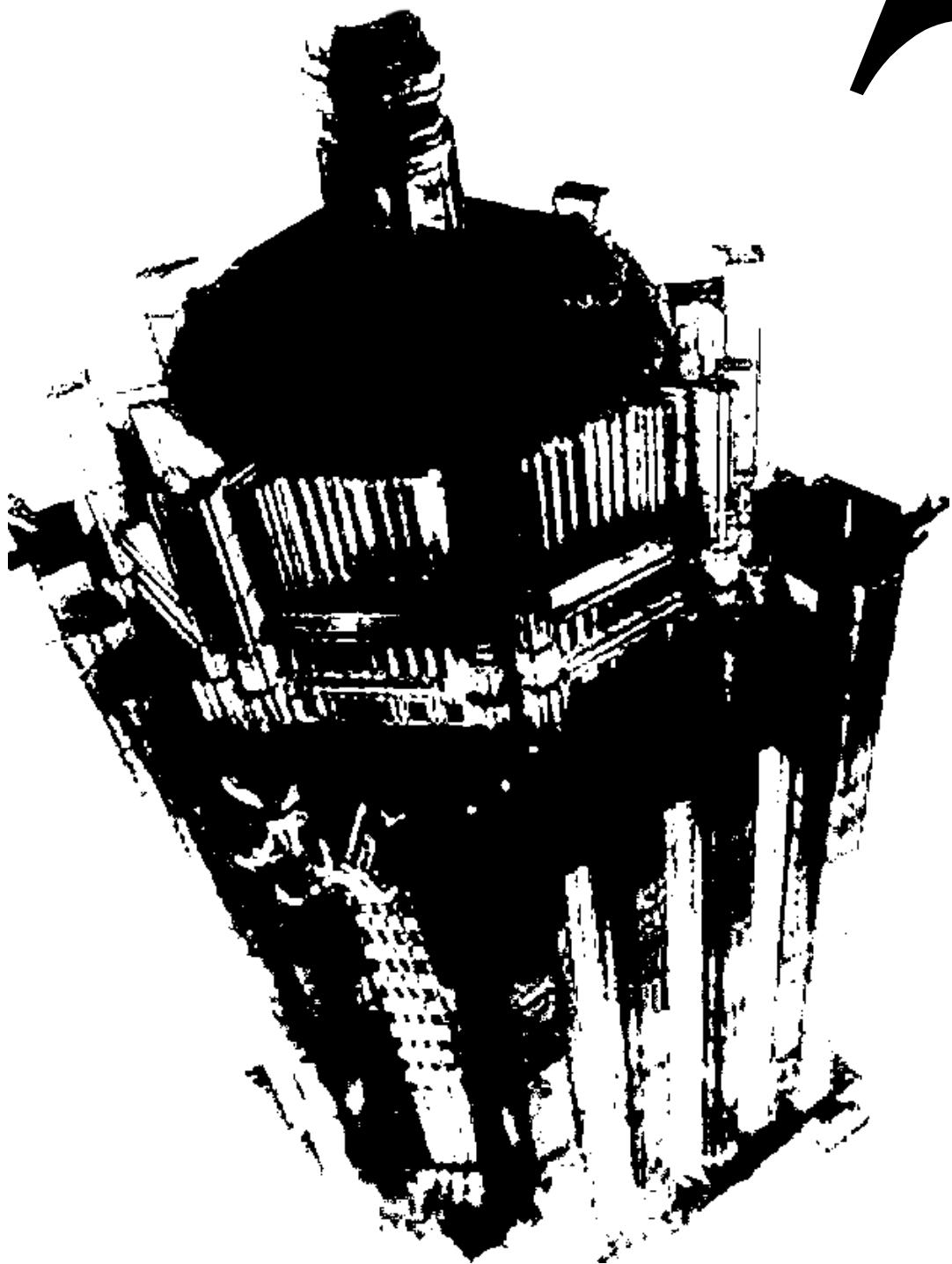


ISSUE 7

# GATEHOUSE GAZETTE

JUL '09



7

METROPOLIS

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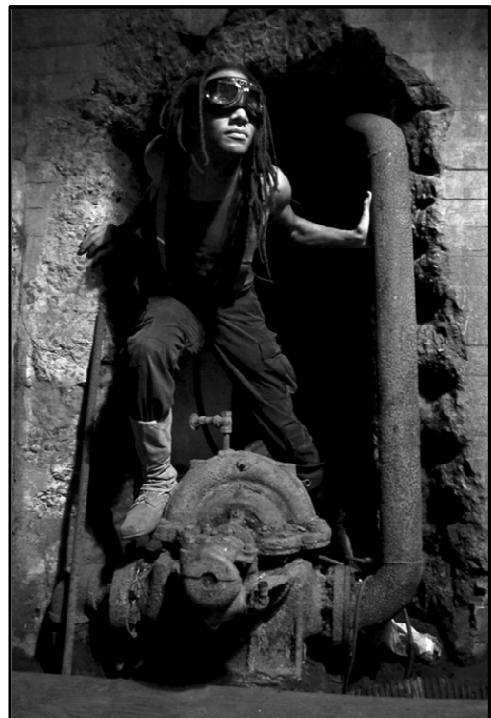
The *Gatehouse Gazette* is an online magazine in publication since July 2008, dedicated to the speculative fiction genres of steampunk and dieselpunk.

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Every issue the *Gatehouse Gazette* selects one photograph submitted for feature. This edition's winner is a 2008 picture of model Emmymau by Lex Machina Photography, [www.lexmachinaphoto.com](http://www.lexmachinaphoto.com).

To nominate a photograph of your own, send it to the editor via [nick@ottens.co.uk](mailto:nick@ottens.co.uk). The winner will see their picture featured here.

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## EDITORIAL

# Enter the metropolis

IN OUR THIRD ISSUE (NOV. 2008), MR PIECRAFT already discussed Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* as one of the notable precursors to the dieselpunk genre. He then described the film as "an excellent example of the genre's style and technology as prevalent in a future dystopian society," referring to the dazzling skyscrapers and big pumping machinery featured throughout the film. "Lang seeks to show us the dire consequences of a war out of which a totalitarian regime emerges victorious," wrote Piecraft but *the metropolis* has not always to be so dire of course. Rather it can be a glorious testament to the pride and accomplishment of a time and a people. Just imagine that zeppelin hovering over the Manhattan skyline or the fog over London or the Chrysler Building towering upward and you get what we're talking about. In other words: the metropolis can be grim as well as glamorous and in our speculative histories of steampunk and dieselpunk, we happily discover it in both ways.

We open the issue that lies before you now with—how could we not?—a review of *Metropolis* by our Mr Rauchfuß. He authors a review of that other Fritz Lang classic, *M*, also, all near the end.

For the latest about what is going on in another fine city, the Old Smoke called Londontown, we are proud to introduce Brigadier Sir Arthur Weirdy-Beardy of, among other things, [thesteampunkclub.com](http://thesteampunkclub.com), a fine establishment soon to open its doors. Be sure to pay them a visit some time soon; I've been told that *Gazette*-readers can expect a free brandy when they first enter!

We are also extremely glad to present an exclusive preview of Mr Toby Frost's upcoming "Space Captain Smith" novel, *Wrath of the Lemming Men*. You should be able to purchase it in all the finer bookstores by the time this issue is released, but if you haven't found it yet, be sure to read our preview—you'll want to get your hands on a copy thereafter, I'm sure.

Of course we have also the columns and features that you might have come to expect from us: Hilde's "The Steampunk Wardrobe," about ethnic steampunk this time; Mr Townsend's "Gentleman Traveler" column; "The Liquor Cabinet," by Craig B. Daniel; and a *Quatermass* review by Guy Dampier, along with further reviews by Trubetskoy, Sigurjón and one by Toby too. So, as usual, there is plenty for you to read and hopefully, to enjoy, in what is already the seventh issue of our *Gatehouse Gazette*. Full steam ahead, I say! (We certainly are!) ■

## PULP FACT

## BY COL. HAZARD



[www.bitstrips.com](http://www.bitstrips.com)

REVIEW *METROPOLIS*

# Future lessons from the past



MARCIUS  
RAUCHFUß



THE 1927 FILM *METROPOLIS* IS A milestone in the cinematographic genre of science fiction and many reviews have been written about it, so I shall concentrate on two particular aspects and hope I am not plagiarizing someone else's ideas.

## Lang's future – our present?

This question only concerns the time frame. From a temporal perspective alone, *Metropolis* could be set in our time, being almost 90 years into the future at the time of its release. There are some elements in *Metropolis* which are amazingly accurate depictions of our present. Most of it, however, is not.

The society of *Metropolis* is extremely stratified, socially as well as spatially. A vast number of menial industrial workers toil and live in underground complexes while the elite dwells happily in towering metroplexes above ground.

The workers' houses are actually deeper underground than the factories, somewhat reminiscent of the subterranean habitats of the Morlocks in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895). Life for the workers is hard and often short. Fatal accidents at work seem to be fairly commonplace and are looked upon with indifference by the rulers.

Social interaction between the members of the elite and the workers is strongly discouraged and frowned upon. During most of the film, up until the very end, an antagonistic relationship between both castes dominates all interaction between them, broken initially only by Freder Fredersen, the son of the most powerful

industrialist of the city, Johannes Fredersen, and later by his worker caste companions.

Also, *Metropolis* itself is, despite all its futuristic design, Art Deco and Modernist skyscrapers, a city in the industrial age, with its vast machine complexes underground and the aforementioned labor force. We see vast halls filled with dangerous machines, huge pipes and ant-like workers in uniforms, toiling along and in some cases, like the worker who trades places with Freder, operating a device that looks like the face of a clock. So the vision of the future in *Metropolis* is positively rooted in the industrial age. It is also rooted in the class struggle between workers and the *bourgeoisie*, which was rampant in the Weimar Republic of Lang's time.

This vision seems to be a political motivated one, although I dare not speculate about Fritz Lang's political stance. Yet as so many futurist before him he did envision the future based on his present. The skyscrapers are enormous, overgrown relatives of the Empire State Building; the machines look futuristic but can be recognized as industrial contraptions nonetheless. The workshop of the mad inventor Rotwang is reminiscent of a strange amalgam between Frankenstein's

laboratory and a metal worker's shop. And, just like Wells and Verne before him, Lang imagines the social situation of his time to extend far into the future.

In retrospect, all these factors make *Metropolis* so fascinating and haunting at the same time. We live in Lang's future and it turned out to be vastly different. There are no longer masses of exploited workers in the western world. Although we are right now in a middle of a catastrophic economic crisis, the vast majority of the people affected have to make do with less, but this is still far more than any of the workers in *Metropolis* would have at the best of times.

In fact, the type of menial worker depicted in *Metropolis* has largely disappeared in the West but is still a very accurate depiction of the traveling, unskilled workers of, say, China. However, since *Metropolis* clearly is a western city, we can safely state that the proletariat of Europe and America had a better fate than the one envisioned in the film. Rather they have been largely replaced by various service-providers, from hairdressers to computer technicians. This broad swath of today's society is completely absent from *Metropolis*, probably because Lang could not imagine them to factor in the future.

Also, there are no real human-like robots around and definitely nothing remotely similar or as advanced as Rotwang's *Maschinenmensch*. Interestingly, though, Rotwang explains to Fredersen Sen., his *Maschinenmensch* would be far better than human workers, no breaks, no mistakes, twenty-four-hour shifts—which is more or less exactly the same reason why industrial automatons

are employed today. In this regard, Lang's vision of the future is frighteningly accurate, down to the actual words.

When we consider the bigger picture, however, we can all be happy that the future did once again turn out differently. *Metropolis* is therefore a place that can never be. Although it may have been likely in Lang's time to exist at some point in the future, too much and too many things have changed. By the time we will have robots like the *Maschinenmensch*, there will very likely be no heavy machinery left to be operated by human workers, because these machines are already quite intelligent today.

Also, modern society is far less stratified than it was in Lang's time and even less than it is envisioned in *Metropolis*. With the right skills and a good education it is relatively easy to rise to a high-income position.

#### The dieselpunk perspective

From a dieselpunk perspective, *Metropolis* might be considered the cinematographic mother of the genre. I am not aware of any earlier film depicting so many elements of a dystopian dieselpunk society in such detail but I am willing to be corrected.

As I wrote, the city is still in the industrial age, while vast skyscrapers dominate above ground. There are shuttle trains and highways connecting these hive-like buildings. Bi- and monoplanes and the occasional zeppelin fly in the chasms between these towers which themselves come in a variety of futuristic shapes and are far grander than any building so far conceived in the real world.

The level of industrialization in contrast actually appears to be less advanced on some levels than it was even in Lang's time. Although we

have very advanced architecture, zeppelins and even robots, mass production, automation and machine tools seem to be nonexistent. Instead, all these missing factors are compensated through the sheer number of downtrodden, exploited workers. We can speculate that this is very much deliberately so. The living conditions of the workers are kept as primitive and toilsome as possible to keep them from having the extra time and energy to plan revolts.

With Rotwang the insane, haunted inventor comes another dark element of dieselpunk and a classic antagonist of the genre, just as his employer, the cold, plotting industrialist Johannes Fredersen.

In tow of the inventor enters the creature of weird science: the humanoid robot, powered by strange electrical force and transformed by the same into the likeness of a living young woman.

The character of the robot is another factor adding to the dark dieselpunk aesthetics: the automaton not only being near-human, but near-woman adds a darkly erotic aspect to its existence, which later is only amplified by the tremendous power it shows luring and inciting both classes of *Metropolis* society.

The caste-defying love story adds melodrama to the film. Freder, son and heir to the most powerful industrialist, is in love with Maria, the angel of the workers. This relationship is not only instrumental in foiling the old Fredersen's plot but also in stopping the workers' rebellion and witch hunt to unite the ruling class with the proles in the final scene of the film.

Altogether, *Metropolis* features all the elements a good dieselpunk film should. Truly a masterpiece, far ahead of its time. ■

## COLUMN THE STEAMPUNK WARDROBE

# Ethnic steam



HILDE HEYVAERT

EVERYONE IS NO DOUBT FAMILIAR WITH THE TWO most common styles of ethnical-inspired steampunk: Victororiental and Western Steam. The first one is, as the name suggest, a mixture of the traditional Victorian steampunk and Oriental influences; mostly Chinese, but other Asian cultures are by far not unheard of and just as suitable. Western Steam is particularly reminiscent

of the American Wild West. But that's not all of it, nor is it all there is to it.

When portraying a persona in steampunk one does not necessarily be of a certain ethnicity to wear an outfit inspired by that ethnicity of choice. The daughter of a wealthy merchant trading with the Orient might be European but choosing to integrate a kimono in her ensemble. A steamy cowboy might wear his costume out of admiration for America's frontier fighters without being American himself. A steampunk dreaming of the great hunters in Africa might go for that imperial adventurer look. And let's not forget all the marvellous steampunk belly dancing costumes, combining a fabulous sensual dance with snazzy steampunk style—what could we possibly want more?

So ethnicity creeps into the costumes, making for new and exciting looks.

Ethnicity in steampunk can be as clear or as subtle as the wearer chooses. It can be dead obvious, hardly noticeable, quirky or even historically accurate—or simply inspired by times past in a certain country. Thus to reference to his heritage, a British steampunk enthusiast can wear the garments of an Edwardian gentleman as a full outfit, or simply add a bowler hat and walking cane to his more contemporary costume. Similarly, a French lady can go for a coquette skirt and beret as part of her wardrobe. And a steampunk of African heritage might want to incorporate traditional colourful robes in one way or another.

And it doesn't end there. Steampunks wanting to do something different might go for a print or incorporate something that their country is internationally known for to express their ethnic background. They can be subtle and incorporate an accessory like a simple tie or go for a far more obvious print. Thus a Belgian might go for a chocolate print garment while someone from the Netherlands could opt for a tulip brooch and someone Parisian for an Eiffel Tower motif and so on.

The list is endless, as are the possibilities of incorporating ethnicity in one's steampunk wardrobe. ■



Photograph courtesy of Libby Bulloff of exoskeletoncabaret.com

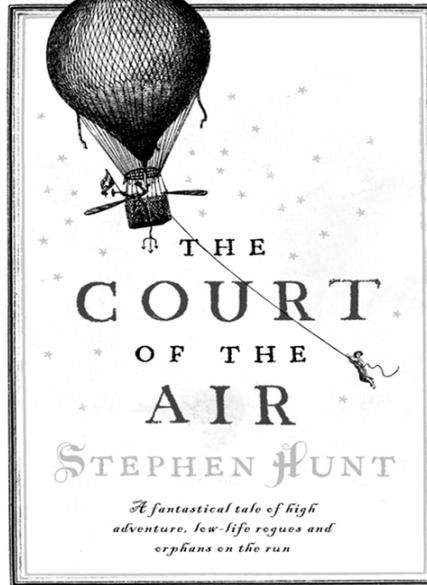
REVIEW *THE COURT OF THE AIR*

# Stylistic dissonance

FOR THE MOST PART, STEAMPUNK is a versatile subgenre. The tropes and themes commonly associated with it, the trappings of era fiction and the wonders of industry, can be applied and reimagined in any number of settings. Today, literary steampunk can run the gamut from straightforward Neo-Victorian adventure to imaginative alternate history to the wildest flights of high fantasy.

However, there is always a risk of carrying things too far.

Stephen Hunt's *The Court of the Air* (2007), the first book in his Jackelian quadrology, starts out in a reassuringly pseudo-Dickensian style. The reader is introduced to Middlesteel, the capital of the Kingdom of Jackals, with its cobbled streets, gas lamps, and rebellious orphans slaving away in the laundry. The sense of familiarity is quickly punctured, however, with a loving description of the ritual mutilation the Jackelian kings undergo during coronation in order to demonstrate their impotence against Parliament. From here, the reader is engulfed in a blizzard of fantastic ideas, including humanoid crustaceans, sentient "steammen" with an interest in mechanical mysticism, "pneumatic buildings," secret societies of airborne spies and quasi-socialist revolutionary,



armies under the control of an ersatz Aztec god from a forgotten underground kingdom. While the world-building bears resemblance to the industrial fantasy of China Miéville, *The Court of the Air* sadly fails to present its world as a unified whole. Instead, the sheer wealth of increasingly bizarre details combined with unsubtle allusions to various real world-cultures makes the setting of the novel seem totally arbitrary. To make matters worse, gaps in the explanation of certain aspects of the Jackelin world only end up corroding the suspension of disbelief. (As an example, the world of the novel operates according to both magical and vaguely scientific



TRUBETSKOY

principles, but there is no real rhyme or reason as to which operates in what circumstances.)

The weakness of the setting is only exacerbated by a rather threadbare plot. The story itself uses a common adventure template, telling the story of two orphans who lose their adult guardians, flee from assassins, meet new friends, learn the truth about their pasts, and fight a postmodern Battle of Dorking. The characters do not really have much in the way of dynamic personalities, and the two orphans generally spend more time receiving knowledge from others than uncovering it for themselves. While some political and philosophical themes are discussed in the course of the adventure, there is very little nuance: most discussions consist of characters shouting slogans at one another. As a result, the book replicates the worst aspects of Victorian adventure, particularly the smug bigotry, narrow provincialism of thought, and the view of outsiders as soulless cattle fit only for destruction by shot and flame.

As a simple pseudo-Victorian adventure yarn with excessive bloodshed and some evocative description, *The Court of the Air* succeeds admirably. As a "serious" steampunk fantasy, much better can be found elsewhere. ■

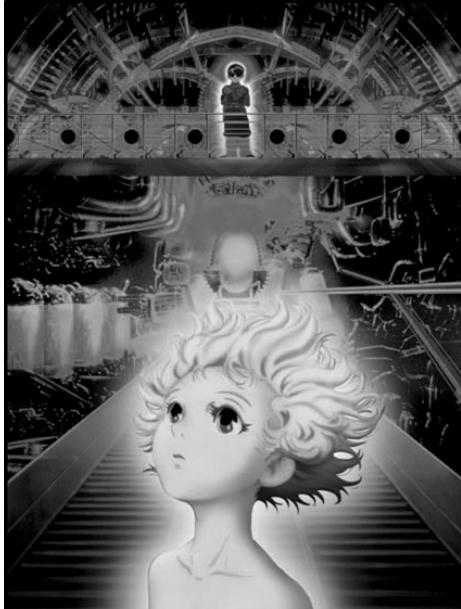
REVIEW *METROPOLIS*

# Rintaro, robots and revolution

IT IS DIFFICULT TO DESCRIBE THE exact relationship between the 2001 anime *Metropolis*, directed by Rintaro, and Fritz Lang's 1927 silent film of the same name without longwinded explanations or vague terms like "inspired by" or "loosely based upon." As a matter of fact, the anime is chiefly a filmic adaptation of a 1949 manga by Osamu Tezuka, best known as the creator of *Astro Boy*, which is purported to be "loosely inspired" by a few promotional images of the famous masterpiece of silent cinema.

The result is a complex creation. The story borrows from many themes, concepts, and settings present in the German original, such as revolution, social stratification, robot life, and of course the "metropolis" that is its namesake. However, the characters and narrative are born of their own world, and the setting varies in its scope and particulars.

Perhaps this is a good thing. Straight remakes of classics very rarely live up to their originals. Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that, as audiences, we have come to value these classics so highly that it becomes hard to accept revisions as anything but imitations of the old version we have come to love so dearly. In this way, I think that Rintaro's *Metropolis* is able to



succeed. It is its own thing, and we can appreciate it as such.

The plot of this *Metropolis* revolves around a young boy named Kenichi, whose private detective of an uncle is searching for a mad scientist wanted for trafficking in human organs. In the process of their search, Kenichi saves and befriends a robot girl named Tima. This entangles them in a struggle between the government, headed by Tima's father Duke Red, and revolutionaries struggling to earn equal rights for robots. Ultimately, their fates lead them to a recently built skyscraper called the Ziggurat, which is in fact a powerful weapon.

The resulting story is one that is ultimately geared towards youth, though it may be a little too scary and "over their heads" for younger children. Overall, the story provides enough levels to be enjoyed by older kids and adults alike.

Visually, the animation style of *Metropolis* reminds one of a twenty-first century *Astro Boy*, as one may guess about an adaption of a work by its creator. The architecture, plentiful in the city scenes, certainly stems from Modernism and Art Deco, as they did in the original silent work, and the general aesthetic will be welcomed by any fans of that era.

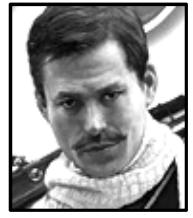
In the end, the film presents itself as rather hard to place. Though set comfortably in the world of dieselpunk, it oscillates between Ottensian optimism and Piecraftian themes of revolt and dystopia. The story is one that is certainly interesting and exciting for adults, but handled with a younger audience in mind. Its message is sure to warm some hearts, though not without a few impressive explosions thrown in for good measure. A must-see for fans of *Astro Boy* and a welcomed friend of Hayao Miyazaki's films, *Metropolis* will also provide plenty of sly nods and ovations to fans of Fritz Lang's masterpiece. ■



SIGURJÓN  
NJÁLSSON

PREVIEW *WRATH OF THE LEMMING MEN*

# The new Space Captain Smith



TOBY FROST

IT WAS AS THOUGH THEY HAD stepped into the workings of a gigantic clock. They were in a hall thirty yards wide, the ceiling impossibly high. Vast cogs with teeth the size of doors broke the floor, rotating slowly. The walls were Racing Green, the machinery polished brass. The air was full of the whirr and clank of distant belts, the stink of oil and the rattle of paper spooling from slots mounted in the wall. Above them, electricity crackled and pulsed.

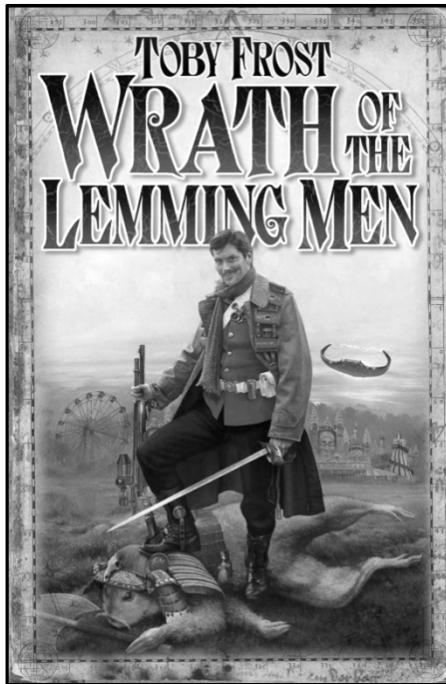
Goggled engineers hurried between banks of levers and dials, white coats flapping. "Ruddy 'ell, Barry!" one woman called. "Gearing's all out on t'mechanical brain!"

"What is this?" Carveth whispered.

"Miss," Harry Sheldon replied, "this is *science*."

A great chain clattered down from the distant roof and deposited a tray of bacon sandwiches on the ground. The workers snatched at them, munching as they studied the machinery, racked levers back and forth and shouted into pneumatic speaking-tubes.

Sheldon checked his pocket watch. "Prepare to consult!" he yelled into a tube, and the workers became frantic, throwing switches, tuning knobs, flicking fingers



against dials. Pistons hammered back and forth, fans whirled, the whole room shuddered.

With a grinding roar two colossal doors swung open at the far end of the room. Steam blasted from vents. Two great machines rumbled into the chamber on rails set into the floor. They were bigger than juggernauts, armoured in black steel, shaped like loaves of bread. Sheldon turned to his audience.

"Gentlemen, you are about to witness the brain of the Imperial war machine: Psycho-futuro-neuro-history at its finest. If Gertie comes

up with a scheme, we have a scheme and a wheeze to stop him."

The armour slid back from the front of the machines. Behind it they saw gears, spinning wheels and hammering pistons of brass and, in the centre of each machine where the face of a clock would be—a human face with eyes and mouth, a great grey smiling disc.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Sheldon cried. "I give you the finest computer in the galaxy—Thomas, the Difference Engine!"

"Hello, fat cogitator," Thomas the Difference Engine said.

"And Alan, the Analytical Engine!"

"Hello," said Alan the Analytical Engine.

"Hello," said Smith and the others.

"Hello, Space Captain Smith," the computers said. "How are you?"

Smith realised that he was addressing the finest minds in the known universe. "Not bad," he said. "And you?"

"Mustn't grumble," Alan said.

"Pretty good, thanks," Thomas said.

It went quiet. ■

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Our gratitude to Mr Frost for this preview of *Wrath of the Lemming Men*, released June 15 by Myrmidon Books Ltd.

COLUMN THE GENTLEMAN TRAVELER

# Tale of the Indian Pacific

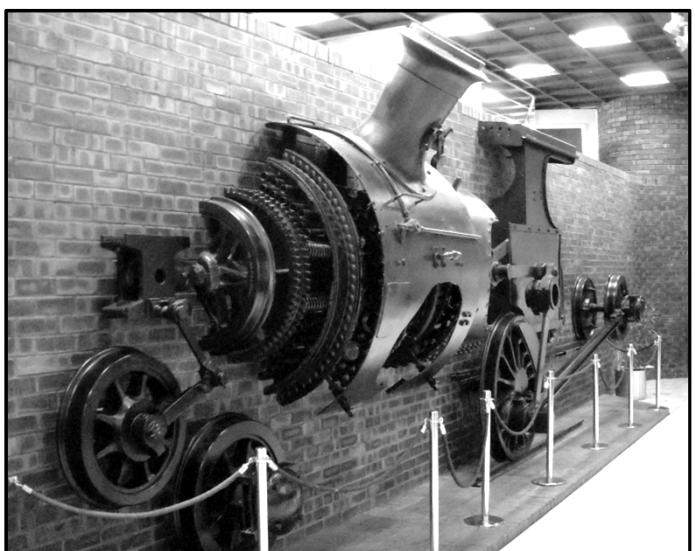
DAVID  
TOWNSEND

HAVING ARRIVED IN THE FEDERATED DOMINION OF Australia, I arrived in the astonishingly pleasant small city of Perth, noted as holding the world record for being furthest distanced from the nearest alternate city. I had already planned to travel on the Indian Pacific train across the southern part of the continent from Perth in Western Australia to Sydney in New South Wales but had had to somewhat rearrange my itinerary as a change in timetable meant that I had to do the trip in two stages with a break at Adelaide. In fact, the whole booking process had been somewhat confused and nerve-wracking as a failure with the etherweb site meant that I had had to book my ticket on the telephone. For myself, having paid somewhat over a thousand pounds for the right to board the locomotive transport, I would have preferred some form of acknowledgement in the form of a ticket or perhaps a letter. Anything in fact beyond a list of numbers and a casual if reiterated assurance that "It will be bonzer, mate."

The first consequences of my lack of ticket rapidly came to pass on the morning of my departure. With the train due to leave at shortly before noon, I decided to give myself a certain leeway and attended the neatly designed Perth railway station around 11 AM. There I was wandering around bemusedly as it slowly dawned upon me that there appeared to be no sign of a boarding location for the Indian Pacific. Being a chap, I regard the reading of or asking for instructions to be the absolutely last resort of desperation but even I was driven to those straits. My instructions seemed a trifle garbled but I came away with the impression that I had to make my way to platform 9 and from there make my way to Estprith. Hauling my worldly goods with me, I galloped down to the said platform where I could see an awaiting train. As the doors slammed shut, I deposited the bags on the floor and quizzically peered slightly myopically

at the list of stations before deciding to take an educated guess that the target for tonight was in fact East Perth and so, dear reader, it turned out.

East Perth is the result of the modern love affair with glass and angles but is redeemed by a fine steam locomotive at the end of the platform, an old carriage within the concourse itself and a wall mural of many gears and levers, of the sort that might have Agatha and Gil gently frothing in the background. It was hard to miss the 26 gleaming metal carriages of the Indian Pacific complete with liveried engine and car transports at the rear. However I did make the ridiculous and foolish assumption that the fact that a sign pointed down the platform for the Indian Pacific, that meant that such would be where the ticket office would be instead of in the exactly opposite direction. Nonetheless, I obtained my ticket and consigned my luggage to the hold for the duration and made my way onto the train. A last minute rearrangement due to a lack of passengers meant that I was assigned a double

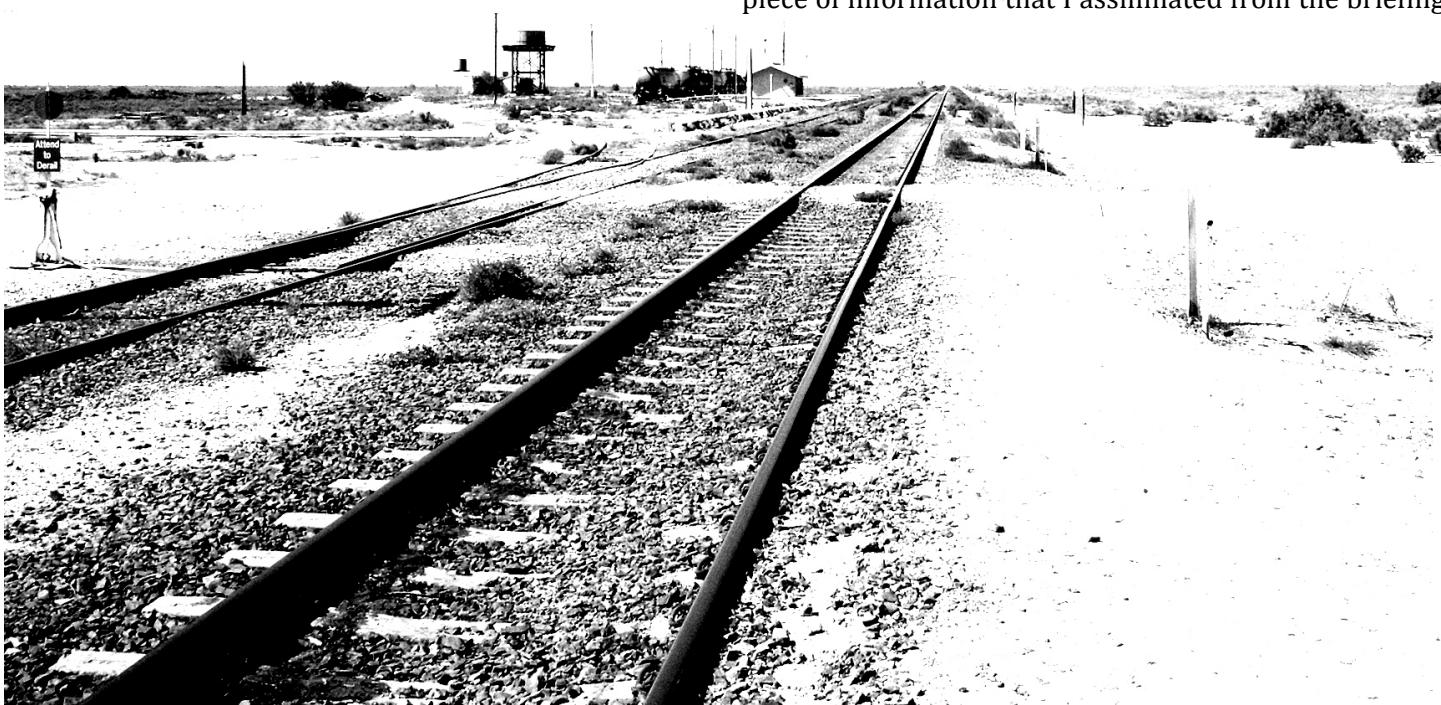


berth nearer to the lounge and dining cars but, given the pride with which it was announced, I must admit to being slightly disappointed with the size. There were bunk beds but only on one side of the cabin giving it something of capsule lay-out. There was, to be fair, an en-suite toilet and shower with the toilet having the disconcerting habit of disappearing into the wall when not in use. Adequate cupboards and storage space allowed me to stow my worldly goods away and out of sight so I settled down having noted that tea and coffee was available to be dispensed in the corridor. I like to check on these necessities, donncha know; being caffeine fuelled can be a burden at times.

As we exited through a fairly anonymous and industrial suburb of Perth, the steward for the carriage came round to brief me individually on the meal times, safety procedures and all those other little touches to show that they care. Rapidly the scene outside changed into farmland, then woodland then quickly into vines. I started musing that I could have had a fine wine-tasting holiday if I had not destroyed my palate a long time ago with the over indulgence in port, mead and cider. By 1 PM we had already the Bush, or possibly the Outback. As I have failed to meet an Australian who can define when one ends and the other begins besides the ever helpful "Well, you just know," I decline to waste my time endeavoring to discriminate. I can reliably report that it is very flat, red and covered with scrub and possibly sheep, at least for a while. Lunch was duly called so I traipsed into the pleasant dining car. Nicely laid out with full cutlery and white linen napkins and

tablecloths, it put on a fine spectacle and I was looking forward to my lunch. Now, despite my noticeably 'adult' size, I do not actually tend to indulge in large lunches however there are limits. The first course was a mixture of red froth (probably tomato based) and pink froth (epicene in some manner or nature) on pita bread or rock-hard crackers. When the menu came round, I was again a tad disappointed. Now, you may wish to call it "Freshly baked Lepinja bread filled with Leg Ham, Creamy Brie, Tomato Relish, Mizuna and finished with Mesculin dressed with a French Vinaigrette" but where I come from, it is called a Cheese and Ham sandwich. There was a choice of dessert, the choice being take it or leave it, and whilst the "Individual Lemon Gateau served with Balsamic Strawberries and King Island Double Cream" was pleasant, it was also minute.

After lunch, the Gold Service passengers were called together for an introduction, a glass of champagne and an initial briefing on the route from Perth to Adelaide. One of the noticeable points of the journey was the high quality of the informational briefings that are given out on the train, be they in the form of recorded narratives, the in-train magazine or the knowledgeable staff. Stealing directly from their work, I can inform my beloved readers that the train itself on our route was over two thirds of a kilometer long consisting of 28 carriages and was traveling down a 4,352 kilometer single track railway to Sydney passing through 86 townships. The track to Adelaide, the nearest city, was 2,666 kilometers alone. I must regret that it is a failing within myself that the main piece of information that I assimilated from the briefing





was that there was a township that was called Koulyanobbin, which sounded like the description of an unusual ice-bucket.

It has to be accepted on a long train journey that there will be nothing to do except for read books, talk to fellow travelers and gaze out of the window as the world goes past. At the start, besides the ubiquitous sheep, the air and waterways were filled with birds from ruddy ducks to black parrots. However, once we had passed through the wheat belt and across the slightly unimaginatively named River Avon, we entered the Nullabour plain. With only sixty-three days of rain a year, the flat bleak terrain truly lived up to its name with the appearance of a scrubby bush being a matter of comment. Cutting through this treeless, waterless and dashed near lifeless land is the railway. Traveling for 300 miles without a curve or bend, the track stretches front and back like an arrow marking the route to the richest square mile in the world, the massive open-cast Super Pit at Kalgoorlie. The train stopped for a whistle-stop tour of the mine and I must say that I was deeply impressed. Gazing down into the pit at midnight and seeing the tiny toy lorries flitting in and out of the pools of light before realizing that these vehicles weighed over 160 ton was daunting. Regardless of personal opinions as to the effect of mining, it was a stunning example of raw industrial power.

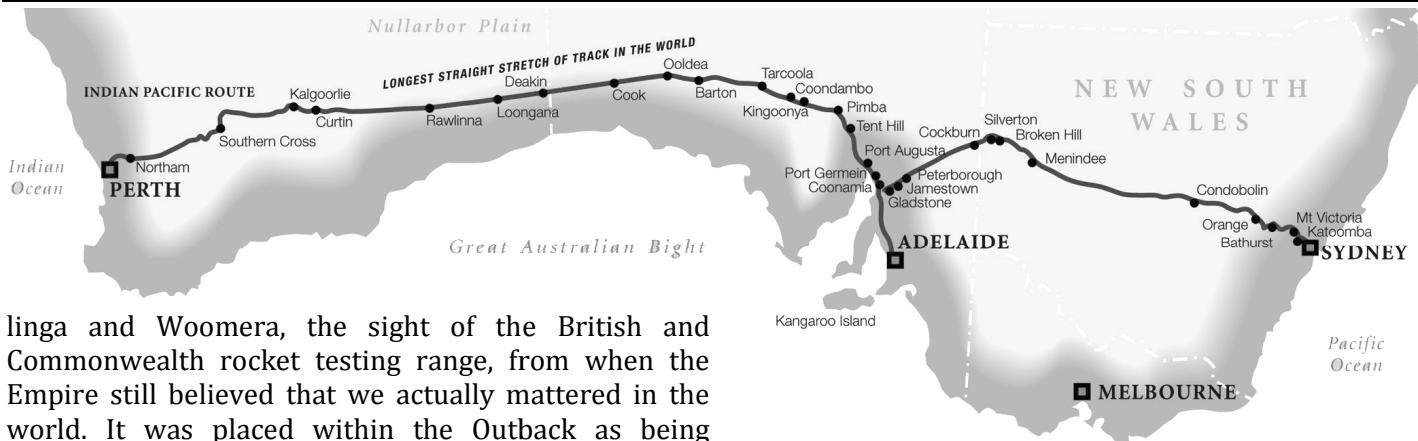
As the evening drew to a close, and after a late dinner of roasted rump of lamb with parsnip puree, I had a glass of port in the dining car. The staff were friendly and well informed, being willing to chat and pass on stories of their previous trips so, being an experienced traveler of a single previous trip, I indulged in some raconteur with some of the tales I told being almost true. It was disappointing that there was no

cider as an option and they had run out of honey beer still needs must when the de'il drives as the port bottle grew lighter until sleep beckoned.

The bed was comfortable enough and the night went by smoothly. I would admit to being less than impressed to be woken up at 7 AM for breakfast, which felt both uncivilized and unnecessary as there was hardly a rush to see the other sights. It seems that during the night we passed through some herds of wild camels. Unfortunately, I mean this in the most literal sense of the word as the camels have the habit of licking dew off the rails. I was informed by one of the engineers that cows tend to be bounced out of the way whilst the camels, being more frailly built, have a habit of exploding and spraying themselves across the landscape. After a lunch of lamb and pumpkin pie with more random puree, we arrived at the thriving metropolis of Cook (pop. 5). Once an important township with a hospital, school and sports ground serving the railway, it now exists solely as a watering spot and a place to change drivers. It is quite eerie to wander through the ghost town where people have just abandoned cars, houses and the detritus of everyday life. To ensure that no cliché was left unturned, a solitary dingo wandered amongst the buildings, sniffing at the remains of civilization. Mind you, I cannot believe it was that great a wrench to leave a place so isolated and blighted.

Back on the train, passing abandoned stations and piles of random fragments of rail track, it became interesting to note the antecedents of the names. Some were named after former Prime Ministers, some after local geographical features and one, Tarcoola, after the winning horse in the 1893 Melbourne Cup. As good a reason as any for naming. Soon we approached Mara-





linga and Woomera, the sight of the British and Commonwealth rocket testing range, from when the Empire still believed that we actually mattered in the world. It was placed within the Outback as being virtually the only place in the world where you could stretch a test site of 1100 miles with nothing of significance being under the route to be accidentally flattened by proto-space junk.

Dinner of soup and salmon was followed by the anticipation of after-dinner music in the saloon car. Humm, let us be polite and assume it was a misprint, a long and complex misprint. Still, it was no great blight on what had been a relaxing and eye-opening trip across some of the bleakest lands on earth. An early bed-time followed as we were due to arrive in Adelaide at 7:30 the next day so I got off the train looking forward to the second part of the trip to Sydney.

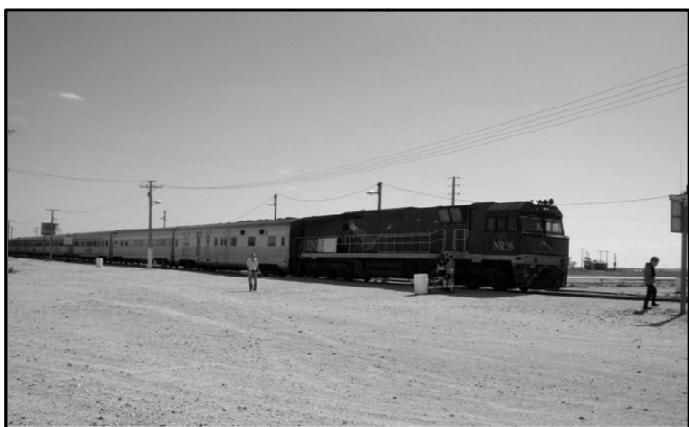
I have often learnt that eager anticipation is followed by sad disappointment but I have yet to persuade myself of the necessity to downplay expectations. The train to Sydney was full and it made such a substantial difference to the whole trip. This time I was in a single compartment; it would be fair to say that it was not so much that there was no room to swing a cat, there was barely enough space to stretch the self-same. I was informed that I had to take the late sitting as the early sitting was full and the passengers who had been on all the way had priority, presumably as the money they had spent was somehow different and better than mine. The lounge car was drab, too full and with inadequate seats, feeling to be barely a step above a 1970s British Rail buffet car. In the bad mood that I was in, even the other passengers seemed a raucous mob, chuntering barely coherent complaints in increasingly loud and shrill voices.

And yet, this too will pass. Returning to my cell after a light lunch of chicken, I relaxed back into the semi-somnambulant state induced by the rocking of the train. Outside was what I was starting to regard as typical Australian farmland; brown parched grass with dust-devils rising like smoke from the savannah.

Abruptly this died out as we entered the marginal land in the driest state in the driest continent in the

world. Of a sudden, the world turned into primary colors as the only life was wedge-tailed eagles and kangaroos racing alongside the train whilst the brown earth leached into red with the horizon stark against the blue sky. A short break at the mining town of Broken Hills became not so much whistle-stop as light speed as the train got in an hour and a half late. There was just time for a visit to the tourist sights of the town, the moving and bleak memorial to miners killed in the area and the famous brothel district. I suppose that they have the basics sorted out, assuming there is a tax office as well. The final dinner of the trip was a seafood salad followed by fillet of kangaroo and the obligatory port.

Waking up the next day saw the train in a completely different environment. The soaring Blue Mountains saw the train climb up into the eucalyptus covered ranges. Of a sudden, the train would emerge from a thicket of magnificent trees into a vista of stark cliffs and waterfalls before plunging into a tunnel hewn through the unclimbable rock faces. As we started to descend, it became a shock to suddenly cross a motorway as we touched the edges of the Sydney conurbation. Farms became houses became offices and, in a rush, we pulled up at the Sydney terminus, rested, impressed and ready to view the city. ■



COLUMN THE LIQUOR CABINET

# A story of beer



CRAIG B. DANIEL

THIS MONTH, LET'S DEVIATE FROM THE LIQUOR Cabinet's usual to discuss the pieces relevant to steampunk and dieselpunk of the history of a drink we all know and love. I'm talking, of course, about beer.

The right beer can conjure up images of a bygone era as well as any cocktail—and certain styles are especially suited to steampunk. In fact, in some cases our cyberpunk roots are showing, as the history of many more modern beer styles has more to do with corporate brewers padding their pockets than anything else. Fortunately for modern drinkers, their path to profit proved to involve some truly extraordinary drinks.

Before about 1850, most beer in England was sold to pubs, which aged it in casks before dispensing it to the public. In the eighteenth century, commercial brewers discovered that they could approximate the flavor of aged beer by mixing a small amount of well-aged beer with a larger amount of the greener stuff, which meant they could age their own product, blend it, and sell it ready to drink, all without needing exorbitant amounts of storage space. The style of beer with which this was popularized was a darker version of the traditional brown ales, known at least as early as 1721 as "porter."

A trend toward darker and darker porters developed, and soon the brewers ran into a problem. The dark color of many beers comes from the fact that as the malted barley cooks, the sugars it contains break down into flavorful colored compounds—which leaves less sugar for the yeast to eat, so using darker malts requires more malt for the same amount of alcohol, and the same customers that wanted dark beers didn't want to pay much more for the privilege. The brewers took to darkening their beer with caramel color, which allowed them to produce porter that looked completely black.

In 1816, this practice was outlawed, and the brewers had to turn back to malt for their coloring needs. Luckily for them, a fellow named Daniel Wheeler patented a solution the following year: by cooking the barley till it burns, it develops enough pigmentation to it that a mere 5% of that combined with 95% of the high-sugar pale malt would produce a black beer, as

dark as the porters of the caramel-color days. This "patent malt" has a distinctive flavor (it's been compared to dark chocolate, coffee, and cigarette ash), but luckily for the brewers people embraced the new porter. Today's more familiar stouts are a variation on this exact style, although the aged taste has fallen out of fashion and is hard to come by—unless you happen to live away from where Guinness is brewed or in a community with people from such places, in which case you can likely buy their Foreign Extra Stout; noticeably different from today's regular Guinness, it captures the historic porter flavor fairly accurately.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the British beer tradition never really caught on; cider was the drink of choice of most Americans until a nineteenth century wave of German immigrants ushered in a fad for German-style lagers, which are fermented at a lower temperature with a different sort of yeast from ales and traditionally consumed cold. Easier to drink quickly (as distinct from the session beers of the British Isles), these caught on as a summertime beverage even among non-Germans.

When gold was discovered in California in 1848, brewers were among the artisans who went west to sell their wares to the miners and live in the boom towns that sprang up around the gold rush that began the following year. Limited in what they could carry, they naturally opted to bring only the yeasts used in the era's most popular beer: lager yeasts. Unfortunately conditions in the gold fields of the west were primitive, and it was hard to keep the beer as cold while it fermented as the brewers wanted, so they had to ferment it at higher temperatures usually used for ale. The result was nicknamed "steam beer" by the miners, and while at first it was regarded as an inferior drink the brewers were quickly able to develop a style that made it work. Sometimes known as "California common" among today's craft brewers, the most readily-available brand of this gold rush tipple is Anchor Steam.

These aren't the only highly appropriate beers for steampunks, however, and I'll be sure to revisit the matter in future installments!

REVIEW *UNHALLOWED NECROPOLIS*

# Doomed city



HILDE HEYVAERT

IN MY REVIEW OF THE FIRST BOOK in this fantastic setting, *Unhallowed Metropolis* (*Gatehouse Gazette*, issue #3, November 2008) I wrote that one of the good points about the game was that all the addendum pieces were freely available on the website. And now there is the second book, *Unhallowed Necropolis*, which isn't free. But I'm happy to forgive that matter because the book is just so fabulous. In many settings extra books are filling, and contribute little to the game in general. This is absolutely not the case with *Unhallowed Necropolis*. This sourcebook explores a whole new part of the post-apocalyptic gasmask-chic Neo-Victorian game and its entire background and history.

Where the first book gives an overview of the entire world, this one focuses on the supernormal of the world haunted by ghosts, spirits, zombies, vampires and other human and inhuman menaces. It places the others of the realm in the centre: the detectives that try to find out more about the crimes that haunt the metropolis; psychosurgeons, the mediums that see beyond the veil of our own world and into that of the dead and those poor humans gifted, or cursed (it's but a matter of point of view) with extraordinary powers such as empathy, electrokinesis, pyrokinesis, telekinesis or others, at the high cost of their sanity and ultimately their lives.

The book offers a whole new history of the paranormal in this



setting, written in a captive and interesting way with proper historical grounds mixed into the fictional setting, creating a fascinating read. The history is presented in the same way as in *Unhallowed Metropolis*, but focuses entirely on the paranormal and supernormal, where the first book discusses the general history of the world. There are new powers for the new types of characters, clearly described and with easy to use rules which makes them appropriate for both new and seasoned role-players.

I've played a lot of role-playing games and am familiar with a lot of settings but I have to honestly say that this one is definitely one of my favorites. The second book is another stroke of genius, building further on the world of personal horror they created with the base book (which you do need together with this one!).

Just like *Unhallowed Metropolis*

this book is build up extremely logically with a clear overview and written in a language that both suits the setting and makes it easy to understand for both native speakers and those that do not have English as their mother tongue.

The new classes available for playing are interesting and well presented, with an incredible array of powers to choose from on all different levels, which allows you to make a varied and unique character with its own special personality and features.

It's about the same page count as the first one, which is really quite impressive and shows the dedication the creators have put into this work. It is extremely well presented and finished off with amazing artwork that contributes perfectly to the setting. The twist given to Victorian history which has been turned in a completely new fictional world is absolutely brilliant, and I'm sure that those interested in history will thoroughly enjoy reading what the creators of this world have come up with.

Not only is this a brilliant book for role-players looking to delve further into the world of *Unhallowed*, or those looking for a new and interesting setting to play; it's also an invaluable resource for anyone looking for post-apocalyptic or Neo-Victorian inspiration for their steampunk persona! ■

Both *Unhallowed* books are available at [www.hallowsevedesigns.com](http://www.hallowsevedesigns.com).

REVIEW **OUTCRY**

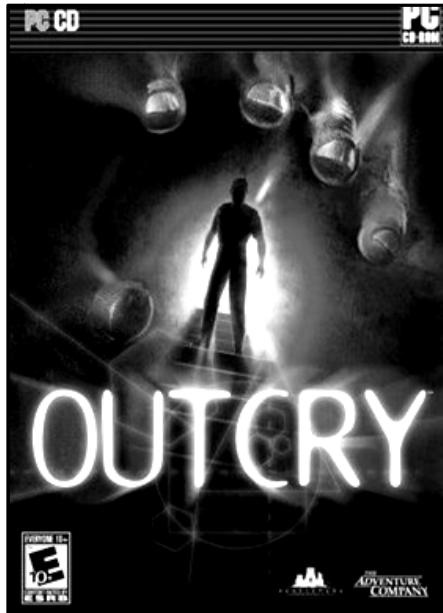
# Persistence of memory



TRUBETSKOY

IN SOME WAYS, STEAMPUNK IS the ideal setting for the classic adventure game. The imagery associated with the era of early industry can create awe-inspiring worlds that sweep the player away, while the industrial bric-a-brac of gears, wires, and valves provide ample opportunities for puzzle solving. While *Outcry* (originally titled *Sublustrum*; 2008), the first game by Russian developer Phantomery Interactive trades in both of the above, the real meat of the game is provided by a surreal, dreamlike atmosphere that will linger long after the game has finished.

Perhaps appropriately, the plot of the game is rather illusive. Set in an uncertain time and place in the early twentieth century (though in-game artifacts suggest a location in the Caucasus before the First World War), the player takes on the role of an unnamed novelist summoned by his estranged brother "K," a scholar and amateur inventor. Upon entering his house, you find his living room dominated by an immense diving bell surrounded by a nest of wires and transformers, with the only sign of your brother being a recording asking you to destroy his invention. Naturally, this being an adventure game, your first impulse is to reactive the machine



and follow your brother into whatever ethereal realms he may have wandered.

In terms of gameplay, *Outcry* plays like most adventure games. The player spends most of the time finding components, reactivating machinery, and reading your absent brother's diary. A sharp ear is required, as there are a number of puzzles that work according to audio cues. The game plays in a first-person perspective, though the adventure tradition of moving between separate screens is retained. Curiously, there is no real interaction with other characters, and the protagonist himself remains

a cipher for the entire game. Yet this portrayal actually helps resolve some of the game's mysteries towards the end of the story.

Artistically and musically, the game is a masterpiece. In keeping with the broader themes of memory, the game is given a style that could best be described as "melancholic industry." As you explore your brother's house, you slowly take in an environment filled with neglected machinery, stained wood, tarnished brass, and a hint of rust. As you progress, the environments grow increasingly abstract, from an Escher-like ruined factory to a forgotten desert town to a giant brass air harp while that sense of loneliness and decay never leaves. As another nice touch, each separate stage of the game is given its own special full-screen filter, ranging from negative scratches to a mirage-like shimmering to a soft omnipresent glow. These feelings are made all the more powerful by the game's phenomenal soundtrack. Composed by the St. Petersburg-based Anthesteria Project, the score is a haunting mix of piano and strings that effortlessly conveys the haunting nature of the game's worlds.

Still, even a work of great beauty must have its flaws. The game does not offer much in the

way of help to the player; you're put down in the middle of the room and expected to work your way out. As a result, a number of puzzles, particularly the ones involving rewiring a circuit in the desert, may be fiendishly hard to solve without a walkthrough. Most of the game's background is conveyed through journal entries, which, as is

unfortunately common in too many Russian games, receive a less-than stellar translation into English. Additionally, the actual plot of the game may not make any sense after the first playthrough, though a quick refresher on dream symbolism and David Lynch should be enough to concoct a working explanation. Finally, the game itself is incredibly

short, clocking in at between 3 to 5 hours for the typical playthrough.

Cosmetic flaws aside, the game is truly a work of art. For anyone who enjoyed the *Myst* series, *Outcry* is a chance to rekindle that love of clanking machinery and those feelings of bittersweet sadness for bygone ages. ■

## COLUMN STEAM FROM THE OLD SMOKE

# Journey to the center of time

IT IS A QUEER THING, OR AT LEAST A JOLLY CURIOUS one, that at my age—fifty-five last birthday—I should find myself taking up a pen to try to write a column upon chrononautical matters for a publication read largely in *America!* After my several adventures in the New World: changing the outcome of The War of Independence; fighting on *both* sides simultaneously during your oxymoronically-named “Civil War”; sparking off a couple of Gold Rushes; &c. (see that volume of my memoirs entitled *How One Won The West* for more details) and the lifetime ban subsequently placed upon me ever returning to those shores, I was somewhat surprised to be invited to do so. Still, forgive and forget, and all that, what?

But why me, I ask myself... as, indeed, I expect you are similarly asking yourself round about now. Who in the name of Charles Darwin is this Brigadier Sir Arthur Weirdy-Beardy (Retired), and what qualifies him to act as the London Correspondent for the *Gatehouse Gazette*? Well, in answer to our mutual question, let me introduce myself to us, and tell us a little about my life.

I have done a good many things in my life, which seems a long one to me... owing perhaps to my having begun work so young.



BRIGADIER SIR

ARTHUR WEIRDY-  
BEARDY (RETIRED)

I was born on St. George's Day in the year 1830—trademark beard in situ—in the spare bedroom of a small tent in the jungles of Chittagong, Bengal, British-Controlled India, during the early days of the Raj. My mother, Lady Susan Decidedly Weirdy-Beardy, was also present. As were a number of servants, of course.

My father, the eminent explorer Doctor Michael Hugh Francis Beresford Livingston Waldo (Wally) Weirdy-Beardy III, was not: having been lost in the field for some two years prior to that point. (I got lost in a field once. But that's by-the-by.)

I was educated at the a series of *good* missionary schools dotted throughout the Empire, as I followed my parents around the world on their various expeditions. This not only left me fluent in no less than eighty-two languages and regional dialects by the time I was three, but also instilled in me the taste for frontier exploration that was to remain with me throughout my extraordinary life. Indeed, I eagerly adopted the legacy of my lineage, and mounted a series of expeditions of my own, as soon as I was able to walk without the aid of “Mr Wheelie.” Admittedly these were initially in search of my ever-absent father, who was forever getting lost in the field, but in later years these became legitimate

journeys of discovery in my own right. Most noteworthy of these, perhaps, would be my discovered of the fables "Fountain of Youth," whilst exploring Mesoamerica—a little keepsake that now takes pride of place as a rather splendid water-feature in the grounds of the Weirly-Beardy Manor.

The skills I learnt during these early forays into foreign realms would prove to be of considerable benefit to the Empire, when, in 1853, I joined The Queen's Own Right Royal Roister-Doisters to fight in the Crimean War. The bloody battlefields of the Crimea River were the first of many I would brave for Queen and Country, in a sixty-five year military career that saw me eventually rise to the rank of Brigadier. I have seen action right across the globe—and, indeed, beyond—and have been painted and decorated several times:

1853-6	Crimean War, mentioned in Dispatches.
1854	Battle of Inkerman, mentioned in <i>The Times</i>
1854	Battle of Balaclava, mentioned in <i>The Lady</i> (along with my pattern for woolen hats)
1857-8	The Indian Mutiny: Indian Order Of Merit, and free poppadoms.
1861-5	American "Civil" War: Congratulatory Medal Of Honor ( <i>their</i> spelling).
1870-1	Franco-Prussian War: Campaign Medal, sovereignty of Grand Duchy of Fenwick.
1879	Zulu War: Campaign Medal, and a rather fine collection of second-hand spears.
1879	Battle of Isandlwana: Distinguished Conduct Medal and a house-point for good manners.
1879	Battle of Rorke's Drift: Military Cross (Don't know why. Not like it was my fault)
1880	Transvaal War: Campaign Medal, and the deeds to several diamond mines.
1881	Battle of Majuba: Sheik Yermani Makhir's spare wife.
1882	Battle of Tel El-Kebir: Distinguished Service Order, and a life-long fatwa.
1883	Mahdi Rebellion, Sudan: Conspicuous Gallantry Cross.
1885	Fall of Khartoum: Discrete Gallantry Garter.
1887	Her Britannic Majesty, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee: Knighthood (Knight of the British Empire).
1898	Battle of Omdurman: Knighthood (Order of the Bath).
1899	Muddy Rebellion, Sudan: Knighthood (Ordered to take a Bath).

1899-'02	2nd Boer War: Campaign Medal, and a rather dull after-dinner story.
1900	Peking: Victoria Cross (Felt that my fighting in two wars at the same time was "showing off").
1914-'18	The "Great War": Tea and Biscuits at The Palace with the new chap.
1919	Retirement: Gold Pocket Watch, and an Honourable, if <i>enforced</i> , Discharge.

Some of you, I know, will be wondering how, writing as I am in 1885 and at the age of fifty-five, I can recall having received honors for battles that haven't taken place quite yet, over the course of *sixty-five* years in the service of Queen, King and Country.

Ah well, you see, when I first moved to England—to my ancestral home of Weirly-Beardy Manor, in the village of Nimby, near the town of Whatwhatford, in the county of Hurtforhire, just ask at the Postal Office—I took to filling the days between wars with a little tinkering in the workshop here at The Club in London.

Since I retired, that's pretty much *all* I do. Though I do get to "field test" my creations with the odd expedition here and there. Keeps one out of trouble.

Certainly keeps one out of the wife's hair.

And Lady Sybil is particularly hairy—great silver-backed brute that she is.

But I digress.

Yes, I've invented all manner of things over the years. But the best, most useful thing I ever invented was my "Patented Hermetic Temporal Envelope Generating Engine" (PHTEGE). At first, I'd intended to use it as a means of prolonging my life, by means of sleeping within the "envelope" thereby generated, wherein time remains frozen.

However, coming into possession of the fabled Fountain of Youth, as mentioned earlier, rendered this something of a moot point.

Nevertheless, I decided it was too useful a device to abandon, and used it as the basis for the greatest of all my inventions... my "Patented Pedal-Powered Temporal Perambulator"!

I'd been experimenting with various time-traveling devices for some time (ironically), initially utilizing steam. However, my early experiments had uncovered a basic flaw in this design, using *steam*, that is: when I first visited the Jurassic Era, it suddenly occurred to me that it might be unwise to rely upon a carboniferous fuel source that hasn't actually died yet, at the point in time one is visiting. Hence, why my later experiments—once I'd caught up with myself and passed on the advice—

tended to favor pedal-power, and a vehicle with which one can travel back and forth in time purely on one's own steam, as it were.

More reliable.

Jolly good exercise, too. Good for the legs. (One's thighs are nothing to be sniffed at.) So you see, to answer your question, I can recall having received honors for battles that haven't taken place quite yet, I can remember the future, as it were, because I've been there, and for me, it's the past. Do you follow?

Yes, it now occurs to me that what I said earlier about my life seeming a long one to me, owing perhaps to my having begun work so young, seems now far more likely to be the result of actually having lived an extremely long length of time... or at the very least, having seen a considerable amount of it.

Time, that is. Seen a lot of it. Quite.

Anyway, it was owing to my being the father of the Empire's first working Time Machine, that I was given an audience with Her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria. (Gawd Bless 'Er!) Yes, I had asked His Majesty Edward VII for patronage, but he was reluctant, so I simply popped back a few years and asked his mum. She was more keen on the idea, being something of a "fan" of yours truly through my thrilling accounts of visiting legendary lost lands; no-doubt helped by my efforts in adding Mars to the list of British Sovereign States; not to mention the fact that my being the first man to set foot in Pangea—the prehistoric supercontinent—made the growth of the British Empire considerably easier from a legal standpoint. However, Vicky *did* insist that I relinquish my monopoly on temporal-tourism and set up something of benefit to the whole Empire. So The Imperial Empyreanaautical, Cryptogeographical & Chrononautical Society was born! Huzzah!

And it is in this capacity, as the Chairman of "The Club," and Editor-in-Chief of its official journal *The Chrononautical Times*, that I keep a watchful eye upon all things Empyreanaautical, Cryptogeographical & Chrononautical taking place in London and the Home Counties, throughout all of Time, so as to be able to suggest suitable outings for our *esteamed* membership. It is therefore no great a demand upon my not-inconsiderable skills to write a few words on the subject for the *Gatehouse Gazette*, and you, our Colonial Cousins, our Foreign Friends, now reading this.

#### **White Mischief's Journey to the Centre of the Earth**

Those of you who, like me, possess your own chrononautical devices may wish to set the dial to "London, May 23rd, 2009" and visit one of the very best

variety evenings it has ever been my pleasure to experience: White Mischief's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, at The Scala, Pentonville Road, King's Cross. (Don't know why—not like His Majesty wasn't invited.) I myself traveled there upon my Patented Pedal Powered Temporal Perambulator, of course. However owing to the chain coming off when I narrowly avoided a doodlebug explosion whilst free-wheeling past 1939—I found myself coming to a stop several hours early, and on the very outskirts of the future metropolis. Undaunted, I parked my Time Machine, and instead took the opportunity to sample the highly sophisticated transport infrastructure which London of the early twenty-first century will possess: catching a "Diesel" train into Paddington, followed by a short journey to King's Cross on the "Under-The-Ground" system. Splendid stuff!

From the off, us "early arrivals" were given heaps of heady hedonistic pleasure, beginning with the door staff allowing us that singularly British pastime of queuing! Marvelous! Though pleasant enough in and of itself, this experience was added to by the amusing game of observing the passing London population in their outlandish futuristic fashions, and spotting those more tastefully dressed chrononauts who were no doubt joining us within for the revels to come.

Once inside, I found myself faced with a bar serving alcoholic beverages, and purchased a brandy. Though the barman made the *faux pas* of asking me if I wanted ice in it (*Ice! In a brandy!*); of serving it to me in a sort of a glass thimble; and charging me more than the staff at home would earn in a month, I nevertheless allowed myself a little indulgence for the sake of enjoying the experience to the full.

First up—at least for me, as several things were going on at the same time in different rooms—was *The*



*Fitzrovia Radio Company*, who, hailing from the 1940s, performed a live radio broadcast from that era, replete with tips for the newlywed woman and a tale of terror about a resurrected Egyptian Queen! Quite aside from the amusement of listening to this as if it were a radio programme, the experience was heightened immensely by the benefit of sight: the attractiveness of the lady members of the cast and the fascinating way in which the show's "folie" sound-effects were created making this well worth seeing, as well as merely hearing.

Following this, I found my way into the main stage area, where a troop of equally as attractive young women were performing for the distraction of the Gentlemen Bachelors in the, it has to be said, sizable audience: firstly, the tantalizing tease of the fan dance, as performed by *Circa Burlesque*; followed by a display of aesthetically beautiful aerial ballet performed by *Illumi* (their name no doubt a reference to the fact that they performed in total darkness, but for the gentle green-white glow emanating from their skin-tight costumes in response to the ultraviolet lamplight cast upon them.)

During this time—and following an off-the-cuff remark I may have mumbled about not having a good enough view—my manservant had managed to "sort out the little matter of confusion" regarding my not being granted access to the VIP lounge, and I promptly headed up there to get a much better view of the acts upon said main stage.

However, once I had got my breath back, with my face pressed against the window I found that the girls had sadly exited, and I was instead gazing down upon a young chap standing there in the altogether! (Or what would have been the altogether were it not for an obviously padded pair of bright red briefs.) I was about to voice my disgust at so shameful an exhibition, when the chap in question began juggling with, of all things, a chainsaw! It is a queer thing, or at least a curious one, but as *The Covent Garden Chainsaw Juggler* swung the lethal tool between his legs, I found myself staring at the aforementioned padded pantaloons, and hoping said padding was adequate to the task!

This was followed by further acts of death-defying daring-do, as *The Irrepressible Mr Flay* performed an act of escapology, freeing himself from chains, handcuffs, and a straight-jacket, whilst suspended upside-down from the ceiling! Not an easy thing to achieve!

At least for anyone lacking the biting strength of my good lady wife, who admittedly escapes from hers on a regular basis... once a month, as it happens... every full moon...

With Mr Flay's place upon the stage taken by a musical troop calling themselves *The Correspondents*, I was reminded that I was at this event as the London Correspondent of the *Gatehouse Gazette*, and thought it about time I did some work. I caught up with Mr Flay, who happened to come into the venue's pipe-smoking area, and had something of a chat with him upon the subject of adequate security procedures for the menstrually lycanthropic, amongst other things. On mentioning in passing how I am often called upon in a sort of consultancy capacity by Scotland Yard's Finest to "assist them with their enquiries," he was good enough to give me a little insider knowledge on how to pick a set of hand-cuffs. Good chap!

By now, the evening was winding down, and the effects of my 124-year cycle ride, and numerous brandies, were beginning to make their presence felt. Whilst various "Wax Disc Jockeys" played a selection of intermixed "Swing," "Rock & Roll" and "Jazz" numbers to those more inclined to dancing, I bathed in the glow of my pleasant evening's entertainment, and puzzled the quandary of how I was going to get from King's Cross to the Airport at Heathrow (where I had parked my Time Machine) at four o'clock in the morning.

With the stations closed and shuttered, no Handsome Cabs to be seen, and the foreign chaps offering a futuristic miniature alternative asking for no less than £50 for the journey (Why, that's a Gentleman's income!), I was at something of a loss. However, I chanced to notice that London has an excellent nocturnal omnibus service, and I was able to make the journey in a little over two hours, and at a cost of a mere £2. Splendid! I would also add, that for the visitor to London of the twenty-first century, this is a far better method of getting about town than the aforementioned "under-the-ground" train network, as the dawn-light views of London's streets, architecture, and parks thereby presented is far more pleasing a vista than the gap-infested sweat-sewer that is "The Tube".\*

Do be sure to check this column in future issues, for reviews of future events (or should that be "foreviews," what?) and suggestions as to suitable events and sights to visit, should you ever feel inclined to visit dear old Blighty.

Until next Time, AWB ■

\* **Gap** (n.) – *hiatus lacuna* (Lat.): a mutated hybrid of a bat and a rat, found in the London Underground Network – hence the often heard cry of "Mind the gap!"

SERIES QUATERMASS

# A Quatermass experiment



GUY DAMPIER

SADLY IN THE EARLY DAYS OF British television, when many dramas were broadcast live and the whole affair owed more to televised theatre than what we would recognize today, recording was viewed as unnecessary. Four of the episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953) have been lost to history; two remain. Therefore this review is short not from a desire to be pithy but due to necessity.

In 1953 a British spaceship is launched from Australia, contact is lost and for more than fifty hours it disappears. On the verge of giving up a signal is detected: the ship is back! It crash lands and with a hiss the door opens. A single figure staggers out and collapses. But of the other two astronauts there is no trace and the survivor, Victor, is somehow slightly... different.

These two episodes are classics

but without the final four it is hard to say much. So much story is missing that the first episodes are only really to be watched by those who love *Quatermass* and really ought to be seen in conjunction with the 2005 remake so that the entire story can be grasped. Nonetheless there is something of interest for dieselpunks, notably the aesthetics of the space-suit design and the treatment of space exploration. ■

REVIEW M

# Shadow show of murder



MARCUS RAUCHFUß

*M* (1931) IS OFTEN NAMED AS ONE of the classics of cinema. It is high up there with the few other masterpieces and this reputation is well deserved as I hope to make that clear in this review.

For the whole length of the film, director Fritz Lang plays masterfully with light, sound and shadow. The

first example is when we are introduced to the murderer. We do not see his face, nor quite his figure. We only see his shadow cast on an advertising column, falling right on a notice that warns the public about him and offers a reward, while he himself is talking to a little girl named Elsie: his next victim. Later,

he buys her a balloon, all the while whistling "Hall of the Mountain King," his trademark tune which he whistles compulsively and ultimately proves to be his undoing.

This scene to me is the key to the whole film. The murderer, played brilliantly by Peter Lorre, is seldom seen, but his presence

haunts the city and the story alike like an ever-present shadow. Lorre makes him always seem small and haunted; so much that the viewer is left puzzled how so pitiable a person who is terrified by voices in his head, can exert such menacing influence.

Next, we see the girl's mother waiting for the return of her child. In the progress of this scene, Lang plays with sound and the lack of it. *M* was one of the first non-silent German movies but it still employs a lot of silence for effect.

For example, after the mother of the little girl starts looking for her child we see various rooms, attics and staircases. Initially we also hear the calls of the mother, but then, the sound stops. We only see silent, empty rooms, which strengthens the sense of helplessness and loneliness. The following two scenes are again filmed in haunting silence: the little girl's balloon, caught in telephone wires and her ball, rolling aimlessly from behind some bushes.

With very little effort Lang manages to draw the picture of a city descending into paranoid chaos. There are people accusing one another, a pick-pocket being mistaken for the murderer and the like. All these scenes are intertwined with the spirited but futile attempts of the police to find any clue. We also see the hands of the murderer writing a letter to the newspaper, again whistling his tune in stark and penetrating quality.

After yet another futile police action, this time on a underground joint, the gangsters of the city get themselves organized to find the killer. Coincidentally the police have a meeting at the same time. We see the police force and the criminals making plans. First we watch the one party, then the other, then back again, their actions mirroring one

another. The police and the criminals are depicted as equal organizations, operating by remarkably similar rules and united in their common hunt of the murderer.

These criminals are, in spite of their status, portrayed as a civilized, organized and rather likable lot. In one scene, just after the aforementioned police raid on a notorious gangster joint, the lady running it points out to the chief of police that none of "her boys" would ever even touch a child. Even the hardcore criminals would go all soft when watching children play.

Finally, the crooks come up with a plan which will become the murderer's undoing. They enlist the beggars of the city to keep watch on every street, every backyard, never losing site of single child.

When the murderer again lures a girl and buys her a balloon from the same blind beggar, again whistling his tune, he is recognized, marked with an *M* for murderer on his coat by another thug, and soon driven into hiding in an office building, where the combined cream of the Berlin underworld follow to catch him. In the course of this, the police is alerted and comes rushing to the building too. The criminals, however, manage to get to the murderer first and drag him away. In their hurried withdrawal they forget the chief safebreaker who in turn is duly arrested by the police.

This safebreaker is portrayed as a gentle soul, who breaks during interrogation. He tells the police about the intentions of his fellow lawbreakers: they seek to put the murderer on trial. The murderer there delivers an impressive, haunting and disturbing monologue in his defense, but is subsequently interrupted by the police.

The film ends in a real court of

law, but we never find out its ruling. Before it is to be announcement, the scene cuts to the victim's mothers with Elsie's mother saying that either sentence will not bring back the dead children.

Fritz Lang makes a point of having both the underworld as well as the police, although on opposite ends of the law, doing exactly the same thing: hunting the murderer. Interestingly, the underworld seems far better able to tackle this task, as they are well aware that their target is none of their own. They know much better whom or what to look for and, through the bums of the city, have the manpower to do so.

The police, instead, although highly motivated, simply intensifies its efforts to hunt down a "normal" criminal. Only at the very end do they catch up with the murderer and only through a lucky arrest, caused by carelessness on the part of the criminals. This portrayal of police and underworld is a thinly veiled depiction of the social reality of the late Weimar Republic itself. The state is almost on the brink of collapse and only the efforts of both law enforcement and lawbreakers, to whom a breach of the status quo is bad for business, can keep society from slipping into anarchy.

This precise social picture, summed up in this film is another feature of what makes it so realistic. In the context of its own time, the film tells a story that very well could have happened like this.

The inherent reality of the plot, Peter Lorre's masterful portrayal of the murderer and Fritz Lang's play with sound, silence, light and shadow have seen to it, that even more than seventy-five years after its release, *M* has not lost its terror and its appeal. It is one of the jewels of early sound film, late German expressionism and world cinema. ■

REVIEW *GORMENGHAST*

# Defending the castle



TOBY FROST

MERVYN PEAKE'S *GORMENGHAST* trilogy consists of the novels *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950) and *Titus Alone* (1959), and tells of the birth and early life of Titus, seventy-sixth Earl of Groan and heir to the vast, rotting castle that is Gormenghast itself. Titus' destiny is to rule a world dominated by bizarre, stifling rituals in which he will be little more than a cog—assuming that his rival Steerpike doesn't kill him and take his place.

## What is Gormenghast?

Simply put, it is the name of the castle. Gormenghast castle itself is certainly ancient: Titus is the seventy-sixth earl of Groan, and it has existed long enough not only for its own rituals to develop but for the meaning behind them to be forgotten. It is also huge, probably the size of a small town, and contains wings, follies and halls that have long been abandoned. The impression is of immense age and, in the first two books, isolation. The Gormenghast books are set in the real world but no date or location is given. (Alan Moore suggests Cologne in the *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* volume II. At any rate the surrounding countryside suggests Britain: there are also no mythical creatures and the castle school teaches French as a foreign



language.) The castle seems to exist in a bubble of its own, untouched by the world yet somehow part of it. Leaving aside magic, the only answer would seem to be that the trilogy is set in an alternate history or far in the future, after an apocalypse—but this is probably best not considered too much.\* It doesn't matter, because the three books are powerful enough to carve out a world of their own without the need for explanation.

Much like Paul Atreides in Frank Herbert's *Dune*, Titus is guarded and advised by a number of retainers, all of them highly

eccentric. There is Prunesquallor, the arch and brainy castle medic, his neurotic sister Irma, Flay the grim manservant and his enemy the fat chef Swelter, and most of all Steerpike, a cunning ex-scullion who reads like a cross between Richard III and Edmund from King Lear, and whose ambition, along with Titus' growing resentment at his ordained role, fuels the plot.

The first two stories, *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, are long, ponderous and epic. They have multiple narrative strands and are written in a complex prose whose density reflects the weight of the castle stone. In switching between characters, the author ranges from horror through to comedy and even, in *Gormenghast*, to an awkward and ultimately rather touching romance.

Peake was a talented artist and poet and his drawings and poems appear in the text. Sadly, his health

\* I mention this because Peake's short story *Boy in Darkness* (1997), which is set near a huge castle that appears to be Gormenghast, includes animal-human hybrids that do not occur in the three novels. It is probably reading too much into the story to suggest that they are post-apocalyptic mutants, like some of the monsters in Moorcock's *Count Brass* (1998).

and perhaps his mind were failing when he wrote the last volume, *Titus Alone*, in which Titus ventures into the world beyond the castle. It is a shorter but more nightmarish book, and shows us glimpses of a sinister, industrialized world beyond the castle, either in the twentieth century or the future.

#### A steampunk angle?

So why should the *Gormenghast* books be of interest to steampunks? They are not steampunk in an obvious way, at least not in its more stereotypical, gadgets-and-airships form, in the same way that they are not fantasy of the elves-and-dragons variety. However China Mieville, often seen as an important influence on steampunk, listed them as part of his recommended books for the *Guardian*, correctly remarking that the BBC adaptation had greatly softened the novels. I feel that both the strangeness and the robust solidity of Mieville's worlds may well be influenced by Peake. Michael Moorcock, whose Oswald Bastable stories contain many steampunk elements, even dedicated his novel *Gloriana* (2004) to Peake and it is at least in part a homage.

Peake's eccentric characters resemble those of Dickens, especially in their peculiar names and unexpected seriousness. This idea of eccentricity together with a

sort of integrity (neither Peake's nor Dickens' characters are there solely to be laughed at) seems to me a very British concept, and places them in that golden era of eccentricity: the Victorian age. For all their quirkiness, the books are not light: not only is there poetry in the series, but also violence and murder that demands to be taken seriously, however bizarre the people committing it. Steampunk, with its emphasis on individualism in both character and technology, draws in part from the same source. It would not be surprising to meet Laurence Oliphant from *The Difference Engine* (1980) or perhaps even Langdon St. Ives from James Blaylock's *Homunculus* (1986) wandering the grounds of Gormenghast.

There are some who consider that to be steampunk, a novel must include some subversive or anti-authoritarian "punk" element. Tim Powers' description of the origins of the term "steampunk" suggests that this is not right, but at any rate it is hard to imagine anything more rebellious than Steerpike's climb through the ranks of the castle—although he seems more of a potential dictator than an anarchist.

But the real influence of the books on steampunk seems subtler than that. It is the anachronism of the stories, the feeling of reading something that mixes different

styles, genres and historical eras to produce a new, original whole. The castle appears to be loosely gothic in style, like a Victorian image of the Middle Ages, and its world feels Victorian also, with horses and firearms, elaborate courtships and high tea. Yet the rituals of Gormenghast are medieval, perhaps oriental, even. (Peake grew up in a missionary environment in China. The BBC adaption of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* draws on this, depicting the castle as part gothic fortress, part Imperial court.)

In *Titus Alone* we see a world of technology and science outside the castle, which in Mr Veil and the helmeted police reflect perhaps the horrors that Peake recorded as a war artist during World War II. In this final book, Peake even introduces science fiction, with the machines that spy on the characters and destroy Muzzlehatch's zoo. He is doing what steampunks do: taking disparate elements and welding them together to make something coherent and new.

The books are anachronistic as well as antiquated, set in a strange world that samples elements from a wide range of times and yet retains its internal logic. We could argue forever whether they are "proper" steampunk, but the trilogy is a close and influential cousin that deserves to be more widely read. ■

## IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

We celebrate Halloween with "Forbidden Tales of Fervor and Fright". Expect things dark, esoteric, perverse and horrifying, with H.P. Lovecraft, a Victorian Halloween party, Simon R. Green's *Nightside* series and maybe even some recipes for how to make your own Halloween-appropriate evil-green-colored liquors!

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