

RAGS & BONES

*NEW TWISTS ON
TIMELESS TALES*

INCLUDES NEW STORIES BY
SALADIN AHMED, **KELLEY ARMSTRONG**,
HOLLY BLACK, **NEIL GAIMAN**, KAMI GARCIA,
MELISSA MARR, GARTH NIX, TIM PRATT,
CARRIE RYAN, MARGARET STOHL,
GENE WOLFE, **RICK YANCEY**,
AND SIX ILLUSTRATIONS
BY CHARLES VESS

EDITED BY
MELISSA MARR AND TIM PRATT

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New Twists on Timeless Tales

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FOR NEIL,

WHOSE REMARKS LED TO THIS ANTHOLOGY. YOU ARE NOW AND HAVE BEEN A WONDERFUL INSPIRATION,
BELOVED FRIEND, AND GOOD/BAD INFLUENCE.

— *M. M.*

FOR MOM AND DAD,

WHO GAVE ME A HOUSE FULL OF BOOKS TO GROW UP IN.

— *T. P.*

The editors' lives had overlaps before we knew each other. Tim studied creative writing in North Carolina and then went on to edit and write; Melissa studied literature at another North Carolina university, and then went on to be a university literature teacher for twelve years before writing. By the time Melissa began to write, she had found Tim's short stories; he also published her first story. Along the way, they became friends with a mutual love of short stories, literature, and science fiction and fantasy. This anthology was born from that mutual love—and a strange retelling of *Heart of Darkness* in the form of a children's cartoon that Tim wrote.

The anthology also sprung from remarks Neil Gaiman made one night in New York about retelling tales, in particular about retelling a specific fairy tale. Whether he remembers that the tale in question was the same one he retold in this collection, we don't know. One of us sort of hopes it was all a grand coincidence. That's what happens with writers: the art we encounter swirls and combines and evolves inside our minds. Those of us who love literature, old tales, folk tales, fairy tales, and half-remembered stories keep them all in some strange simmering pot and ladle out bits into our own new stories. We return again and again to old loves and old obsessions, or wrestle with the troubling and problematic aspects of stories we adored when we were young.

The two of us thought it would be fun to ask some of our favorite writers to return to those best-beloved old stories, intentionally this time rather than in the usual subconscious ways. We asked them to choose stories that had moved them, influenced them, and fascinated them, boil those stories down to the rags and bones, and make something new from their fundamental essences. The results are wonderful. You don't need to be familiar with the original sources of inspiration to appreciate these tales, but if these stories send you in search of their literary ancestors, you aren't likely to be disappointed by what you find.

In a story that grew far beyond anyone's expectations, Rick Yancey takes Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" into a distant future where our fear of science and the mystery of love mingle in fabulously disturbing ways. Carrie Ryan leads us into a different future—one where we have gone underground and rely on technology even more than we do in the real world. Kelley Armstrong also takes on the future, but in her hands, it is not technology but magic that drives the story—magic and brotherly love. In all three—both horror and science fiction—human foibles are the true heart of the stories.

But not only do the stories in *Rags & Bones* reflect the literary influences of the authors, they also reflect personal interests and influence. Margaret Stohl drafted her tale while on the set of the film adaptation of her co-authored series—and tied her tale into an area she visits for her writing. *Beautiful Creatures* co-author Kami Garcia crafted a story that makes use of her background as a fighter and as a teacher in underfunded areas. Both stories reflect the authors' stores of knowledge and experience, but develop in delightfully dark and unexpected ways.

The structures and styles chosen for the stories offer interesting variety as well. Garth Nix offers a unreliable narrator who tells his own story—or a version of it—inspired by Rudyard Kipling's overly ambitious characters. Holly Black imagines the vampire Carmilla from the eponymous story by Sheridan Le Fanu as an immortal, but still modern, teenager fighting her own nature, written in the

form of a desperate confessional outpouring. Saladin Ahmed gives a voice to the maligned and caricatured Saracens from *The Faerie Queene*, harnessing the imagery and rhythms of that proto-epic fantasy for his own purposes. Gene Wolfe looks beyond the end of a William B. Seabrook tale of savagery and inhumanity to speculate on the disturbing consequences. Several of the other authors tried narrative styles different from their normal approaches, and in every case, the resulting story is one we are thrilled to share with you.

The editors also included stories of their own in the collection. Without telling the other, both turned to the American South in their stories: North Carolina native Tim Pratt adds a touch of Southern lit to a Henry James story and Melissa Marr takes a story from traditional Southern lit and tangles it in a Scottish/Orcadian influence.

We hope you enjoy the results.

—*Melissa Marr and Tim Pratt*

CARRIE RYAN

It isn't until he's nearing the bottom of the ladder that Tavid realizes his sister hasn't followed him. He stares up the narrow tunnel to the surface expecting to see her there, but instead he finds nothing except darkness capped by a wash of stars.

"Pria!" When he calls her name, his voice echoes unnaturally from the metal walls surrounding him. He isn't used to this claustrophobic nature of sound; where he lives there's space for noises to unfold and stretch.

His sister doesn't respond. Doesn't even pop her head over the lip of the tunnel to taunt him or let him see her face. Tavid hesitates, wondering if he should go back or if Pria's merely lost her nerve. He glances down. Not far below him a harsh light glows, illuminating where his feet curl around the lowest rung. Only a small drop and he will be fully inside the Underneath. A humming sort of buzz reverberates everywhere until it seems to settle within his bones, rattling even the individual corpuscles in his veins.

How easily the sound lures him, the very nature of its mechanicalness entrancing. It is like a heartbeat, as if this world is itself alive and not just the components nestled within. This thought both repels and awes Tavid. By its very nature—or more aptly by its lack of nature—the underground domain of the Machine is abhorrent. This is an unquestionable fact in Tavid's world.

And that's what makes it alluring. Because Tavid doesn't believe in the unquestionable. He wants to see the Machine for himself before its inevitable demise.

He releases the rung of the ladder and lets himself drop into the artificial light. As he does, a monster of metal screams toward him, forcing him to dive against the wall. He flattens his body and sucks in a breath. Even so, the distance between his chest and the side of the carriage is less than a hand's width and his shirt flutters in the buffeting wind that clatters with a *WHOMP WHOMP WHOMP* until the thing is finally past. It roars around a curve, following a set of rails into the distance. In its wake is a kind of perfect silence broken only by the constant hum of the Machine and the pant of Tavid's breathing.

Tavid's body trembles, every bit of him almost on fire from the fear. He doesn't know when he closed his eyes, but it was after he'd seen a face peering at him. It had been through a glass window as the train sped past and it had been only a glimpse. Whether the creature had been male or female, Tavid couldn't say, but he was pretty sure it had been a human. Its body was puffy and white, its head bald except for a few wisps of hair, and its mouth open in surprise, fleshy pink gums gleaming where teeth should have been.

The image is enough for Tavid to feel he understands this buried world and he is ready to leave. But when he turns, the hole he'd climbed through no longer exists. In its place is a smooth expanse of white tile, a continuation of the unending pattern throughout the tunnel. The broken scraps of debris that had littered the base of the hole are gone as well.

And this is when he feels the truth of where he is: so deep underground that the climb down made the muscles in his legs and arms quiver. There are not enough kinds of measurements for the amount

of earthen weight between him and the surface. Between the stale yellow air of the Underneath and the freshness of fog. Between the constant artificial light and the shifting time of darkness.

He is trapped. Brutally so. As if in a casket, in a grave, in a tomb. He claws at the tiles, not caring when his nails break and his fingertips smear the white walls with blood. He screams, not caring if someone hears; hoping they do and will cast him out like the Homeless.

“Help me!” he cries. “Help!” In the space between panicked sobs he thinks he hears an echo beyond the tiles. A whisper down the hidden ventilation shaft. A call for help like his own. He pauses to listen. There is a scraping and his heart slams in his chest thinking that it is Pria come at last to rescue him.

He is standing, staring up at where the tunnel to the surface used to be, his face sodden with tears and his body heaving with ragged breaths, when the worms arrive. He doesn't notice them until one is wrapped around his legs, pulling tight. As he falls he catches glimpses of their long white mechanical bodies and then his head strikes the ground and there is only darkness.

He wakes on a bed in a small room with a floor shaped like the cell of a honeycomb. A chair is pushed against one of the far walls and between it and the bed sits a square table with a gargantuan book resting on top. Tavail pushes up on his elbow and swings his legs around until he's sitting. He stares at the cover of the book, tilting his head until he can read the title: *Book of the Machine*. The pages inside are thin and whispery, almost transparent, so that when he holds his face up close to one he can make out the movement of his fingers across the other side. The pages are covered with series of numbers and words so tiny that his eyes burn trying to focus.

The light in the room isn't bright, but neither is it dim, and Tavail searches for its source but finds nothing. The light just *is*. The same as the humming felt by every aspect of his body, vibrating almost from the inside out. When Tavail stands, the hairs on the very top of his head skim the ceiling, making him feel as though he should constantly duck. It takes only a few strides for him to reach the other side of the room, which has begun to feel more like a cage. Why else would its dimensions be so perfectly confining?

He wonders if perhaps he is in a cell or some sort of jail, if this is his punishment for trespassing. So, how long will he be trapped underground? Just like before, the thought of the weight of dirt resting between him and the surface causes his chest to tighten and his skin to prickle. He plucks frantically his shirt and pants, neither of which are the ones he was wearing when he climbed down the ladder.

As he spins, his eyes scouring one wall after another, all he finds are endless rows and columns of buttons except for one blank expanse, which he takes to be the door. He throws himself against it, but it will not open and the seams along the hinges are too tight for him to wedge his fingers into them. What he needs is a weapon, so he flings the book to the floor, grabs the table, and heaves it at the door.

It isn't enough. He tries to lift the chair, but there's some sort of mechanical motor embedded in its base and it's too heavy to move easily. As a last resort he reaches for the book and, in a frenzy, hurls it across the room. When it strikes the wall by the door the covers bend back and the insides explode. Delicate pages fill the air like the petals from an apple tree on a breezy spring morning.

The door swings open and pages drift free, floating lazily through the opening into whatever lies beyond. The success shocks Tavail and makes him catch his breath in such a way that the blood returns to his hands and his heart ceases its screaming. He rises and steps forward, shoulders hunched so his hair won't brush against the ceiling. The spine of the massive book left a mark where it struck the wall, just below a button. He rubs the hem of his shirt between his fingers, drying them of sweat, and after licking his lips he presses the button.

The sides of the door swing together again, sealing him inside. He presses it again and the doors open, ~~the movement creating a soft *swiff* of breeze that unsettles the papers scattered around his feet.~~

Tavil peers outside. A tunnel stretches out in front of him, curving gently away as it veers into the distance. There is nothing particularly unique about the tunnel. Its walls are the same color as his room (white), though unlike his room they are bereft of buttons. The ceiling is a bit higher, so Tavil can stretch to his full height. The hum still throbs, and the air tastes old, as though it has been through too many lungs before entering his own.

He crosses the threshold and begins to walk. To where he has no idea. For what purpose is simply the necessity of movement and the desire for escape. He cannot stay here where the walls are too close and there is no room to breathe. The more he thinks about the tightness surrounding him, the more frantic he becomes.

His heart no longer listens to his command to be calm and it roars inside his chest. Likewise his mind sends out panicked signals: *I am trapped. I am trapped. I am trapped.* Tavil tries to override the message but his body is inconsolable: it sweats, it numbs, it shivers.

There is only one thing for it: Tavil must get back to the surface. Now. He must see the sky, hear the silence, taste air that hasn't been stripped apart by some machine. But as he runs, the corridor only continues to curve away, hiding any hope of a destination.

He passes other doors set along the sides and he imagines other people trapped in buttoned-up rooms like his own. The doors are all closed, hiding their occupants, shielding them from even the existence of a world mere feet away from their own.

Shielding them from him.

Tavil wonders if they can hear the way he screams. The raggedness of his breathing. His fists hammering, hammering, waiting for someone to open their door and help him.

But there is nothing until he rounds the curve and is faced not with the endless monotony of before but with the novelty of an open door. He approaches it carefully and stares across the threshold. It's a mirror of his own but without the bed, only a chair in the middle with a table next to it, the massive book perched on top.

It is empty. He turns to move on when something catches his eye: a mark on the wall, just inside the door, beneath a button. The mark is familiar to him. He knows it because he made it, moments ago when he threw the book at the door.

The book that had exploded spewing paper across the floor and out into the tunnel. All of it is gone now, cleaned away. The book replaced. Nothing remains of his panicked tantrum except for the mark on the wall and the small tremors in his chest, the remnants of alarm drifting away through his system.

Calmer now, Tavil stoops into his room but leaves the door open to give the impression of space. Of an exit to this tomb. He sits in the chair, his body almost instantly relaxing as it sinks into a plush softness that seems to wrap and hold his body in a soothing comfort.

There are buttons arrayed along the arms and he presses one, squawking in alarm when the chair jerks forward and rolls across the room. Never in his life has Tavil moved by any means other than his own: first crawling, then walking, then running and climbing. The sensation of being carried by something that churns with a motor instead of beating with a heart feels wrong, and when he can't find a way to stop the mechanical chair he's forced to climb over the back of it to escape being pinned against the wall.

Even though it has met an immovable obstacle, the little motor in the chair continues to whir, adding a new frequency of humming to the air. It grates against Tavil, causing his teeth to ache as he stands in the middle of the room clenching his jaw.

He turns to the book on the table, flipping open the cover so forcefully the pages flutter. He presses his hand flat against them, not caring that the sweat of his palm dampens the page, running the text together in an almost blur. Then he begins to read.

Tavil sits in his chair in the middle of his tiny room, the door now closed. Thanks to the Book of the Machine, he has learned how to order food (delivered immediately on its own table that rises from the floor with a touch of a button); how to change the lighting (a toggle switch on the wall); how to turn on music (a separate toggle switch). He knows how to summon a tub full of hot or cold waterish liquid, a toilet, a sink, or even his bed—all of which rise from the floor with the push of the proper button.

His chair is set to warm and cradle him as he faces one of the many walls and holds the massive book spread open on his lap. He has been reading about communication through the Machine and has turned off the isolation knob, but still the room is silent. No one knows Tavil in the Underneath. No one has need to contact him.

And so he traces his finger along the thin pages of the book, mumbling to himself as he reads, and then he presses a button and across the far wall a round blue disk drops from the ceiling and bursts into color.

So much has surprised Tavil in so many ways this day that even this marvel can hardly elicit a gasp of fear. Instead his blood blooms with a sort of curiosity as he sits forward, the colors resolving into images that give the appearance of looking out a window aboveground. He stands and walks slowly forward until he can trace his fingers across the flat plane, the color from the glass glowing against his flesh but dissipating the moment he removes his hand from contact.

It is a wonder of a world perfectly wrought, and he recognizes it instantly. The dusty landscape capped by brown-black clumps of dried weeds, stretches of sharp-edged stones meandering along the surface like scars, the gray fog hovering in the distance. The stones are all that is left of a great building that once existed long ago. Tavil knows of it because he's been told stories: of how this was the last structure to stand against an enemy—before the Underneath, before the Machine, before men attempted to defeat the sun. He has seen the ruins himself once before, when he journeyed with his sister to view the sea for the first time.

At the images Tavil feels something hard and immovable begin to grow in his chest. It crushes the air from his lungs and presses against his ribs, this feeling that he is *wrong*. Where he is, the air he breathes, the chair by which he stands, and the buttons over which his fingers hover ... all of it wrong.

That place through the screen, that is the truth and he should fear to be parted from it for so long. His legs feel weak, and he sits. The book slips from his numbed fingers to land on the floor with a thud. It touches the ground for only an instant before the floor lifts it again to a height where Tavil merely has to slide it back onto his lap with no effort exerted on his own part.

And then something moves onto the screen: a wheeled carriage carrying a human-shaped creature unlike any Tavil has laid eyes on before except through the window on the train. This one is mannish, his body round and draped in a tunic that hides most, but not all, of his wobbling white flesh. A respirator masks his face, covering from his chin to just below his eyes and strapped over his bald head.

He is speaking. Tavil knows this only because the man's jowls bunch and sway. Tavil touches a button, and the sound soars around him.

"... against an inner rebellion of those who'd once lived within these walls and in other structures surrounding the castle."

“That’s not even close to correct,” Taviil mumbles to himself, the noise floating a bit in the air of his room before settling around him. ~~The history of the ruins isn’t one of rebellion, but of protection: town defending itself against the onslaught of another.~~

The man on the screen hesitates and adjusts his mask. This squeezes the several layers of skin trapped under his chin even more, so that his flesh bulges out from his neck. He clears his throat and continues.

“The remnants of which are, of course, still scattered through the Seven Hills of Wessex, which leads to the idea that ...”

Taviil barks with a sort of indignant laughter while the man prattles on. “*Eight Hills*,” he calls to the screen.

Again, the man pauses and fiddles with the straps of the respirator. His breathing is wispy and echoes against the chambers of his mask. Taviil hears someone cough and then a grumble, the sound filling his room from some unknown source in the same way as his light.

This is how Taviil understands his mistake: that as he hears so also can he be heard. He fumbles for his book, intending to shuffle through the pages to learn which button will silence anything he might say.

But his task is cut short when the lecturer continues, seeming to speak directly to him, though Taviil feels this must not be possible. “I assure you, that the hills number seven is not a firsthand idea. It is beyond fact at this point.”

Taviil sputters. “That’s absurd! All you have to do is look around and count. It’s not like they’re not obvious!” Someone hisses as others begin to murmur, but he ignores them. He stands before the screen tapping it with his fingers as though the lecturer can see where he points as he counts out the hills. “There’s one with the crag, two next to it where the top is sheared off to the west.”

He’s forced to talk louder and louder as the chatter emanating from the walls begins to grow overwhelming. They bark against the prospect of using observation to determine any sort of information, arguing that doing so adds an improper color, a bias skewed toward any idea that has not come down through intermediaries.

Taviil shouts over them all. “Three is just behind—it can sometimes be hard to see in the mist but right now it’s clear and four—”

And then one voice—a woman’s—breaks through the rest, clearer than the others: “Tell them *nothing* about the surface.”

This stops Taviil, his finger hovering just over the screen. He takes a step back. “Who said that?”

He’s met with the roar of attendees from the lecture, their words and arguments now grown indistinct.

“Who said that?” he demands again.

Some kind of feeling tickles along the back of his neck and he catches his breath to listen. It is the same instinct he learned to heed on the surface, with the wilds of the remaining world around him. He shakes his head against the humming in the walls, the voices in the air, but they continue to overwhelm any sense of his surroundings. He pounds the button by the door and it springs open. He stands and listens. Behind him is the chatter from the lecture, and in front is the long, curving tunnel.

He starts to walk, letting his frustrations burn through energy, opening his senses to this dry mechanical world. Ahead of him he hears a new noise, the whir of a machine different from the one humming in the walls. He speeds up but the sound eludes him and so he begins to run.

It always seems to be just around the next corner. Sometimes he’ll catch a glimpse of something darting, and he pushes himself faster until he comes tearing around the same unending bend and there

in front of him a wheeled carriage sits.

~~A woman steps from the carriage. She is unlike the man from the screen or the person Tavid saw on the train. While she is still of a roundish shape, she is tall, able to carry herself on her legs, and her long dark hair swings as she moves. She steps through an open door.~~

“Wait!” he calls out.

But then as the doors begin to close she turns to almost face him. He knows, without her having to utter a word, that it is the woman who issued the warning.

Tavid stumbles when he sees that she, like him, is of the surface. Her skin has seen the sun, of that there is no doubt—it is written across her cheeks in the form of freckles. In her hands she carries the massive book. When she sees Tavid running for her, her eyes flare slightly. She does not move or make any effort to stop the doors from closing.

And then she is gone and Tavid is left pounding on the door. There are so many questions he needs to ask her.

He notices a button and he presses it until the door swings open again and he is faced with nothing but an empty white box. He storms inside, looking for any trace of the woman but finding only more buttons—columns of them racing up the wall.

He pushes one and a small red light blinks in its center. The doors close, he feels something twist in his stomach, a sensation of growing heavier, and then the doors open again and he is facing the tunnel. Only this one is different; there is no wheeled vehicle sitting in front of him.

He has moved to another level. He listens for sounds of the woman, but there is nothing. He moves back into the box and presses another button. He repeats this again and again but there is no trace of her. No trace of another living being at all. And then he has touched the last button and the doors open and he is someplace new.

Long platforms stretch out away from him and from them branch more platforms that lead to the decks of several massive airships. Their bloated hulls curve toward the heavy domed ceiling, where the stretch of white tiles is marred by a large circular opening that presumably leads to the surface far above. Tavid is familiar with the hulking ships, but he has only ever seen them from a distance as they rise out of the tunnels from the Underneath and sail off toward the horizon. Their cabins have always been shuttered, but now they are not and Tavid can see inside.

Each is a mirror of his own room below: a chair, a table, walls crowded with buttons. Almost all are empty, and it is the rare window through which Tavid glimpses the bulbous flesh of another human being.

They are all headed to the surface, and just thinking the word makes him realize that he can almost taste how the air on this level is different. As if each airship brings a bit of the world above back with it as it arrives.

A fierce yearning spreads through Tavid, a desire to abandon this mechanical world and return home to his sister. He strides along the platform, choosing a ship at random and climbing toward it. At the top he's met by a woman with an officious demeanor.

She looks at him oddly, and her voice holds a note of suspicion. Her eyes slide away from him as she states, “Please present your Egression-permit.”

When Tavid has no response, she glances at him. “I'd simply like to get to the surface,” he finally tells her.

An expression of horror crosses her face at his request but she quickly controls it. “This is the airship to Courland.”

That tight feeling Tavid experienced the first moment he realized he was trapped underground

begins to crawl along his arms. Perhaps it is the taste of the surface on the back of his tongue or the knowledge that he has finally found a way out of the labyrinthine Machine, but he is unable to hold back the sensation of being buried alive.

He swallows again and again though his mouth is dry. "Please," he begs. "I need to get to the surface." In an attempt to gain the woman's sympathy, he places his hand on her arm.

She recoils instantly, disgust roiling her features at the physical contact. "You forget yourself!" Her words bite at the air, and Tavid takes several steps back. He can see her pulse pound furiously in her neck.

She says nothing more, refuses to even look at him. He waits, hopeful, but is finally forced to retrace his steps to the small white box and count the buttons back down to his level, where he wanders until he comes upon an open door with a mark along the wall where it was struck by his boot.

Everything in his room is as it was except the image on the screen is of a different blob of flesh sitting in a carriage in a different landscape. That, and the air is filled with the sound of chimes. Buttons flash along one wall. When he presses one, a voice issues forth asking if perhaps he'd attended the lecture on the Brisbane school of music or a discussion on Plewis's theory of the French Revolution as informed by Graubert.

Even as he stands, doing absolutely nothing, the bells continue to chime, and the voices issue forth. They ask to share ideas; they ask his thoughts on a recent lecture; they talk about the recent scent added to the bathwater and whether he prefers the new platters used to hold the food.

Tavid sits in his chair and he listens, searching for that voice that had warned him, "Tell them nothing about the surface," and yet he never hears it. He thinks about this warning, trying to understand what it means and why it was issued. To tell him to say nothing is to imply both that there is something he *could* tell and that something should be kept secret.

But what could that be? He can think of nothing special about the surface: food is scarce, machinery is a distant memory used only as a cautionary tale, life is not about sitting but moving and doing for oneself and the community. It is about existing *with* nature rather than opposed.

And so, after a while, his curiosity overwhelms him and he issues a question of his own to those voices on the other side of the buttons along his walls. "Tell me about the surface," he asks. He hopes he has tread close enough to the female voice's warning that perhaps she might chastise him again and in doing so he'll be able to communicate with her directly.

If she heard his question, she is silent, but others are not. Instantly, he is inundated with responses: the surface is frozen, it is dry, it is cracked, it is broken, it is uninhabitable. It is irrelevant. It is where they render dissenters Homeless, the worst conceivable punishment.

What he hears is all incorrect, but he cannot understand the purpose of the misinformation. Those living aboveground have always been aware of the Machine, the great cities below the surface, and why should the reverse not also be true?

Why do they not know of the small communities scattered in the hills, people living with the land rather than below it? How can they not know that it's possible to survive aboveground where they don't need the Machine to feed and clothe, to teach and communicate? Perhaps it wasn't easier aboveground, but it was honest and sustainable.

Though he has learned how to isolate himself to stop the unceasing communications now inundating his room, he chooses not to. Instead, he presses the buttons to call for his bed and to dim the lights, and then, in the darkness, he listens to the chatter, trying to understand.

During the night, while Tavid sleeps, the conversations have shifted to other topics. He wakes to a

discussion on the historical significance of indoor plumbing. Voices respond to one another rapid fire citing various lectures they've heard as sources.

He turns the isolation knob, at first seeking solitude, but then he is faced with nothing but the humming of the Machine around him. He calls back the voices for company.

As he listens he reads the Book of the Machine, searching until he finds the information on Egression-permits. Immediately he presses the proper button to apply for one and is rejected almost instantly. The Book informs him he is allowed one application per day, and so he waits.

His ninety-seventh day underground is the first that he forgets to apply for an Egression-permit. He doesn't realize this until the next morning, and he presses the button immediately and almost as quickly receives his rejection. He experiences only a moment of disappointment before turning to the walls and his buttons.

He has already planned his day: a lecture on the lakes of Sumatra followed by a discussion of such and then he has promised several correspondents to listen to their ideas and give his thoughts on them. At first he found such invitations tedious and pointless and only indulged them out of boredom.

However, as time passes he begins to gain a bit of a reputation in the cities Underneath for a perspective almost wholly intermediary. Because the only information Tavil knows firsthand relates to life on the surface, which he refuses to ever discuss, anything he knows beyond that must necessarily come through intermediaries. He learns nothing about anything directly; rather, he learns only what others have thought about those things.

Because of this reputation, Tavil finds his time more and more sought after. So much so that gradually, as the months collect upon themselves and turn into years, he spends less time outside his room, walking along the tunnels, looking for the woman with skin like his, searching for a way to the surface.

More and more his days are spent moving only between his bed and his chair until, in the distance of time, his legs grow soft and his body rounded. Rarely anymore does he think of his sister left behind at the mouth of the ventilation shaft so long ago. When memories of life aboveground do enter his consciousness, he shudders at the thought of the wasteful expanse. At the bugs, the variance of temperature and light, the struggle of daily necessities like preparing food and eliminating waste.

In these moments he's reminded of just how much comfort the Machine gives; how much easier it is to exist in his little room where all needs can be met with the touch of a button.

Sometimes, however, in a fit of nostalgia, he'll decide to strike out and explore like he did during his first days underground. He'll wheel his chair to the door and call for the carriage, grumbling over having to walk the distance between the two. He'll take the lift to the top floor, where he'll call for another carriage, and he'll let it carry him along the platforms so he can stare up at the airships, wrinkling his nose at the stench they bring.

He'll think about his first trip here so many years ago, and the sensation of placing his hand on the ship attendant's arm, and he'll shudder in revulsion and embarrassment. How unenlightened he'd been to seek physical contact! To seek anything of necessity or desire outside of the Machine!

As often as not he'll bring the Book of the Machine along with him on these jaunts, finding himself unsettled and anxious when he can't place his hands on its cover and murmur, "Blessed is the Machine," in an echo of the words recently printed on the opening page. Besides, to not constantly carry the Book is to invite suspicion of being anti-Mechanism, which carries a punishment of Homelessness.

Out of a sense of dwindling obligation Tavil continues to apply for an Egression-permit.

Sometimes a week or a month will go by and he'll have forgotten, but then some small thing will trigger a reminder—a lecture on the Seven Hills of Wessex or mention of an airship route being terminated—and he'll promptly press the button to submit his application.

Thus he's surprised when, one day, rather than the expected and usual rejection, he is approved. As evidence of the approval, a button by the door begins to glow with a green light—if he were to press it, his door would open, a car would gather him and deliver him to the top level, a mask would be presented to him, and a narrow door would open to a vestibule leading to the surface.

Tavil doesn't move. Instead, he sits in his chair, the voices of his friends drowning the humming of the Machine, and tries to understand what to do with this new information.

The thought of going aboveground appalls Tavil. It has been years since he was there last, with his sister at night hovering around the tunnel to the Underneath. Would he even be able to find his way to the village again? Would anyone recognize him anymore? He closes his eyes and imagines what it would be like to go back: all that space, the silence, the gray fog that dampens everything it touches.

His heart races at the thought of it, his muscles going rigid. Without the walls of his room, what's to keep his body—his mind and his soul—contained? What use is the world of the surface to him anymore?

There would be no one to clothe him, feed him; no buttons to press for light and music, his bath and his bed. Everything civilized exists in the Machine now, he thinks to himself.

In his agitation he reaches for the Book of the Machine, finding an instant peace as the weight of it settles in his hands. He presses the button indicating how unwell he feels and an apparatus drops from the ceiling to check his pulse, his temperature, his blood pressure, his respirations. A table rises from the floor with a cup perched on top, and he takes the proffered medicine without thought.

He calls for his bed and turns his isolation knob. In the dark silence he listens to the Machine hum around him: everywhere, like a womb. He stares at the green button by the door until he can stand it no longer, and he turns to his other side and falls asleep with the secure knowledge that the Machine will care for him, the Machine will tend to him, the Machine will always protect him until the day it grants him euthanasia so another may take his place.

For weeks the green button glows by Tavil's door. Whether the room is dark or light, whether he is present or not, whether he is awake or asleep. It becomes like a persistent itch that he can't reach and he's reminded of what it was like to sleep aboveground where, no matter how hard he tried, the beds would always fill with grit that dug into his skin, arresting comfortable slumber.

Here his sheets are always perfectly crisp, and not once in his years underground has he found a speck of dirt in his bed. Dirt doesn't exist Underneath; there is no need for it.

And yet, every time he thinks to cancel his Egression-permit, he finds an excuse to delay the action. He tells himself he is merely too busy today, but perhaps tomorrow will be different.

Once he even goes so far as to open his door and summon the car, but the gulf between his doorway and the carriage is too great—the idea of that much movement too taxing. He retreats to his chair and his buttons, his correspondents and his lectures.

Life continues in the Machine the way it always has; the green button fades into the background in the same way as the mark by the door where it was once struck by the large book. Tavil has learned to ignore these things because to think of what he did to the Book of the Machine—hurling it across the room and causing it to break apart—makes him shudder. How profane he had once been! How barbaric!

Eventually the decision regarding the Egression-permit is made for him. The Central Committee

the Machine has decided there is no need to go to the surface as there is nothing new to learn from it. It revokes all outstanding permits, and that is that. The green light in the button dims and extinguishes, and Tavid smiles almost wistfully, thinking for a moment how nice it might have been to see his sister again, before beginning his lecture on the Seven Hills of Wessex.

Tavid is asleep when he hears the noise. It intrudes in his dreams because of its novelty—a sound that doesn't exist in the Machine. He sits up in bed. There is no need to press the button for light because over the past weeks something has changed in the Machine. His room is in a perpetual shade of twilight no matter how often he presses the button or complains to the Central Committee.

Still the noise persists. Laboriously, he heaves himself into his chair and causes it to motor across the room to the source of the noise: the door.

Someone is knocking on the other side as if trying to secure his attention. A light sweat breaks across his forehead and in the folds of his arms at the thought of another person endeavoring to initiate face-to-face communication.

He contemplates ignoring the knock and calling for a bath instead to wash away the offending perspiration. But the bathing liquid has been a bit tepid and a touch malodorous for his liking lately.

Throughout all these thoughts, the sound persists, gratingly so, and he fumbles for the buttons, forgetting for a moment which is the one to activate the door, as it has been so long since he used it last.

The door parts, and Tavid is faced with a woman. He sees no carriage waiting in the corridor, and he is exhausted just thinking of the energy she must have expended bringing herself to his room. She stands just across the threshold and, though much time has passed, he recognizes her: long hair that sways with her subtle movements, legs strong enough to carry her for as long as she could want, dark spots spread across a face browned from the sun.

She is the one from the surface. An expression of disgust shifts across her features as she takes in his appearance. When she speaks, Tavid is jolted back to that moment on his initial day Underneath when she issued her first, and only, warning: *Tell them nothing about the surface.*

He struggles to remember what to do in a situation such as this. Whether there is some sort of greeting he is supposed to give, a gesture he should offer. Unable to come up with anything, he merely sits in his chair and stares.

“The Machine is stopping,” she tells him.

The statement jolts Tavid, sending a tremor of alarm through him. He reaches for the Book of the Machine, needing the comfort of its weight, but he has left it behind on the table by his bed. His fingers fumble in agitation, searching for something to occupy them.

“To say such a thing is blasphemous,” he informs her.

“No matter,” she says. “I have friends in other cities—they've seen the signs. It's only a matter of time now.”

Tavid doesn't want to believe her. “Impossible. No lecturer has touched on such an idea. Besides, the Machine is omnipotent—it cannot stop.”

Her upper lip curls. “Even so, the Machine was made by men and has escaped the bounds of men's understanding. There is no one left who knows enough of the whole to repair it.”

Tavid scoffs. “The Machine will fix itself.”

She shakes her head. “It will not. The power station is failing and soon enough everything else will follow. Those left Underneath will suffocate. Now is the time to escape to the surface—it's the only chance to survive.”

Drops of sweat drip along Tavid's cheeks, his desire to reach for his Book so powerful he is almost shaking. The woman's words begin to penetrate deeper into his consciousness, attaching themselves to recent events to give them significance and meaning. All the little ticks and hiccups in the operation of day-to-day life that never occurred before and have been so subtle and pervasive as to be ignorable: buttons not responding as usual, lags in repairs, shudders sometimes felt within the walls.

All of it supporting the same conclusion the woman has drawn. "Why are you telling me this?" Tavid asks her.

The woman drops into a squat so that she is facing him head-on. "You're from the surface, like me. There are more of us down here—we're the only ones who know how to live aboveground. We're the ones with the best hope outside the Machine."

She reaches forward. "Come with us," she says as she grasps his hand in hers.

At her physical touch Tavid recoils, jamming the button to move his chair away from her. "You forget yourself!" He rubs his hand against his tunic as if he can somehow erase the feeling of her flesh resting on his own.

Shaking her head, the woman straightens. "You'll die if you stay down here."

In response, Tavid presses the button to close the door, sealing himself back into his sanctuary. He wheels to the center of his room but doesn't disengage the isolation knob. Instead he stares at his hand, remembering the feel of the woman.

There's a part of him, a small part, that used to know how to climb trees and walk for miles through the grassed plains, that knows the woman speaks the truth and accepts it. It explains the light in the bathing liquid, why his favorite music sometimes pauses and gasps as it never has before. There have been delays when he presses the button for food, and his bed has twice now risen from the floor with its sheets still tossed about and wrinkled as if he'd just awoken.

When he was a child, his parents and theirs before them predicted that the cities of the Machine could not continue forever. They spoke of ancestors who'd been rendered Homeless, cast out of the Underneath after a rebellion, and who had thereafter chosen to live a natural, honest life on the surface. According to them, technology was a bane rather than a blessing; it rendered men decadent and complacent.

And Tavid had believed them. He'd abhorred those who lived underground and awaited the day their constant quest for comfort would cause them to collapse in on themselves. It's why he'd snuck down the tunnel that night so long ago. To see the Underneath for himself, before its inevitable end, so he would have firsthand knowledge of the Machine to pass on to future generations as a warning to never allow life to sink to such depths again.

But his parents had been wrong. He'd been wrong. Underneath is progress, evolution. It is life at its most advanced—existence for the pure pursuit of ideas and the cleansing of the human soul!

He reaches for the Book of the Machine and lifts it to his lips. "Oh, Machine," he murmurs, kissing the cover. Holding the Book is tangible proof of the truth he'd been denied as a child on the surface: that there is power greater than himself.

The thought comforts him, causes his trembling to cease and the sweat gathered along the remaining wisps of his hair to dry. He closes his eyes to feel the hum of the Machine around him, caring for him and protecting him. He is a part of it now, irrevocably so.

So be it if it fails—this marvelous Machine of progress. He has known of this inevitability from the moment he released the final rung of the ladder and fell into its depths. He will not abandon it now, will not return to that old life of strain and sacrifice.

It is too much to ask of him. He would rather live his last moments below the surface, ensconced in

the Machine, than spend eternity aboveground away from its comforting hum.

Even until the end, Tavid's faith in the Machine is absolute. He has his rituals, and he adheres to them faithfully: repeating the mantra of the Machine as the first and last words he speaks each day, kissing the cover of the Book three times before opening it and after setting it down, ensuring it never touches the floor or that its spine faces the door.

Some of these are habits he developed on his own over time, others are shared by the larger community of believers. Even as the medic system fails, the lifts cease their function, the bathing liquid turns foul, and the beds no longer rise from the floor, those Underneath continue their devotion.

If anything, this causes Tavid's idolization of the Book to intensify as it remains proof of the Machine's supremacy.

And then the communication system collapses, the last throes of their dying world. Tavid knows that many around him have left their rooms to gather in the tunnels and along the airship platforms. Unlike him, they did not know of the inevitability of this day; they had not been expecting and waiting.

They had not known their fate as he has.

The idea of joining one of these groups repulses him. He rubs his hand against his tunic, remembering the last time he came into physical contact with another human being. The woman from the surface, who'd warned him of this day and asked him to eschew what he believed for the chance at a life he did not want, who'd offered him a false salvation from a world he so embraces.

In these final moments, Tavid thinks of his sister, Pria, left behind on the surface. He pictures her face framed by the stars as he'd last seen her before climbing down the ladder into the Underneath. What a life she must have led, constantly wrenched by the needs of the human body: for food, for shelter, for the constant touch of others. No time for her soul, any moments of quiet contemplation necessarily rare.

His life would have unfolded similarly had they never seen the geyser of air pouring from the ground and found the shallow hollow where a man from the Underneath flailed about around an old ventilation shaft. Had Tavid never decided to take the unexpected opportunity to see the world of the Machine for himself.

What a waste his life would have been had he stayed aboveground.

Tavid sits in the chair in the middle of his room. The motor in its base ceased working yesterday and so he hasn't moved since. Though the lights have cut out, Tavid still turns the pages of the Book, feeling the thinness of the paper with his fingers. He does not need to see to know what is written on them; he memorized his favorite passages ages ago.

When the Machine stops, there is nothing. The walls cease their vibration, the constant hum finally stills. Tavid mumbles lines from the Book to himself, clinging to the comfort of his eternal adoration of this marvelous Machine.

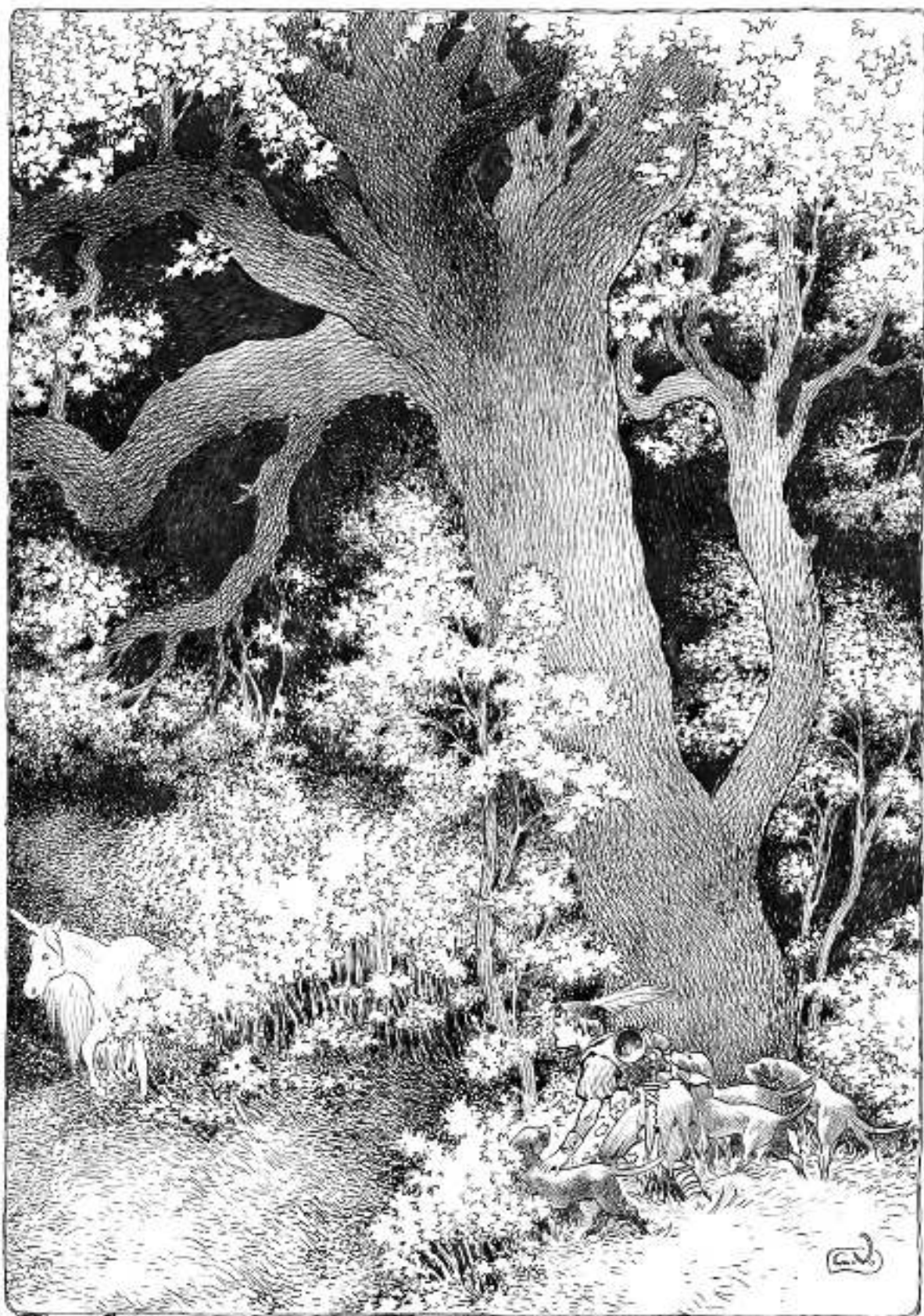
Otherwise the world would be too silent.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When I first read “The Machine Stops” I thought of it as a fairly straightforward postapocalyptic story: the Earth’s surface becomes uninhabitable, which forces mankind underground to live in cities where every aspect of existence is controlled by the Machine. However, the more I reread the story and considered it, the more I came to see it as a work of genius.

Not only is it a thought-provoking meditation on the role of technology in our lives, it is also a graceful portrayal of faith and how easy it is to become so focused on worship of a *thing*—on a representation of the belief—that one can lose sight of belief itself. In the story, E. M. Forster leads his characters toward a very deliberate conclusion in which they ultimately understand, and accept, their fallacy. This is what I wanted to explore in my own story.

There is a moment in “The Machine Stops” when one of the characters makes his way to the surface through an old ventilation shaft and later recalls: “I thought I saw something dark move across the bottom of the dell, and vanish into the shaft.” This is where my story begins: What if that dark shape were a man from the surface, and what would happen to him if he became trapped in the Machine?



The King of Elfland's Daughter

The King of Elfland's Daughter (1924). The Irish writer Lord Dunsany wrote over sixty books, including short story collections, mysteries, plays, essays, an autobiography, and several novels, of which, unquestionably, *The King of Elfland's Daughter* is his best. Evocative and wildly inventive, his prose has influenced many writers, including H. P. Lovecraft and Jack Vance. I know when I began reading this novel, I was forever and completely enthralled by Dunsany's language. For years afterward, every bit of writing I put my hand to was not-so-very-subtly influenced by his lyricism.

Here the reader finds Alveric, the prince of the Vale of Earl, who is sent by his father, the king, into Elfland so that when he returns it will be with some bit of magic that will enrich the lives of the mundane people who live within the fields we know. The witch, Zironderel, gifts the prince with a magic sword made from lightning bolts gathered from under cabbages in her garden, on the high lands where the thunder rolls. In due course, after winning through adventure after adventure, he does return with the Elf King's daughter, Lirazel, and soon everyone in his kingdom will know the coming of too much magic into their lives.

—Charles Ves

GARTH NIX

It was a year ago, or slightly more, as I recall. I was coming back from Orthaon, I had been there to discuss the printing works at the original monastery, they had a very old press and, though it worked well enough, it had been designed to be driven by slaves, and since the most recent emancipation a number of the mechanical encouraging elements needed to be removed, quite a difficult task as the original drawings for the machine were long lost and some parts of it were very obscure.

What? Oh no, I was not present as a mechanic, I was there to write an account of the reworking. I thought it might prove to be of some interest, for one of the city gazettes, or perhaps as a selection in a book that I have begun, observations of curious machines, sorceries, and the like.

You might yourself make an interesting dozen pages, Master Puppet. I have heard of you, of course. Read about you, too, unless I miss my guess. That is to say, I have read about a certain sorcerous puppet who bears a striking similarity, in the works of Rorgulet and in Prysme's *Annals*—oh, of course, Sir Hereward, you would rate at least as many pages, I should think. But you desire discretion, and I respect that. No, no, I *will* be discreet, I do not write about *everything*. Yes, I am aware of the likely consequences, so there is no need for that, good knight ... please, allow me to withdraw my throat a little from that ... it looks exceedingly sharp. Really? Every morning, without fail, one hundred times each side, and then the strop? I had no idea. I do not treat my razor so well, though perhaps it gets less shall we say ... use ... no, no, I am getting on with it. Have patience. You should know that I am not a man who can be spurred by threats.

As I said I was coming back from Orthaon, traveling on the Scheduled Unstoppable Cartway, in the third carriage, as I do not like the smell of the mokleks. Speaking of razors, what a job it must be to shave a moklek, though I have heard it said it is required only once, and the handlers rub in a grease that inhibits the regrowth. Done at the same time as the unkindest cut of all, though nothing needed there to prevent the regrowth, of course. It is interesting that the wild mammoths treat the occasional escaped moklek well, as if it were a cousin who had fallen on unfortunate circumstances. Better than many of us treat our cousins, as I can attest.

Yes. I was on the cartway, in the third carriage, through choice, not primarily through lack of funds, though it is true both fare and luxury reduce from the front. We had stopped, as is common, despite the name of the conveyance. My compartment was empty, save for myself, and though the afternoon light was dim, I had been correcting some pages that the dunderheaded typesetter of the *Regulshim Trumpet-Zwound* had messed up, a piece on the recent trouble with the nephew of the Archimandrite of Fulwek and his attempt to ... ouch!

I told you I need no such encouragement, and it would have been a very short digression. You might even have learned something. As I was saying, the light suddenly grew much brighter. I thought the sun had come out from behind the skulking clouds that had bedeviled us all day, but in fact it was a lesser and much closer source of illumination, a veritable glow that came from the face of a remarkably beautiful woman who had stepped up to the door of my compartment and was looking in through the window. A very good window; they know how to make a fine glass in Orthaon, no bubble

or obscurity, so I saw her clear.

“Pray stay there, for a moment!” I called out, because the light was extremely helpful, and the proofs were such a mess and set quite small, and there was this one footnote I couldn’t quite read. But she ignored me, opening the door and entering the compartment. Rather annoyingly, she also dimmed the radiance that emitted not only from her beautiful face, but from her exposed skin. Of which there was quite a lot, as she was clad only in the silken garment that is called a rhuskin in these regions, but is also known as a coob-jam or attanousse, I am sure you know it, a very long, broad piece of silk wound around the breast and tied at the front and back so that the trailing pieces provide a form of open tabard covering the nethers, save when a wind blows or the wearer attempts a sudden movement as in entering the compartment of a carriage on the Scheduled Unstoppable Cartway.

She had very fine legs. I may have admired them for a moment or two, before she interrupted the direction of my thoughts, which I must confess were running along the lines of the two of us being alone in the compartment, and the interior blinds, which could be drawn, and why such a beautiful, shining woman would intrude upon my compartment in particular, even though of course it is not entirely unusual that beautiful women throw themselves upon ... why do you chuckle, Sir Knight? Not all women favor height and splendid mustaches, and the obvious phallic overcompensation and fascination with swords ... and yes, daggers like that one, which I do not want thrust through my hand, thank you. This hand that has written a hundred ... well, ninety books ... and has many more to write. Thank you, Master Puppet. I would be grateful if you could keep your ... your comrade contained.

So. She was in the compartment, beautiful, illuminated, and semi-naked. Obviously a sorceress of some kind, I presumed, or a priestess, perhaps of Daje-Onkh-Arboth, they tend to be lit up in a similar fashion. I had no idea then what she actually was, you understand.

She smiled at me, winked, and sat down on the cushions opposite.

“Tell them you haven’t seen me, and put me in your pocket,” she said, very sultry and promising. “It shall be to your advantage.”

“Tell who—” I started to ask, but she shrank away before my very eyes, and in a matter of moments there was no longer a shining woman on the cushion, but a small figurine of jade, or some similar greenstone, no taller than my thumb. Now, as you can plainly see, I am a man of the world who has seen a great deal more than most, but never anything like that. I picked up the figure, and was further surprised to find it very cold, as cold as a scoop of ice from the coolth-vendors you may have seen along the street here, offering their wares to chill a drink or a feversome brow.

I put her in my pocket, the deep inner one of my outer coat, where I keep a selection of pencils, an inkstone, and other odds and ends of the writer’s trade. It was none too soon, for there was a commotion outside only a few seconds later, with a great clattering of armor and the usual unnecessary shouting of military folk, the roar of battle mounts and the like, all of which I understood immediately to be the sudden arrival of some force bent on intercepting the conveyance, which meant more stopping and greater delay. I was not pleased, I tell you, and even less so when two rude troopers flung open the compartment door, waved a pistol and a sword in my face, and by means of emphatic gestures and strange, throat-deep grunts, demanded that I alight.

Naturally, I refused, pointing out to them that there were numerous treaties guaranteeing the inviolate nature of the Unstoppable Cartway, and that by interfering with it they were risking war with no less than three city-states, and the Kingdom of Aruth, admittedly a great distance away at the terminus, and not only these polities but also the parent company of the Cartway, which they might not know was the Exuberant Order of Holy Commerce, well known for its mercenary company business, in addition to its monopoly on Hrurian nutmeg, the original source of the order’s wealth,

which by curious chance—

Your interruptions, sir, delay matters far more than my minor educational digressions. Yet I protested in vain, as in fact occurred with these other soldiers. After they had dragged me out quite forcibly, I ascertained that in fact they were deaf-mutes, directed solely by a sign language that I did not know, involving numerous finger flicks from their officer. This fellow, from his ill-fitting gun-metal cuirass and the crushed plumes of his helmet, was clearly more priest than soldier, the armor worn over robes of an aquamarine hue flecked with silver bristles, here and there showing silver buttons that were embossed with the heads of two women, one gazing left, the other right, and apparently sharing the same neck. I did not immediately recognize this outfit, but then there are many gods in the Tollukheem Valley, some with multiple orders of followers.

“Have you seen Her?” asked the officer, the capital “H” readily apparent in his speech.

“Who?” I asked.

“The Goddess,” said the officer. The capital “G” was also very evident.

“What goddess?”

“Our Goddess. Pikgnil-Yuddra the Radiant One.”

I must admit that upon hearing this description the jade figurine felt suddenly very much heavier in my pocket, and I felt a similar chill around my heart. But I gave no sign of this, nor of the slight unease that was beginning to spread in the region of my bowels.

“Am I to understand you have lost a goddess?” I said to the officer, with a yawn. “I am afraid I have never heard of your Pikgnil-Yuddra. Now, I trust you will not be delaying the Cartway for very long?”

“Pikgnil-Yuddra the Radiant,” corrected the officer, with a frown. “You are very ignorant, for our Goddess is the light that does not fail, the illuminatrix of the city of Shrivet, and verily for leagues and leagues about the city!”

“Shrivet ... Shrivet ... ” I pondered aloud. “But that is at least a hundred leagues from here. I take it the illumination does not extend that far? I believe here we fall under the aegis of the god of Therelle, the molerat-digger Gnawtish-Gnawtish?”

I made the molerat godlet up, of course, for my own amusement. That part of the world is so infested with little godlets that no one could know them all, and as the soldiers were from Shrivet, which was indeed a great distance away, they would have no clue.

“Other gods do not concern us,” said the officer. “Only our own. She must be here somewhere, we were only an hour at most behind her chariot.”

“Chariot?” I asked. I looked around, hoping to see it, for I was naturally curious about what style of chariot a luminous goddess might drive, and what manner of locomotion might propel it, or beasts draw it.

“Crashed half a league back,” said the officer. “But near the track of this ... this ... ”

He gestured at the carriages of the Cartway, and the ten mokleks harnessed in line, with their mahouts standing by their heads and the guards in the howdahs watching the temple soldiers search with surprising equanimity or possibly cowardice—certainly they had made no attempt to intervene. There were more guards by the rear carriage, and the conductor-major herself, but they were even more relaxed, offering wine to another priestly officer.

“It is called the Unstoppable Cartway,” I said. “Though clearly it is neither unstoppable nor do the mokleks draw carts, but luxurious carriages. I believe in its infancy, carts were drawn, carrying a regular cargo of foodstuffs from Durlal to Orthaon, and manufactured goods on the return—”

The officer was, as might have been expected, uninterested in learning more. He interrupted me

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