

# The Aether Chronicle

The Imaginary Alternate History of the Steampunk Empire

From Saturday February 11, 2014 to Friday February 21, 2014



A FICTITIOUS RENDERING OF TRITON “KING OF LONDON” HAVING TAKEN POSSESSION OF THE BRIDGE OF LONDON.

## Triton ‘King of London’

CITIZENS OF LONDON, THE SITUATION OF THE GIANT OCTOPUS-LIKE CREATURE THAT INVADDED LONDON ON JANUARY 10 2014, HAS BEEN RESOLVED! THE CREATURE, WHOM TABLOID PAPERS ARE NOW REFERRING TO AS “TRITON THE OCTO-CLOCK,” HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM BIG BEN AND TAKEN TO A SECURE GOVERNMENT LOCATION. THIS REPORTER’S SOURCE CLAIMS IT IS AN UNDERWATER-LAB LOCATED SOMEWHERE IN THE OCEAN. FROM THERE TRITON WILL BE STUDIED IN HIS OWN ENVIRONMENT, AND BROUGHT FORWARD FOR FORMAL STATE OCCASIONS SUCH AS THE QUEEN’S JUBILEE, THE UPCOMING WORLD CHAMPION CRICKET MATCH AND RIBBON-CUTTINGS FOR CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS ART GALLERIES AND SHOPPING DISTRICTS. BECAUSE OF IT’S RECENT ‘REIGN OF FAME’ TRITON HAS BEEN GIVEN THE DUBIOUS TITLE OF ‘KING OF LONDON,’ WHICH THIS REPORTER BELIEVES IS MEANT TO HEarken BACK TO ANCIENT TRADITIONS OF CHIEFS FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT TO RULE THE TRIBE. MIGHT MAKES RIGHT. ONLY THE STRONGEST AMONG US HAS THE RIGHT TO BE KING SO IN TIMES OF DANGER HE MIGHT DEFEND THE CITY.

TRITON WAS EVENTUALLY REMOVED FROM IT’S, FOR WANT OF A BETTER WORD, “NEST”, IN THE BELOVED CLOCK TOWER BY MEANS OF SEVERAL OF HIS NEW PRIESTS, THE MOST NOTEWORTHY OCEAN ZOOLOGIST IN EUROPE,

SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD, AND A BAGFUL OF JELLY SWEETS. ESTEEMED OCEANOGRAPHER A.E. LUCIUS INSISTED THAT DEEP-SEA CREATURES RESPOND DUBIOUSLY TO LIGHT, TO DARK, TO HOT, TO COLD— APPARENTLY IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW HOW THE CREATURE WOULD REACT TO THIS STIMULI WITHOUT DOCUMENTED EXPERIMENTATION. TRUTHFULLY, HE CLAIMED, HE WASN’T SURE HOW THE CREATURE WAS SURVIVING SO LONG OUT OF WATER. FURTHER SPECULATION ON THIS POINT HAS DETERMINED THAT IT MUST HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE BEAST’S CLOCKWORK NATURE. MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD BOMBARDED THE CREATURE WITH VARIOUS FORMS OF MUNITIONS, TO NO EFFECT. THE CREATURE SEEMED IMPERVIOUS TO TRADITIONAL WEAPONRY, RANGING FROM BULLETS, TO GAS, TO PARTICLE WEAPONS. IT WAS THE PRIEST, ONE “KNNNRKK-GNAH” (THE CLOSEST THIS REPORTER COULD COME TO AN ACCURATE SPELLING—THIS PRIEST ADHERES TO THE BURGEONING BELIEF THAT TRITON SPEAKS ITS OWN LANGUAGE COMPRISED OF THE CREAKING AND GROANING OF IT’S SINEWS AND MUSCLES, ITS GEARS WHIRRING, ITS EYEBALL BLINKING, AND THE PRIEST SPEAKS ALMOST SOLELY IN THAT LANGUAGE.) APPARENTLY A NUMBER OF WORKERS WERE TRAPPED IN BIG BEN WHEN TRITON FIRST DESCENDED. THEY SURVIVED UNTIL THEY COULD BE REMOVED BY RESCUE TEAMS BY FLINGING WHATEVER THEY HAD HANDY AT THE MONSTER’S FLICKING

TENTACLES. WHEN THE CREATURE CONTRACTED AND FOLDED ITSELF INTO BIG BEN’S TOWER TO “SLEEP” (ALTHOUGH THIS SEEMS A POOR DESCRIPTION, AS TRITON’S SINGLE EYE REMAINED EVER OPEN.) THESE POOR SOULS FLUNG WHAT LITTLE FOOD AND WATER THEY HAD IN THE VICINITY OF THE CREATURE’S MOUTH, IN THE HOPES THAT IT WOULD BE “TOO FULL TO WANT ANOTHER SNACK” QUOTED TOM FIGGINS, JUNIOR ENGINEER. THIS PERHAPS WAS NOT THE MOST SHOCKING DEVELOPMENT: THE REPORT THAT THE CREATURE IN FACT ATE THE OFFERINGS FIRST CAUSED LOCAL MARINE BIOLOGISTS TO SNEER, THEN TO SCOFF, THEN TO RE-EVALUATE. APPARENTLY, ALL THE MEN HAD ON THEM WAS A BIT OF SAUSAGE ROLL, SOME CRISPS, AND A SMALL BAG OF JELLY SWEETS. THE CRISPS WENT WIDE, THE CREATURE SPAT OUT THE PASTRY SURROUNDING THE SAUSAGE ROLL, BUT THE JELLY SWEETS SEEMED TO MEET WITH APPROVAL. THUS, A PLAN WAS CONCOCTED TO REMOVE TRITON FROM BIG BEN: UTILIZING A TRAIL OF JELLY SWEETS, THE NATIONAL GUARD MANAGED TO COAX TRITON ONTO A PREPARED STRUCTURE OF SCAFFOLDING. FROM THERE IT WAS LURED DOWN TO THE GROUND WHERE IT WAS CONTAINED WITHIN A BIO-SPHERE PATENT PENDING TO ONE DR. IGNACIOUS, A BUBBLE MADE FROM SHEETS OF GLASS RIVETED TO AN IRON FRAMEWORK, CREATING A LATTICEWORK OF GLASS SECTIONS IN THE SHAPE OF AN EYEBALL. THE CREATURE WAS THEN HUMANELY GASSED WITH A SEDATIVE, AND PAINSTAKINGLY REMOVED TO A SECURE LOCATION. CITIZENS OF LONDON WERE ON HAND FOR THIS MASSIVE UNDERTAKING, AND THE CREATURE’S IMPRISONMENT WAS GREETED BY THE POPULACE WITH A MIXTURE OF CHEERS AND BOOS. SINCE THEN THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF CONFLICTING ACCOUNTS OF THE EVENTS: SOME CLAIM THE CREATURE TOOK A WOMAN HOSTAGE ON THE PEAK OF BIG BEN, AND SHE WAS HELD IN ONE OF HIS WRAPPED TENTACLES WHILE CITIZENS BELOW WAILED AND WEPT. SOME RENDITIONS HAVE THE CREATURE SPEAKING ALOUD WORDS OF WISDOM, BEFORE BEING CRUELLY PRODDED INTO A GREAT CAGE WITH IRON BARS. THE PHENOMENON OF TRITON SEEMS TO BE HOLDING STRONG IN LONDON: ALONG WITH THE CARICATURE FEATURED ABOVE, THERE HAVE BEEN SIGHTINGS OF SOFT PLUSH “TRITON” DOLLS, ARTISTS RENDERING TOURISTS IN FRONT OF BIG BEN WITH TRITON CLINGING TO ITS PEAK, “WE ♥ TRITON” POLITICAL BUTTONS, AND, OF COURSE, A BRISK BLACK MARKET TRADE IN OCTOPUS-REPELLANT, AND BOTTLES OF “AUTHENTIC” TRITON INK TO MAKE ONE IMPERVIOUS TO THE CREATURE’S STING (NO SUCH STINGS HAVE BEEN REPORTED.)



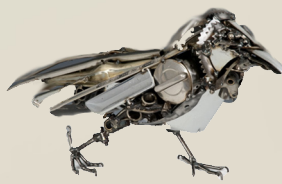
A "Cog Dog"



A "STEAMPUNK SCHNAUZER"



A "CLOCKWORK CAT"



A "BOTTLE CAP BIRD"

## CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS SOLD OUT IN LONDON

THE RECENT CRAZE FOR "CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS" HAS FINALLY REACHED A CLIMAX IN THE SHOPPING CENTRES OF LONDON—ALL STORES HAVE SOLD OUT! WHAT BEGAN AS A SIMPLE NOVELTY ITEM SOLD IN A SINGLE SHOP ON PICADILLY FOR TOURISTS AND KNICK-KNACK BUYERS HAS BECOME A PHENOMENON. CREATOR MIKHAIL CLOCHVICHE WAS AN OUT-OF- WORK CLOCK MAKER WHEN HE DEVELOPED THE FIRST GENERATION OF CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS. ORIGINALLY, THE CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS WERE PRACTICALLY INANIMATE, MORE LIKE ANATOMICAL PAPER WEIGHTS MADE FROM RECYCLED MACHINE PARTS. HOWEVER, THE CONCEPT CONTINUED TO EVOLVE. SOON THE LITTLE FIGURES COULD BE WOUND LIKE A CLOCK, AND ON JERKY LIMBS THEY TOOK A FEW SHUDDERING STEPS FORWARD BEFORE WINDING DOWN. THEN THEY WERE WOUND FURTHER SO THEY RAN IN CIRCLES. THEN THEY LIFTED A PAW AND BEGGED. SOON, THE COMPANIONS WERE LIFE SIZE, AND MIMICKING ALL THE BEHAVIOURS OF A LIVING ANIMAL! WITH A FEW EXCEPTIONS. CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS DO NOT BARK, MEOW OR CHEEP, THEY DO NOT EAT, NOR DO THEY NEED TO GO OUTSIDE. THEY ALSO ARE WATER-RESISTANT, RUST-RESISTANT, AND NO LONGER NEED TO BE WOUND. SIMPLY BRING YOUR PET TO CLOCHVICHE'S NEW THREE-STORY SHOP ONCE A YEAR, AND ONE OF HIS MANY ATTENDANTS WILL PERFORM THE COMPLEX BIT OF GADGETRY THAT WILL EFFECTIVELY "WIND YOUR PET" FOR THE NEXT YEAR. THE

CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS HAVE COME A LONG WAY: THE LATEST MODEL NOW OFFERS ADDITIONAL BENEFITS FOR THE OWNER. THE CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS NOW HAVE BUILT-IN DEFENSIVE CAPABILITIES, AND BEHIND THEIR STATE-OF-THE ART GLASS EYES (AVAILABLE IN EVERY COLOUR) THERE ARE TINY LIGHT BULBS THAT LIGHT YOUR PATH WHEN ROAMING AT NIGHT. THE COMPANIONS' NEW AUDITORY SENSORS ALSO ALLOW THEM TO LEARN THEIR NAMES, COME WHEN CALLED, AND PERFORM A NUMBER OF USEFUL SERVICES AROUND THE HOME. FOR EXAMPLE, ONE MIGHT SAY, "SPOT, GO TELL THE GARDENER THAT THE PLANTS NEED WATERING." SO LONG AS "THE GARDENER" HAS BEEN ENTERED INTO THE COMPANION'S MEMORY SERVER, THE ANIMAL WILL TROT OBEDIENTLY OUTSIDE, APPROACH THE GARDENER, AND A RECORDING OF THE OWNER'S VOICE WILL ISSUE FROM THE COMPANION'S MOUTH: "SPOT, GO TELL THE GARDENER THAT THE PLANTS NEED WATERING." COMPANIONS HAVE EXCELLENT MEMORY RECALL, AS WELL AS A BUILT IN OBEDIENCE CHIP THAT MAKES THEM VERY LOYAL TO THEIR OWNERS. BUT THAT'S NOT ALL!

THE LONGER YOU OWN YOUR CLOCKWORK COMPANION, THE MORE OF A COMPANION THEY SEEM TO BECOME! THE CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS' OBEDIENCE CHIP AND MEMORY SERVER, ORIGINALLY INTENDED TO INCREASE EFFICIENCY AND CREATE THE SEMBLANCE OF LOYALTY IN EVERY COMPANION, HAS TAKEN ON A STARTLING LIFE OF ITS OWN. THOSE FEW OWNERS WHO STILL OWN A THIRD OR FOURTH GENERATION COMPANION (THE EARLIEST MODELS WITH EVEN LIMITED MEMORY OR OBEDIENCE) HAVE DISCOVERED THAT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, WHAT BEGAN AS INDIFFERENT PAPERWEIGHTS WITH LIMITED CAPABILITIES HAVE GROWN INTO WHAT MIGHT BE TERMED A FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP. "THE FOURTH COMPANION WAS A BIT OF LEAP FOR ME AT THE TIME," ONE ELIZA DARTMOUTH CONFESSES, "I'M NOT REALLY INTO ALL THE GADGETRY. BUT A FRIEND RECOMMENDED A COMPANION TO ME BECAUSE THE FOURTH GENERATION HAD A CHIP THAT ALLOWED IT TO MIMIC BACK YOUR LETTERS AND LISTS AND MESSAGES. IT SEEMED THE PERFECT THING FOR A SECRETARY TO HAVE, AND MY EMPLOYER SAID I COULD BRING THE COMPANION CAT TO WORK. WELL, THREE YEARS LATER, THERE'S BEEN THREE UPGRADES TO THE COMPANIONS SINCE THEN, BUT I NEVER TRADED IN CLOCKWORK CAT AND I'LL BE BLAMED IF THAT CREATURE ISN'T GRATEFUL ON SOME LEVEL! FOR YEARS CLOCKWORK CAT RECORDED MY LETTERS SO I COULD TRANSCRIBE THEM LATER. AT SOME POINT, SHE LEARNED MY NAME. SURE, THE FIFTH AND SIXTH GENERATION COMPANIONS ARE INTRODUCED TO THEIR OWNERS, AND GIVEN NAMES OF THEIR OWN, BUT THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION COMPANIONS AREN'T SUPPOSED TO DO THAT! BUT SHE CALLS ME BY MY NAME NOW. AND HERE'S ANOTHER THING: MY COMPANION IS CAPABLE OF TAKING DOWN MESSAGES AND REPLAYING THEM ON A SPECIFIC COMMAND. BUT THERE'S AN ABSOLUTE CAD AT MY OFFICE, AND MY COMPANION SIMPLY REFUSES TO TAKE ANY MESSAGES FOR HIM! SHE JUST BLINKS AT HIM, AND IF HE PERSISTS IN TRYING TO FORCE HER, SHE CURLS UP INTO A BALL AND TURNS HERSELF OFF. TURNS HERSELF OFF! I DON'T EVEN THINK THE SIXTH

GENERATION COMPANIONS CAN DO THAT! BUT THEN THEY DON'T HAVE TO MAKE IT TO THEIR EVENING WINDING. I KNOW THE COMPANIONS WERE DESIGNED TO BE CLEVER, BUT I THINK THEY PUT SO MUCH HUMAN CAPABILITY INTO THESE CLOCKWORK ANIMALS THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE GOTTEN A BIT MORE THAN THEY ORIGINALLY BARGAINED FOR!"

## CAN ENGINEERS AND TINKERERS CREATE LIFE!?

MIKHAIL CLOCHVICHE AND HIS COMPANY CLOCKWORK COMPANIONS HAVE FALLEN UNDER CRITICISM OF LATE FROM VARIOUS RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, CLAIMING THE LATEST GENERATIONS OF COMPANIONS ARE TOO INTELLIGENT FOR A COLLECTION OF GEARS AND WHEELS. NO ENGINEER HAS YET TO CROSS THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE, TO CREATE A COMBINATION OF THE TWO (APPARENTLY TRITON "THE KING OF LONDON" IS CONSIDERED TO BE OUTSIDE THIS PARTICULAR ARGUMENT.) THIS REPORTER DOES NOT MINCE WORDS: THE COMPLAINT IN A NUTSHELL IS 'DO THESE MECHANICAL CREATURES HAVE A SOUL'? SOME MAY SCOFF. BUT WITH ALL OF THE COMPANIONS' ENHANCEMENTS, THE TECHNOLOGIES THAT WERE INTENDED TO GIVE THEM INSIGHT INTO HUMAN LIVES, THEIR ABILITY TO SPEAK AND BE SPOKEN TO, ALL OF IT CULMINATES IN MORE- THAN-JUST-AN-ANIMAL. AS MISS DARTMOUTH STATED, MANY OWNERS ARE BRINGING THEIR COMPANIONS TO WORK. THE COMPANIONS' LIST OF FUNCTIONS INCLUDES ASSISTANCE WITH VARIOUS FORMS OF SOCIAL DRUDGERY, SUCH AS LIST-MAKING, FACT CHECKING, NOTE-TAKING, REMEMBERING AND DELIVERING MESSAGES, ETC. IT STANDS TO REASON COMPANIONS WOULD BE USEFUL IN WORK SITUATIONS. OR SCHEDULING APPOINTMENTS THROUGHOUT THE DAY. BUT BASED ON THEIR SPECIFICATIONS, SHOULD THEY KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FRIEND AND AN ENEMY? SHOULD THEY CLIMB UP INTO THEIR OWNER'S BED WHEN THEIR OWNER'S HAVING NIGHTMARES? MIKHAIL CLOCHVICHE, CREATOR OF THE COMPANIONS, STATES THEIR FUNCTION QUITE SIMPLY: "THE COMPANIONS ARE MAN'S NEW BEST FRIEND: A BEST FRIEND FOR THESE MODERN TIMES. THEY ARE NOT EMPTY VESSELS WAITING TO BE FILLED, THEY ARE NOT DEMONS, THEY WERE NOT DESIGNED WITH SOME DARKER PURPOSE IN MIND. THEY WERE DESIGNED TO BE EXACTLY WHAT THEY ARE: SIMPLE TOOLS TO MAKE LIFE MORE PLEASANT. OF COURSE, EVERYTHING IN THIS WORLD HAS POTENTIAL." THUS MANAGING TO DENY AND SUPPORT THESE RELIGIOUS FACTIONS' ARGUMENTS AT THE SAME TIME, MIKHAIL CLOCHVICHE MAINTAINS THAT THE COMPANIONS ARE DOING THE JOB THEY WERE DESIGNED TO DO, AND THAT IS ALL. IN HIS MIND, NEITHER GOD NOR THE DEVIL FACTORS INTO THE SITUATION. IN THIS REPORTER'S MIND, IF THE DEVIL WAS GOING TO INFLUENCE BEINGS THAT SUCCESSFULLY MIMIC THE BEHAVIOURS OF DECENT, HARDWORKING, RESPECTABLE INDIVIDUALS, HE WOULD CHOOSE THE SPECIES HE HAS HAD SO MUCH SUCCESS WITH IN THE PAST: HUMAN BEINGS.

# The Aether Review Of Books

“Hand of Miriam”, By Eva Gordon



ROLOGUE

THE ARCANA, LONG AGO.

AVENGING ANGEL, GESHER LAY IN A HEAP ON THE MARBLED FLOOR. BLEEDING. BROKEN. DEFEATED. DREAD COURSED THROUGH HIS

CORE. ARCHANGEL MECHAEAL'S VOICE CRACKED WITH SORROW, “BY RETURNING THE BABE TO HER MOTHER'S ARMS, YOU HAVE CAUSED A DISRUPTION IN THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS. WE MUST MEET TO RATIFY OUR NEXT COURSE OF ACTION. UNTIL THEN, WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY?”

ON HIS KNEES, COVERED IN BLOOD FROM THE GASHES THAT ONCE HELD HIS MAJESTIC SILVER WINGS, HE LIFTED HIS HEAD TO LOOK AT HIS FORMER MASTER. “LET ME DIE, FOR WITHOUT MY WINGS I CANNOT GO ON.”

AZARAEAL, THE ANGEL OF DEATH, GLOWERED AT GESHER. “I SAY WE TURN HIM INTO STONE, NEVER TO RETURN, BUT WITH CLEAR MEMORIES HE WAS ONCE AN ANGEL OF THE HEAVENS.”

GESHER GLARED AT AZARAEAL. “YOU REEK OF ENVY, DARK ONE. WAS I NOT STRONGER THAN YOU? AM I NOT HANDSOME COMPARED TO YOUR HIDEOUS FORM? ONCE MY WINGS WERE GLORIOUS AND NOT TWISTED BLACK ONES THAT LOOK LIKE AGED BAT WINGS. AM I NOT FAVOURED BY ALL THE ANGELS AND THE ALMIGHTY, BELOVED BY MANKIND? NOT FEARED AND DESPISED AS YOU ARE, DARK LORD.” MICHAEL'S VOICE ECHOED. “ENOUGH. YOU HAVE SHAMED ME WITH YOUR PRIDE. I WAS ANGEL-TOUCHED, TO REMAIN WITH THEM. I WILL CONSIDER AZARAEAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS.”

GESHER BEGGED. “PLEASE MY LORD. WAS MY SIN SO GREAT THAT I AM TO BE INTERNED AS STONE FOR ALL ETERNITY?”

THE ARCHANGEL SLOWLY EXHALED. NO. NEVERTHELESS, YOU MUST ENDURE PUNISHMENT. I WILL SEND YOU BACK TO EARTH AS CLAY. TO BE SUMMONED AS A GOLEM TO DO WHAT YOU DO BEST, PROTECT.” HE PRODUCED A BOX. “THIS IS THE GEMMATRIDON. IT WILL BE USED TO GIVE YOU LIVE. SOMEDAY, A MASTER MIGHT DESTROY THE BOX, ALLOWING YOU TO RETURN TO YOUR FORMER ANGEL FORM, ONE WITHOUT WINGS BUT STILL MEANT TO SERVE. I VERY MUCH DOUBT ANY LEARNED MASTER WILL DESTROY THE BOX.”

“MY LORD, CAN I SOMEDAY EARN BACK MY WINGS?” AZARAEAL PROTESTED. “HE MUST NOT BE GIVEN A CHANCE, NOT EVER.”

MICHAEL IGNORED THE ANGEL OF DEATH. “IF YOUR MASTER LETS YOU DESTROY THE GEMMATRIDON AND YOU LEARN HUMILITY, THEN YES, IT IS POSSIBLE.” HE RAISED HIS SWORD ABOVE GESHER'S HEAD. “FAREWELL, MY FRIEND.”

CHAPTER 1

Mt. JEBEL IDEID, NEGEN DESERT, OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1888

BAYLA GIDEON OPENED HER PARASOL TO PROVIDE SHADE FROM THE UNRELENTING DESERT SUN AND STRODE FOR THE MAIN CAMP IN SEARCH

OF HER HUSBAND. HARSH WHISPERS BEHIND THE EQUIPMENT TENT CAUGHT HER ATTENTION. SHE STEPPED CLOSER TO EAVESDROP, CAREFUL HER BOOTED FOOTSTEPS OVER THE STONES DID NOT REVEAL HER INTENT. HER HUSBAND OF SIX MONTHS, NOTED PROFESSOR OF ARCHEOLOGY, ISAAC GIDEON, ARGUED VEHEMENTLY WITH HIS COLLEAGUE PROFESSOR ERASMUS HIX. AND IT WAS NOT ABOUT WHICH MAP TO FOLLOW. NOT AGAIN. IT WAS ALWAYS “MRS. GIDEON THIS” AND “MRS. GIDEON THAT.”

“I KNOW YOU HAVE MODERN IDEAS ABOUT WOMEN NOT BEING FEEBLE, BUT MY DEAR MAN, DO YOU NOT REALIZE THE DANGERS OUT HERE?” SAID ERASMUS.

“BAYLA IS EQUIPPED WITH A BLASTER AND HER AIM WITH GUNS IS...” ISAAC PAUSED FOR MUCH TOO LONG, “GETTING BETTER.”

TRUE, SHE HAD TERRIBLE AIM WITH REGULAR GUNS, BUT HOW COULD SHE GO WRONG WITH A BLASTER? ITS STEAM-CHARGER-PROPELLED BULLETS IN ALL DIRECTIONS. THE DANGER WAS HITTING EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE IN THE VICINITY. SHE WINCED. IT WAS NOT HER FAULT IN REGARDS TO PROFESSOR ERASMUS HIX'S ILL-PLACED LAUNDRY. FORTUNATELY, HE LOOKED RATHER FETCHING IN BEDOUIN GARMENTS.

“WHAT OF THE OTHER DANGERS A BLASTER WON'T PROTECT HER FROM? IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO ESCORT HER BACK TO THE IBIS BEFORE IT DEPARTS.” THE DESERT DIRIGIBLE WOULD LEAVE FOR CAIRO IN A FEW HOURS.

BAYLA EDGED CLOSER. OTHER DANGERS? PROFESSOR HIX WAS STARTING TO SOUND LIKE AUNT FANNIE. ORPHANED AT AGE NINE, BAYLA WAS RAISED BY HER OVERPROTECTIVE AUNT AND UNCLE IN A RELIGIOUS JEWISH HOUSEHOLD.

“MY REINA, YOUR PLACE IS AT HOME NOT GALLIVANTING AROUND THE WORLD,” AUNT FANNIE HAD PLEADED. SHE FRETTERED BAYLA WOULD BE STOLEN AND SOLD AS A HAREM SLAVE. SUCH WAS THE FATE OF MANY UNWARY YOUNG EUROPEAN WOMEN. TRUTH WAS, THE BIGGEST DANGER TO HER PERSON WERE THE VENOMOUS SCORPIONS AND CRUEL DESERT HEAT.

ISAAC LAUGHED. “MY WIFE WOULD NO MORE BOARD THE DIRIGIBLE TO RETURN THAN YOU WOULD. BESIDES, I NEED HER ASSISTANCE. SHE HAS PROVEN INVALUABLE ON DATING ARTEFACTS.”

“I'M NOT ARGUING WITH THAT. I MYSELF HAVE NEVER SEEN A BETTER CHRONICLER OF ANTIQUITIES BUT SHE IS UNAWARE OF OUR TRUE PURPOSE.”

SHE LIFTED A BROW. WHAT, PRAY TELL, ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT? WAS IT RELATED TO THEIR MEMBERSHIP IN THAT MEN'S ONLY CLUB? ISAAC SAID SHE SHOULD NEVER QUESTION HIS LOYALTY TO HIS SECRET BROTHERHOOD. NOT OLD-FASHIONED, BUT FOR THE ONE MEN'S GROUP, SHE RELENTED TO NOT PESTER ISAAC ON HIS ONE PRIVATE PASTIME.

“BALDERDASH! WE'RE HERE ONLY TO TEST MY THEORY, NOTHING MORE. AND, I DARE SAY, I'VE GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO HAVING HER RADIANT

BEAUTY AROUND. COME NOW, WOULD YOU ROB ME OF A MAGNIFICENT SUNRISE?”

SHE SIGHED AND SMILED. WELL PUT, HUSBAND. TO THINK AUNT FANNIE SENT HER TO A MATCHMAKER TO FIND A TRADITIONAL HUSBAND. DESPITE HER AUNT'S BEST EFFORTS, BAYLA HAD FOUND HER FUTURE HUSBAND, NOT FROM POTENTIAL PROSPECTS PRESENTED BY A MATCHMAKER, BUT AT HER JOB AS ASSISTANT CURATOR AT GOFF'S MANOR. SHE HAD BECOME ENAMOURED WITH THE PROFESSOR WHILE ASSISTING HIM IN ORGANIZING HIS VAST ARCHIVES OF ANTIQUITIES. ISAAC WAS NOT RELIGIOUS, BUT A SCHOLAR WHO WAS ALWAYS TRAVELLING TO FAR-OFF COUNTRIES. NOT A GOOD MATRIMONIAL PROSPECT, CONDUCIVE TO A STABLE FAMILY LIFE. AFTER MUCH PLEADING AND THREAT OF SPINSTERHOOD, THEY FINALLY ACCEPTED ISAAC'S REQUEST FOR HER HAND IN MARRIAGE. HE WAS JEWISH, AFTER ALL.

“VERY WELL, JUST REMEMBER I WARNED YOU.”

ERASMUS OPENED THE TENT FLAP.

BAYLA DASHED TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CAMP AND TOOK OUT HER JOURNAL, PRETENDING TO WRITE. SHE PUT HER PEN DOWN AND THREW HIM A SMILE. ERASMUS HIX GAVE HER A BRUSQUE NOD AS HE PASSED BEFORE ORDERING HIS PORTERS TO READY HIS CAMEL FOR DETOUR TO THE MARKET. SHE STOOD. “PROFESSOR HIX.”

ERASMUS STIFFENED AND TURNED. “YES, MRS. GIDEON?” HE TOOK HIS PITH HELMET OFF AND BRUSHED DUST OFF.

“HOW SOON WILL YOU BE JOINING US AT THE EXPEDITION SITE?”

“IF ALL GOES WELL BY THE END OF THE WEEK.”

HIS BROW PINCHED AND HE STARED AT HIS PICKET WATCH AS IF CONCERNED ABOUT TIME, AN IRRELEVANT CONCEPT IN THE DESERT, SINCE THERE WERE ONLY TWO TIMES, DAY AND NIGHT. “IS THERE ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR YOU WANT FROM THE MARKET?”

“ACTUALLY, COME TO THINK OF IT, I'D LOVE HALVA WITH PISTACHIOS.”

ERASMUS CHUCKLED. “I SHALL BRING YOU SEVERAL BLOCKS OF THE CONFECTION.”

“MOST GENEROUS INDEED.” HIS CAMEL WAS BROUGHT, AND HE MOUNTED THE BELLOWING BEAST AND BID HER FAREWELL. SHE RETURNED TO HER TENT TO PACK HER JOURNAL. TOMORROW AT SUNRISE THEY WOULD CROSS THE SANDY WASTELAND TOWARD Mt. JEBEL IDEID, WHICH ISAAC BELIEVED TO BE THE REAL SITE OF Mt. SINAI.

ABOVE THE PATH, A LARGE DARK-WINGED CREATURE SHADOWED A BOULDER. GONE. WHAT WAS THAT? Hmm. TOO BIG TO BE AN EGYPTIAN VULTURE. SHE DABBED AT BEADS OF PERSPIRATION ON HER BROW. LIKELY A MIRAGE. ESPECIALLY, IN LIGHT OF THE FACT, THAT HER CAMEL HAD REMAINED CALM. THOUGH BY NATURE, DROMEDARIES WERE LESS NERVOUS THAN HORSES. SHE STOPPED HER CAMEL AND LOOKED AGAIN. NOTHING. THE SHADOW MUST HAVE BEEN A HALLUCINATION BROUGHT ON BY THE HEAT AND THE FULL LANDSCAPE.

# The Aether Review Of Books

From The Editor

## “HAND OF MIRIAM”

BY EVA GORDON

THE FIRST BOOK OF THE BAYLA SERIES OFFERS TWO INTERSECTING PLOTS.

PLOT 1: AN AVENGING ARCHANGEL, GESHER, IS CONDEMNED FOR SAVING THE

SOUL OF AN INFANT AND RETURNING THE BABE TO ITS PARENTS, THUS INTERFERING WITH THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS. AS PUNISHMENT, GESHER IS CONDEMNED TO RETURN TO EARTH IN THE FORM OF A GOLEM: A BEING MADE OF CLAY, DESIGNED TO PROTECT. GESHER WILL SERVE HIS SENTENCE ON EARTH FOR ETERNITY, UNLESS A MASTER DISCOVERS THE WAY TO RETURN HIM TO HIS ANGELIC FORM.

PLOT 2: BAYLA GIDEON, WIFE TO A NOTED PROFESSOR OF ARCHAEOLOGY, ISAAC GIDEON, TRAVELS WITH HER HUSBAND ACROSS THE NEGEV DESERT IN 1888 TOWARDS MT. JEBEL IDEID, WHICH THEY HOPE TO PROVE WAS THE REAL SITE OF MT. SINAI.

BOTH THESE PLOTS INTERTWINE WHEN BAYLA AND HER HUSBAND ARE CAUGHT IN A DEADLY SANDSTORM AND SEPARATED. UNDER THREAT OF EVIL, SUPERNATURAL FORCES, BAYLA ENCOUNTERS AND AWAKENS THE GOLEM. GESHER, UPON AWAKENING, EXPERIENCES HOPE FOR THE FIRST TIME—HERE IS HIS CHANCE TO REGAIN HIS PLACE AMONG THE HEAVENS. HOWEVER, THE HUMAN BAYLA PROVES ENLIGHTENED AND SHE CHALLENGES HIM, PROVING TO BE THE FIRST ENTICEMENT SINCE HIS IMPRISONMENT. HOWEVER, BAYLA AND THE GOLEM FIND THEMSELVES THRUST INTO THE MIDDLE OF A WAR, AND THEY COME TO BELIEVE THEY HAVE BOTH BEEN CALLED TO DEFEND THE WORLD AGAINST THE SUDDEN ONSLAUGHT OF EVIL. ONE MERE HUMAN ARCHAEOLOGIST, AND ONE FALLEN ANGEL IMPRISONED IN CLAY, AGAINST VILLAINS SUCH AS MAD TINKERERS AND EVEN JACK THE RIPPER.

IN THE HAND OF MIRIAM, THE AUTHOR OFFERS FEMALE READERS SOMETHING THAT THE STEAMPUNK WORLD MIGHT NOT YET HAVE OFFERED. A JEWISH, FEMALE ARCHAEOLOGIST, IN NEW AND DANGEROUS DESERT TERRAIN. THE SECOND PLOT OF THE STORY DESCRIBES A CELESTIAL RULING THAT PLACED THE BODY OF AN ANGEL ON EARTH, DESTINED TO BECOME THE GOLEM, A BEING TRADITIONALLY CONSTRUCTED OF EARTH THAT IS ANIMATED THROUGH OTHERWORLDLY POWERS. THE BAYLA CHARACTER OFFERS READERS EVERYTHING THEY COULD WANT IN A STEAMPUNK HEROINE: EDUCATION, CHARM, WIT, AND ADVENTUROUS SPIRIT, AND AN INGENUITY AND ROMANCE THAT BELIES THE RESTRICTIONS



OF SOCIAL CLASS THAT ARE PREVALENT IN THAT TIME IN EUROPE. HER HUSBAND, ISAAC GIDEON, IS A UNIQUE SPECIMEN OF THE AGE: INTELLIGENT, PASSIONATE, YET HE REGARDS HIS WIFE AS A TRUE PARTNER IN HIS ADVENTURES AND RESPECTS HER ABILITIES AS A TALENTED CHRONICLER OF ANTIQUITIES, VIEWING HER AS KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF HIS LATEST VENTURE. ISAAC ALSO PROVIDES THE “TINKERERS” AMONG THE STEAMPUNK COMMUNITY THE GADGETS AND TOYS THEY FIND NECESSARY FOR CONTINUED EXISTENCE. THE CAMERA OBSCURA, QUIRKILY NAMED “GIZMO”, FOLLOWS HIM AROUND SNAPPING PICTURES OF HE AND HIS WIFE DURING THEIR TREK TO WHAT THEY HOPE TO PROVE IS MT. SINAI. THEY ARE ALSO ARMED WITH “BLASTERS” WHICH SHOOT STEAM-CHARGER-PROPELLED BULLETS IN ALL DIRECTIONS. THE BOOK’S MYSTICAL ELEMENTS ARE OFFSET BY REAL-WORLD LOCATIONS AND DISCOVERIES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS, SUCH AS PALEOLITHIC ART AND STANDING STONES DATING BACK TO MOSES AND THE ANCIENT ISRAELITES. BAYLA ALSO DISCOVERS A MEDALLION SPARKLING IN THE SAND, DEPICTING A SMALL HASMA: THE SYMBOL IS KNOWN AS THE HAND OF MIRIAM, THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHICH IS REVEALED LATER IN THE STORY. THE BOOK ATTEMPTS TO INCORPORATE ELEMENTS OF ADVENTURE AND ROMANCE, RELIGION AND MAGIC, AND WORK THEM TOGETHER TO CREATE A HYBRID URBAN-FANTASY. A FANTASY THAT INVOLVES FANTASTICAL THINGS HAPPENING IN A REAL-LIFE SETTING. IN MYTH THE GOLEM PROTECTED ANCIENT JEWS FROM DANGER; IT WAS A GUARDIAN, A WATCHDOG, A CREATURE WITHOUT EMOTIONS BUT UNFAILING IN ITS VIGILANCE. BUT WHAT STORY MIGHT UNFOLD ABOUT A GOLEM WHO IS PLACED INTO THE HANDS OF A FEMALE MASTER WHO, DESPITE ANTIQUATED CONVENTIONS DUBBING HER “THE WEAKER SEX”, DESIRES TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE HIM AND TRIUMPH OVER EVIL.

EVA GORDON’S FIRST BOOK OF THE BAYLA SERIES, THE HAND OF MIRIAM, IS NOW AVAILABLE AT AMAZON.COM IN THE KINDLE EDITION. ENJOY!



## Welcome to The Aether Chronicle!



AMELIA OWEN KIBBEY, AGE 24, IS THE NEW FEISTY REDHEADED TRAVEL-WRITER AT THE AETHER CHRONICLE, AND SHE WILL BE REGALING OUR WRITERS WITH THE TALES OF HER ADVENTURES ACROSS THE GLOBE! A PROFILE PICTURE OF THE NEW WRITER WILL BE FEATURED SOON. TO READ HER FIRST ARTICLE ON PARIS, FRANCE, SIMPLY LOOK BELOW.



SHOULD YOU WISH TO SEND A LETTER TO THE EDITOR, SUBMIT YOUR WRITTEN WORK, OR OFFER A TIP REGARDING A POTENTIAL STORY (EG. POLITICAL UPHEAVAL, CRIME, SPECIAL EVENTS, ART AND MUSIC) PLEASE CONTACT LESLIE ORTON AT: ORTONLJ@HOTMAIL.COM.

# Travel

## PARIS, FRANCE

GREETINGS AND SALUTATIONS FROM THE AETHER CHRONICLE'S NEWEST REPORTER- AMELIA OWEN KIBBEY! BI-MONTHLY I WILL BE CONTRIBUTING ARTICLES BASED ON MY TRAVEL ADVENTURES ABROAD. I AM ROAMING THE WORLD ON ASSIGNMENT AND IT IS HERE THAT I WILL POST THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF IT ALL. HOTEL RECOMMENDATIONS, MISADVENTURES, FORAYS INTO NEW GASTRONOMIC TERRITORY, AND GENERAL TOMFOOLERY WILL BE THE CONTENT, AND NOTHING WILL BE CENSORED!

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT OUTSIDE OF MY HOMETOWN OF LONDON IS PARIS. THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS IN A CITY OF SUCH GRANDEUR AS I HAVE NEVER SEEN! IT WAS A WHIRLWIND TRIP, FROM ITS TENTATIVE BEGINNINGS TO THE SCANDALOUS END. SITTING HERE IN THE PRIVATE TRAIN COMPARTMENT EN ROUTE TO MY NEXT CITY IS THE FIRST MOMENT THAT I'VE ACTUALLY HAD TO COLLECT MY THOUGHTS. ALICE, MY TRAVEL COMPANION AND BEST GIRLFRIEND FROM UNIVERSITY, IS UP IN THE DINING CAR SO I CAN CONCENTRATE WITHOUT ANY DISTRACTIONS...

DAY ONE... WE ARRIVED AT THE GARE DE L'EST JUST BEFORE NOON AND MADE OUR WAY TO THE HOTEL, A DIMINUTIVE AFFAIR THAT CATERS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY TO FEMALE TRAVELLERS SUCH AS OURSELVES. THE ROOM WAS ABOUT AS SMALL AS MY QUARTERS BACK AT SCHOOL BUT IT MADE NO MATTER IN CONSIDERATION OF THE LOCALE. ADDITIONALLY, THE WALLS WERE COVERED WITH MURALS, AN ARTISTIC GRAFFITI OF THE SITES OF PARIS FROM ONE END TO THE OTHER. THE DAY WAS FILLED WITH SHOPPING EXCURSIONS, TRAM RIDES, EXPLORATIONS OF MAMMOTH MUSEUMS AND OLD LIBRARIES, AND A PALACE OF HORTICULTURAL PARADISE IN THE JARDIN DU LUXEMBOURG. AGAINST MY WILL, I FOUND MYSELF STROLLING THE CREEPY BOULEVARDS OF THE CIMETIÈRE DU PÈRE LACHAISE NEAR ON SUNSET. ALICE HAS A BIT OF THE MACABRE IN HER AND SHE COULD NOT RESIST ITS LURE. ADMITTEDLY, IT HAS A DARK BEAUTY TO IT. THE GRAVE SITES ARE ORNATE, EXPRESSIVE, AND AT TIMES NOT WHAT ONE WOULD EXPECT. THEY ALTERNATE BETWEEN HAUNTING AND ALMOST COMICAL. I WILL NEVER FORGET THE MARKER OF MONSIEUR YVAN SALMON, ALSO KNOWN BY THE NAME VICTOR NOIR. THAT EVENING WE DINED ON CRUSTACEAN, SHARK SOUP, AND ROASTED SWEET POTATOES AT A RESTAURANT CLOSE TO THE PONT NEUF. QUELLE FEAST! JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT WE TRAVELLED TO THE FAMED NOTRE DAME FOR AN ASTRONOMY PARTY ATOP THE SOUTH TOWER. ASCENDING THE ALMOST FOUR HUNDRED STAIRS ALL BUT KILLED ME! THEY ARE NOT MEANT FOR A WOMAN IN A CORSET, NOT EVEN ONE IN HER TWENTIES.

DOZENS OF PEOPLE WERE CAMPED OUT ON THE ROOFTOP AMIDST THE GARGOYLES AND SPIRES OF THE CATHEDRAL, PITCHING THEIR TELESCOPES ANYWHERE THAT THEY COULD FIND A DECENT VANTAGE POINT. THERE THE NIGHT SKY CAME ALIVE. WE MADE FRIENDS WITH AN OLD MARRIED COUPLE AND THEY TAUGHT US THE FINE ART OF IDENTIFYING AND CATALOGUING CELESTIAL BODIES. THEY KINDLY PARTED WITH A SPARE

NOTEBOOK SO THAT WE COULD SKETCH AND MAKE EQUATIONS OF OUR OWN. IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO BECOME PROPER STARGAZERS. I COUNT IT AS MY FIRST SURREAL EXPERIENCE IN PARIS, FILLED WITH GARGOYLES THAT WINKED AT ME IN THE MOONLIGHT, AN ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE OF THE CASSIOPEIA CONSTELLATION, AND MY FIRST TASTE OF BOURBON WHISKEY FROM A METAL FLASK.

DAY TWO... THE EXTRAORDINARY AND FANTABULOUS PARIS AERONAUTICS EXHIBITION. ALICE AND I BOARDED A LOCOMOTIVE THAT TOOK US TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY PROPER WHERE WE JOINED AN ASSEMBLED GROUP OF HUNDREDS, NE-THOUSANDS, OF AIRSHIP ENTHUSIASTS FOR THE ANNUAL CONVENTION. IT TOOK UP QUITE THE FAIR AMOUNT OF TERRITORY. ALICE HAD HER NEWEST GADGET WITH HER, A SMALL BOX CAMERA MEANT TO CAPTURE IMAGES OF SUCH WONDERS AS HOT AIR BALLOONS AND FISHER ZEPPELINS AS THEY TRAVERSED THE SKIES. THERE WERE DISPLAYS OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT AND MILITARY PROWESS ALIKE. WE SAW SOME OF THE NEWEST MODEL ZEPPELINS THAT ARE FUELLED BY A DERIVATIVE OF THE COCOA BEAN RATHER THAN THE OLD STANDARD FOSSIL FUELS. THE AROMA OF BITTER CHOCOLATE PERMEATED THE AIR WHENEVER ONE OF THEM TOOK OFF. I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE A TOUR OF THE MODEL 27AF MYSELF. IMPRESSIVE, BOYS AND GIRLS! CARPETING INSIDE THE CABIN, TAPESTRY COVERED SEATING FOR UP TO TWENTY, AND BRASS FIXTURES ALL AROUND. IN ONE CORNER OF THE FIELD THERE WERE MEN TESTING OUT INDIVIDUAL FLYING CONTRAPTIONS. HOW ANIMATED THEY ALL LOOKED AS THEY SOARED UP TO TWENTY FEET IN THE AIR, LEGS JUTTING OUT STIFFLY BENEATH THEM. WERE IT NOT FOR MY OVERBEARING AND FLOUNCY SKIRTS I WOULD HAVE COMMANDEERED ONE OF THE MACHINES FOR MYSELF. THE HOT AIR BALLOONS TOOK OFF AT FOUR O'CLOCK, A SITE IN THEIR MAGNIFICENT ARRAY OF COLORS. I NOTED THE GREEN, BLUE, AND WHITE OF MY OWN GREAT BRITAIN WITH PRIDE. GOD AND COUNTRY.

DAY THREE... I CAN ONLY DESCRIBE MY LAST DAY IN PARIS AS ONE OF SHEER EXCESS AND DEBAUCHERY. AFTER A LEISURELY MORNING LAZING ABOUT THE LITTLE ATELIER THAT I CALL MY HOTEL ROOM IN MY NEW NEGLIGEE, ALICE COLLECTED ME AND WE HEADED TO A PRIVATE SHOWING OF THE SPRING FASHIONS SET TO PREMIERE SHORTLY IN THE AVANT-GARDE BOUTIQUES OF PARIS. MY OWN BLUE FROCK PALED IN COMPARISON TO THE LIKES OF WORTH AND HIS ILK. GOWNS IN THE COLORS OF CLEOPATRA, CONGO, LUCIFER, AND PRUNE DE MONSIEUR PARTICULARLY CAUGHT MY EYE, ESPECIALLY PAIRED AS THEY WERE WITH PARASOLS, RETICULES, AND VELVET HEELS. MUCH TO MY SURPRISE AND PLEASURE, THEY EVEN FEATURED SOME CLOTHING FOR THE SPORTING GIRL, ONE WHO WOULD BE LOST WITHOUT HER COMPASS, WRIST WRAPPED CHRONOMETER, AND GOGGLES. DRIVING ENSEMBLES FOR THE GIRL IN HER FIRST COMBUSTION ENGINE MOTOR CAR; HUNTING COSTUMES FOR THE TEMPTRESS IN ALL OF US, THE ONES WHO CANNOT BEAR TO SIT AT HOME WHILE THE MEN GO OUT AND HAVE THEIR FUN. THIS SHOW, OF COURSE, WAS DONE AFTER THE MAIN AFFAIR BUT I DARE SAY THAT JUST AS MUCH OF THE AUDIENCE STAYED FOR IT AS FOR THE HAUTE COUTURE. THE MOMENT THAT CHANGED

THE TRAJECTORY OF THE DAY WAS MEETING THOSE LADIES AFTERWARD AT THE CAFÉ. WE WERE IN THE MIDST OF A CUP OF STEAMING DARK ROAST WHEN WE CHANCED UPON A CONVERSATION WITH THREE WOMEN WHO, AS IT TURNS OUT, ARE... WELL... WELL, QUITE FRANKLY READERS, THEY ARE PARTICIPATING IN A LIFE OF THE ARTISTE BY MASQUERADING AS MEN!

ALICE AND I ABANDONED OUR COFFEE IN FAVOR OF ABSINTHE AND JOINED THEM AT THEIR TABLE, WHERE THEY REGALED US (IN HUSHED TONES FILLED WITH WAY TOO MUCH LAUGHTER TO BE CONSIDERED POLITE IN FRENCH SOCIETY) WITH THE TALES OF THEIR EXPLOITS IN THE WORLD OF THE CREATIVE SPIRIT. ONE THAT ONLY SEEMED TO BE INTERESTED IN FURTHERING THE CAREERS OF THOSE OF THE MALE PERSUASION. AFTER BECOMING WEARY OF NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY SALON OWNERS AND GALLERIES THEY DECIDED TO TAKE MATTERS IN THEIR OWN HANDS AND EMPLOY DUPLICITY IN THEIR ENDEAVORS. A WICKED EXPERIMENT, NO DOUBT, AND SCANDALOUS. BUT I WILL BE DAMNED IF I CAN CONDEMN THEM FOR THEIR ACTIONS. ONE OF THEM IS NOW A SUCCESSFUL PAINTER, ANOTHER A SCULPTOR, AND THE THIRD WORKS AS A PLANNER OF CITIES OF THE FUTURE, ALL THE WHILE DONNING THE ACCOUTREMENTS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX IN ORDER TO DO SO.

ALICE AND I SPENT THE REST OF OUR DAY AND NIGHT WITH THEM. WE FREQUENTED ALL OF THE PLACES TWO TWENTY-FOUR YEAR OLDS OUGHT NOT TO. THERE WAS A GAMING HALL THAT WAS FOR WOMEN ONLY, FILLED WITH ENOUGH CIGAR SMOKE TO CHOKE AN ELEPHANT. I SHARED A ROLL OF THE DICE WITH AN ELDERLY LADY SMOKING A PIPE IN THE SHAPE OF A PHALLUS. WE WENT TO THE CABARET DE L'ENFER AND CABARET DU NEANT. SUCH A SCORE! TABLES TO SIT AT MADE OF COFFINS, DRINKS WITH THE NAMES OF DISEASES TO THEM, AND SKULLS POSED HERE AND THERE FOR GOOD MEASURE. THEY FRIGHTENED US WITH THEIR PEPPER'S GHOST PARLOR TRICKS AND WRITHING WOODEN FIGURES OF DEAD BODIES THAT PROTRUDED FROM THE CEILING. ONE ESTABLISHMENT THAT WE TRAIPTSED OVER TO IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT IN MONTMARTRE ENTERTAINED ITS PATRONS WITH EROTIC POETRY READINGS.

ALL IN ALL, NOT THE DAY WE HAD PLANNED FOR (I HAD ORIGINALLY SUGGESTED A NIGHT AT THE OPERA FOR OUR LAST EVENING IN PARIS) BUT ONE THAT I WILL NOT SOON FORGET. WE FINISHED OFF OUR NIGHT AT THE FAMED LA COMTESSE TEA ROOM, SLOWLY SIPPING OUT DEMITASSES OF DARJEELING WHILE THE SUN ROSE IN THE EAST, FEELING A MIXTURE OF ELATION AND WILTED ROSE AFTER SUCH ESCAPADES.

YOU CAN INTUIT JUST HOW EXHAUSTED I FIND MYSELF WHILST SITTING HERE COMPOSING MY VERY FIRST TRAVEL ARTICLE FOR THE AETHER CHRONICLE. IN TRUTH, MY PIECE WAS DUE TO THE EDITOR YESTERDAY. BY NECESSITY IT WILL GO IN THE POST AT OUR FIRST STATION STOP ON THE TRAIL TO MY NEXT DESTINATION. I LOOK FORWARD TO WHAT AWAITS ME THERE AND PROMISE TO RELATE IT ALL TO YOU IN DETAIL IN TWO MORE WEEKS. AU REVOIR UNTIL THEN!