night at the library and a hearty breakfast we explored what the train had to offer. It was like a rolling hotel: apart from the compartments which were more like hotel suites, there was a restaurant and a games room. The latter was my target as it seemed perfect for passing

the time. I fared better at roulette than I did on the Seine riverboat and then switched to the card table where an interesting group had gathered: Alfred Grantham, a businessman; Colonel Warwick (retired), a fine and fun character indeed, full of stories and later, wine and brandy, with a good supply of fine cigars he was happy to share; Tristan Orleans, a very quiet Frenchman and finally Jack Ellis, an American archaeologist who was on a quest to find out everything about Tutenchamun. He and the Colonel were the most likable travellers and I spent quite some time with them.

In the meantime, Prof. Carter and Nicolas managed to finish the translation of Parsons' book. Everything pointed towards Africa and specifically to the area that was our destination but not very clear information about the other items Parsons was after (the box being the "key" and when combined with the other items, like the knife (probably), would result in - something, Parsons seemed to think it would give him ultimate power). Prof. Carter also managed to decipher the ritual described but was at yet unsure what or whom exactly it would summon so it was agreed not to touch it at all.

Silas had an interesting conversation with our old friend Mr. Blue Eyes Jim where a few things came to light (or not). Jim claimed that Parsons had smuggled the box into William's luggage while William said that he bought the box. How curious. Also, Jim claimed Parsons stole the box (a holy relic) from the tribe in Northern Kenya and that betrayal was the reason Jim left Parsons' employ and promised the tribe to retrieve the box. We still don't know what his agenda is, he might just be after the same things Parsons is and try and grab the power (or whatever it is) for himself.

During one of our card games, James Ellis mentioned that the archaeologist Anthony Nelson was also on the train and had brought one his mummies to be transferred to Cairo. How exciting! I was sure the others and especially Jeremy would be interested in this, too so I asked if Mr. Nelson would join us for dinner and he happily agreed.

Robert and Thomas later "inspected" the luggage car and reported that there was indeed a large crate tightly secured which might contain the mummy. They also mentioned that there was something not quite right about the crate but couldn't put their finger on it. Oh, and the second door to the luggage car was unlocked.

The first stop was Budapest where we left the train and were shown around the city and had lunch at a nice hotel. The city is indeed as beautiful as the travel guides claim and the architecture is duly impressive. We were pleased to find out that one of the city's most modern pieces, the huge iron bridge over the Danube was designed by an Englishman. I had made the acquaintance of a Mrs. Ethel Stephenson (yes, indeed, of THE Stephensons) who seemed to be distraught about something but wouldn't say what. Her friend Gertrude had asked me to keep an eye on her so I did but nothing happened, thankfully. However, something else seemed to have happened during our trip. As we returned to the station, a man was acting a bit oddly, checking his watch nervously every other moment. I casually wandered over and asked him what troubled him and he mentioned that his friend, Simon Carr, the jewel merchant had not yet returned and the train would leave in five minutes.

There was nothing I could do while I could remember having seen the man once or twice I could not tell where he might have ended up. I wished the man (a Mr. Johns) good luck and boarded the train. After it had set off, I asked one of the conductors if Mr. Carr had returned but apparently he had not. Very curious.

In the evening, we had dinner with our new friends Ellis, the Colonel and the archaeologist Nelson and his assistant, Roger Hill who seemed a bit nervous and shifty and really distraught when we asked Nelson if we could see the mummy and Nelson agreed.

After dinner, a plan was hatched: Robert, Thomas and Jeremy would remain in the games room to

wait and possibly confront Hill if he tried anything.

I had other plans and wanted to talk to Mrs Stephenson and her friend Gertrude. It took some convincing but eventually she would see me. It looked like the businessman Grantham was trying to blackmail her, he wanted her wedding ring with the rose diamond her husband had given her but she wouldn't go into what exactly the bastard was holding against her. I promised to keep an eye on Grantham so he wouldn't try anything funny and keep her alone. When we returned to the games room, I joined Grantham's card table and sat right between him and the Stephenson's table to block his vision. He didn't seem happy with that arrangement but didn't mention it. So I spent all evening in the company of Grantham and then followed him when he left to find out where his compartment was before I turned in myself. In the morning I would find out if the others had encountered anyone trying to get into the luggage car...

## 16

The next morning I met up with the others at breakfast and I told them about Grantham blackmailing Mrs Stephenson and they told me about their little stakeout. They had waited and Hill had indeed turned up and entered the luggage car (with a key from a guard). However, he wouldn't divulge what his purpose was. The crate seemed to be in order although Alex said he'd heard something moving inside and Prof. Carter thought the nails had been put in the lid in an odd way. No real progress there, we just knew we had to watch out for this Hill character.

That day, two more stops were on the agenda, one at Sinaia for the quite wonderful Peles Castle and later Bucharest which was nice enough, too.

At the hotel in Bucharest (where we would also stay the night) I had opportunity to speak to Mrs Stephenson again who told me that Grantham had given her an ultimatum until Istanbul. Upon my urging, she finally divulged what Grantham had in hand against her: Several years ago, the Davy family and the Stephensons were bitter rivals in developing a lamp, which eventually made them bitter enemies. There'd been some scandal but nothing major. What nobody knew was that her brother had married into the Davy family and was promptly disowned and shunned by his family, the other family members being under strict orders not to contact him or face a similar fate. Despite this threat, Ethel and her brother met secretly in London and somehow Grantham had gotten wind of this, broke into her hotel room and stolen a letter her brother had written. Grantham now threatened to send this letter to her husband if she didn't hand over the rose diamond. I promised I would do anything in my power to help her retrieve the letter and told the others about it.

A plan was hatched. While everybody was out at the next stop at Varna, Alex, Robert and Thomas would gain entrance into Grantham's compartment and search it for the letter. Should they not find it, they wanted to wait for his return and persuade him to hand it over.

Lo and behold, it worked. With the letter in my breast pocket, I visited Mrs Stephenson who was very relieved and grateful and disposed of the letter so it wouldn't cause anymore harm.

Perhaps not surprisingly, we didn't see Grantham during the rest of our journey which ended quietly in Istanbul where we transferred to a fine hotel.

After spending two days booking our onward journey, seeing the sights and doing various bits of shopping, we boarded the ferry for Cairo where we arrived safely a day later, while the archaeologists and their precious cargo took a privately hired boat. Anthony Nelson had invited us to the grand opening of his exhibition so we were looking forward to finally seeing the crate's contents.

Having arrived in Cairo, we found a hotel. Jeremy received a note from Nelson that he and his

cargo had arrived and all was set for the exhibition in two days' time and that he would spend the intervening time at a dig nearby. However, Silas later found out that not only had the crate vanished from the museum but that Nelson hadn't been seen, either. Most curious. Our suspicions - especially against Nelson's "assistant" Hill - were raised again, so we hired a truck to take us to the dig site first thing the next morning.

## 17

Early in the morning we boarded two trucks, one driven by Alex the other by yours truly. Our local guide, Mohammed, was in the first truck and led the way. A while after we were out of Cairo and in the open countryside, well, desert, the accelerator suddenly jammed, with the sole of my boot wedged between it and the floor. Our truck was speeding up so quickly I was unable to avoid running into the truck in front with an almighty bump. Thankfully, Alex managed to steer out of the way, leaving us careening on towards a rather sharp bend. Just in time, I managed to free my foot and bring the truck to a screeching halt with everyone inside intact. It took Thomas a while to fix the problem but eventually we were on our way again.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at the camp. With the help of our guide we learned that the professor and his helpers had a crate to the dig site but not returned, although by now they should have had.

Prof. Carter, Silas and I scouted up the ridge and over in the distance we made out some occasionally winking lights that most likely came from the dig site so we climbed down again and persuaded the others to go out to find the dig site and hopefully, Prof. Nelson despite the failing light.

We made good progress and soon saw the dig site. A large rectangular area, surrounded by the remains of a wall with a large bonfire burning in the centre. There were three Egyptians, too, who, after we shouted our greetings, opened fire. Thomas tried to negotiate in his rudimentary Arabic but his efforts were only met with more rifle fire so we had to return the "greeting". After several exchanges I had enough trying to hit the imbeciles so when they had to reload, I jumped up and charged. Meanwhile Alex had snuck around the perimeter and just before I had reached my intended target, Alex took the Egyptian out with a well aimed pistol shot. I'm sad to report that all three (the third one had disappeared down a hole in the ground but later returned) were killed but we persevered.

The hole in the ground turned out to be an entrance with steps leading down so I carefully made my way down but whoever was waiting succeeded in surprising me and I received a bullet in the stomach. I went down. Robert and Thomas came after me and managed to take down the shooter, only to run into further trouble. I could hear a strange voice chanting, shouting and more shots and battle noises. Inhuman shuffling and moaning, too.

Most of what follows I reconstructed from the few things I managed to witness myself and the tales of my companions:

At the end of the corridor leading away from the bottom of the steps was a larger chamber, in which two open, upright sarcophagi stood, each holding a mummy. On the floor was the mutilated corpse of Professor Nelson and between them stood Roger Hill, his erstwhile assistant, chanting in Ancient Egyptian with a book in one and a dagger in the other hand. When Robert and Silas entered the chamber, the mummies came alive! Hill was taken down quickly but the mummies seemed unbeatable as bullets seemed to be of no use. Surprisingly, Silas managed to weaken one by repeatedly punching it but in the end received an almost fatal blow himself.

Meanwhile, Prof. Carter and Alex helped me up the stairs and briefly saw to my wound. I felt

helpless as I was too weak to move, the bullet wound burning like fire in my gut. I was propped up next to the fire, rifle in hand and hoped I'd be able to defend myself but thankfully, I was spared. One mummy appeared, shambling after Robert out into the desert. Robert managed to shake his pursuer who then apparently carried on into the dark night.

The other mummy, already weakened by Silas' punches tried to flee as well but Alex threw a burning bottle of gin at it. Dry as it was, the fiend caught fire immediately and soon fell over, exploding in a ball of flames.

With the danger over momentarily, we gathered our forces, Alex administering first aid to those who needed attention, which was everyone except Alex himself. Some of us had gunshot wounds, others had been injured by the mummies or had sustained burns while trying to retrieve brands from the bonfire as makeshift torches.

A long discussion followed as to how to proceed. Prof. Carter was adamant to stay behind and decipher the hieroglyphics on the walls of the chamber while everybody just wanted to go back to Cairo. Eventually it was decided that Nicolas would be sent to the site to keep Prof. Carter company and then return in the other truck while the rest would return to Cairo. There were more discussions back at the camp which led to everyone except Alex, Silas and I staying behind.

Despite an accident, we made it back to Cairo and I'm now safe and recovering in a nice private room at the hospital, eagerly awaiting the return of my companions.

## 18

After regrouping and staying at the hospital a while for recovering, we set off on a boat through the Suez Canal and around the East Coast of Africa towards Mombasa, Kenya. The gun wound in my gut was still giving me the odd trouble so I hired a doctor to look after me while I relaxed in my cabin. There wasn't much to do or see anyway so I buried my nose in a good book and made sure I didn't miss any of the doctor's prescribed administrations of gin, which seemed to do wonders.

On the fifth day of our journey, my birthday no less, I'd just had breakfast and was still only clad in pyjamas, smoking jacket and slippers, Prof. Carter knocked at my door inquiring if he could borrow my telescope. I was still wondering what he wanted to look at when there was some commotion outside and shots were fired. I quickly instructed the doctor to hand me my rifle just in case anything untowards happened. Just then, Prof Carter burst through my door again shouting about the boat being boarded by pirates. Now, I just could not take this sitting down so I handed the good professor my shotgun, instructed the doctor to set up a triage and get ready for more patients. The ship had indeed been boarded and some of the pirates had managed to wound and even kill a number of the crew but swift fighting and some well-aimed shooting quickly saw an end to their plans. The pirates had thrown ropes across from their boat and tucked it alongside our ship. At one point there was a shot from the lower deck and the smokestack exploded, bringing the pirate ship to a standstill. Some of the ropes snapped and the thing veered off. Meanwhile, fights had taken place all over the ship and suddenly there was Robert, heaving a bleeding, headless corpse over his head and lobbing it at a huge black pirate who had just boarded, sending him over the railing into the murky depths. One pirate survived and was taken in by the captain to be turned over to the authorities in Nairobi. Alex, our intrepid author, had sustained a rather nasty gunshot wound to his arm and locked himself up in his cabin. Thankfully, we managed to persuade him to unlock the door and have his wound seen to. Good thing I'd hired a doctor, I wonder if we should invite him to join our expedition?

The captain was both apologetic and grateful and not only invited us for dinner at his table but also refunded our fare. Frankly, all we did was save our own hides but we didn't decline his generous

offer. I'm hoping he'll be able to continue his business despite his losses of crew, the first mate and three further officers among them.

The rest of our journey passed without any further incidents so we arrived in Mombasa two days later. After checking in at the Castle Hotel, we explored the city for a while and did a spot of shopping for the trek into the heart of the Black Continent ahead. I finally managed to get my hands on a rather splendid elephant gun and I also bought a Colt automatic as I've found that rifles could get a little inconvenient in tight spaces. Then I signed up for the zebra bounty (the beasts being a pest at the moment) for which I was rewarded a Mauser rifle which will come in handy as a backup.

Early next morning, we boarded the train to Nairobi. Eighteen hours on a wood-fired train, even in first class, were rather more uncomfortable than on the Orient Express but you can't expect everything in these primitive climes. At least the views were stunning, if a bit damp, it being the rainy season.

After arriving in Nairobi, the rather bustling capital with a surprising amount of motor traffic, I rejoined society as it were by checking in at the best hotel and joining the local gentleman's club for completeness.

At its first gathering, I met the rather famous Peter Rogsby, expeditioner extraordinaire who was willing to not only be our guide but also outfit the expedition for us, taking a lot of trouble off our hands. Mr. Rogsby also offered to reduce his rather hefty fee if he were allowed to hunt elephants on the way. As I'm still missing a decent pair of tusks in my collection and had just picked up a gun, I willingly agreed in the hope of getting a shot in myself.

We'll see tomorrow how effective Mr. Rogsby's machinery is but now it's time for some rest.

## 19

When I met Mr. Rogsby for breakfast the next morning, he had already made a list for what was needed. I sent runners to fetch the others so we could pool our requirements (Thomas and Alex were still injured from the fight against the pirates so would be transported on litters). In the end, the expedition would consist of 85 people (bearers, personal gunbearers, a number of well-armed Askari as guards, headmen to keep everyone in check) and literally tons of foods and supplies, tents and everything else that was needed, all in all coming to the princely sum of 100 pounds, half due up front. Thankfully, our finances stretched that far as we had wired for money the day before so everything could be set in motion and we were due to leave on the train to Kalambo, which would be the starting point for our trek to the Rift Valley, which Rogsby thinks is the most likely location for the source of the river described in the book Prof. Carter translated.

As we had some time and Rogsby had delegated the business of getting everything together we had some time to discuss the upcoming journey, first over open savannah, then rockier terrain which would get more difficult the closer we came to the Rift Valley. There would always be the possibility of meeting less friendly tribes and of course, wild animals so we would always have to be on our guard. Rogsby also told us tales of tribes consisting entirely of werebeasts (humans who would turn into wild animals, mostly big cats) and the evil Black Mountain (which might well turn out to be our destination).

Prof. Carter and Nicolas summarised what they had found in the book we had taken from the evil cultist in the basement of the National Library: It was all about rituals and related tales about people interbreeding with vile undersea creatures, creating "hybrids" which were apparently immortal and looked like some strange mix of human and fish/frog. This brought odd memories from the Isle of



Wight back to the surface...

The rest of the day was spent preparing and resting for the dangerous journey ahead.

The train journey to Kalambo took all day and was the most uncomfortable yet but there were some amazing sites of landscapes and the occasional herd of wild animals (sadly the train wouldn't stop for hunting excursions).

Kalambo mostly consists of a military fort and a number of houses as well as a lonely hotel where we spent the last night with a solid roof over our heads.

Early the following morning, we set off in a more or less Northern direction into the open savannah. The first day was uneventful, we didn't even get close to anything we could hunt.

The following day, we stopped at a lake infested with crocodiles and Alex spotted smoke in the distance and we detoured into its direction. We eventually reached a coffee plantation (of all places) and it suddenly occurred to me that this had to be the rather famous Crest estate. We halted the company and then carried on to the house, just a one storey affair but quite impressive considering this was miles from civilisation. For some reason Prof. Carter thought we were at an opium plantation and there was no way we could persuade him otherwise. Ever since he's started reading those odd books, he's become quite odd.

Arriving at the house, we were hesitantly welcomed by the owner, indeed a Mr. Crest, a quiet fellow who also seemed quite sad. We talked about this and that and he asked whether we'd be prepared to leave one of our bearers behind in exchange for a cow as he was a bit short of staff during the start of the harvest season. Rogsby agreed to this and then we were invited inside for a cup of coffee, which was really rather nice. Crest also talked about how he had brought over agricultural techniques from the Western world and was using irrigation to feed the coffee plants. This all sounded quite plausible to me but Alex thought Crest was a sort of dangerous maniac. He and the other had left for a while so I had the opportunity to talk to Crest alone. He wasn't very talkative and would only talk about coffee. When I asked him why he was alone and didn't have any family he said that they "are gone" but wouldn't elaborate. Poor fellow.

When the others returned Alex held a gun to Crest's head and said "What is Djagota? How do you stop it? Will it stop if I shoot you?" Crest pretty much collapsed at that point and wouldn't answer any questions. He was then drugged and tied to a chair so he wouldn't run away or cause any trouble, while we were discussing the situation outside.

Things went back and forth, various people on the plantation were questioned and we eventually came to some sort of conclusion:

There was something in this area that made the land fertile. The foreman talked about Offerings to "Djagota", some sort of (evil) spirit? It turned out Crest had made human sacrifices to appease this dark spirit in exchange for fertility of the land, apparently his family were among the victims and then workers, one a month. No wonder there was a staff shortage. The next sacrifice was due the following moon.

Thomas and Carter had searched the house but not found anything pointing to this evil spirit and nobody else on the plantation did or wanted to talk about it. The foreman only mentioned that the evil spirit dwelled in the old well, a "bad place".

Alex was of the opinion that Crest was possessed in some way and should be killed but both Prof. Carter and I protested and we came to the conclusion that it would be best if Crest were sent to Kalambo to be handed over to the authorities. All the workers were sent away as well for their own safety. We told them to return in two days and do with the plantation as they wished.

Meanwhile, it was late afternoon so not enough time for a full investigation but I wanted to at least

know where the well was so I took my gunbearer and two Askari to look for it. After marching a while in the direction indicated by the foreman, the grassland gave way to more rocky terrain and a hill in the distance. On top of the slope there was a manmade, ringlike structure, a low wall, rather like a well but rather big, at least 12 feet in diameter. As we came closer, the wind stopped and one of the Askari started muttering to himself and looking quite frightened. Still closer and ... things happened. There were screams and wailings all over and around us and something else. We turned and ran, the Askari was snatched back, I turned around and there was this mass of undulating, writhing limbs and faces, impossible to describe. I managed to run and felt something snap at my shoulder but miss. I ran for my life, I don't think I'd run this fast for this long ever, back the way we had come, crashing through the coffee plants until I heard familiar voices shouting. There were my friends who took me back to the house. After a generous glass of gin, I slowly calmed down. I was uninjured but what I had seen had left me shaken. I described what I had seen and urged the others to not pursue this any further as this thing was most certainly beyond the power of our mundane weapons. Alex suggested dynamite but we didn't have any. It was therefore decided to leave things as they were and spend the night at the plantation before carrying on our journey the next morning. My gunbearer, Dara, had returned as well, sat by the fire and proceeded to slash at his arms with a knife. I ran over and screamed at him to stop but he only babbled in his native language I did not understand. One of the interpreters was fetched and with his help I established that Dara tried to make penance so he and his family would be spared from the evil spirits. We finally managed to persuade him to stop his cutting by suggesting a cow be sacrificed in his stead. Phew.

There is one last thing I have to report, sadly. Robert saw fit to end Crest's life. He seems to revel in pointless cruelty recently, I hope this won't be to our disadvantage in the future...

## 20

We left the plantation in the late afternoon as we thought it wasn't safe to stay with that horror in the well not too far away. There was nothing we could do about it so we could just leave it to its fate. We set off in a northwesterly direction and pitched camp at nightfall. The next morning we continued our trek towards the Rift Valley, with a detour to shoot some zebra. The Mauser rifle I was given turned out to be no good so I'm sad to report that Rogsby bagged three zebra tails while I didn't get a single one. The meat, however, was wonderful and kept us well supplied for a few days as we continued. Later that day, the savannah gave way to a more forested and mountaineous landscape but the rain kept on falling.

The next morning we were awoken by some commotion from the camp. Two bearers were in a wrestling match, apparently about stealing money. Thankfully, the matter was resolved soon. Later in the day, Alex spotted a huge dust cloud in the distance. When Rogsby saw it, he sent everyone running for the treeline and made us climb the trees. The reason was soon apparent: As the dust cloud came closer, we spotted dark shapes within, thundering towards our position. It was a stampede of wildebeests that rushed past and below us. Fortunately, everyone had made it up the trees and nobody was injured. Anyone staying on the ground would surely have been trampled to death. I shot one of them but it got trampled into mush so was of no use to us. There was one good thing to this episode, the rain subsided a while later.

The next morning there was still no rain and we covered quite some distance during the day. In the afternoon, we spotted some smoke in the distance in the West. Hoping for a village of natives with whom to trade we made a detour. It was indeed a local tribe, quite friendly and after a short discussion with Rogsby, traded us fresh water and other supplies. The women were wearing huge discs that stretched their lower lips to huge proportions, the men had elongated earlobes.

With the aid of one of our interpreters, Alex asked them about local legends and they told him about a “three-pronged” mountain east of the Great Lake that had “bad magic”. This sounded just like the one we were looking for. Trading done, we carried on.

In the morning of the next day we arrived at a lake almost completely covered in flamingos. I took some photographs, shot a flamingo to have stuffed and found a rather peculiar footprint that was bigger than an elephant's. There was only one and no tracks so I still do not know what might have made it.

We carried on around the east shore of the lake and made camp. One of the bearers had come down with Malaria, so he was put into the litter Alex had used until he had recovered.

The next day we reached the Great Lake. Herds of zebra and wildebeests were plenty so we attempted to hunt again. Luck was against me so again I did not manage to bag a single tail. Further on at the shore was a big village, surrounded by palisades. Ragsby and one of the headmen went and talked to the natives but these weren't welcoming at all and sent us on our way.

As the sun set, we spotted three peaks in the distance, our goal in front of our eyes at last!

The next day we came closer to the mountains, quite impressive and indeed there were three peaks. The next day it turned out that the centre peak was actually separate and closer than the others. Still later, we were able to make some odd features: it had an almost unnatural cone shape. On the ground leading towards it was a huge ramp. To the right of it was another unusual shape, as if something had broken off the mountain or possibly a cave. We were still too far away to make out any details, even with our binoculars and telescopes.

We reached the ramp the next day. It was made out of rock, some sort of basalt according to Prof. Carter, half a mile wide and consisting of one giant slab. Astounding!

Going further up the ramp and looking down at the disturbed part, there seemed to be some sort of camp or settlement with tents and pens and pits with ramps leading into them. The tents were still in good condition but there was no-one to be seen. A pile of animal bodies (camels?) was in a corner. We decided to investigate further, went back down the ramp and around to the camp. The whole area was surrounded by a wall of brush wood and brambles with few gates set in between consisting of crudely lashed together pieces of wood. We made our way through one of the gates and split up to search the tents. All were abandoned but still in good condition. Alex found a lady's tent with a diary. The last entry was from four months previously. It seemed we had found an archaeological dig. Prof. Carter was in his element and investigated the pits while the rest of the party searched the tents.

In the one I picked I found a large locked chest, a lantern and a desk with papers in an unknown language strewn about the surface. I gathered them up to show to Prof. Carter later. In a drawer I found a piece of paper in Latin, entitled “Contact Rock Crawler” or something along those lines. This sounded like one of those rituals Carter and Nicolas keep babbling about and trying to perform, I think I'll keep this away from them. This “Rock Crawler” does not sound friendly. I also found two books, one in English (fables and short stories about the “Masked Messenger”) and the other in the same unknown language as on the pieces of paper. That book contained a variety of artful but shocking and mind-numbingly haunting illustrations of dismemberment, torture and rape which left me shaking.

Catching up with the others, we shared what we had found (I withheld the book with illustrations but showed the English book). The others had found various dead bodies, some half eaten or mutilated in some way, one half stuffed into an oven and partially, well, cooked. What had happened here? It was quite frightening.

As we continued our search, we discovered a cave or tunnel, partially hidden behind a pile of rubble, leading into the ramp. I guess that's where we'll be going tomorrow...

## 21

In the evening, we collected our findings. In one tent, Alex had found the diary of a Prof. Forbes, an Australian anthropologist, containing ramblings about skulls and odd things and the phrase “They are coming” was repeated again and again towards the end. Whoever “they” were, they were threatening to “breach the fissure”. The diary also mentioned that the expedition had found a “gate” in the side of the mountain, with no cracks visible and no way of opening it.

We assumed the “fissure” meant the cave in the back of the dig and had a good look. Indeed, the rubble in front of the cave looked like it was seemingly pushed out from the inside but whoever or whatever had done that had left no trace.

We set up camp on the other side of the ramp, leaving four Askari to guard the fissure.

During the night, I woke up to the tent and even my blanket on fire. I tried to make it out but the fumes overcame me, I choked and fainted before I was able make it out...

Then, I woke up again, with a throbbing pain in my palm. Oh, just a dream, phew. The landmark was bleeding, there were shouts outside so I stumbled out of my tent. A bright light was falling from the sky. The Askari had fired a flare from the other camp! Thomas was screaming and rambling about snakes and was behaving like a lunatic. Then there were gunshots from the direction of the dig. We headed out, the Askari were gathered by the fire doing something with something on the ground. A warthog! It was just a warthog that had crashed through the bushes and frightened the Askari so they shot it. Oh well, there is good eating in one of those. While the Askari were cooking the hog, we went back to our camp to share what had been going on. The others had dreamt as well, but of more frightening things. Some were being pulled into the ground by claws, others had seen snakes attacking them, Dr. Parsons and Jim had appeared in some reams as well, attacking, dismembering and killing everyone in the camp.

There was nothing left to do so we went back to sleep.

The next morning we made plans for surveying the area. We went all the way up the ramp, where a wide ledge lead around the mountain. Having arrived at the top of the ramp, we saw a large indentation in the shape of a gate, just like it was mentioned in the diary. Familiar symbols were carved in the surface which Prof. Carter translated as talking about a key. At the end of the description was a circular indentation, exactly the size of the ominous ball...

We left the gate as it was for the time being and walked around the wide ledge. There was nothing else in the side of the mountain, the large mountain range in the distance was quite normal. Having arrived back at the gate, we had a closer look. It was as if it was carved out of the side of the mountain, there were no cracks, hinges or other features visible. It was all smooth except for the carved inscriptions. I put my left hand on the key symbol (the ear symbol) and felt a strange sucking sensation or if something was trying to crawl out of my hand. I let go.

After a short discussion, we decided to use the ball. We got ready, I had my rifle cocked, prepared to fire and pushed the ball into the hole. There was a loud thunderclap and the gate simply vanished.

On the other side was a dark tunnel and there was ... Jim! He was holding a staff over which green snakes were writhing. Without a second thought, I raised my rifle and shot Jim straight in the chest. He crumpled to the ground. Robert emptied his guns into the body as well which started to disintegrate. Green smoke was billowing up. Prof. Carter dismembered the body and threw the body parts over different sides of the ramp. I think he'd seen too many opponents come back to life... The ball had fallen onto the ground so Alex picked it up.

We continued into the tunnel, down a long slope. After we'd had walked for a good 10 minutes, we realised we were past and below the mountain. Our ears kept popping. Finally we reached the bottom where there was another gate with similar inscriptions and a place for the ball as on the first one. Alex used the ball, there was another thundercrack and the gate opened. Immediately, our senses were assaulted by a loud, screeching, howling "music" which was oddly familiar. Beyond the gate (which seemed to hang in mid air seen from the other side), steps led down into a huge, cyclopean, ruined city, much like the one we had visited in our dreams but even more ruined. The four towers had almost collapsed and also the huge building in the centre had disintegrated more. It was there from which the horrible music emanated. There were unfamiliar stars in the night sky but thankfully no horrible flying monsters. I checked my watch to see it had stopped at 12.

We headed down into the city towards the river or canal which was now dry, with just some black sludge in a few places. We climbed up the other side and continued towards the cacaphony. By now, we could make out the odd shape of the undulating mass we had jokingly referred to as bagpipes.

Suddenly Alex shouted "We've got company! I believe it's Jim!" - How can that be? I mused that there might have been more of him, which would explain why he had been both outside and inside the mountain. Indeed several figures appeared, all looking like Jim, carrying staves made of snakes and odd sticks with crystals at the end,

Pro. Carter started to throw rocks, Alex ran back into the direction from where we had come, Thomas took a shot but missed. One Jim fired a snake at Carter momentarily immobilising him, another hit me with what I can only describe as electricity from his crystal staff, another snake staff missed Alex. We returned fire and eventually managed to defeat them all. The dying "Jims" transformed into snake-headed humans. Carter again dismembered them.

Onwards towards the big bagpipe building we walked. The atmosphere was constantly changing, our ears kept popping. Coming closer, we saw four figures like in our original dream guarding the huge contraption. There were solid parts of stone, moving parts of metal and a giant, undulating, slightly translucent mass. Inside the almost organic appearing mass, I could make out a gigantic egg shaped object. Slowly sneaking closer, Robert and I took on the one pair of guards, who seemed to almost deflate and collapse to the ground. While the rest examined the huge contraption, Robert and I made our way to the other side of the thing and took out the other guards, which collapsed as well, only empty shells of snake men. When we returned to the others, Carter and Nicolas had deciphered some of the markings on various parts of the eldritch organ, explaining that they stood for sounds, describing how control the "music". He pressed an organic part and the notes lowered. I pushed my walking stick into the mass but nothing happened except that contact with the mass had melted the end off.

Then Prof. Carter pushed a dismembered hand of the snakemen in and seemed to fall in some sort of trance for a while. After coming to, he said he knew how to switch it off, if Nicolas and he were doing something with their "essence". Alex wanted to help them so the three of them stood around the thing. Alex pushed the ball into the thing and all hell broke loose. There was more writhing and the cacophony was even louder and more horrible and the egg inside slowly started to split open.

Alex screamed "I can see God! It is my child, born into the world ... Jesus to cleanse the world of our sins." and similar nonsense. "If you touch me you will speak in tongues." - "The mushrooms are coming, I made them come with my brain!"

Down below, more Jims/snake men appeared and there was another fire fight from which we emerged victorious. With the hellish contraption behind us disintegrating, we headed back towards the gate, helping heavily injured comrades along. And then, I could not believe my eyes, there were indeed giant mushrooms falling from the sky. None of us were hit by them, except Prof. Carter who could not avoid a chunk of falling masonry and fell to the ground, unconscious. I picked him up and

we continued. More Jims appeared but by sheer luck, a huge mushroom hit a wall behind them, dislodging it and crushing them beneath the rubble. We skirted around it and hastened through the gate which closed behind us.

Alex saw to the Professor's wounds but it was too late, Professor Jeremy Carter had succumbed to his injuries. However, there was no time to mourn. Cracks had appeared in the ceiling and walls and rubble started to fall, the mountain was collapsing! With the last of our strength, we managed to get out shouting at the camp to get up and out as we ran down the ramp. Only after a considerable way into the savannah, I dared look back. The mountain had turned into a volcano, spewing lava and collapsing slowly under its own weight.

Hoping that this was the end of the wretched ball, Jim, and the whole dreaded business on the Isle of Wight, we moved back to Nairobi. On the way, Diana was finally with me and I managed to bag two elephants.

A good week's rest in a hotel in Nairobi sounded like a brilliant idea to all of us because most of us had sustained some injury or other and there was obviously the business of taking care of yet another death in our group.

**Part 2**  
**Brave New World**

After leaving in a hurry until the area of the Black Mountain lay over a day's travel behind us, we slowed down to a more casual pace and concentrated on some big game hunting. Fueled by the relief of having left the horrors behind, Lady Luck was with me and I managed to bag two elephants, magnificent tusks included. Back in Mombasa, we arranged for Prof. Carter's remains to be cremated as an urn would be easier to transport than a coffin (having acquired consent from his estate by wire beforehand).

There was also a telegram waiting for me. It was from William, wishing us luck on our trip and inviting us for celebrations if successful. Happily I wired back that we had indeed been successful and were looking forward to enjoying his hospitality once more.

The boat trip back to Southampton was uneventful so we spent the time recovering and relaxing. It was the 11th of May when we arrived on the Isle of Wight.

Coming up to his estate, we noticed a few changes, including an impressive array of hedge animals. William welcomed us with open arms and looked really well. Over a cup of tea and a snifter of brandy he told us that on the night of the final confrontation under the Black Mountain he had dreamt about a tremendous thunderstorm above a mountain but had slept like a baby since then. Dinner was served by William's rather sullen looking new butler Nathaniel as the previous one, stout chap he had been, had apparently had to leave because of family matters and not quite being able to cope with the events during our last visit.

After dinner, we told William about what had happened in Africa and he was well impressed, also with the elephant tusk I had brought as a gift. Then we discussed our future plans which involved Nicolas telling his story:

In his hometown of Plattsburgh a new "church" had been set up, led by a mysterious stranger called Nicoli Ruiz. This cult (as Nicolas preferred to call it) quickly gained followers despite its odd teachings of ancient angels walking the Earth who had been the true masters and such nonsense. Much to his dismay, Nicolas' wife was quite taken with it and attended many sermons and even sometimes dragged Nicolas along. The worst of all was the one at Christmas where a live sacrifice was made. However, Nicolas wasn't perfectly sure what, he thought it could have been a person... He'd also seen writing resembling that in the books and documents we had found, which was the reason why he'd been in Paris where we met him.

William was faster than us and had deducted from my wire that we would need transport to America so had very kindly booked us all first class passage on the fine RMS Mauretania from Southampton to New York the following week. This was obviously even more reason for celebrations so we found sleep only in the early hours of the morning but this time for altogether better reasons.

The next few days were spent preparing for the trip: a new wardrobe was in order and I needed to check up on my friends at the club and my London apartments, the others were looking after their own concerns and we all attended a memorial service for Professor Carter.

Then the big day came along and we joined the crowds gathered at Southampton Harbour. The luxury steamer was an amazing sight: 790ft long, 88ft beam, 32,000 tonnes, 4 chimney stacks and decked out in the latest fashion with all modern conveniences.

As we patiently waited in the line to board, an extravagantly dressed gentleman accompanied by a band of six brutes (all looking Eastern European to me) charged past to the front of the queue and was waved urgently on board. How very rude! The rest of the passengers behaved in a much more civilised manner.

The ship was truly magnificent. After locating my cabin, and then watching the ship set off under



full steam from the upper deck, I had a wander and perused the various bars, dining rooms, casinos and other facilities.

Randomly, I ran into Gerald Moat, a well-known gambler who I had played on a few occasions and who was also joining us at our dining table. Further on our table (other than the divine food) there were also Ian Haddock, actually one of the main engineers of the RMS Mauretania, and his wife who were on their honeymoon. Mr. Haddock and Silas quickly found a liking to each other as they were talking about engines and other pieces of technology so we left them to it and looked for a game or two and later had a bit of a knees up at one of the dance halls which provided a good end to the first day on this marvellous vessel.

Before I forget, we also found out the name of the extravagantly dressed Eastern European gentleman: Count Kurosov, always surrounded by his goons, sitting either in his own cordoned off area or dining at the Captain's Table. I shall make it my mission to find out who he is.

## 24

Where was I? I'm not sure, I must have eaten something that didn't agree with me and I spent a whole day indisposed in my cabin. When I met the others for breakfast I learned of a failed attempt on the count's life (Bolcheviks! Again!) with exciting explosions no less. Except for the Bolchevik goons nobody was hurt, thankfully.

Also, allegedly, the Polynesian crew down below are worshipping the "Great Old Ones", among them one with the face of a squid. One of the professors Nicolas had met the previous evening called it a "Thoolhoo", or whatever that was.

Thomas tried to search the count's hold but instead found somebody else's bag with interesting items: old books (one of them a very old bible), a gun and ammunition. There was also an auctioneer's catalogue of sorts with various items highlighted, the bible among them. This looked like someone was out to "acquire" certain items. Turns out the owner of the bag currently resided in Cabin 57.

Nicolas had a bit of a rummage in the newspaper archive of the ship and indeed found out that the bible had been stolen from a well-known art collector called Johnathan Tilburn two weeks previously. Alex had a word with the bursar and learned the name of the passenger in Cabin 57: Michael Trent.

Nicolas also mentioned that his professor friend had invited to us to his cabin in the evening to demonstrate some more "magic".

We hatched a plan and sent Alex to inform the bursar about Trent's doings. After examining our evidence, the bursar promptly went into action and apprehended the criminal with the help of two burly sailors. Trent protested his innocence but went along without resorting to violence and was securely tucked away in the brig.

Afterwards, the bursar accompanied us to Cabin 57 which was thoroughly searched. There was no further loot but Robert found something odd about Trent's suitcase as it seemed bigger on the outside than the inside. After careful inspection he found a catch which he very carefully triggered with a stick at outstretched arm. However, there was no booby trap and a hidden compartment was revealed containing a set of intricate tools and a pair of fine leather gloves. The bursar thanked us and promised us complimentary bottles of wine and spirits for dinner which was nice.

As there wasn't really anything we could do before we came into telegraph range of New York, we spent the rest of the day socialising, gambling and similar things until it was time for another

scrumptious dinner (we had decided the professor's invitation didn't include food).

After dinner we made our way to the professor's cabin. I didn't really know what to expect and wasn't really looking forward to it considering the things we had witnessed but Nicolas was adamant we all join him so we did.

The cabin was decorated in fabrics and smoke from several incense burners filled the room. In the centre was a large glass orb on a little draped table, seating cushions scattered around it. A large candle behind the orb cast an eerie light as it was refracted through the thick glass.

After introductions had been made we were asked to sit on the cushions and Professor Fudar explained that he'd be attempting to use the orb to find answers to any questions we might have. Not what I had expected, really, it all felt a bit like a fairground attraction with all the incense and occult paraphernalia. Just a black cat was missing.

Nicolas started by asking, "what's the source of Ruiz's power?"

The professor read passages from a large old book and muttered things nobody could really understand and the atmosphere in the room changed. Shapes and a desolate desert landscape appeared inside the glass sphere, then a green orb panned into view, much like a globe with shapes like continents on them. Below, there was a huge sailing ship on full mast, sailing over the desert, squat figures moving around it, very odd figures, human shaped but much much wider than humans. I certainly could neither make heads nor tails of it.

Alex then asked, "What is the face of god?". There was an extremely odd sensation, almost like nausea. Again, shapes and things moved around the light but I think experience told me to close and avert my eyes while Robert tried to crawl away. Everything seemed to move in slow motion. I heard wimpers and moans and Nicolas shouting, "Professor, something's going wrong!". Thomas threw his jacket over the orb. The fabric caught fire and there was a bolt of lightning striking Thomas who fell over. I got up and ran out into the corridor. There was a steward with a tray of drinks. I grabbed the tray and shouted "Fire in the cabin!". The Steward grabbed a bucket of sand and stormed into the cabin, I right behind him but Robert had already put the fire out. Thomas was still on the floor not moving, Nicolas hunched over him and shaking his head. I sent the steward (who, sadly, took the tray of drinks with him) to fetch the ship's doctor and had a quick look around. Thomas' jacket was over the orb, still smouldering but the fire was out. Everything was a mess. I couldn't see the professor but the door to the bathroom was open and I could hear retching from inside.

Then I figured I had enough of "magical" objects, ran back out into the corridor and picked up the fire axe I had spotted earlier. I returned to the cabin, axe held high, intent on smashing the orb into tiny smithereens but Robert held me back. I calmed down a bit and agreed that destroying the orb probably wasn't a good idea so I just picked it up, carried it outside and threw it over the side of the ship where it sank with a satisfying splosh.

Robert offered us drinks from the bottle of whisky he'd been given for dinner and we gratefully accepted, except Silas of all people who seemed to be visibly shaken by what he'd witnessed and said he would retire early.

Meanwhile, the doctor had arrived and taken care of Thomas who was badly burnt but still alive. He was put on a gurney and trundled off to the infirmary where he would need to stay at least until our arrival in New York.

Alex was upset about not having seen the "face of god" but told us later that he'd spoken to Trent, offering him a deal if he were to share his criminal escapades for Alex to write in his book.

Unsurprisingly, really, Trent refused.

The morning after the “experiment” Nicolas went to see the professor - and found that he had hanged himself in his cabin. His companions and students were obviously distraught as well but seemed more concerned with a loss of prospects than the loss of a fellow human being. Only Nicolas was questioned and he gave the story we'd agreed on, that the doctor wanted to show us an electrical experiment that had gone wrong and caused a fire and we'd thrown the source of the fire into the sea.

The rest of the day and the following one was uneventful and in the evening we reached the magnificent New York City. Quite a sight, to sail in among all those lights and be greeted by a huge crowd. We made our way through the port authority and customs quickly. Well, with one exception, Alex who was asked into a side room and questioned. Apparently, he had tried to smuggle several bottles of alcohol into America... To much our surprise, he emerged a while later with a victorious smile on his face and all his luggage in tow. Who knows what he told them...

Thomas was still very ill and weak, on a gurney, and was transferred to a local hospital where he would need to stay the rest of the week.

So we checked into the Waldorf Astoria, did some urgent shopping so we would blend in better with the latest fashion and took a quick tour around with Nicolas showing us some sights. We ended up in an exclusive private club called “The Merry-go-round” that actually served alcohol at extortionate prices. I think it was what the locals call a “speakeasy”.

The next day we went separate ways, Alex and Robert on business, Nicolas to meet a friend who might be able to help us in our attempt to find out more about the situation in Plattsburgh and also to meet with the Professor's students, and Silas and me playing tourists visiting the Statue of Liberty. In the evening we took in a talking film and a Broadway show.

The next day we met up with Nicolas' friend John at a baseball game (odd sport, that) and we made plans for how to proceed. Plattsburgh (where Nicolas left his family and a dangerous cult had taken over the whole town) was our destination but how to get there without drawing attention to ourselves? Now, there was a big scout jamboree on that weekend so some of us were going to use that as a disguise (Alex going back to being a priest and trying that as a way of getting close to the leader of the cult), I was going to pose as a tourist and foreign investor seeking to buy land nearby (the lakes are said to be beautiful).

Finally, Thomas was on his feet again.

The plan was to travel to Plattsburgh in three groups: Nicolas, Alex, Silas with Scout Group 23 on their way to the big Jamboree; myself and Thomas as “tourists” posing as possible buyers of land/investors in the area; and Robert on his own.

The train ride was uneventful and we arrived on schedule. Plattsburgh was a dreamy and quiet New England town, nothing special but quite possibly nice to live if you're not looking for night-time entertainment and hunting and fishing are more your choice of spending your time.

We checked in at the La Quinta hotel only to be told that “Thomas” had already done so. Slightly confused, I asked for a description of said “Thomas” and it turned out to be Alex. Right.

Thankfully, there was another room available so we checked in. We then had a look around town to get an idea of the lie of the land and took a coffee at the Carlton. The atmosphere was oddly quiet,

people were going about their business, not overly friendly or welcoming but not hostile, either. Later back at the hotel, Silas met us in the hotel restaurant and reported that he had successfully helped set up the scout camp but Nicolas had stayed behind in the fear he would be recognised in his hometown. Robert and Alex joined us for dinner and we discussed what to do.

Alex suggested some of us attend “midnight mass” at the “Holy Word of God Baptist Church” so him, Thomas, Silas and I went after relaxing for a while and freshening up.

Considering it was a weeknight, there were quite a few people arriving at the church, which sat in its own, fenced area with a few further buildings. Two strong looking gentleman stood on either side of the church doors but didn't question or hold up anyone so we were free to move in and find our seats. The church was quite magnificent, opulently decorated with rich wood carvings and gilt everywhere, especially on the huge cross above the altar. The congregation was mixed from folk in simple clothes to those in the first rows who were wearing finer garb, one even in uniform, most likely of the local police. There were bibles and hymn sheets which at first glance contained nothing out of the ordinary, nothing you wouldn't expect in a Baptist church. Revelations seemed to be a bit more thoroughly thumbed than the rest but it certainly contained nothing sinister.

Then the organ started a powerful tune and the first hymn was sung. During this, a very tall, smooth figure in the typical vestments of a Baptist minister, with short cropped hair, entered the church and took his place behind the podium, singing along in a powerful voice that almost drowned out the rest of the congregation. Impressive indeed. The sermon that followed was all about punishment of sins and the importance of self reliance, of being strong in one's faith to overcome any obstacle. Very dark, very doom laden, nothing about salvation and other positive aspects. The congregation were in rapture, hanging on his every word. This man knew how to sway people, with his catchy voice and his imposing figure, not someone you easily say No to. Despite this, there was nothing odd or non-Christian about the sermon, nothing about old powers or similar, which I had been expecting. I wonder if that content is reserved to a trusted circle of followers. Hopefully, we'll have opportunity to find out more. Nicolas' words hinted at much more sinister things going on.

After the rather lengthy service was over, the congregation slowly moved out, while others stayed behind to shake the pastor's hands and have a quick word. Among them, to my surprise, Thomas. As I was making my way out, I saw that the pastor and one of his aides led Thomas to a side door. This didn't look good. Alex had spotted it, too, and we quickly left the church and walked around the side to see if we could find a way of coming to Thomas' help if necessary. There was a side door but it was guarded by another of the church's dark suited servants. Alex suggested I distract the guard while he would try to slip into the church. And this was when it all went wrong. I foolheartedly agreed to this and walked up to the guard. He seemed friendly enough, if reserved when I made smalltalk about the wonderful church and how it must be difficult to maintain it all when suddenly, Alex stepped up behind the guard and smacked him over the head! The blow only glanced off the guard's side with no harm done and a fight ensued. We scuffled for a fair while, during which the guard managed to get in a mighty blow to Alex' face which knocked him to the ground, unmoving. Finally, I managed to get my walking stick in and the guard dropped. I quickly dragged him behind the door (a kitchen) and gagged and bound him before I took care of Alex who really wasn't in a good way. I managed to stop the bleeding somewhat but he was still unconscious so I took him over my shoulders and made way out to the side road down to the centre of town. Thankfully, a carriage stopped, urged us to get in and dropped us off at the hospital where Alex was immediately seen. He was in a stable but critical condition and I was told to leave as there was nothing I could have done so I left for the hotel where a message was waiting for me to meet the others in Robert's room so I did after freshening up and changing my clothes in my room.

The events of the day were discussed. Thomas had indeed met the Father and told him some made-up story about being “Thomas Fitzroy from London” who had bad dreams after picking up an

antique alabaster cat or some tosh like that and was now looking for answers. The Father had invited him for a chat the next day.

Robert clearly wasn't happy with what happened to Alex and I but there was nothing we could do about it now and take things as they come.

Silas was dispatched to inform Nicolas at the scout camp and we turned in.

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### Sunday, May 25th

The next morning, everything was quiet, really quiet. Except for the hotel, not a single shop or even cafe was open, and very few people were about. As there was nothing to do, I went back to the hotel to while away the time before the scouts' raft race started.

The race turned out to be moderately exciting as one part of the river they could choose to go through actually had some rapids. The rapids proved the Little Beavers' undoing but the "Seahawks", the team Silas had been looking after and helping build their raft, went through them and promptly won.

A big celebration at the scout camp followed and afterwards we retired for an early and quiet night.

### Monday, May 26th

The scouts were off on their big hiking challenge and our group split up to organise various things. I visited the City Hall where I posed as a foreign investor interested in purchasing land. My main purpose, however, was to see how much of the town (all of it) and surrounding land (most of the land South of the river) was owned by the church. I picked a beach plot adjacent to the Church's property and made a note of landowner's details (a Mr. Pike) in a pretense to visit him in the afternoon.

I then hired a hunting rifle and wandered off towards the lake where I spent the good part of the afternoon snooping around (without spotting anything suspicious) but managed to bag a wild goose (sadly no luck with the beavers).

When I returned to the hotel, I handed the goose over to the kitchen staff who promised to roast it for me. I learned that Nicolas would be entertaining the scouts with a fireworks display that evening and that Silas was at the camp as well helping out. Robert had snuck out to spy on some of the church properties, mainly that big barn.

Thomas and I had just sat down with the rather splendidly roasted goose when Robert barged in, sat down at our table and told us that what he had found at the barn: It was full of children!

I ran off to Scout Camp to get Silas and Nicolas. When I arrived, Sheriff Steele and his deputies were already there about to lead a search party into the hills. Silas told me that the Seahawks hadn't returned from the hike and he had found signs of a scuffle and hints that they had been abducted! After telling him about Robert's findings, the Sheriff and his deputies agreed to come along to investigate. Silas and Nicolas joined us. Back at the hotel we picked up Robert and the others and headed to the barn in the police wagon.

Once there, everything seemed quiet so the sheriff questioned Robert. After a bit of back and forth, the sheriff believed Robert, shot off the padlock and opened the door: Inside there was a long corridor down the center, with stalls left and right barred with iron gates!

Before we could enter, I spotted movement from the side of the building: Three goons with pistols and the priest! One of the goons shouted "Drop your guns!". Undeterred, I shouted "Drop YOUR guns" and pointed my rifle at them. As they cocked their guns, I shot one down, but another returned fire! The shot seemed to have hit a vital part in my leg because I went down, almost fainting from the pain. Then the gunfight started properly and from here on things got a little

sketchy so most of what follows is a second hand account.

One goon was shot in the hand, another in the head, the sheriff tried to stop the fight by screaming and shooting in the air shouting "Stop shooting" but unsurprisingly, things only got worse.

Suddenly, there was a horrible screeching sound from where the priest had hidden that seemed to explode in my head and I lost consciousness...

From what I can piece together from the others' accounts, the following transpired:

The priest was screeching and chanting, fire coming from his eyes, mouth and hands and this action caused the back wall of the barn to turn into a bright, shiny gate of some description from which some horrible creature came forth and terrorised the people who were there.

Despite this, Robert and Silas managed to shoot the priest several times and Nicolas finished him off, taking revenge for his family. The unnamable thing proved more difficult as the mere sight of it caused Robert and Thomas to temporarily lose their faculties but Silas emerged as the hero of the hour. He jumped into the police car, started it and drove it straight at the monstrosity (clipping Robert in the process), pushing it along the barn corridor and through the wall, barely managing to jump to safety as the horrible thing and half the car vanished into nothingness!

After this, the injured were transported to hospital and the town slowly returned to normal.

Realisation of what had happened over the recent years crept in which obviously had a depressing impact on its inhabitants but I'm sure they will find their way back to a normal life and who knows, I might return for a hunting holiday.

Nicolas was probably the most happy of them all as he had found his children unharmed in the barn and his wife was found in one of the other buildings, too.

Slightly embarrassingly, the town celebrated us as heroes, we were given lodgings free of charge for as long as we desired (or, in my, Robert's and Alex's case free treatment at the hospital until our recovery).

We also received a grateful letter from a certain Mrs. Hubbard who thanked us for the rescue of her son Lafayette and said if we were ever in Washington State, we'd receive a heroes' welcome.

## **Part 3**

### **Rise of the Supreme Race**

After defeating the evil reverend of Plattsburgh and sending the wicked creature back to the hell it came from it was time to relax. Or was it?

The following day we relaxed and licked our wounds a little but those who could also explored what was left of Plattsburgh. Slowly, the town came back to life but it will take quite a while until everyone will be back to normal. Especially those who had been under the Reverend's full control now couldn't remember anything

I went turkey shooting in the morning and when I returned to the hotel I found a note from Silas who had found something interesting at the boarded up Methodist church (i.e. not the evil cultist church). Under the loose slabs underneath the altar, he found an odd statuette with batrachian features and tentacles (rather like the eldritch creature we saw at the barn) in a stone circle carved with cyrillic characters. Robert, Nicolas and I joined him back at the church to take a closer look. I took a few photos of the statuette and the carvings and Nicolas made a rubbing so we might decipher it later. None of us could read Russian or cyrillic characters and it turned out the "library" at the school didn't have any books or dictionaries, either which, considering the political climate, wasn't really surprising.

Continuing our investigation, we went back to the Reverend's church where we found another batrachian statuette, whole piles of documents and a book, also written in cyrillic but with disturbing diagrams and illustrations. There was also a locked safe behind an elk's head. We didn't find any clues as to the combination nor had any tools but Nicolas said he would look for some chemicals in the school lab so he could burn the lock off but would only be able to do that the next morning.

I should probably mention at this point that the local police were entirely uninterested in our meddling and on the contrary were grateful for any light we might shine on the sinister Reverend's machinations.

We returned to our hotel and retired early.

Thursday, 29th of May

While we were having breakfast, we received a visit from the chief of police accompanied by another gentleman who stayed in the background while the chief was passing on some rather troubling news: Apparently, the FBI were on their way, intent on investigating not only the incident at the barn but also a group of foreigners accused of being involved in smuggling and bribery. The chief told us of a good friend of his, Prof. Seymour, who lived in Canada not too far from here and he would offer to hide us for a while until the investigation was over. We were to take the first train as the FBI could turn up at any time. That professor researched the rituals and culture of local Indian tribes, which also sounded interesting.

The chief then introduced us to the other gentleman, a Doctor Henry Vargas, the professor's personal physician. He would accompany us to Canada and he also offered help in our current matters when Nicolas mentioned that we should go to the church quickly and open the safe so we hurried over there. Vargas asked us to leave the room so we didn't see what he was doing but after a few minutes he called us in and the safe was open. There was quite an amount of money, more documents and another one of those weird statuettes, but this time in silver. It also had symbols carved around the base, symbols that were oddly familiar, the language we had seen in various places and that had ultimately come from that forsaken place in Africa. Nicolas deciphered it to say "Laws of the Moon".

We left the money in the safe, to which Silas added a bottle of his "medicinal gin" for good measure which might derail the FBI for a while.



We hurried back to the hotel and quickly packed. Thomas was to be sedated and bandaged up well in hospital and Alex had already left for New York to speak with his agent, so it was Robert, Silas, Nicolas and I accompanied by Dr. Vargas who boarded the train.

At the border to Canada, we were harrassed by a rather annoying and belligerent French speaking guard who asked us silly questions about our business in Canada but eventually carried on to the next carriage, undoubtedly to annoy more passengers. Finally, the barrier was lifted and the train crossed over to Canada.

The landscape soon started to change, more and more trees, lakes and then mountains in the distance. Soon the train was rolling through thick forest.

We were just having lunch in the dining car when I was idly looking out of the window and suddenly spotted a woman in ragged clothes running through the woods. There were two hooded figures running not far behind her, clearly intent on catching her. Silas must have spotted her as well because he exclaimed something and pulled the communications cord. The emergency brake slammed on and we barely stay upright while food and wine was flying everywhere. My beef bourgignon was all over my shirt and Nicolas had taken a dive face first into his pasta. Wasting no time with things like that Silas, Robert and I stormed towards the door, just about missing the cook who was screaming and shouting about his lovely kitchen.

Outside, we hurried along the track towards where we had come from and then searched the woods. After a while I found a scrap of bloodied cloth, evidently from the woman's clothes. Vargas turned up, urging us to return to the train which wasn't going to wait but we had a woman to rescue so sent him back to delay the train.

We carry on, following the sparse trail of footprints, occasional drops of blood and more scraps of cloth until we arrived at a trail through the woods with fresh tyre tracks. If they had a vehicle, they would be a mile away or even further by now.

We gave up and headed back and arrived just as the train set off. Both Robert and I managed to jump on but Silas twisted his ankle and stumbled to the ground. Robert, already arguing with a train guard and being threatened with a fine, pulled the brake again, stopping the train. He jumped out and dragged Silas in. The guard, showing no sympathy whatsoever and babbling on about the train being late, then fined both of them 50 dollars. Robert paid up but Silas refused and was retained by the guard.

After about 3 hours, we finally pulled into Lacolle where Professor Seymour resided. It was a rather small settlement, small houses built mostly of wood by a lake busy with fishing boats. In the distance we could make out mountains, quite a lovely place, if rather remote.

When Silas was dragged off to the police station, I came along so we could give our story to the officers. Naturally, they didn't believe us and as Silas refused to pay his fine, I had to bail him out. We returned to the station, just as a couple of cabs arrived to take us to Professor Seymour's residence. A short drive later, we arrived at a big house, the maitre'd John happily greeting Dr. Vargas (who immediately enquired about the Professor's wife) and welcoming us. We were shown into a cosy reception room loaded with book shelves and animal heads, mostly deer, and served brandy, fine cigars and some rather fine ginger biscuits.

Prof. Seymour came down to greet us. A weary looking gentleman, tired, slightly dissheveled with salt and pepper hair.

Nicolas asked the Professor about his research and he began a rather confusing account about charcoal burials and crystal things found by and in the lake (apparently similar to the crystal skull found in South America a few years ago). Seymour seemed to think that the things he found weren't

depictions of humans and he also talked of creatures called ghouls who apparently eat humans. I couldn't quite make sense of it.

Working with him was a Prof. Nigel Bonaparte from the University of Montreal who is apparently not in for the research but for his own personal gain. Seymour alleged that according to a student's report, Bonaparte found a whole crystal knife at the edge of the lake but never reported it and kept it to himself. He thought Bonaparte had been meddling with dangerous things, was completely mad and obsessed with those crystal artifacts. Hm, possibly a person to stay well away from but something tells me we would be paying him a visit soon.

Nicolas then showed him the silver statuette and explained the symbols. Seymour examined the statuette and thought it was a vessel of sorts, with one of the toes being a spout and he also thought that the statuette was hollow and contained a liquid.

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Prof. Seymour had John fetch some basic laboratory equipment and we go outside to the gazebo in the garden as it was a nice, ventilated area. As the professor did not want to be involved, I donned a rubber apron, rubber gloves and a pair of goggles, just to be on the safe side, set up a big ceramic bowl on the table. I held the frog statuette feet up, and grabbed the toe. I wiggled and twisted it a bit and then it came free with a rubbery squeak and a pop. Suddenly, the air pressure seemed to shift, everything around me shimmered and warped and I was overcome with a strong feeling of seasickness. Vaguely, I made out retching sounds from the others but I was too disorientated but started to see what was going on. The world around me changed as well, the colour seemed to drain from everything. The gazebo, the garden and the house had vanished and had been replaced by an empty, barren, rocky desert. Above us, a black sky with blinking stars in different constellations from where they had just been. Nicolas and Dr. Vargas were here, too, on their knees, still retching. Suddenly, the air cleared, the gazebo and the other familiar surroundings returned and the nausea passed. Having had enough of this for the time being, I put the stopper back into the statuette. Nicolas and Dr. Vargas slowly recovered from having thrown up violently, and John mopped up the rather impressive mess. Curiously, only Nicolas, the Dr. and I had been affected by the sickness, the Professor was fine, despite standing right next to us. He also hadn't noticed the area changing into a rocky desert from the other side. Robert and Silas who had been outside, hadn't noticed anything, either. Still confused, we retired for the night.

The next morning, Dr. Vargas left on the train to pick up Thomas from Plattsburgh, Robert went shopping and on a little hunting trip, while Silas, Nicolas and I went to Montreal University to spy on Bonaparte. Prof. Seymour had given us a key, plans to the university grounds and directions. We strolled through the rather magnificent botanical gardens, marvelling at plants and flowers, towards the building the Professor had shown us. The key fit and we went inside. Roomy but empty and silent corridors awaited us. Suddenly, I heard footsteps so signalled the others to stop and be silent. The footsteps faded and a door closed. Relieved, we carried on. The ground floor was obviously the biology department so we headed up the sweeping stairs where we found the archaeology department we had been looking for. There were displays with various finds, both native and exotic, interesting in other circumstances but we had reason not to dawdle and carried on. There was a photo of Bonaparte, a squat, unpleasant looking chap, in one of the displays next to two doors marked with Prof. Nigel Bonaparte's name. Nicolas tried the first one which just happened to be unlocked. While Silas waited outside to stand guard, Nicolas and I went in to investigate. It was a big research lab filled with boxes, finds, maps, books, all strewn about on big metal tables, shelves and desk. I had a look around the tables and Nicolas examined the desk where he found a

book with odd symbols and writing.

Suddenly, the light went out ...

and we were back in the hotel in Plattsburgh, sitting at the breakfast table as the police chief accompanied by Dr. Vargas arrived ... Confused, we looked at each other as the chief came towards us warning us of grave news. "The FBI are coming?" I asked. "Er, yes, how did you know?" "I ... don't know..." Confused, the police chief seemed to ignore this and ushered us to get ready so we wouldn't miss our train. We picked up Thomas, who had recovered surprisingly quickly, from the hospital.

We rushed and picked up everything we had before (the statuettes and papers) and got back on the train. The journey went well at first and there was a different border guard who was a lot more friendly so we made good time.

We had come up with a plan to try and save the woman this time so we got ready, careful not to miss the spot. Checking time passed and the scenery outside, we found it.

Thomas feigned a heart attack, Robert pulled the signal cord and the train screeched to a halt. While Dr. Vargas directed people to make room for his patient, Robert, Nicolas, Silas and I used the confusion to leave the train, running back along the tracks for a bit and then cutting into the woods where Robert had spotted the group, two burly men in brown robes, one carrying the woman over his shoulder. Robert, being ahead of the rest of us, shouted at them and they stopped. One of them drew a gun but missed Robert who had also drawn his gun, creating a standoff. I made my way slowly around the group but failed to spot the other scoundrel who managed to shoot me!

Thankfully, the bullet just grazed the side of my head. I dropped to the ground with a scream and continued crawling, hoping they would believe I was dead.

Meanwhile, Robert continued to talk to the bandits, trying to persuade them to give up but they didn't relent. Nicolas turned up and was shot in the shoulder by the criminal not holding the woman. I crawled a bit further and then took a shot at the man holding the woman. I hit him in the hand, he screamed and dropped his gun. Silas, who had finally arrived as well, stepped out, raising his gun but there was only a clunking noise so he threw his gun at the criminal but missed. Robert managed to get another shot in as the man pushed the woman to the ground and ran, dropping him. Then Silas jumped out from his cover and knocked out the other man.

Robert freed the woman from the bag over her head while I tied up the man and searched him. In a large pouch at his belt I found a small knife, some money, a handful of strange, smooth bronze coins with a hole through the middle, and a small glass vial containing a purplish liquid. His face was covered in tattoos of odd symbols and Latin writing (as, as it turned out, was the other brute, who was quite dead).

We found out that the woman was called Michelle, a clerk from Montreal, who was abducted on her way home from work.

A guard from train arrived and we explained what had happened.

Silas had searched a bit further and found the truck the gangsters had arrived in. Michelle told us she had been on the back of the truck when she managed to loosen her bonds and jump off, causing the gangsters to chase after her.

We decided this was all evidence and had to return it to Montreal. The guard agreed to this but urged us to get back on the train so it wouldn't be caught up by the express behind it.

While Silas and I took the truck to Montreal, the others picked up the gangsters and returned to the train.

After a long and painful journey on bumpy forest tracks, we finally arrived at Montreal police station where we met up with the others.

With the thug locked up, Michelle taken care of and Nicolas in hospital, the rest of us took a cab back to Professor Seymour's house - or was it the first time we were there? I'm not certain... John met us at the door, clearly not remembering us, but he told us the professor had been taken ill and had passed away the previous evening ... which was different. John nevertheless showed us in. While Dr. Vargas viewed the body we waited outside the Professor's room. The doctor couldn't find anything unusual, by all accounts he had passed away quietly in his sleep from a heart attack as the first doctor to examine him had stated.

We heard a door open so went downstairs we we met a tall man with messy red hair who introduced himself as Paul Seymour, the Professor's son. We introduced ourselves and offered our condolences and then waited in the drawing room while Mr. Seymour talked to Vargas.

A while later, Vargas came in reporting that the son was clearly stricken with grief. Most of us retired for the night while Robert and I decided on a walk around the grounds. However, we couldn't find any evidence of vomiting or dimensional shifts so we went back to the house and retired.

In the morning Nicolas returned from hospital, and the Doctor came down with a plaster on his nose. He told us he had investigated the statuette, opened it and then he babbled about hallucinogenics from the Amazonian rainforest and odd visions he experienced. I showed him the vial with purple liquid from the dead goons. He uncorked it, we heard a faint sound as if pebbles on a beach, but thankfully, no visions. Vargas wet his fingertip, tasted it and recoiled, wobbling a bit on his feet. Apparently, it "packed quite a punch" but there were no ill effects.

We discussed the events that had happened previously and more recently and Nicolas thought it was Bonaparte's book that had transported us back in time as it was called "Invocations and Thought Transference". So, had Bonaparte moved us or the book? Nicolas thought the book had been booby-trapped.

I enquire about Prof. Bonaparte's social standing and public face, considering the chances of starting a police inquiry into his life and work but Dr. Vargas thought the chances of us, as outsiders and foreigners succeeding were slim.

I also had a look at the "coins" I had found on one of the tattooed goons. They were all smooth, from a shiny material that looked like metal but was very much lighter. Most curiously, they stayed cool, even after I'd held them in my hands for several minutes. Nobody else could make sense of them, either.

We finally decided to visit the university again to have a look through Prof. Seymour's office and then also Bonaparte's again. This time we even had a cover as Dr. Vargas had been put in charge of putting Seymour's affairs in order. We arrived at the university without problems and gained entry with the professor's keys. We found Prof. Seymour's office upstairs, seemingly undisturbed but Robert pointed out that the room had been searched in the last few days, very carefully. We looked more thoroughly and discovered that notes from about a week's time were missing...

At Bonaparte's office Dr. Vargas noticed that someone had picked that lock before we arrived. He picked the lock and we have another look around the office. Nicolas found the book again which Dr. Vargas wrapped in a large handkerchief. I examined Bonaparte's papers and found that notes had been taken from here as well, from the same time period as the ones missing from Seymour's office. Most odd. This clearly pointed at a third party being involved while we had previously believed it was only Bonaparte who had been after Seymour's work.

Vargas then tried to pick the lock of the other of Bonaparte's doors but managed to get his finger stuck in it (Apparently, it was US military issue, unpickable) which he only managed to extract by applying large amounts of soap... Instead, Nicolas shoulder charged the door open. Behind it was a lecture room with nothing of interest inside it.

Slightly disappointed, we left the university.

## 31

As we made to leave, we heard someone come up the stairs. Most of my associates tried to hide in corners or the lecture room while I strode confidently towards the stairs. It was a caretaker of some kind, carrying a big metal toolbox. After a quick chat the good man was persuaded we were there on business, retrieving, ahem, important documents from Prof. Seymour's office. Silas borrowed some of the caretaker's tools and fixed the lock on the lecture room door. Dr. Vargas gave the caretaker a vial of his "invigorating elixir" and from Silas he received a cigar. Quite pleased with himself, he went his merry way and we left the University.

We decided to split up. Silas, Thomas, Robert and I to visit the library and look for clues in the recent newspapers, Dr. Vargas to visit and question Dr. Bonaparte and Nicolas to try his luck at the chemistry department analysing the various items we had found.

There was nothing really exciting in the local political news, just things about a local election coming up and about the local authorities coordinating with American police to clamp down on smuggling. A little more interesting was an article about "exciting discoveries" at the archaeological digs which were to be announced soon (possibly about now and most likely whatever the notes pertained to that had been taken from Seymour's and Bonaparte's offices). Silas copied down the map so we would have an idea of where to look.

We then returned to Prof. Seymour's house where we reconvened with the others and shared what we'd found.

Dr. Vargas visited Bonaparte, who wasn't home, but the door had been open so had an opportunity to search his house. He found a number of odd books, a knife sheath made from an odd, almost glowing crystal that was catching the light in an unusual manner; and a statuette of a tripodal two-headed thing.

Nicolas had tested the liquid from the batrachian statuette and found that it was some sort of solvent that would eat through any material but glass and had rather peculiar properties (tests revealed it to be both an alkaline and an acid). The statuette itself was made from a magnesium alloy. The smooth metal discs I found on the dead kidnapper were completely inert and could neither be scratched, heated or otherwise manipulated. The purple liquid in the small vial (also from the kidnapper) turned out to be honeylike and rather like the liquid from those marine plant pods we'd found on the old man on the Isle of Wight. Nicolas drank it and felt a lot better afterwards.

At the Professor's house, Nicolas touched the crystal sheath which sparkled oddly and sparks ran over his hands up his arm. Robert jumped in and separated the two.

We then looked at the various books Dr. Vargas had found. Nicolas examined a book containing rhymes in Latin mentioning the name "Cthulhu" in various places. I looked at a rather old looking one, bound in a peculiar black leather with gold trim. Its text and illustrations told of the coming of the "Great Deep One" (resembling the statuette Dr. Vargas had found) and contained rituals to summon "him" via sacrifices.

The third book contained rambling and rather random descriptions of things and creatures.

We then searched Prof. Seymour's study but didn't find anything that could have helped us shed light on the current situation. Dr. Vargas joined us, reporting that the Professor's wife had sadly passed away as well.

There was a safe but we had no luck opening it as we had no clue as to the combination. Vargas thought that the Professor's son might know.

As there was nothing else to do, we retired for the night.

## 32

I woke up to screams emanating from the direction of Robert's room so grabbed my gun and ran into the corridor. The door was smashed and as I peeked in, I saw a nine foot long serpent thing, with bat wings, horrible protrusions all over its body, hovering over the bed with Robert in its claws. In fear of hitting Robert, I didn't shoot but Dr. Vargas, who had also emerged from his room armed with a knife, jumped in and grappled it. Thomas also turned up, fired a shot and hurt the thing. I grabbed Robert and wrenched him free, a bullet whizzed inches over my head, and Robert crawled out of the room. The creature grabbed at me but missed, I shot it at point blank range but the bullet pinged off without any effect. Thomas then managed to shoot off one of the beast's eyestalks making it screech ghastly with pain and anger. Dr. Vargas then set fire to the curtains, ripped them off and attempted to throw them over the thing but misses and the curtains land on the bed, setting the sheets alight. The beast clamped its jaws on Thomas' leg and I shot it ineffectually through the wing. The scuffle carried on for a while until the serpent wrapped itself around Thomas and scrambled out of the window. Both I and Nicolas grabbed at him but he slipped through our fingers. Robert shot it and the thing started thrashing, already halfway out of the window. Robert slammed the window shut on it but it bounced off so the monster could slither outside. It immediately took to the air and flew off in a rather erratic fashion, clearly wounded and most likely weighted down by Thomas' weight.

In despair, We fired our guns several times, Robert and I hit and it let go of Thomas who plummeted to the ground.

Whilst the others ran outside to look for Thomas, I put out the fire before it could spread to the rest of the house. I also had a quick look around the house and found that the front door had been smashed to pieces and the professor's room searched with the safe cracked open and, naturally, emptied.

As thankfully, Thomas was still alive, some set off for hospital, while Nicolas and I stayed behind to repair the front door and look after the house.

John the butler was missing. His cottage was empty, the bed unmade but someone did have breakfast before they left. Outside the cottage, Nicolas found an odd circle of ash with five points around it. At the points he found some sort of semi-precious stones. Later, he suggested it was some sort of summoning circle that had been used to call that serpent creature.

We then called the police and a constable turned up soon, we explained the story of the break-in, and the cracked safe. Nicolas' room was also searched and the book from Bonaparte's office stolen. We had made up a story of a huge dog attacking Robert and Thomas which was confirmed by our companions at the hospital.

Soon after the professor's son turned up, clearly annoyed at the news of the cracked safe (less so of our companions' injuries). Apparently, the deeds to the house had been in the safe, and as they were now missing, it would be impossible for him to sell it at this time. He argued with police, claiming

he'd always suspected the butler of being a criminal and made sure he was treated as a suspect. He also argued with Dr. Vargas who inquired about the continuation of his employment status (as both his charges were now dead).

The son also claimed the professor had been in financial troubles for quite some time so the son wanted to sell the house to recoup the money he had had to keep lending him. He eventually left for the bank and the police went on as well.

The others returned from the hospital and we learned that Thomas would make a full recovery in relatively short time. This was a great relief.

We discussed what to do next, we agreed that only the dig site would bring us further at this time so it was decided to visit it first thing in the morning. Dr. Vargas also suggested we hire "independent contractors to act as physical leverage" and wanted to look into that.

### 33

The next morning we set off for the dig site. After Doctor Vargas' hired goons had turned up, we took the professor's and a hired car around the lake towards the dig site. The road was quite bumpy, making for an uncomfortable ride. After going down a slope and round a bend, there was a police car blocking the road. The officer told us the dig site was closed due to an accident and we were told to return to where we came from. Thomas spun a yarn about the "London Archaeological Society" having sent us to investigate and that the site needed to be secured by professionals. Sadly, the policeman would have none of it and told us to leave. So we did.

We drove back a bit, concealed the car in the woods and set off on foot. After wandering around for a while we found the dig site which consisted of six primitive huts, two trucks (one flatbed, one covered), pegged out areas, a well or mineshaft with a wooden gantry above it. Some exposed rock at the bank looked intriguing, too.

I headed around the treeline towards the buildings while Dr. Vargas inspected the vehicles. The first building contained four bunkbeds. I tried the large building next but it was secured by a large padlock that resisted a good kick but Dr. Vargas managed to pick the lock (a rather unusual pastime for a physician, I thought). Inside there was an office area with bookshelves and desks and a large bunk room. We searched the office but couldn't find anything of interest. We had the distinct impression that someone had been there before us and taken everything that could have told us anything about what was going on, just like in the professor's and Bonaparte's offices. The other buildings didn't reveal anything, either.

The only way the workers who had been here could have gone was down the shaft as the lift had been lowered and had stayed down, as Nicolas had told us so we decided to investigate. Nicolas, I and two of Vargas' goons went down first in the lift which was basically a metal cage suspended from the gantry. The way down was rather peculiar, there was packed earth and rock on three sides (as you would expect) but the fourth side was made of smooth stone blocks that fit together neatly without mortar, like in the old Maya ruins or the pyramids of Egypt. At the bottom was a small chamber with a muddy floor over which some planks had been laid. There was a short tunnel with a crawlspace at the end leading off into utter darkness.

I got on my hands and knees and crawled through the space for about four metres until the crawlspace opened out into a room, about ten metres square and high, also built of those smooth, regular blocks. There was a corridor leading to the left. I called for the others to come through (meanwhile the lift had been sent up again and the rest had come down).

When everybody was assembled in the square room, we heard a faint voice from the other side of the corridor but were unable to make out any details so we set off carefully down the corridor. The walls were most peculiar. First made up from those large, regular slabs, the slabs subdivided, becoming smaller and smaller and in turn more in numbers, until the individual pieces were so tiny one was unable to discern their shape and it was basically a tunnel cut from smooth rock. We carried on and we heard the voice again, whimpering.

The tunnel opened out into a huge, spherical cavern. In the centre was a raised dais, with a circular slab of crystal on top, on which an unhealthy looking gentleman lay, stripped to the waist. His chest was a mess of blood, red bubbles rising and bursting with each shallow and laboured breath. Before anyone could stop him, Nicolas raced over, grabbed the man's hand and tried to pull him off. Something was wrong, Nicolas started groaning and jerking so I grabbed Nicolas and pulled, one goon pulled the man's leg, another goon pushed from the other side until the man finally detaches from the slab, exploding in a shower of blood and intestines, accompanied by the most horrific scream...

There was a brief burst of static and our two electric torches flicker and go out. We took this as our cue to leave so we headed back out and up, Nicolas for whatever reason dragging the eviscerated corpse behind him. Back on the surface, we heard vehicles approaching and made for the treeline. Three trucks with a large number of burly men in dark clothes pulled up. They found the corpse which Nicolas had finally left behind as he fled into the woods. Armed guards headed out in various directions, one of them coming towards us so we retreated further into the woods and split up. We successfully managed to stay clear of our pursuers by leading them this way and that and in circles but away from our cars, where we finally arrived, except Nicolas. Robert went back into the woods searching for him and eventually bringing him back. We bundle in the remaining car (Dr. Vargas had already left in the professor's) and took off back to civilisation.

## 34

We raced away from the area and caught up with Vargas' car who suggested visiting Prof. Bonaparte. While the others went to see the professor, Nicolas and I returned to Seymour's house to relax for a while. Nicolas had to clean up and I decided that there were too many people to see Bonaparte already. I read the papers which contained a story on "tourists who prevented a kidnapping". Thankfully, our names weren't mentioned. There was a small obituary for Prof. Seymour but no news story on his death or even the break-in. Probably good as well. The others came back and reported not having found Bonaparte but instead some armed goons who involved them in a firefight. Vargas found out from one of the goons that Bonaparte was being held at an abandoned farm north of the city.

The next day was a day of legwork. I took the map we had found at the dig site to the council offices to find out who the marked properties belonged to. There were ten marks on the map, six of which were actual and registered dig sites, while four spots were military property arranged in a square around Camp North of the Canadian National Guard outside Montreal. The dig sites were registered by joint requests of Professors Bonaparte and Seymour. After the first dig site had been opened and the two professors quarrelled over rights to finds, the university intervened and forced them to enter a joint venture.

The police was next on my list, to find out who the trucks that had turned up at the dig site belonged to: a haulage company called "Maple Express". Back at the council offices, I found out the registered owner of that company: outstanding citizen and celebrity Paul Thompson, local bigwig and philanthrope. Anything involving logistics, transport including rail rights belonged to him, as



well as considerable stretches of land. His grandfather had been one of the city's founders so he was from a well-respected family, untouchable.

Thomas found out that the farm buildings had been abandoned for 10 years but still belonged to a Lachelle family.

There was some discussion as to what to do next and we decided that Thompson was too big for us so we chose to investigate the farm in the evening to see if we could find out what happened to Bonaparte.

Doctor Vargas had organised a flat bed truck we took towards the farm in the evening. Before we could reach the farm, however, there was another police roadblock. The officer claimed there had been a “trapping accident” and that the farm was closed while an investigation was taking place and “professional hunters were taking care of the bear”.

There was no point in arguing so we drove back a bit and then around and across the fields towards the farm. When we were close enough, we got out and crept a bit closer on foot. The place didn't really look abandoned with all those lights illuminating the buildings. With my telescope I could make out four people moving around, two of them guarding the doors of the barn. After a while, they opened the doors and I managed to take a peek inside. There was a fence inside and behind that fence ... were people, just standing there, unmoving. I could see about thirty but considering the size of the barn, there could be hundreds, if not thousands... That sight was quite enough so we decided to call it a day and returned to the truck.

What should we do? The police were clearly in it, so reporting what we had seen would most likely get us locked up. There was, however, a base of the National Guard nearby. It was highly unlikely they would be bribed so we were thinking of reporting our findings to them.

Dr. Vargas returned his truck while the rest of us returned to Prof. Seymour's house. The news of the day was that oil had been found nearby.

Late at night, we were woken up by Thomas' scream of “Fire!”. I grabbed my rifle and stepped into a smoke-filled corridor. I also heard the crackle of fire from downstairs, so I went back into my room to fetch a wet towel to wrap around my head. That's when I heard machine gun fire from outside.

Suddenly I felt awful, a gut-wrenching sensation, and passed out.

When I came to, all of us were sitting around the breakfast table at the hotel ... in Plattsburgh. The newspaper on the table claimed it was Saturday, the 29th of May...

After a few cups of strong coffee Nicolas told us about the book from Bonaparte's office. He claimed it would become “unstable” when damaged so he stabbed it with his penknife when he realised we had been in grave danger. The book had sent us (who Nicolas claimed were “keyed” to the book) right back to where it had all begun.

## **35**

Just as we were about to leave the hotel, I started to feel really woozy and remained so for some considerable time so what follows is a summary based on accounts of my companions.

They acquired a car in Plattsburgh, drove to Montreal and went straight to the university. They were attacked by huge rats with humanoid faces and picked up the book that had sent us back in time twice already. Although we were back in the past, so to speak, when we found the book, it was in the same state as we'd last left it, that is with the damage it had acquired when Nicolas stabbed it so we could escape from the assault. It seemed the book was a constant in time...

Next, they went to the ranch where they found hundreds of undead soldiers who were passive and

didn't attack. A single guard was surprised and interrogated. A trapdoor let into a basement where there was some sort of laboratory arrangement with odd glass objects and a row of cages, one of which held Bonaparte. They managed to free Bonaparte but he was delirious.

## 36

As they returned to the car, my dizziness had passed and I was able to take part in happenings again. As mentioned, Bonaparte was delirious but not only that, he was blind, too, apparently having had his eyes scooped out. Poor devil. He was babbling about a desk and a secret but couldn't remember or wouldn't say which desk or where. Finally Thomas managed to extract from the mad professor's brain that it was the one at his house so we drove there.

Nicolas stayed in the car with Bonaparte while the rest of us searched the house. In his office I found his diary which was mainly filled with notes about the excavation and rather nasty comments about the other archaeologists, especially Professor Seymour. One interesting titbit was at the end: A book that was apparently the key to the secret had arrived. Probably still a bit dizzy, I didn't realise this was the book we'd already had and had been in our possession a few times so I started searching the library.

There was also a note taped under the desk that made little sense or was some sort of riddle about the Seeker of Hades and something needed to be burned. A gunshot went off outside, we ran downstairs and saw how Robert and Nicolas fought with one of those rat things that had tried to get into the car. They soon dispatched it and I went to the library looking for the book. Then Dr. Vargas stormed in and started setting fire to the curtains and loose pieces of paper. Before I could protest, I was bundled outside and we all squeezed ourselves back into the car.

Our next destination was the mine (this we pieced together from interrogating Bonaparte and decrypting the note) and we had to burn something there. Also, we needed to stab the book with the crystal dagger. We stopped on top of the hill and Vargas brought Bonaparte around with the aid of some drugs. These sadly turned out to be an overdose and the poor Professor died after a fit and babbling about a riddle.

We went to the large administrative building first. Just after Vargas picked the lock, three of those rat things scuttled out of the door and ran off into different directions. Vargas urged to make haste as those things might bring back more. We searched the place but didn't find anything of interest. Nothing remained but going down the lift. It looked like the first time we were there so we found our way through the crawlspace and various tunnels into the huge circular chamber where we originally found the poor fellow who had been bled to death. The pedestal was there, in the centre of the room, a stone bowl on top with curious inscriptions around the rim and a silver dish. Nicolas went to work attempting to decipher the inscriptions while Robert stayed behind at the entrance behind those sacks, keeping watch for anyone coming down the lift.

I searched the place further, went through an arched doorway at the other end into a long narrow room, about 200 yards long. The floor was dusty and nobody seemed to have been down here for a long time as the dust was undisturbed (unlike the area up to the pedestal). Further down the room were two archways on the left and right. I took the one on the left, another tunnel that ended in a blind archway. It wasn't bricked up, it looked unfinished as if someone had gone through the effort of carving out the doorway but not continuing the tunnel. The surface wasn't quite as smooth and there were silver specks converging into a point. I went back into the main corridor where I met Dr. Vargas who reported that the opposite tunnel looked just like that. There were two further tunnels branching off from the end of the corridor, also ending in blind doorways with those odd silver speckles.

I went back into the tunnel and touched the silvery bits. First, there was nothing and then all colour seemed to drain out of my fingers. Vargas had a wild idea and we touched the ends of the corridors at the same time. There was a sensation of pins and needles crawling up my fingers. The silvery bits shone a bit brighter but this stopped after a while.

Then we heard a shout from Robert that the lift was coming down. I joined him and we set up with our rifles behind those stacks of sacks, Robert also had made a supply of petrol bombs. Two uniformed bodies came down. We fought the undead soldiers for a while, they kept coming but we were able to fight them off.

Meanwhile, Nicolas had formed a plan he had devised from bits and pieces from the book, the note and the inscriptions on the bowl: We each had to touch the end archway of one of those corridors while he burned blood and stabbed the book.

So we took our positions. There was an odd sound and then Nicolas shouted, "Touch the wall!". We did, the archway in front of me lit up and became a translucent, shimmering portal. I stepped through into bright light and I don't really remember what I saw there. I vaguely remember horrific images but I'm not really sure I should write these down.

When I came out of what seemed like a trance, we were still in the circular chamber but all the undead soldiers had crumpled to the ground.

We headed out and drove back to Montreal. Everything seemed to back to normal. Professor Seymour was still dead but nobody asked any questions of us.

We bade our good-byes, heading back into civilisation, Robert and Thomas back to their shops in London, Nicolas back to his family. Doctor Vargas mentioned that the South Seas would be a nice place to visit at that time of year and as I'd never been, I asked him if he wanted a travel companion. He agreed so we went. An account of our adventures there will have to wait for some other time.

**THE END**